GUILDMAG

THE ANNUAL 2015



EDITOR'S LETTER



2015 is over, and with it ends the year of *Guild Wars 2*'s first expansion: *Heart of Thorns*. This special edition magazine has been crafted by the GuildMag team to celebrate this fantastic year in Tyria; it's something we've been planning since our 2014 Wintersday issue, and I'm proud to finally be able to release the first GuildMag Annual to everyone.

We've taken some of our best articles from previous issues and our website, and combined them with a plethora of brand new ones just for you. Inside these digital pages, you'll find lore on the Exalted, the druids, revenants and more. We've also put together a fantastic *Heart of Thorns* screenshot gallery, plus Starconspirator takes you on a tour of Tangled Depths in "Off the Beaten Path". For art and fiction lovers, there's our usual selection of works (including some great community-contributed illustrations and cosplay), plus articles on in-game fashion for different budgets, the evolution of gameplay from Dry Top to Dragon's Stand, and many more just waiting to be discovered. As if all that wasn't enough, there's also a competition to win 800 gems included in this issue, so make sure you enter for your chance to win!

Last year, we attempted the first physical GuildMag magazine in the form of our Wintersday issue. Shortly after, we received a tonne of fantastic feedback, with many asking where they could get their hands on one. As a limited run of just 13 copies, we were unable to accommodate requests at the time - but that's all changed with this issue. The GuildMag Annual 2015 is the first in our 5+ year history to be openly available for anyone to buy a copy of; in early December, we opened up pre-orders and received an amazing response. It is our hope to be able to continue to create annual physical magazines moving forward, and to do that we rely on the constant support of the *Guild Wars* community. If you're interested in becoming more involved, joining the GuildMag team is a fantastic way to spend some of your free time to produce awesome content for everyone. We have positions for writers, editors, designers and more, and pride ourselves on accommodating people of all ages, skills and interests. You can visit www.guildmag.com/join to learn more about our available positions, and to apply.

I hope that you have a fantastic 2016, and that you enjoy this first GuildMag Annual.

- Valiant



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EXALTED AND MURSAAT:

LORE

When we caught our first glimpse of the Exalted at the end of Season 2, people were quick to interpret this as our first tease of a mursaat in *Guild Wars 2*. This impression grew stronger as we saw the gate of Tarir bearing a symbol similar to those associated with the White Mantle, followed by a council of three Exalted (keeping in mind, of course, that it was a similar council of three mursaat that aided Saul near Demetra). Add in the belief that the shining city of the mursaat first seen by Saul was somewhere in the jungle, and it seemed a done deal.

Over time and further scrutiny, however, questions began to be raised. How could the notoriously selfish mursaat now be our allies when, if any beyond Lazarus the Dire had survived at all, they could simply phase out of Tyria and hide from the dragons like they did the last time the dragons were awake? And how could the highly magical, but still corporeal, mursaat we saw in *Guild Wars 1* be the same as the glowing beings of light we saw in the trailers? With the vision from the Pale Tree indicating that the golden city was to be the incubator of Glint's egg, why would the Zephyrites trust Glint's heir with a race that Glint had schemed to push to the brink of extinction? Finally, ArenaNet answered these questions when the true nature of the Exalted was revealed shortly before *Heart of Thorns* released, with an additional 'take that' in the form of a Priory scholar in Tarir expressing that she had feared a connection, but found no evidence of one. What visual similarity there was appeared to be coincidence.

This is not the first time that something associated with the Forgotten has been connected to the mursaat. Early in the days of *Guild Wars 1*, one of the lore community's early theories grew out of an observation of similarities in appearance between the armour worn by the mursaat, and the Enchanted armours used as foot soldiers by the Forgotten. The conclusion was that the mursaat themselves were the very first humans to ascend, and that the Enchanted had been created from the tarnished armour of proto-mursaat that fell along the way.

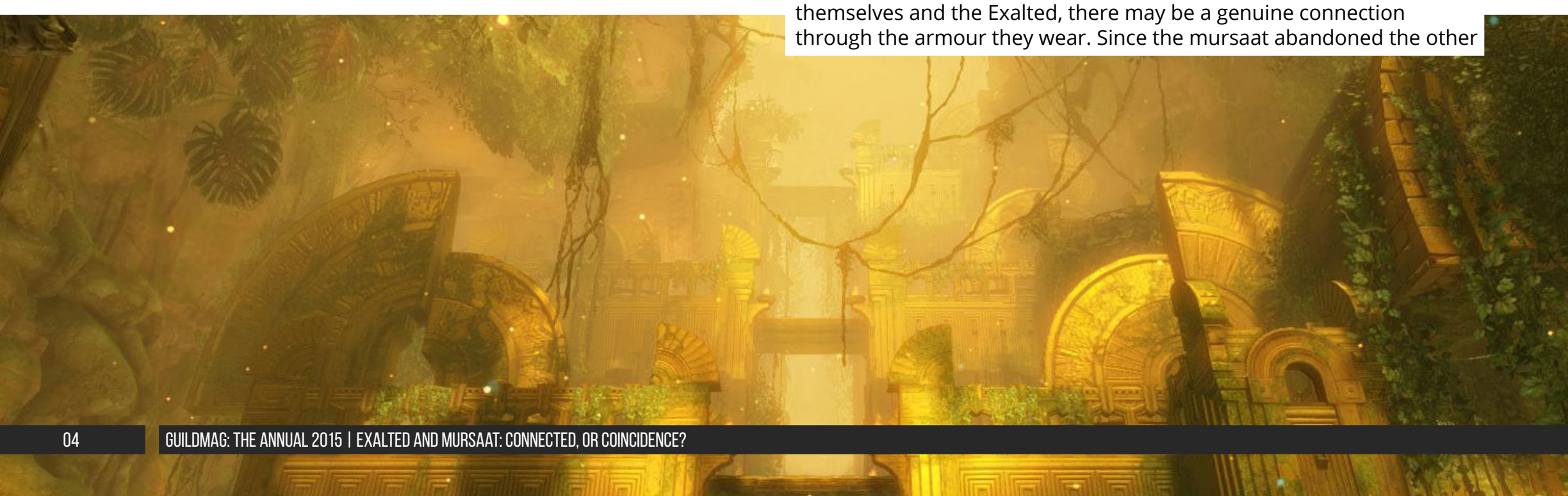
This theory was debunked during the lifespan of the original *Guild Wars*, but it remains possible that the similarity in appearance is no coincidence.

In ancient times, before the mursaat chose to flee, they were part of an alliance of races against the previous awakening of the Elder Dragons – an alliance that included the Seers, dwarves, jotuns, and the Forgotten. Each of these races appeared to bring something to the alliance, with the mursaat, through their Spectral Agony, being the best at destroying dragon minions.

The elder races, however, had a problem. While the elder races appeared to have a greater understanding of magic than the modern races (possibly even the asura), what technology they had appeared to be completely reliant on it. Only the dwarves, and possibly the jotun, show evidence of having any technology that does not rely on magic, and even that was quite primitive compared to that of the Iron Legion or the Pact. When fighting against creatures that feed on magic, this presents a problem: You want your soldiers to be the best equipped as they can be (even if many of them are primarily spellcasters in turn), but any magic items they have is just more food for the dragons if they fall.

This may be where the Forgotten came in. The Forgotten's speciality appeared to be in dealing with dragon corruption. The Forgotten path of Arah shows not only that the Forgotten had a ritual that could reverse some of the effects of dragon corruption in a soon-to-be-former dragon minion, but also that Forgotten artifacts are difficult for Zhaitan to claim. This could have made the Forgotten extremely important to the alliance as smiths and armorers. Only they could provide their allies with weapons and armour that could resist dragon corruption, and, perhaps, protect the wearer from rising as a dragon minion afterwards. And at the time, those allies included the mursaat.

Thus, while there is no direct connection between the mursaat themselves and the Exalted, there may be a genuine connection through the armour they wear. Since the mursaat abandoned the other





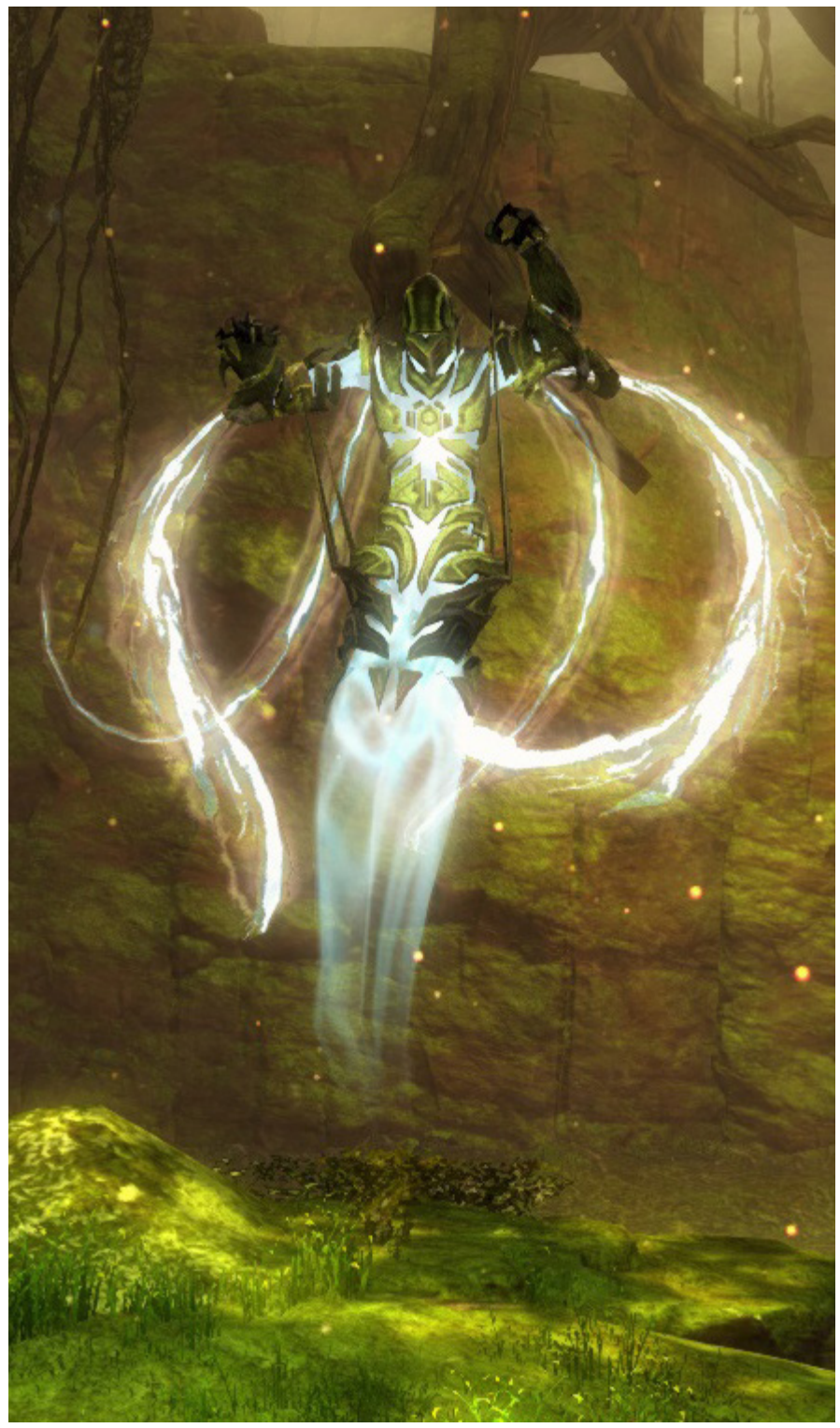
COINCIDENCE, OR CONNECTED ?

WRITTEN BY DRAXYNNIC

races in the first place, it seems quite likely that they would not have shown the courtesy of returning the armour they had been given. Even if the original armour that the mursaat had received from the Forgotten was lost or discarded, it is possible that they retained the style. It is even possible, since the Forgotten have a different body shape and do not appear to wear any armour themselves, that the Forgotten simply crafted the armour they made according to the styles preferred by the mursaat.

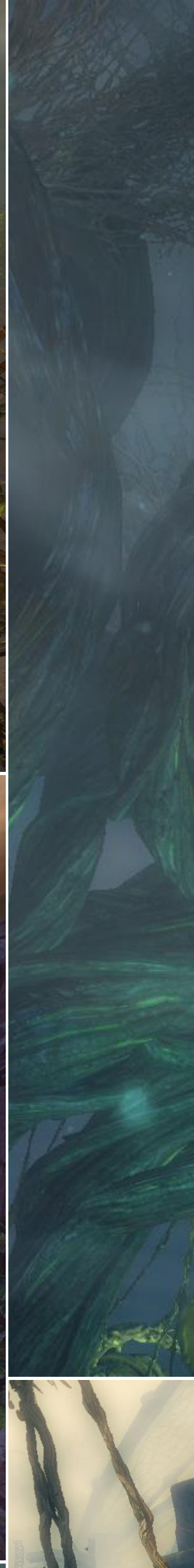
Whether it was the mursaat or the Forgotten that initially specified the design, it stands to reason that not only would the mursaat continue to use the perfectly functional armour, the Forgotten would also continue to use the design. A heavier form of the design, intended for direct physical combat rather than the lighter armour used by spellcasters, would likely have been animated as golems to become the first of the Enchanted that bulked out the numbers of the Forgotten in the Crystal Desert... and which have possibly done so since before the dragons last went into hibernation. It was this design that we are told was improved to create the Enchanted Armours that can be inhabited by player characters in the defence of Tarir, and, given the similarity in appearance, it is likely that a modified form of the same design was used for the golden casings of the Exalted themselves.

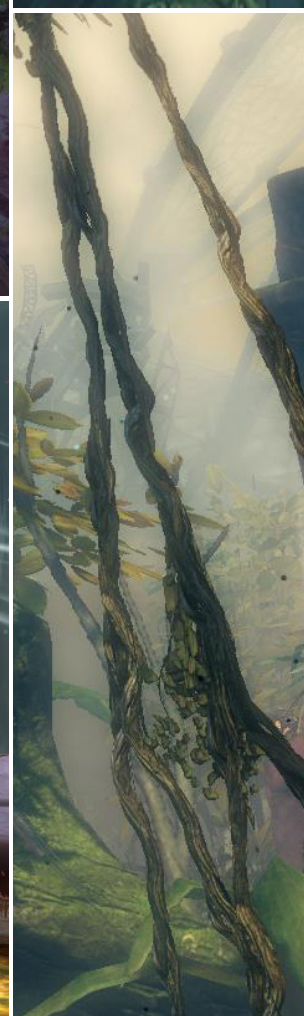
So, while the mursaat and the Exalted are entirely different beings with separate goals, loyalties and motivations (to the point where they would likely be mortal enemies should the mursaat ever show their face on Tyria once more), there may nevertheless be a connection between them that explains the similarity in appearance. It may be that both are wearing sets of golden armour that was provided by the Forgotten; a design that stretches back to the last time that the dragons sought to consume all of the magic of the world.

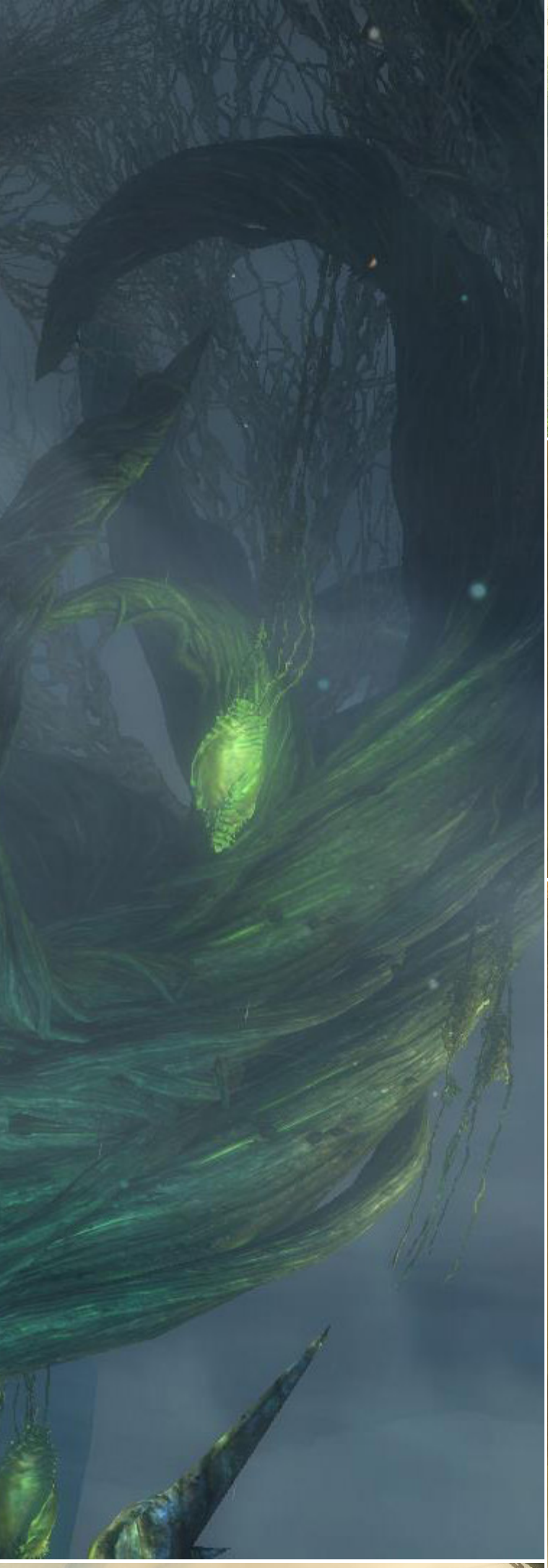


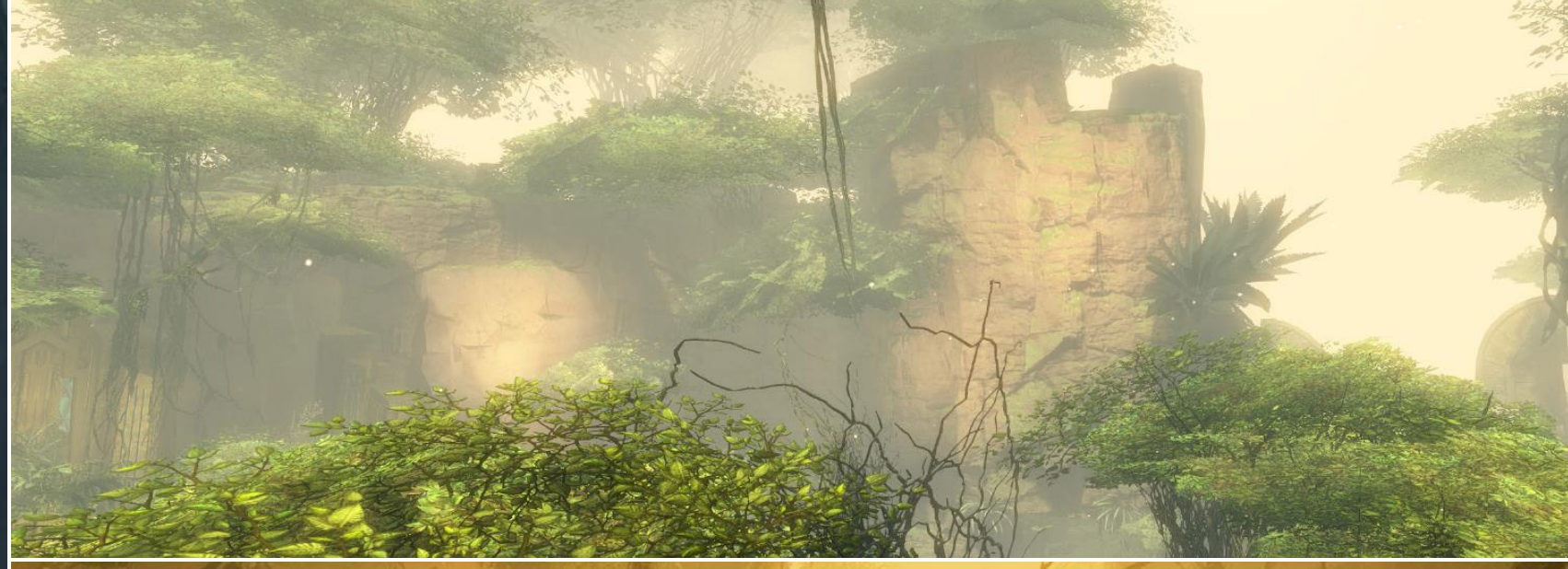


















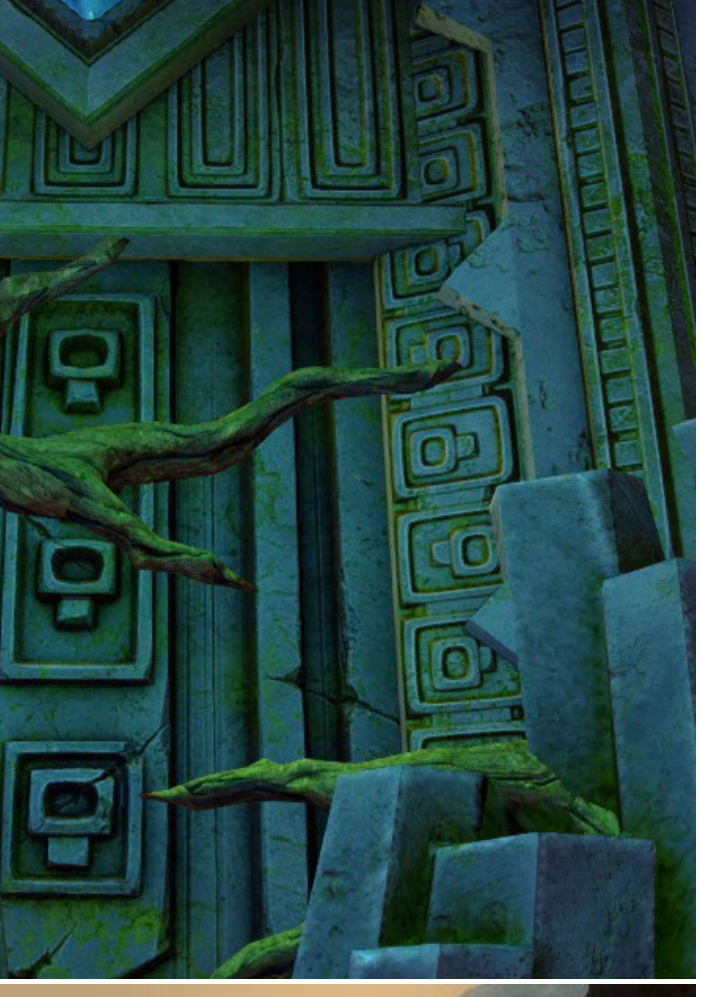






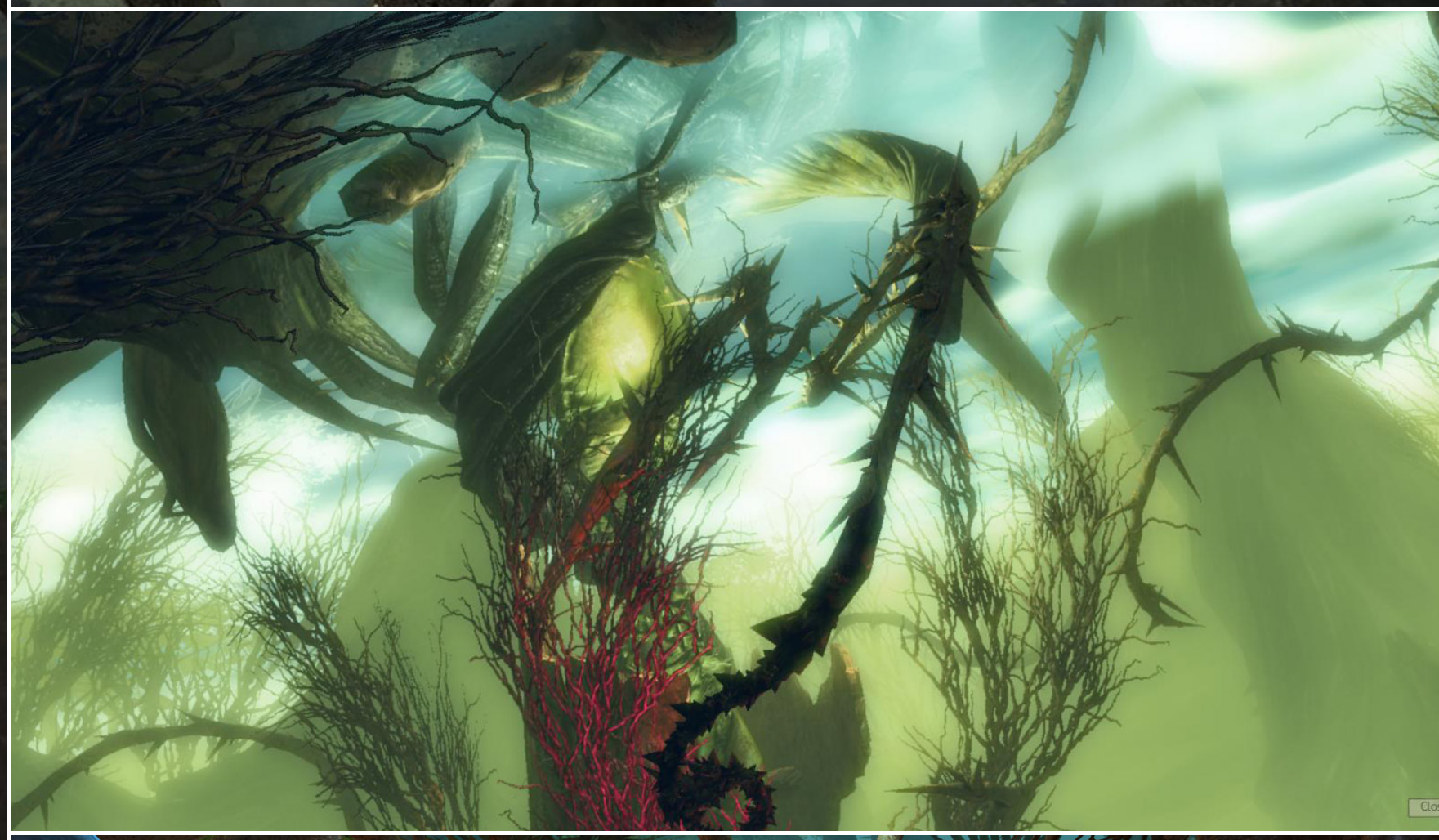












RECAP

HEART OF THORNS STORY SUMMARY

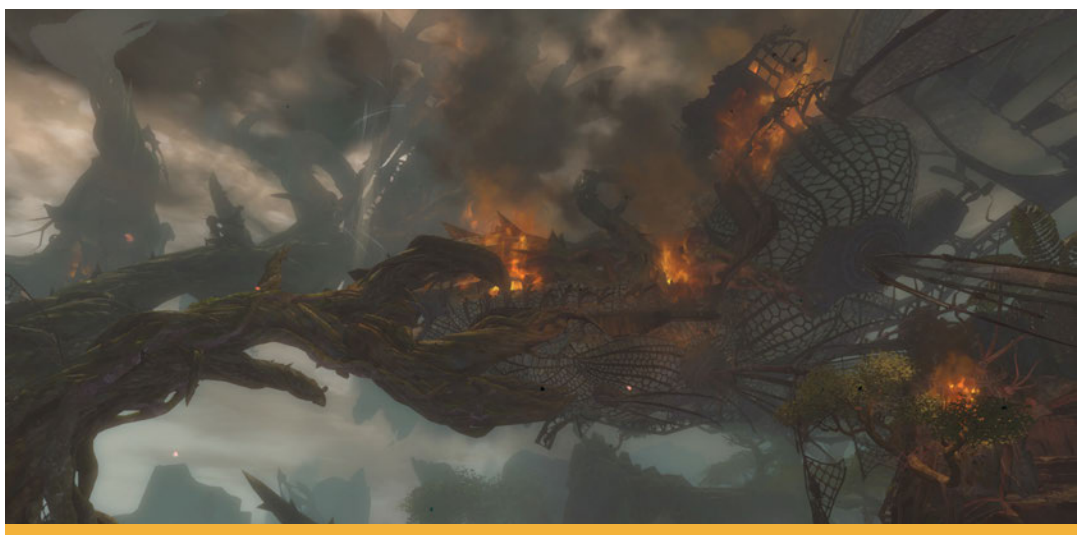
WRITTEN BY STARCONSPIRATOR

As the Pact fleet descended on the Maguuma Jungle, Mordremoth lashed out and tore the ships from the sky. Pact forces were scattered across the edge of the jungle, while Mordremoth claimed the weaker-willed sylvari soldiers for his own. The enthralled turned against friends, hurling explosives on the ships and killing fellow Pact soldiers. This sowed the seeds of distrust and sylvari survivors found themselves alone in the wilderness.

THE PACT FLEET LOST

As word reached the Commander and B-iconics of the fate of the fleet, they rushed to the devastation. Braham, Eir Stegalkin's son, was especially anxious to discover the fate of his mother, from whom he'd been estranged until recently. Upon entering Verdant Brink, they were met with the remnants of Pact ships strewn across the canopy. Witnessing the burning wood and metal, the Commander took charge after locating a nearby struggling gathering of Pact soldiers. The Commander (and player) was faced with a decision: rescue nearby sylvari from the mordrem, or reinforce the soldiers' position for the coming night. Choosing to scavenge supplies, the Pact Commander's forces were able to set up a defensive perimeter, including a small cannon. However, if the Commander chose to rescue those taken prisoner by the mordrem, a number of rescued sylvari bolstered the camp's defenses instead.

As the defenses were completed, the mordrem attacked. During the onslaught, a strange creature appeared from the Mists: Rytlock Brimstone, now a revenant and wielding a new type of magic. With his help, the battered soldiers were able to survive the night and drive back the jungle. Regardless of the Commander's choice, Laranthir of the Wild took this opportunity to form a sylvari-only unit composed of the Pale Reavers that could take care of each other should Mordremoth claim any of them. Finally reunited with Rytlock, following his disappearance in Season 2, the Commander's improved party set out to track down the remaining members of Destiny's Edge, and Trahearne, who'd been taken prisoner in Mordremoth's domain.



Pact ships lie in ruins atop the jungle canopy.

Now in unfamiliar territory, the party sought to enlist the help of the local hylek tribe, the Itzel. While searching, they came across two hylek fighting against the mordrem: Ibli the Itzel and Tizlak the Nuhoch, the last survivors of a scouting expedition. The Commander offered to help the pair, and the party cleared away the remaining mordrem. With the enemies defeated, these new allies agreed to take them to the nearby Itzel village, Jaka Itzel, and ask the chief for aid in finding their missing friends. Braham, still impatient to find his mother, paired with Rytlock and separated from the main group to continue their own tracking efforts.

NEW ALLIES AND OLD ENEMIES

At Jaka Itzel, the tribe's chief informed the Pact Commander that a mordrem assault against the village was imminent. To gain their favor, the Commander had to choose: stay and defend the village, or take the fight to the mordrem. In choosing to stay, the mordrem attacked Jaka Itzel in multiple waves as predicted, but were held back by the Itzel and the Commander's remaining party. In the aftermath, the hylek tribe suggested the Commander track down two of their finest scouts and ask if they had knowledge of the prisoners. On the other hand, choosing to attack the mordrem foothold meant the party would follow the Nuhoch Tizlak to the mustering ground and destroy all mordrem present, including several Blighting Pods, that the party mused were used to convert the dead to minions. After fending the enemy off, Tizlak offered a horn that alerts nearby Nuhoch to ask for their aid.



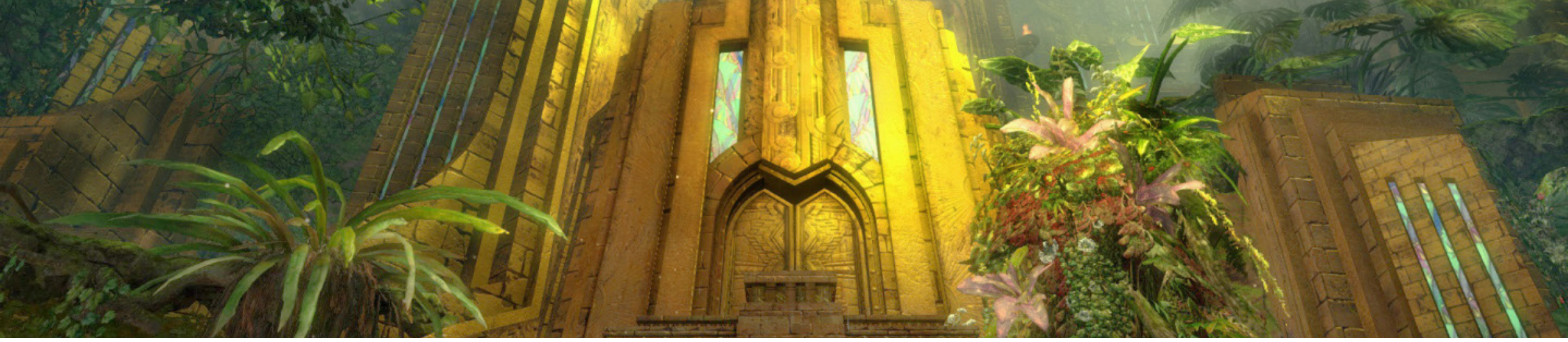
New allies, the Itzel and Nuhoch.

Pushing onwards, the party sought out hylek scouts who were tracking Rytlock and Braham. The scouts reported that prisoner caravans were moving deeper into the jungle and that Caithe and Glint's egg had been spotted. Despite the concern for Caithe and the egg, the Commander first had to regroup with Braham and Rytlock and see if they had been able to pick up the trail of Destiny's Edge. With aid from the scouts, the duo were located and informed that a group of key prisoners were being held nearby.

Storming the prison camp, the group discovered both Eir and Faolain, the leader of the Nightmare Court, being held captive. Reunited with Eir, an elite Vinetooth mordrem attacked. In the group's attempt to escape, Faolain stabbed Eir with a vine thorn, leaving her behind to slow the creature. Downed, Eir ripped the thorn from her side and hurled it at Faolain, landing in her back. With both wounded, the Vinetooth extended its deadly tail, piercing Faolain's back and claiming her body for Mordremoth. As the rest of the group looked on, the Vinetooth moved behind Eir and landed another deadly blow. Stirred into a bloodrage, Braham and the rest of the party attacked and slew the Vinetooth, avenging Eir's death. Following the battle, and grieving for his lost mother, Braham stayed behind along with Rox to perform funeral rites for her. With one chapter over, the remaining party members journeyed into Auric Basin.

LOST CITY OF SECRETS

Travelling deeper, the party came across a Priory camp: survivors of the crash had headed into the jungle to explore a nearby ruin. They reported that when Caithe arrived with Glint's legacy, the ruins began to glow and react to the egg's presence. Shortly afterward, the party discovered a strange creature made of pure energy and wearing golden armor: Ruka the Wanderer. He claimed to be tracking Glint's legacy and invited the Commander to accompany him as he searched for it. The party eventually caught up with Caithe, now in great danger from an extraordinary creature: Faolain, returned as a Vinetooth. Taking the egg, the Commander and Ruka ran from the creature, determined not to let Mordremoth take it. Faolain gave chase, but by harnessing the egg's powers and using Ruka as a guide, the Commander was able to evade the Vinetooth through secret passages and places impossible to reach otherwise. Frantic but alive, they entered the sanctuary of the Forgotten City of Tarir, where Ruka explained that he was one of the Exalted: a race of people who had sacrificed their mortal existence to act as guardians for Tarir - a city built by the Forgotten to house Glint's legacy. According to the Exalted, a new portal had appeared in the city when the egg had entered the area. Leading the Pact Commander underground, Ruka said that the egg belonged beyond the portal but that only the Commander could proceed. Beyond it, to challenge the egg bearer's worth, the Commander faced three tests (strength, wisdom, and leadership) devised by the Forgotten. Navigating the three trials, the Commander finally came across the egg's resting place and placed it in the safety of the Exalted. As the Commander did so, a beam of brilliant light shot into the sky, and the egg shared a vision of the future with its bearer: Zojja, Logan and Trahearne claimed by Mordremoth, and Tarir under attack from the Jungle Dragon.



Determined now to stop the vision coming true, the Pact Commander hurried to catch up with the B-iconics and Rytlock using a series of hologram disks left behind by Taimi. The trail led to Taimi and an offline data station that the Exalted had built with the asura, which she wanted to re-activate. After collecting saurian bones, the asuran prodigy brought the station back online, revealing a map of ley energy concentrations. Kiru, an Exalted charged with its maintenance, appeared before them, revealing the existence of the lost asuran city Rata Novus, with whom the Exalted had allied. Returning to the party waiting outside, including Braham and Rox (now returned), the Pact Commander chose to detour to the revealed Rata, thinking the ancient asura may have known how to combat the Elder Dragons.

Moving into Tangled Depths, the party came across Canach and a camp of Pact soldiers with news of Zojja and Logan; tasked with fighting through the monstrous chak to save a Pact magister, the Commander learned that the members of Destiny's Edge had sacrificed themselves so that the soldiers could escape, and had been taken further south into the jungle. In order to pursue both goals, the party decided to split, with the Commander, Braham, Taimi and Canach going to Rata Novus and the rest continuing to track Zojja and Logan.



The mysterious Ruka guides the egg to Tarir.

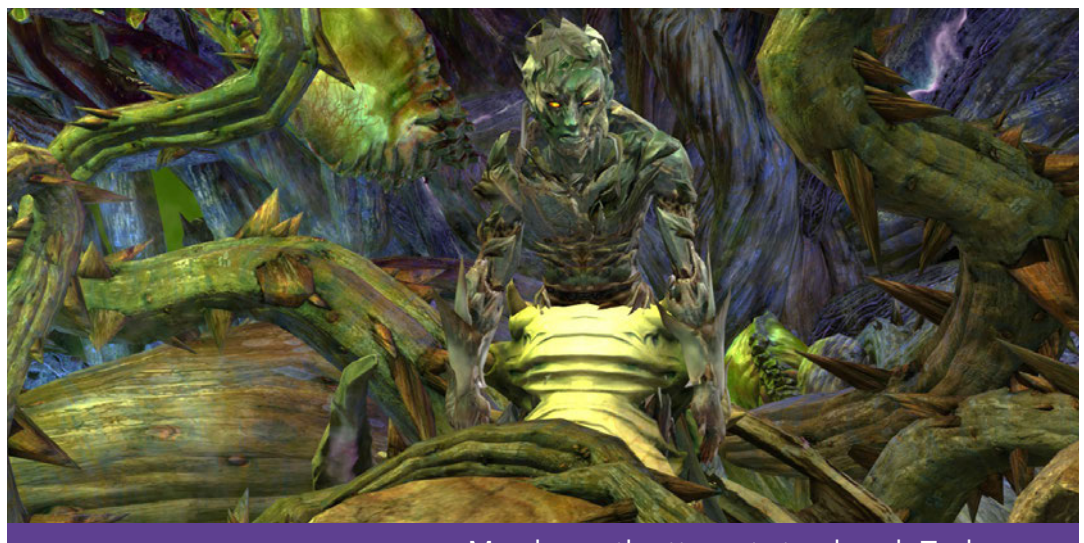
After helping the local Nuhoch hylek combat an infestation of chak, the Commander's party, entered Rata Novus. The city was abandoned, with only golems and chak inhabiting the Rata. Convinced that the ancient asurans' knowledge could help them, the group searched for a way to access the data, fending off chak attracted to the activity. While searching, Taimi uncovered a disused asura gate and an angry chak blitzer. Having successfully defeated the chak, Taimi powered up the gate and the party stepped through, moving further into the research lab. There, they found their passage blocked by a sealed blast door bearing the emblem of the Elder Dragons. To power it, Taimi was forced to sacrifice her bodyguard and companion, Scruffy, to complete the damaged power circuit. Now vulnerable, Taimi moved into the lab along with the others. Facing a horde of chak, the three defended Taimi as she worked to power up the lab's giant microscope, weaponizing it to destroy the remaining foes. With the Novan's research, Taimi uncovered that each Elder Dragon has a distinct weakness, though these remained unknown. Nevertheless, the party was bolstered by the fact that Mordremoth *could* be killed. Leaving Taimi behind to continue her research, the Commander hurried to catch up with the others, anxious to rescue the Marshal and the rest of Destiny's Edge.

THE HEART OF MAGUUMA

Following a trail left behind by Rox, the Commander's party entered Dragon's Stand, and the center of Mordremoth's power. Fighting through hordes of mordrem, they encountered the rest of their squad, pushing forward to find Zojja and Logan. At a fork in the path, the Commander split the party to follow both, one heading to Zojja and the other to Logan. Continuing to fight, the Commander's party finally reached their imprisoned target first, breaking them out of the Mordrem Pod before moving to the next. Drained of most of their energy, neither Zojja nor Logan were in any shape to fight, and were forced to return to the nearest camp with Kasmeer and Rox.

Unexpectedly, Caithe had reappeared to help in freeing the second prisoner, determined to put an end to the creature using Faolain's body. Reluctantly, the Commander agreed to work together to save Trahearne and end Mordremoth. With that, the party pressed further into Dragon's Stand, pursuing Faolain as she taunted the group from afar, to the top of a twisted double helix where Trahearne was being held prisoner. There, they battled the creature, avenging Eir's death and leaving the Vinetooth dead. In that instant, Trahearne was pulled deep into the bowels of the structure, and the party followed suit, entering Mordremoth's inner sanctum.

Battling past ambushes, the Pact Commander once again found Trahearne as Mordremoth sought to absorb him and fulfil the egg's vision. Still conscious, however, the Marshal was in a unique position to help the party into the mind of Mordremoth - into the Dream - where they could battle the Dragon and put an end to it. Rytlock and Marjory offered to stay behind to protect the bodies as their minds entered Mordremoth's, while the Commander chose two companions to accompany them inside, the third also staying behind. Using Trahearne as a link, they entered Mordremoth's domain. The Commander awoke in a strange world, faced against illusions based on the two companions, designed to torment and break the Commander. Finally, the trio came face to face with the mind of Mordremoth. In the ensuing battle, the Commander once again fought illusions of all their companions, utilizing rifts in the Dream to turn them against their master. After a long battle, the mind of Mordremoth was finally broken. Returning to the real world, Trahearne revealed grave news: a seed of Mordremoth remained inside the Marshal, and must not be allowed to grow. To end the Dragon, he insisted on the Commander ending his life with Caladbolg, his trusted sword. With little time, the Commander reluctantly agreed, and with Trahearne's passing, an enormous wave of magical energy was released into the world, surging through Tyria's ley lines and into Tarir, and the egg.



Mordremoth attempts to absorb Trahearne.



EDITORIAL

FROM DRY TOP TO DRAGON'S STAND

WRITTEN BY ANTHONZ

With *Heart of Thorns* out for a few months now, it's hard to remember that feeling of anticipation as to whether or not ArenaNet was going to release a full expansion for *Guild Wars 2*. We were getting regular updates, sure, but a vocal part of the fanbase was looking for something more. *Guild Wars* had expansions. Other popular MMOs had expansions. Surely *Guild Wars 2* would get at least one as well, right?

It turned out that those regular updates, billed as the "Living World", were all working towards the *Heart of Thorns* expansion both narratively and in the gameplay, most notably in the the two new permanent maps: Dry Top and The Silverwastes. By creating and maintaining these new areas with the Living World format, ArenaNet was able to fine tune and test the types of new content they wanted to add in *Heart of Thorns*. With the introduction of those two maps, we saw many firsts for what would become the standard in the new maps included with the expansion. Dry Top and The Silverwastes are where we would first experience the precursors to new elements like the masteries, map-wide meta events, unique vendors and currencies, and collections.

One of the first things players are introduced to in Dry Top are the Aspect crystals. These crystals, each corresponding to either the Wind, Sun, or Lightning Aspects, allow players to explore the area of Dry Top with a specific new skill that affects their mobility. The Wind and Lightning Aspects, which allow players to jump higher and jump to a target area respectively, provide the means to explore the rocky terrain in ways that would be impossible in the rest of Tyria. These mechanics also allowed ArenaNet to create a map with more verticality than was previously seen in the core game. Players could jump to hard to reach areas for more challenging jumping puzzles, or just to get around the map more quickly. Simiarly, the Silverwastes has its own map-wide mobility mechanic in the skritt tunnels, which allow players to get further into the map and jump into ongoing events, where waypoints are typically contested or just not present.

In *Heart of Thorns*, there are Mastery tracks that, once completed, provide players with access to similar mechanics. Where a player would normally get a new experience level for filling their bar before reaching level 80, in the *Heart of Thorns* maps players can choose which Mastery to level up. The Nuhoch Wallows, present in all *Heart of Thorns* maps, are a direct translation of the skritt holes in The Silverwastes, while other Mastery mechanics like gliding, bouncing mushrooms, and speed boost mushrooms, are spiritual successors to the Aspect crystals. At the very start, many of the Mastery tracks provide access to these new abilities, adding a level of excitement to exploring the vast new terrain of each map. However, one of the drawbacks to having players rely on the new skills to get around a map is that it now takes some time and effort to unlock specific masteries. To their credit, ArenaNet does indicate which masteries are required to progress the *Heart of Thorns* story, but working on something like map completion is now gated behind specific masteries. This can become tedious if a player chooses to put their effort into other masteries rather than the ones that give them access to areas that are blocked by a Mastery skill, making something like map completion arbitrarily difficult. It's a good thing that there are plenty of events to help fill that experience bar.



Event chains are nothing new to *Guild Wars 2*. There are plenty of areas in Tyria that have their own cycle but, for the most part, these events are not on a map-wide scale - at least not on the scale that was started in Dry Top. There, each event contributes to the map-meta event of the Favor of the Zephyrites. The more events completed, the higher the Favor tier achieved. Higher Favor tiers mean better rewards and cheaper prices at vendors. This is all done before the map-wide dust storm hits which, when completed, resets the Favor tier. The Silverwastes has a similar meta system in place, but relies more heavily on groups of players defending or claiming specific outposts for a time, pushing to the final boss meta event, the Mordrem Vinewrath. The Vinewrath is an event in its own right, requiring players to divide and conquer specific lanes before conquering the Vinewrath itself.



All of these types of events can be seen carried over to *Heart of Thorns*. In all four of the new maps, players will find that the events are working towards the same goal. In Verdant Brink, players can work on one of several camp preparation event chains, each with its own unique side story, to help defend the camp against the increased attacks that occur during the night. Additionally, several boss battles occur in the highest level of the map - the canopy - at night, giving players plenty to do.

> "DRY TOP AND THE SILVERWASTES ARE WHERE WE WOULD FIRST EXPERIENCE THE PRECURSORS TO NEW ELEMENTS FOUND IN HEART OF THORNS

In Auric Basin, events are split up by their cardinal direction: north, south, east and west. Just like the camp preparation events in Verdant Brink, each chain has its own unique side story, with all events leading to the Defense of Tarir meta event. This event is broken into four paths, each path with its own Octovine to defeat in a different way. Tangled Depths also shares this type of meta progression, with several lanes converging to a final boss. Participating in the metas for all these maps help players learn the mechanics of the fight against Mordremoth himself in Dragon's Stand: Pick a path and form a group of players;

continue down that path to a boss and defeat it using a unique set of mechanics. In fact, Dragon's Stand is tied so closely to its meta event, that the entire map is on a timer to complete it. Once the timer runs out, the entire map closes, forcing players out. That concept of the map-wide timer, as well as the timer for the day/night cycle in Verdant Brink, have roots in the Dust Storm timer in Dry Top. The idea of having players divide and conquer specific lanes or areas simultaneously to reach a final boss was shown to work with Vinewrath in the Silverwastes. To incentivize players to stay around for the complete meta event cycle, ArenaNet introduced Participation and Map Bonuses. The more events a player does in a map, the better their rewards become, including the final boss chest at the end. However, placing so much emphasis on the meta events makes it harder for players to explore freely, to the point where in Dragon's Stand, players only have a small window of opportunity to even consider map completion after a successful run on Mordremoth. This makes it particularly difficult to take the time to explore and find reward chests that have been placed throughout the map.

With the introduction of Dry Top, we were also introduced to the buried treasure and key concept. By completing events or visiting vendors in the map, we could obtain Zephyrite Lockpicks to open the Buried Locked Chests that appear during the Dust Storm. The chests would have the chance to contain some rare loot and other items. The Silvewastes took this idea a step further and added shovels into the mix, creating bands of players roaming the map together, unearthing one chest after the other. This idea must have been popular with ArenaNet since now each new map in *Heart of Thorns* has its own key and chest combination. They dialed it back a little, removing the digging up requirement, but rewarding the keys for completing meta events remains a staple of the *Heart of Thorns* maps.

Another map staple is the unique vendors and currencies for each map. To draw players back to specific maps after they have become familiar with them, ArenaNet has rewards that can only be obtained through vendors on that map that are purchased with a currency only obtainable by completing content in that map. While instance-specific currencies have been around since dungeons, they weren't expanded on until Dry Top and the Silverwastes. In Dry Top there are Geodes that can be used to purchase specific crafting materials, recipes, and other exclusive items from the Zephyrites. The Silverwastes takes it one step further and includes exclusive armor boxes as well as other materials necessary for completing the Luminescent Armor collection, one of many collections players can work towards in *Guild Wars 2*.

With the release of *Heart of Thorns*, we saw the introduction of several new armor and weapon sets, each with its own collection and achievements. These new armor and weapons are obtainable only by completing specific content in the new maps and occasionally random drops. Again, this idea is an expansion of the Ambrite Weapons in Dry Top and the Luminsecent Armor in The Silverwastes. But collections aren't just for crafting armor weapons: players can also work towards specific Order backpieces in a similar way they worked towards Mawdry in Dry Top. Collections also play a heavy role in the new precursor and legendary crafting that was implemented with *Heart of Thorns*. And while they can make content more available, such as precursors for legendary weapons, a lot of items in the list are left up solely to random drops. While I don't mind replaying content, it seems like the drop rate for these items make it more of a chore to complete a collection than it is a reward for playing the game.

Despite some minor shortcomings, I think it is clear that ArenaNet made the right choice in regularly updating content before jumping head-first into a full expansion. They could use the updates to test new types of gameplay on the entire player base, making sure that players would continue playing the content long after it had been released. And while it would've been nice to see some of that classic exploration we get in Tyria, I think *Heart of Thorns* added something wonderfully fresh to an already well-conceived game.

Can't keep your maps straight?
Use this table as a reference for what each map's specialty is.

DRY TOP	GEODES	Ambrite Weapons	Zephyrite Lockpick + Buried Locked Chest
SILVERWASTES	BANDIT CRESTS	Luminescent Armor	Bandit Skeleton Key + Bandit Chest (+ shovel)
VERDANT BRINK	AIRSHIP PARTS	Bladed Armor	Pact Crowbar + Airship Cargo
AURIC BASIN	LUMPS OF AURILLIUM	Auric Weapons	Exalted Key + Exalted Chest
TANGLED DEPTHS	LEY LINE CRYSTALS	Chak Weapons	Vial of Chak Acid + Chak Cache
DRAGON'S STAND	CRYSTALLINE ORE	Leystone Armor / Plated Weapons	Machete + Noxious Pod

DRUIDS: FACT OR FICTION?

WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 15

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*.

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

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 mursaat 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 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.

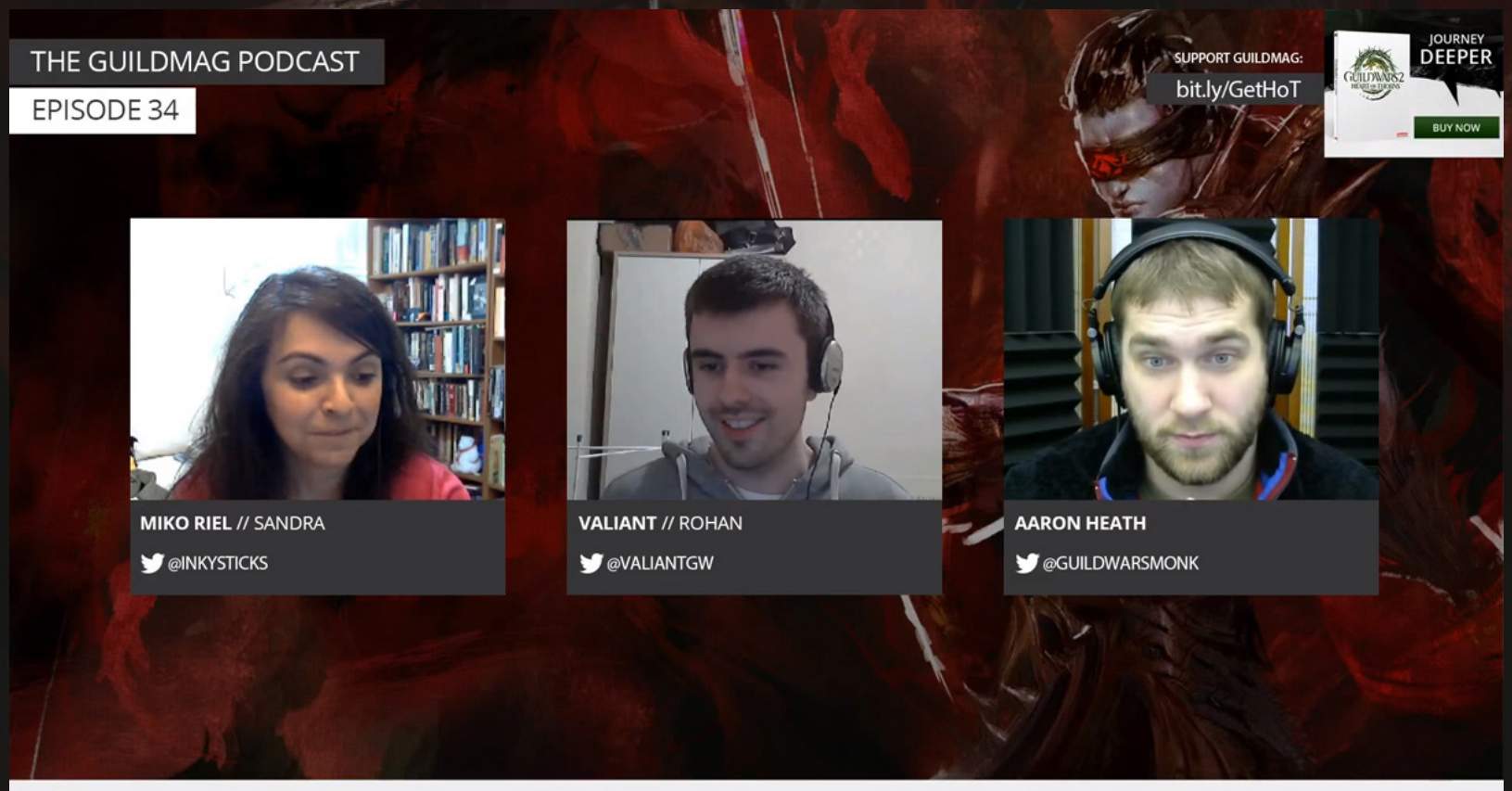
Bearing this ominous information in mind, it seems very likely that the druids have intimate knowledge of the Elder Dragons and Tyria's place in the universe. If this is true, they are almost certain to come into play in *Heart of Thorns* in some capacity, if not many. The proximity, foreshadowing, and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

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THRIFTY THREADS

WRITTEN BY THE GUILDMAG TEAM

This year, our team tasked themselves with finding Tyria's best getup for their gold. This is a collection of some of the most popular outfits from the GuildMag blog.

THE SECRET SYLVARI

Since the revelation that the sylvari are creations of the Elder Dragon Mordremoth, the children of the Pale Tree have faced discrimination and suspicion from the other races of Tyria. While there are gorgeous armor pieces that allow the sylvari to show their roots, in these troubling times it might be best to dampen their bioluminescent glow and blend in with their allies in the fight against the Jungle Dragon.

I created this look with armor that did not cost much gold and could allow a sylvari to pass for a human. It is designed for the medium armor class in an effort to aid any sylvari thieves or rangers that might face extra suspicion due to their profession. It certainly looks fantastic for the value, and those who appreciate a more subtle, gritty appearance will get the most out of this setup! This set was assembled to show that with the right colors and combination (and graphics settings) even the cheapest of armors can be used to create a stylish, affordable look for your character. Good luck, brothers and sisters of the Pale Tree, in your fight against the slavery of Mordremoth.

COMPONENTS

HEAD: Mist Walker Cap (295 Badges of Honor)
The wide brim and bandana help hide your sylvari's face, while also staying fashionable in the Jungle. You can purchase it in your server's Borderlands from the Armor Trader for 295 Badges of Honor.

SHOULDERS: Privateer Shoulders (~2s)
This piece is probably the easiest to obtain. It is a very common drop from most mobs and bags, and can be purchased on the Trading Post for under 2 silver.

CHEST: Rogue Coat (182 karma)
This coat can be unlocked for free as a level-up bonus, or purchased from Paden in Beetletun for 182 karma.

HANDS: Sneakthief Gloves (~1g)
Just like the shoulders, this is a very common drop as well as a reward when leveling up a character. It can also be purchased on the Trading Post for about 1g.

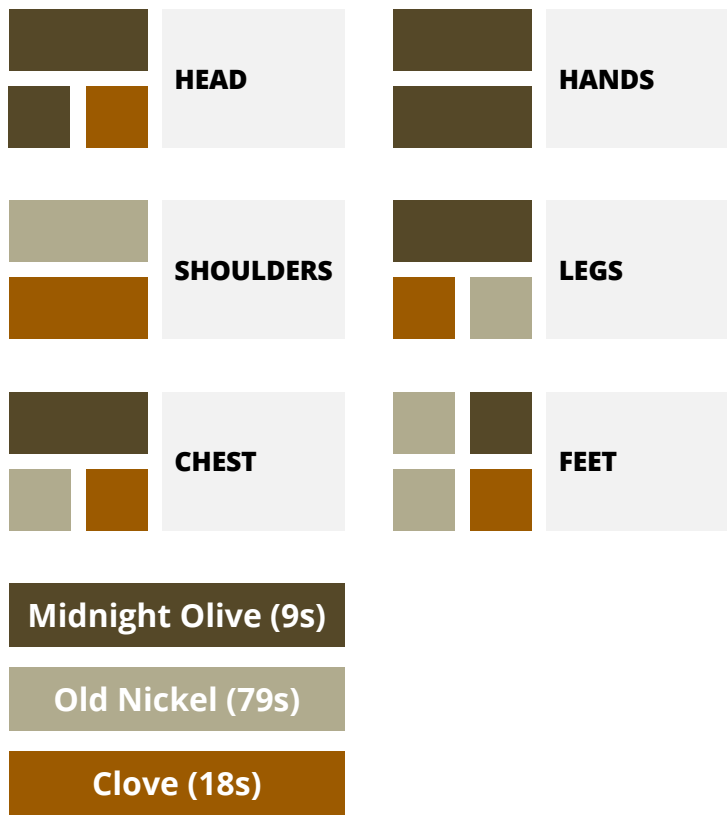
LEGS: Sneakthief Leggings (~45s)
The Sneakthief pants skin can be obtained through leveling up a character, or purchased on the Trading Post for under 45 silver.

FEET: Ascalonian Sentry Boots (180 Ascalonian Tears)
This skin is purchased from the dungeon armor vendor in Fort Marriner for 180 Ascalonian Tears. Alternatively, you can level up the Ascalonian PvP track to claim this skin as a reward.



DYE SCHEME

I chose a dye scheme that wouldn't draw too much attention from allies or the Modrem of the Jungle. All the dyes I used are available on the Trading Post for under 1 gold.



Midnight Olive (9s)

Old Nickel (79s)

Clove (18s)

THE GLADIUM WARLOCK

Ever since launch, the way most armor pieces look on charr characters has bothered me immensely. It's no secret that the charr got seriously snubbed by ArenaNet in terms of armor model quality and tailoring, and for those of us with charr characters, finding the right look has always been limited to a handful of in-game armors. Most charr players end up purchasing expensive tier 3 cultural armor or Gem Store outfits just to keep themselves from looking laughably absurd! In particular, I've noticed that charr players who wear light armor suffer from this debilitating lack of wardrobe options even more than medium and heavy players, so I decided that I would take it upon myself to create a decent looking and affordable alternative to the cliché Citadel of Flame armor, cultural armor, and Gem Store outfits worn by most light armored charr players.



When designing this ensemble, I wanted to go for something that would not only look at home on a charr, but also resonate with their cultural background and lore. Thus was born the Gladium Warlock.

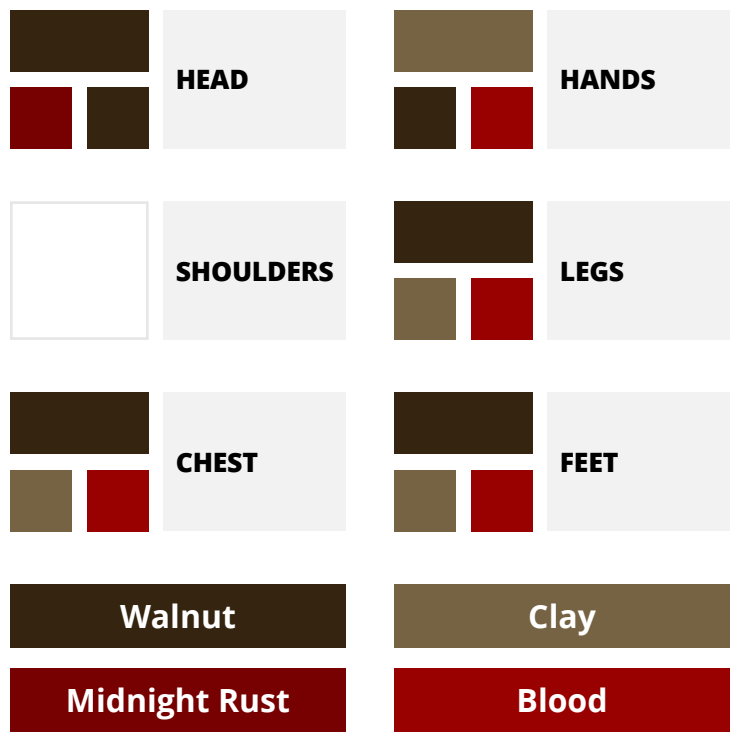
In charr culture, gladiums are soldiers who have lost their warband in some way. Charr who find themselves without a warband, even if it was through no fault of their own, are branded gladiums: aimless wanderers outside the chain of command, rejected by charr society.

The Gladium Warlock is a seasoned traveler, ragged and worn, with no flashy baubles or gaudy adornments festooning their clothing. He or she is a skilled mage and is deadly in combat, their prodigious skill born from years of fending for themselves in the wilderness.

While this may not be the best looking option across the board, it certainly looks fantastic for the value, and those who appreciate a more subtle, gritty appearance will get the most out of this setup!

DYE SCHEME

If you like the dye scheme I've used for my setup, feel free to use it! Below is an image of the dyes with a color key below the image (all dyes can be purchased on the Trading Post for less than 2 gold).



COMPONENTS

HEAD: Diviner Helm (88s + 150 Badges of Honor)
This is one of the few charr headpieces available through in-game means that does not hide the player's horns. It can be purchased from an Armor Master in the staging area on each of the WvW Borderlands maps.

SHOULDERS: None!
No shoulder armor!? That's right! The Diviner Helm will override any equipped shoulder skin , so wear what you wish in your shoulder slot.

CHEST: Winged Tunic (~30-50s)
This tunic can be crafted by Tailors who are at least level 225. It will cost 1 Linen Coat Lining, 1 Linen Coat Panel, and 1 Linen Insignia of the player's choice to craft, which equates to about 30-50 silver depending on the price of linen.

HANDS: Whisper's Secret Gloves (Light) (1g 12s)
These gloves can be purchased from Armor Requisitioner Betje on the second level of the Chantry of Secrets. Remember, you must be on a character that has joined the Order of Whispers to buy these, but once bought, they can be skinned to any character you like.

LEGS: Primitive Legwraps (40 Badges of Honor)
When compared to the typical hoopskirt aesthetic most light armor leggings provide on a charr model, these paint a much more vicious and intimidating picture. The easiest way to obtain these leggings is to buy the Tactical Leggings Skin from an Armor Master in WvW.

FEET: Path of Koda (180 Symbols of Koda)
These boots round off the vagabond look we're going for nicely. They feature an iron-banded leather boot, and their design suits both our vision and the charr in general very well. They can be purchased from Dungeon Armor and Weapons in Lion's Arch for 180 Symbols of Koda, which can be earned by running the Honor of the Waves dungeon.

A REVENANT'S REGALIA

In this piece I'm going to explore what it means to build an outfit that tells a story. As a self-proclaimed lore enthusiast, I am thrilled that *Heart of Thorns* has included new species, new places, and many references to the original *Guild Wars* throughout the wet, muddy, and tangled mass that is the Maguuma Jungle. However, I felt that one important aspect of the new expansion, the introduction of the revenant profession, was missing all historical context. Unlike the guardian profession, which was explained in blog posts and the *Guild Wars 2* novelizations, the revenant has near to no information about it, but appears to have a history that predates Rytlock's transformation, as players can obviously begin their revenant's journey long before Rytlock abandons the corporeal world for the Mists.

So what is a player to do? How are revenants made? How are they chosen? How does one create a look that embodies what it means to be revenant if there isn't much lore to go by? The simple answer for now is: make your own story. An alternative to jumping on the Mistward bandwagon (while it is an impressive armor set in its own right) is to create an outfit that weaves a tale of how your newly created legend-communing master came to be.

For me that story begins with a human thief, Lu Tian. My written background for Lu is that she grew up in a noble family, trained under Lady Wi to be a spy, thief, informant, and eventually, assassin for the Order of Whispers. At some point, she's badly injured in a mission against Mordrem in the Silverwastes. During her downtime in Divinity's Reach, she acquires a tome said to be written by two norn legends, titled "The Untold Hero," from a contact in her Order. When she breaks the enchanted seal that holds the book closed, she finds the book's pages to be blank except for the first, which is headlined "The Beginning." Out of excess frustration and a little bit of dry humor, she pens in "My name is Lu Tian and this is my legend." In an instant, Lu is spirited away, sucked into the Mists through the book. There, she meets the two norn that created the portal, Sif Shadowhunter and Olaf Olafson. Together they help Lu regain her strength and teach her how to channel the power of the revenant to sow her own legend.



DYE SCHEME

One of the challenges (albeit a fun challenge) that comes with mixing and matching armor is that the metals, leather, and cloth don't always dye the same on different armor sets. For certain pieces to match, sometimes you have to play around with darker or lighter versions of a color between several armor pieces. The effort usually makes up for it in the end with a kickass outfit.



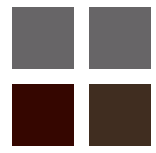
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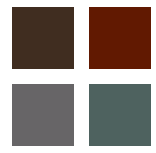
SHOULDERS



CHEST



HANDS



LEGS



FEET

Gray

Umber

Amenity

Taupe

Graphite

Silver Lead

Copper

Cocoa



COMPONENTS

HEAD: Resplendent Curtain (character creation)
The first piece is one of the headbands a revenant can choose from during character creation. I prefer it over the other two because of its sleek, but finely plated, model. It has an almost science-fiction look to it that accentuates that the revenant is something other-worldly.

SHOULDERS: Braham's Pauldrons (800 gems for Braham's armor skin set)
The inclusion of pieces from Braham's armor allows to me to give Lu Tian's outfit a norn aesthetic that would normally be harder to convey without them, and while the shoulder piece isn't 100% necessary, I really feel like it helps to complete the ensemble. Sadly, to acquire this and the leggings, you'll have to dip into your gem savings and drop a hefty 800 gems in the in-game store.

CHEST: Brawn of Koda (330 Symbols of Koda)
While I could've made use of more of Braham's armor, I decided to play around with some of my other northern-style options to see if I could avoid set conformity; the Brawn of Koda became my solution. What I like most about this particular piece is that the side cloth appears to flow with the "battle skirt" of the leggings. It's also sleeveless so, like a norn, Lu can show some muscle in the most literal sense. The breastplate part, while curvy, reminds me a little of Marvel Comics' new Thor and her outfit. It's powerful, it's bold, it's tough, and it'll cost you 330 Symbols of Koda to buy. Time to rally the guild for some Honor of the Waves dungeon runs.

HANDS: Dragonhunter's Gauntlet (free - unlock Dragonhunter elite spec)
Proof that the dragonhunter does hold a gridlock on dragonhunting swagger, the Dragonhunter's Gauntlets can either pay homage to Glint as a herald or represent a character's role in the ongoing war against the Elder Dragons, specifically for Lu's story, the norns' greatest foe, Jormag. The asymmetric look doesn't always work, but I liked that the main armor piece is opposite the shoulderplate. This armor piece is earned by fully unlocking the dragonhunter elite specialization.

LEGGINGS: Braham's Legplates (800 gems for Braham's armor skin set)
Its rough-and-tough but flexible design is proof that hunters have to occasionally weigh mobility and speed against protection, and in true norn fashion that usually means exposing some amount of skin to the frigid Shiverpeaks air (because nothing says "we're the toughest" more than the constant threat of hypothermia). Humor aside, the leggings mesh well with the top and provide the decorative metal buckle and the hip fur to match the shoulders. Like the shoulders, the leggings come as part of a normally 800 gem set.

FEET: Avenger's Footgear (80s)
I picked out these plated boots as they provide knee guards, and they have a distinct and sleek design that really gives my character a bit of a valkyrie vibe. The name, of course, is amusing for reasons that one might understand if they read the chest armor blurb. The Avenger's Footgear is purchasable at the Cultural Armor vendor in Divinity's Reach on the top floor for 80 silver. Note that these are only available for human characters.



EDITORIAL

WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH

HEART OF THORNS: FLAWS AND FOLLIES

After waiting a reasonable but nevertheless excruciating 10 months for the release of *Heart of Thorns*, players have finally been able to experience the long-awaited expansion content. However, the 16 story quests featured in the expansion were met with lukewarm to outright negative reception. While not universally panned, the *Heart of Thorns* narrative definitely failed to meet the standards and expectations of many players, though it did achieve certain things rather well, such as broadening the Living World idea of integrating public events into the narrative structure. However, on the whole, the storytelling in *Heart of Thorns* featured a few key issues that held it back considerably, keeping it from reaching its full potential.

We start off right where Season 2 left us: the Pact fleet has been reduced to a smoldering ruin, Pact forces are scattered and broken, and the player character and their posse are searching high and low for what remains of Destiny's Edge. Unfortunately, we then proceed to spend the entirety of the plot chasing Eir, Logan, and Zojja. This cripples the narrative more heavily than any of the other writing choices in the expansion because it directs the plot in such a way that it restricts other, more interesting stories from unfolding.



Part of the problem with the story in Heart of Thorns is that it is rushed, the reason being that the player character is constantly motivated to disregard fascinating discoveries like the Exalted and Rata Novus to instead continue their frantic search for Destiny's Edge. If ArenaNet had had us discover and rescue Destiny's Edge within the first couple of quests, the narrative would have been freed up to spend much more time interacting with the Exalted, the Itzel and Nuhoc Hylek, and Rata Novus, and would have also been able to explore some potential plot points that never made the final cut.



A common counter to this suggestion is that if we rescued Destiny's Edge in the first two or three quests, the story would lack the serious consequences we see in both the death of Eir and the near corruption of either Logan or Zojja (depending on who was saved first). Well, that simply isn't true. These events could take place at literally any point in the story and have the same effect and impact. The story feels like it's not sure whether the primary objective is finding Destiny's Edge or defeating Mordremoth, and making the transition from one to the other earlier in the plot would only serve to strengthen and enrich the narrative as a whole.

Let's take a moment to discuss Eir and her untimely demise. Overall, this was a poor writing decision, but not because of who died. While I would have preferred a more interesting end to Eir Stegalkin, I cede that the jungle is a dangerous place, and that Faolain is a cunning and treacherous enemy. Furthermore, her death allowed us to witness a side of Braham we were unfamiliar with. No, the tragedy here is the casual writing off of one of the most compelling and interesting villains in the game: Faolain.

"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EQUALLY INTRIGUING TO SEE HOW FAOLAIN'S PRESENCE IN THE STORY AFFECTED CAITHE, AND WHAT THEIR INTERACTIONS MIGHT HAVE LED TO

The Nightmare Court prides itself on its independence from authority more than anything, and it would have been fascinating to experience Faolain and the rest of the Nightmare Court struggle with the decision of either joining or fighting Mordremoth. Furthermore, it would have been equally intriguing to see how Faolain's presence in the story affected Caithe, and what their interactions might have led to. In discarding Faolain as a generic (though admittedly nightmare-inducing) dragon minion, ArenaNet missed out on the portrayal of a fascinating character study exploring the concepts of love, morality, redemption, and treachery.

So, after progressing through a very rushed storyline in which we brush past monumental discoveries such as the Exalted and the city of Rata Novus, the latter of which was more or less completely unnecessary to the plot and could have been cut entirely, we arrive at a final mission that, despite its gameplay flaws, I actually found relatively satisfying. The idea that Mordremoth is more of an abstract presence than a physical being makes a lot of sense considering his dominance over the mind, and in turn it makes perfect sense that the only way to defeat it would be through a mental confrontation. I also thought it fitting that Trahearne died, though it would have been more compelling if he had been turned completely and was an actual boss.

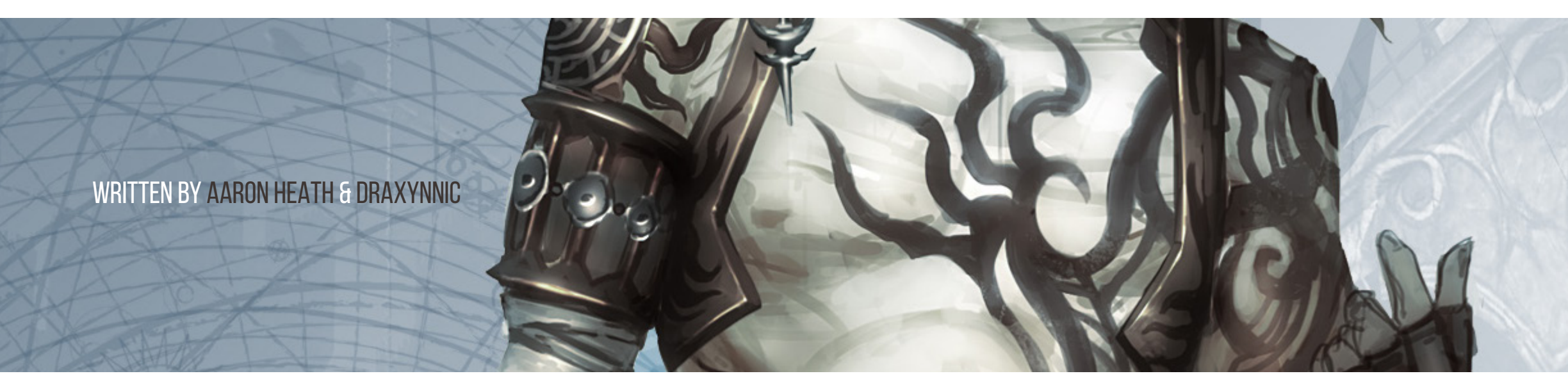
The final cutscene features the fallout magical energy from Mordremoth's death being transferred into Glint's egg, which lends aid to a couple of theories. One is that Glint's offspring has the potential to become an Elder Dragon under the right circumstances, and the other is that when an Elder Dragon dies, the astronomical amount of magic stored within them has to go somewhere. It's similar to what happened with Abaddon and Kormir in *Nightfall*. ArenaNet deserves a tip of the hat here, as these were concepts that they alluded to in the Living World, and delivering on them in a way that does not feel shoehorned or forced is commendable.

ArenaNet also improved on the concept of using public dynamic events to tell large portions of the story. One of the key reasons why we see so little of Tarir and Rata Novus is most likely because those regions are featured heavily in map-wide event chains that explain a great deal about the Exalted and the technology and lifestyles of the extinct Rata Novus asura. The Tarir meta event chain in Auric Basin establishes several Exalted characters, though they lack very distinct personalities and serve relatively standard event-NPC roles. Furthermore, the meta event in the Dragon's Stand map tells the story of a vastly significant plot point: that of the major final military conflict against Mordremoth and his armies. Many agree that this event should be completed prior to starting the final story quest because of its significance to the plot.

While it is an intriguing concept in theory, it also has its flaws. Even with the Mastery gates in the story that force players to explore the jungle and do events, there is no guarantee that players will experience the full extent of story content the dynamic events have to offer. Overall, ArenaNet did a fairly decent job of keeping the dynamic event story content fairly light and non-pertinent, but the disconnect between the instanced and public story content still confused a lot of players and ultimately did not add enough to the overall story to justify the lack of complex narrative.

Originally, I think the writing team at ArenaNet had big plans for the *Heart of Thorns* storyline. Remember, story concepts get drafted months and even years in advance of their release. But the unforeseen need for all the new features contained in the expansion slowly bit into the story resources until we were left with a fragment of what the original vision for this story likely was. Furthermore, despite its many flaws, the story achieved an exciting setup for Season 3 of the Living World, which will be more story focused than a feature-laden expansion. *Heart of Thorns* also laid a comprehensive groundwork for future expansions to build upon, so hopefully subsequent expansions will feature more expansive and complex narratives. It's unfortunate that the story in *Heart of Thorns* ended up being such a major step backward from Living World Season 2, but I also think that it will serve as a learning experience for all involved, and that with these new mechanical systems in place, story content will reign supreme in future content releases.

RAZAH AND THE REVENANT



WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH & DRAXYNNIC

LORE ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON GUILDMAG.COM

PART I: RAZAH THE REVENANT

Ever since the revenant was revealed at PAX South, theories about the new profession's origins and how it might fit into the world lore-wise have been circulating through the community in abundance. As an avid fan of the original *Guild Wars* campaigns, my personal favorite of these theories is the notion that the revenant's powers originated with Razah, a character encountered in *Guild Wars Nightfall*. I love this theory not only because it fits so well with the class, but because examining it in greater detail actually taught me a great deal about the *Guild Wars* universe and cleared up a few misconceptions I had about how things work in the lore. Due to the learning experience that was the fleshing out of this particular theory, I want go over it from the beginning so that people with the same misconceptions can rectify them.

I suppose everything starts with the character itself: Razah. But who was Razah? At the end of *Guild Wars Nightfall*, the player character was required to enter a realm of the Mists known as the Realm of Torment. After the defeat of the fallen god Abaddon at the hands of the player, the player could acquire the loyalty of a mysterious entity found deep within the Realm of Torment. This was Razah. A genderless, bipedal entity spawned by the Mists through methods unknown, Razah was not quite human. It had the body of a human, and its mind was similar to that of a human, but since it was spawned by the Mists so mysteriously, its true nature will likely remain largely unknown.

This is where we can draw parallels with the revenant. Revenants wield magic tied to the Mists, which is also known to be the source of Razah's life and power. However, in and of itself, that isn't much to go on. To get a better idea of why Razah being Tyria's first revenant makes so much sense, we must compare the skillsets of the two parties in question. In *Guild Wars*, Razah was a Hero, an NPC that players could add to their party and micromanage. However, Razah was unique in its role as a Hero, as it was the only one in the game that could have its primary profession changed at will. This unique ability correlates well with the revenant's ability to channel the abilities of characters from the original games and swap between them at will, especially since each legend has such a different skillset. This is also where I developed a bit of a plot hole in my original theory.

At first, I believed that the Bloodstone, which was created by the Seers during the last Elder Dragon uprising to house the magic of the races, effectively starving the Dragons, should prevent the revenant from being able to wield so many different types of magic. I believed that the same went for Razah, so I came to the conclusion that since their magic was born of the Mists, it must be completely outside the Bloodstone's realm of control. However, after double-checking with GuildMag's resident scholar on all things Tyria, Draxynnic, I've come to the conclusion that it's a flawed theory. I bring this up because I believe it to be a common misconception in the conceptualization of this theory. The Bloodstone merely limits what type of magic can be wielded by a person at any given moment, so it actually has no bounds over the ability to, say, give up the ability to cast one type of magic in favor of another, which

is exactly what both Razah and the revenant do. Sure, primary profession swapping for player characters in *Guild Wars* was not possible, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this was purely a balancing decision and holds no weight in lore. First of all, there's Razah and the revenant, not to mention Rytlock Brimstone, who has officially changed primary professions. Furthermore, the character Keiran Thackeray, ancestor of Tyria's favorite pillock, went from a ranger to a paragon in Hearts of the North. So the changing of one's profession does hold ground in lore.

However, that doesn't make it any less likely that Razah could have been a revenant, or at least an early precursor to what the Mists (or some entity within them) has now refined into the revenant. It simply means that the Bloodstone could still hold sway over Mists-based magic, which just makes the Seers' magical power all the more impressive. I mean, they may have successfully shackled the Mists. That's serious... Erm... Stuff, right there. Serious stuff.

So it's clear that there are undeniable parallels between Razah and the revenant class. They both have close ties to the Mists, and they both seem to be able to swap the type of magic they wield at any given moment with much more versatility and ease than other professions or entities. What is important to remember is that that really does not prove anything. In fact, I'd go as far as to say it's flimsy, circumstantial evidence at best. There are numerous other possible reasons as to why Razah functioned the way it did, and the same goes for the revenant. Razah's profession swapping could hold no basis in actual lore, and could have been a purely mechanical choice as an endgame reward. Razah's mind could simply be sharper than a human's when it comes to magical and martial aptitude. Its connection to the Mists could have granted it the ability to quickly mimic the magical abilities of others, or it could be something else entirely. The fact is that Razah was such a mysterious specimen that no conclusive evidence can be drawn as to what it was, what its purpose was (if any), and how its powers worked.

Now, that is not to say that the theory holds no weight, because it does. I personally find it to be both a likely theory and one that would be very pleasing for the developers to confirm in some way, or at least drop subtle hints at (knowing ArenaNet, it would be subtle hints). My personal spin on this theory is that ArenaNet wanted to create the revenant in *Guild Wars*, but lacked the technology to make it work the way they wanted it to. Thus was born Razah, an incomplete template for an idea that would eventually be brought to life years down the road in another game entirely. Viva la revenant!



PART II: COPYING LEGENDS

As Aaron observes, one of the properties of the Mists is that they have the potential to spawn new creatures and locations through forming themselves into a reflection of that life form or environment. The accuracy of these reflections varies, due to processes that are not fully understood – from uncannily accurate even to an individual (as Dessa appears to be until she attempts to leave the Mistlock Observatory) through slightly off (the Searing fractal) to a twisted mockery of the original (such as most Torment demons). Razah fits in the middle category – it is in many ways like a human, but also in many ways clearly not.

Razah's main distinguishing feature is that, while it starts off as ritualist due to its affinity for the Mists, Razah gains the ability to switch between primary professions with relative ease. While it is possible for mortals to do so, this usually occurs as a result of years of retraining (ArenaNet has compared it to a scientist switching disciplines) or a life-changing epiphany. Razah, however, does this with apparent ease.

But how? If Rytlock learned the skills of the revenant from Razah... then how did Razah discover them?

Possibly the simplest answer is that Razah retained some of the mutability and potential to mirror other beings of its Mists origins. To change profession, Razah doesn't need to undertake the laborious process of unlearning the habits of the old profession and learning anew – Razah might simply duplicate the powers and skills of a member of the new profession directly into its own mind, overwriting the profession it abandoned: a skill at stealing the knowledge of others that any mesmer might envy.

During the period between Razah's liberation from Abaddon and the end of the *Guild Wars 1* timeline, it would have mostly had the PCs and the NPC heroes and henchmen to serve as templates, and hence he could only borrow the same abilities available to everyone else. However, while those characters changed the course of history in their time, they did so by cooperation: Individually, they were (with the exception of certain builds, anyway) not the match of the likes of Shiro, Mallyx, or the Great Dwarf as embodied in Jalis Ironhammer. As Razah's mortal friends began to die off and retire, it would be natural for it to seek to further develop its abilities by seeking out more powerful 'templates' – such as the vestiges of these legendary figures that remain in the Mists.

Such an explanation for the source of the revenant would neatly explain why all of the legends announced or suspected thus far date from *Guild Wars 1*. Razah would have had the opportunity to meet Shiro and Mallyx while still under Abaddon's thumb, and if it accompanied the heroes into *Eye of the North*, then it would have met Jalis and Ventari there. This would grant it the impetus to seek out the vestiges of these legends in the Mists, and explain why it was able to impart the powers of these legends upon Rytlock.

The source of the suspected Glint-oriented specialization, however, may not have come directly from Razah. Canonically, the player's meeting with Glint occurred years before *Nightfall*, and thus well before Razah was first recruited as a hero. It is possible that Razah was able to experience Glint's power through some other means – such as helping to protect Glint's hatchling in *Eye of the North* – or that it visited Glint at some time outside of the scope of *Guild Wars 1*.

Unlike Razah, however, we do know that Rytlock has met Glint in person... and, furthermore, has carried an anger ever since that the deaths of Snaff and Glint proved to be in vain. It is, therefore, possible that it was Rytlock who provided the impetus to seek out Glint's vestige and add her legend to his repertoire. Such an event would explain why it might be Glint's legend, out of all of them, that becomes the elite specialisation while the others are 'core'. Jalis, Shiro, Ventari and Mallyx are all part of Razah's core teachings, while the ability to channel Glint's power comes from Rytlock's own contribution to the profession.

With all that said, it is possible that Razah is not technically a revenant. While in this theory Razah has been able to develop techniques that allow mortals to take on some of the "mirroring" qualities of the Mists through channelling the legends, it is doubtful that mortals can achieve this with quite the proficiency of one who was born directly from the Mists. In game terms, this is represented by a core set of revenant skills (specifically, the weapon skills) that do not change according to the legend that is channelled, making the adoption of a legendary stance only an imperfect mirroring of the vestige. Razah, on the other hand, might have no such limitation: when Razah channels a legend, Razah may be able to mimic the legend in all particulars.

Thus, Razah may not truly be a revenant, but the ideal to which revenants strive to reach – but can never achieve.

THE PRIORY ARCHIVES

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THE NEW HOME FOR GUILD WARS 2 LORE

OFF THE BEATEN PATH IN TANGLED DEPTHS

EXPLORATION

WRITTEN BY STARCONSPIRATOR

The *Heart of Thorns* release brought us four new maps, each with their own special flavor and challenging content. One of the most challenging to navigate is the jungle floor map, Tangled Depths, with its four twisting layers of paths, caves, streams, and waterfalls. Players find their way here after exploring Auric Basin and once trapped in the maze, many may have a hard time finding their way out. Some players have expressed exasperation with the new maps, finding them difficult to navigate, and the meta events exercises in frustration. However, Tangled Depths has much to offer; straying from the roads, not referencing the map, and fearlessly getting lost are the keys.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

The immenseness of the jungle floor map can be seen in a short run from the Order of Whisper's camp near the entrance to Auric Basin. Heading south, you will come to a stream and following it will lead you to a precipice where the stream tumbles away as an amazing waterfall. Below you, in the underground cave systems, you will see a second Order of Whispers encampment. There, you will find the sylvari Arwyna who asks to be escorted safely to the Ogre Camp. "Arwyna's Camp" is a good landmark and starting point for several forays into the jungle: For example, by running south along the green path out of "Arwyna's Camp" you will reach an eerie pitch black tunnel. If the bones and green ambient lighting aren't enough to dissuade you from entering, you will find the perfect setting to show off any luminescent armor you've collected, and there are no hostile creatures in the darkest portions of the cave so it is safe to linger.

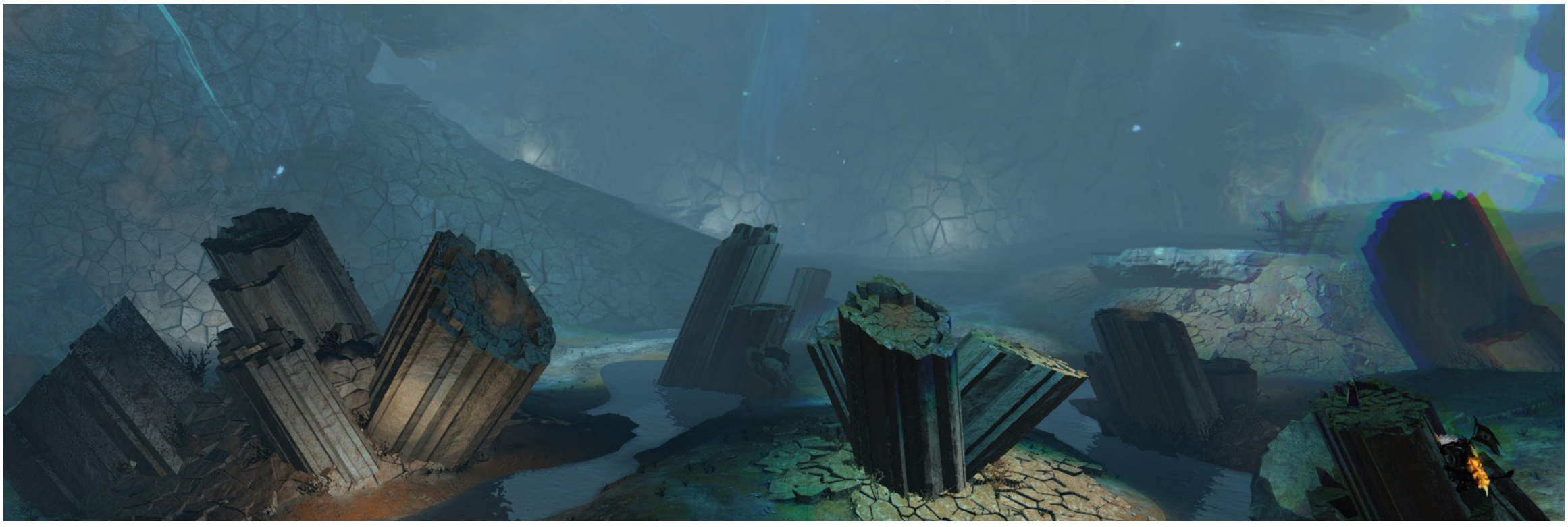




THE OGRE CAMP AND TEKU NUHOCH

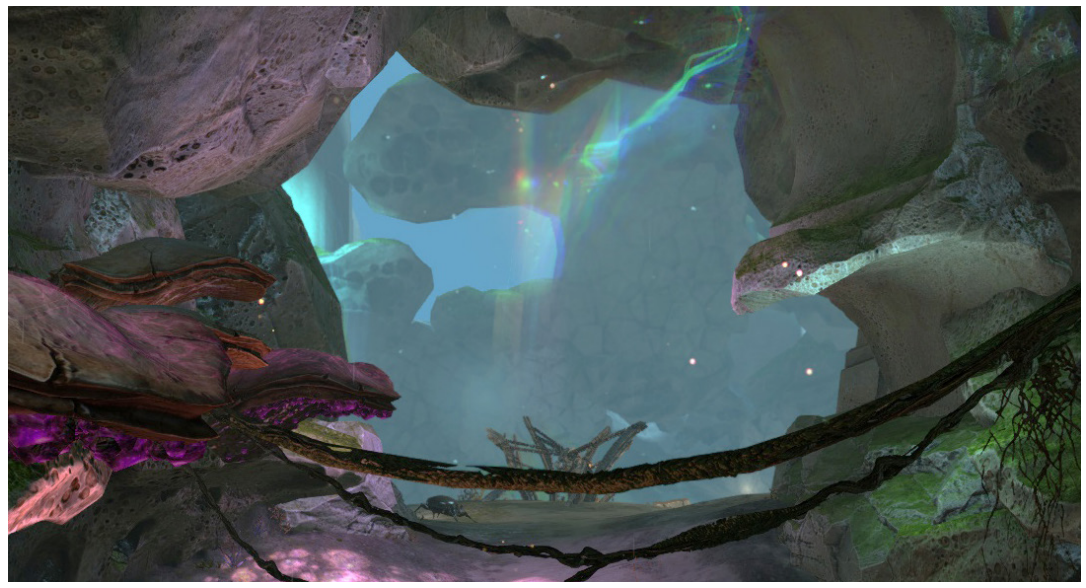
By following Arwyna from her camp, you can unlock the Ogre Camp waypoint. If you don't wish to follow her, take the upward sloping road just north of camp past the mushroom enemies. When you reach the mordrem, look for another upward-sloping path on the south side of the cavern. It will lead you into the Great Tree - now merely a stump - and beyond this lies the Ogre Camp. The hollow interior of the tree is littered with ogres who lost their lives exploring the structure, and by following the spiral path upward, you can climb to the top of the stump. Near the top, a series of shelf mushrooms leads to the highest reaches where you will find the Arboreal Overlook Point of Interest. Beyond this point, a series of updrafts lead to a mastery point, the Strongbox of the "Shard of Brilliance" and the Order of Whispers Camp near the entrance to Auric Basin. Southeast of the tree, not far from the Ogre Camp, you can use bouncing mushrooms to climb the cliffs and discover the ogre crash sight. Exploring the crash sight will yield both an amazing view and a splendid treasure.

To reach the village of Teku Nuhoch, begin again at "Arwyna's Camp." From here, take the same upward-sloping road you took to the Ogre Camp. This time, follow the road past the mushrooms as it loops south and then turns east again. Along the eastern wall, you will find a spiderweb-lined cave full of chak. Push past them and as you exit the cave you will see a stump in the mid-distance, which houses Teku Nuhoch, offering a welcome respite for those traversing the jungle. Recuperating in Teku Nuhoch gives you a chance to converse with the villagers, help them to hunt delicious beetles, and sit in on a lute jam session.



THE LEY-LINE CONFLUENCE, RATA NOVUS, AND SCAR BIVOUAC

From Teku Nuhoch, the path to the Central Confluence and Rata Novus is a straight-forward push through a chak-infested cave system. Despite the infestation, the chak tunnels are wide, well-marked and form natural lanes to each main area. Rata Novus can be reached along the Confluence paths, as can SCAR Bivouac, however there is a second way to reach the bivouac: From the Rata Novus waypoint, look for the large waterfall to the southeast. By using bouncing mushrooms, you can scale the waterfall and follow the river out to the surface near the Cascade Descent Point of Interest. The SCAR Bivouac is a short run southwest of Cascade Descent.



THE CASCADE DESCENT

By dropping down the Cascade Descent, you will reach the lowest level of the map: an underground river. This tunnel is the gateway to a few secret areas, as well as a quick way to travel between points on the map with few enemies. It isn't as fast as waypointing, of course, but it is an interesting journey. Be warned, however, that many of the entrances to the tunnel are protected by environmental barriers, including hungry piranha, laser beams, and poisonous water. To pass the piranhas, the Exalted Beacons that appear in the tunnel provide the answer, plus a welcome speed boost.

Beginning at Cascade Descent, the tunnel first leads to Rata Novus. If you continue north past the city, you will find the secret asuran lab from the Rata Novus story instance. Continuing west from Rata Novus, the water tunnel branches north a second time to exit near Teku Nuhoch in the subterranean lake. However, the environmental barrier here is the lake's poisonous waters so entry and exit will require Itzel Poison Lore. Poison will also greet you inside the chak stronghold, the next water tunnel exit as you swim along the southern fork.

Beyond the stronghold, journeying west and south along the water tunnel will bring you to a short eastern spur near the Ogre Camp. Look for the exit along the top of the water tunnel. Here, you will find yourself in a deep pool surrounded by crystals. By climbing along the crystal path and then ascending through the interlacing roots, you will find the ancient golemancer Zinn's long-lost lab.



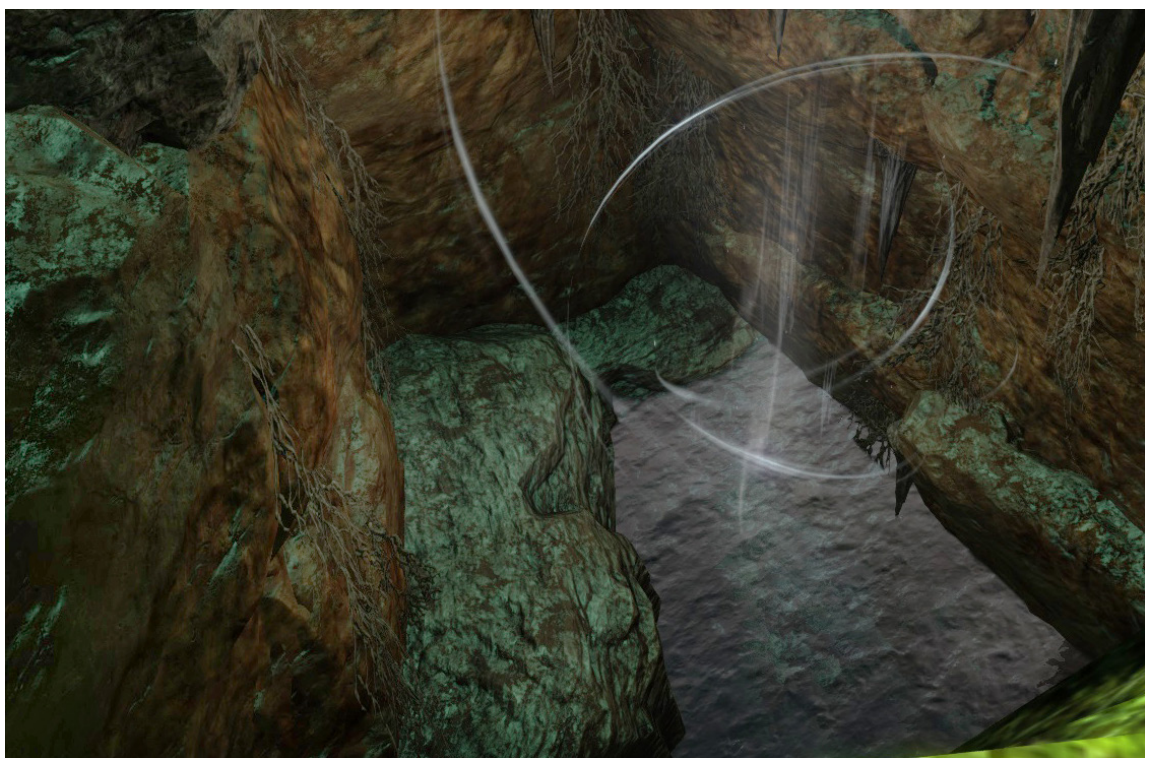


DEEPROOT SINK AND DRAGON'S PASSAGE

Continuing southwest from Zinn's lab, you will find the Jellyfish Grotto Hero Point and just beyond that, another exit into the upper world at the bottom of a deep crevasse. You can use updrafts to escape from the crevasse, and by floating to the very top you will find a chest and an exit into Deeproot Sink. Then, from Deeproot Sink, it is a short but dangerous jaunt south and west to Dragon's Passage and the exit into the final area of the *Heart of Thorns* expansion: Dragon's Stand.

However, there is no reason to fight your way past the chak. Instead of dropping into Deeproot Sink after gliding up the crevasse, return to the bottom and the water tunnel. Ride the first updraft and land on the green ledge near the start of the second updraft, then turn south. Although dropping to the path below will take you to Dragon's Passage (north of the Dragon Passage waypoint), by using the series of nearby updrafts, it is possible to glide from the green ledge to the waypoint with very little time on the ground.

With main waypoints open and knowing a few key landmarks, shortcuts, and alternate routes, navigating Tangled Depths becomes easier. The labyrinthine map earns its name and the UI map can only offer vague guidance as it lacks the ability to properly convey the elevation changes, twists, and turns that make up this map. Like other *Heart of Thorns* maps, the Tangled Depths is amorphous instead of linear and it offers unique challenges and an amazing variety of locales: From ancient cities and long-forgotten labs to poisonous lakes and tree stump villages. Exploring these, spending time off the beaten path can prove quite rewarding.











A STUDY INTO THE

LORE

WRITTEN BY DRAXYNNIC

Part 1 of a review into the nature, divisions, and denizens of the Mists, penned by Scholar Eleanor Draxynnus in the year 1328 AE.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISTS

While scholarly interest in the Mists has persisted for hundreds of years, recent events have been increasingly drawing the Mists from being primarily of academic interest to a topic that may have important ramifications on Tyria's future. The opening of a portal during a ritual intended to reverse the Foefire might indicate that the answer to a permanent solution may lie in the Mists, while the appearance of a new branch of magic drawing power from "legends" – echoes of powerful beings from Tyria's history – suggests that the Mists may contain as-yet-untapped magical resources. Alternatively, these "legends" may be more of a risk than they're worth, allowing the personalities of defeated villains to once more exercise harmful influence over Tyria.

In the following treatise, I discuss what we know of the nature of the Mists, and how some of the regions within the Mists are divided. In the second part of this study, I will give an overview of the beings known to reside in the Mists.



THE NATURE OF THE MISTS

The first thing we know about the Mists is that they are a force of limitless creative potential. Legend holds that Tyria itself was born from the Mists, although whether this was a true case of spontaneous creation, a copy of some other world, or called into being by some unidentified creator is unknown.

Most of our own experience with creation in the Mists, however, involves copying some aspect of Tyria that serves as a 'template'. In some cases, such as the fractals, this copy is almost perfect – creatures are indistinguishable from Tyrian natives, and even the terrain and events within the fractal may match up, to a greater or lesser degree, with historical events in Tyria. Other copies show greater imperfections, such as the Torment demons that reportedly occasionally resembled nightmarish jumbles of limbs and other parts. Exactly what the criteria is for something to be used as a template by the Mists is unclear, but it does seem that the more significant an object, creature, or event, the more likely it is to be copied in the Mists.

Certain powerful beings, such as the gods, also appear to have a limited ability to shape the Mists through conscious direction. While it is likely that each of the realms of the gods has been shaped by the god that owns it, the clearest example may be in the changes wrought by Abaddon in the Realm of Torment in order to bring the Realm to Tyria.

From research into accounts during that period, it seems that the main 'crack' that Abaddon needed was for someone within Tyria to have knowledge of him. This knowledge formed a link between the mortal's mind and the fallen god, allowing Abaddon both to send minions to our world and to draw current knowledge from that person's surroundings in Tyria. With that knowledge, he could shape a portion of the Realm of Torment to match the victim's surroundings – and through a form of sympathetic magic, this allowed Abaddon to project this portion of the Realm of Torment into the world of Tyria, merging with the target location and providing Abaddon with a foothold.

While some less-directed 'leak through' occurred as the barrier between Tyria and the Realm of Torment was weakened by Warmarshal Varesh, major incursions of this nature did not come without a warning. It seems the link worked both ways, and as the Nightfallen copy was made, the victim would begin to see it in their dreams. In one case, heroes employed a ritual to enter the victim's dreams and destroy the Nightfallen substitution from within, removing the threat. In the other, however, the sacred Garden of Seborhin was corrupted, and while the corruption was contained by the efforts of heroes and the spirit defenders of the place, it was not fully restored until after Abaddon's defeat.

This potential for creation may not be restricted to powerful entities such as the gods alone – it is possible that magic itself may be derived in some manner from the energy of the Mists, with mortal use of magic being a form of conscious or semi-conscious direction of energy to generate a creative effect.



NATURE OF THE MISTS

REGIONS OF THE MISTS

When talking about the Mists, there are two distinct realms that we have experienced, and a possible third that we have not. While there is likely no explicit barrier between them as there is between the Mists and the Tyria we live in, the two appear different enough to be considered separately.

The first is what, in lieu of an existing formal term, I shall refer to as the 'Tyrian Mists.' While according to legend Tyria was born from the Mists, and a 'veil' partially separates the Tyria we live in from the Mists, there are, in fact, two versions of Tyria: the Tyria we live in, and a Tyria that is found in the Mists. It is unclear whether the Mists' version is a copy of Tyria or simply a reflection that, like spirits who manifest in our world, Tyria exists both within and outside the Mists. Either way, the Tyrian Mists behave as a spirit analogue to our world – where the spirits of the deceased first find themselves, as well as the home of animal spirits and other beings that remain closely linked to Tyria. The Tyrian Mists are relatively easy to reach – in some places the veil grows thin and the two overlap, and some mystics, the norn havrouns in particular, have the ability to step into and out of this spirit world.

> "THERE ARE, IN FACT, TWO VERSIONS OF TYRIA: THE TYRIA WE LIVE IN, AND A TYRIA THAT IS FOUND IN THE MISTS

A region of the Tyrian Mists is closely bound with its equivalent region in Tyria, and events in Tyria reflect on the Tyrian Mists, and possibly vice versa. The Nightfall events provoked by Abaddon, for instance, might be caused by Abaddon shaping a region of the Tyrian Mists to match an analogous region of the Realm of Torment, causing the Tyria of the living to physically reshape itself to match.

Some correlation seems likely between the Tyrian Mists and the Dream of Dreams. Like the Tyrian Mists, regions within the Dream will match their physical analogue, and these regions can be considered similar to those regions where the veil is thin between the physical world and the Tyrian Mists. As sylvari also say that dead sylvari return to the Dream – as souls of other races enter the Mists – it may be that the Dream simply represents a region of the Tyrian Mists of particular interest to, and influenced by, the Pale Tree and the sylvari. Alternatively, it may be another realm within the Mists that happens to be a particularly close analogue to the physical realm.

The second are the True Mists, the chaotic region that many adventurers think of when they consider the Mists. This is the region where the various realms of the Mists can be found, whether they be fractals, realms of the gods, the battlefields of the Mist War, or the Hall of Heroes. While these realms are distinct from Tyria, many are still formed from imperfect copies of places and events on Tyria, or are at least similar enough to Tyria that we are able to survive in those environments.

A possible third region may exist, which I shall call the Deep Mists. This would represent a region sufficiently far from Tyria or any other physical world, such that the Mists there are unable to use a physical world as a template to form realms. Thus, these regions may contain realms that are entirely unrecognisable (and possibly inhospitable) to Tyrians, or even lack stable realms altogether. If any have ventured to such places they have not returned to tell the tale. However, some accounts of the fight against Mallyx the Unyielding speak of rumours that the Ravenheart Gloom may have led to such a place. If the Realm of Torment did sit on the edge of the Deep Mists, this would explain the twisted shapes of the torment demons that inhabit it. While creatures formed within closer sections of the Mists (such as the fractals and the realms of the Mist War) are inhabited by creatures which are perfect or near-perfect copies of creatures from Tyria, the reflections of Tyrian creatures into regions deeper into the Mists may be distorted by the greater distance, resulting in the misshapen forms of the demons that form there.

In the second part of this treatise, I will go into greater depth on how the Mists behave as a spirit realm for Tyria, including a discussion of the denizens of the Mists that have influenced Tyria: the souls of the dead, the Spirits of the Wild, and the gods.



ART

COMMUNITY ART: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD

WRITTEN BY KENT BENSON

As an amateur artist, I often find it difficult to stray from my comfort zone. Whether it be my reluctance to take on building a detailed landscape or drawing an action scene from a challenging point of perspective, making and improving one's art is all about putting yourself out there, taking risks, and letting go of what feels safe. For this issue, I decided to choose art that I felt made bold statements or tackled a significant challenge in one form or another. Of course, this is art; my opinions and perspectives are subject to my preferences and to the limits of my artistic knowledge. However, these are ultimately bound to one important rule: I'm here to have fun.

"NIVH PORTRAIT" BY KAIYELA



Immediately what stood out to me about this painting is the face; it's the focus. I love that the head appears larger, that it's all up in my face while the rest of the body is mostly non-descript, opaque, and smaller. In the case of this piece, less is obviously more. The charr, "Nivh" presumably, is fierce, alert, and likely less than pleased (though some charr are known to have naturally grumpy expressions). The creases around the muzzle, the snarl of the nose and mouth, are indications of both age and emotion.

The cherry on top, for me, are the tiny, sparkling pupils in her eyes. Like the shimmering of distant headlights on a highway, Nivh's eyes pierce the dark of dusk around her. It is a subtle but powerful detail that helps make this piece as bold as I think it is. Finally, for a few last notes, I love that the setting is also not too descript. It's enough for me to build the scene and story in my head. The time of day, the season, it's all here.

"CHARR ELEMENTALIST" BY DANDZIALF

Since we're already taking a ride on the charr train, let's stick around a little longer with Dandzialf's "Charr Elementalist 6." One aspect of the charr that give players some amount of grief is the lack of armor sets that are designed around the charr body. What Dandzialf has done with this character concept is design their own outfit, which frankly, I'd throw on my daredevil in two shakes of a charr's tail.

The outfit is not absurdly elaborate and plays to many of the same design features of some charr racial armor: banded leather, straps, folded robes, and open toes. That said, the specific design is a little more elegant than I've seen with most charr apparel, though not abundantly so. The color scheme focuses more on faded blues and browns, with some parts tinted slightly green and embroidered with gold.

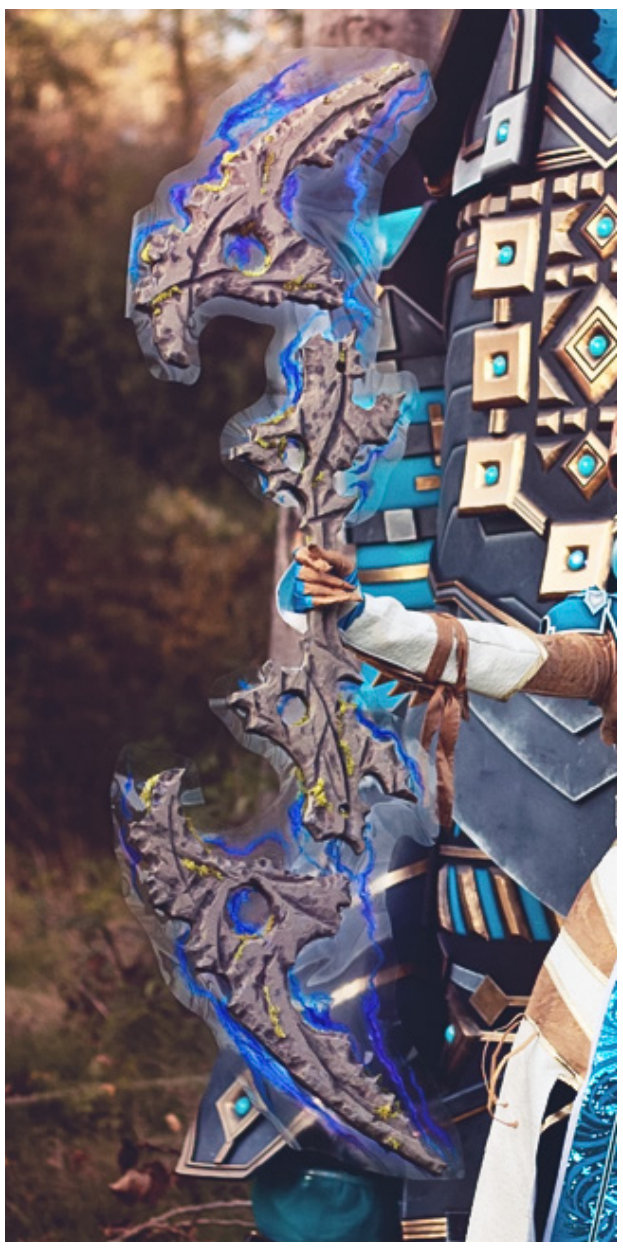


“OFFENSIVE GOLEM SUPPORT” BY ENAYLA COSPLAY



On the topic of outfit design, there’s nothing more artistically bold than taking on a cosplay project - especially when that project leads to the construction of a ridiculously large asura golem battlesuit. Enayla’s signature white, blue, and gold Inquest outfit and blue-haired asura cosplay has been making splashes in the *Guild Wars 2* creative community for some time now. I first saw her at PAX East when she was sporting a model of the basic glider skin. Little did I know that she was going to take her asura cosplay to its technological conclusion.

The golem suit is nearly perfect in detail (obviously there isn’t real magic holding its limbs together because that’s, you know, impossible) down to the occasional scuffs and fades in the paint and around the hard edges that give its faux metal armor that “tempered and tested” look. The feather in the cap, however, is the fact that Enayla can actually climb into the suit by standing on platforms that she built into the legs. Add on the fact she also made a ley-line bow lined with wispy blue magic, every crag and crack chiseled in, and the whole getup becomes the stuff of cosplay legend.









“JOURNEY THROUGH TYRIA” BY RIENLEN



Cosplay and digital character design are functionally fascinating, but my passion in art belongs to illustration. Taking characters and putting them in some form of context, that tells a story. With Rienlen’s triptych piece, the artist does just that in a very distinct and loveable cartoonish style that is dynamic and expressive. The first image features a female sylvari (at least, I think so, judging by the outfit design) in Orr, engaged in elemental combat. I love the liveliness of this panel, which is sort of ironic considering the setting. The bright golden light, the whirling elemental magic, the appropriate use of action blurring effects and perspective tilt give the first image its punch. I can’t help but look at it and think about how cool this would look as an animated sequence.

The center image, for me, is all about expression and perspective. Sure, it has a lot to do with the human and asura reacting at... something (probably a brood of spiders; it’s always spiders). One thing I love about more cartoonish styles is that it allows the artist to really exaggerate and magnify facial expression beyond what is normally possible; Rienlen doesn’t hesitate to do that, and it pays off in a big way. It makes me, as the viewer, curious about what is happening in that scene, and of course, humors me to see an asura make such a face.





The final image in the trio appears to be more scene-focused. The way the scene is lit is meant to draw our eyes to the horizon, the mountains in the distance, and the dragon circling them. The feeling I get when looking at this last image is on par with the feeling I get when I’m in Lornar’s Pass or Timberline Falls, when you come to the top of a hill or turn the corner of a cliffside path to see a green and white valley ahead of you. You pause and think “woah,” before journeying onward, propelled by the need to see what adventure lies over the next hill.



“REAPER” BY H1FEY



What brought me to h1fey’s piece is how well it embodies how I imagine the reaper elite specialization. Reapers are known as bringers of death, destruction, and are often considered a force for evil, tearing away the things we love. However, as *Guild Wars 2* is a story about heroes and their war against the Elder Dragons, it allows the reaper to be put in this unique role of being fiercely grim and terrifying, but also heroic.

The subject (what I can only assume to be a sylvari reaper) is traversing a world of shadow, stalking its target. The scenery is almost non-descript to avoid drawing the viewer’s eyes from leaving the figure, as it should; even the figure itself ultimately blurs into a flowing shadowy mass. The reaper’s scythe is appropriately wispy in form and doesn’t go overboard with the green glow, while the armor has just about the right amount of detail so that it looks like actual armor. Ideally, I would have liked to see a little bit more “texture” or differentiation in the black mass that makes up the legs. Monochromatic (mostly) painting can be difficult in that shapes of color can blend together if they aren’t defined, which the artist skillfully avoids in their work.



FICTION

WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH

A SHATTERED PACT: PART I

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 14

Sound was the first thing that penetrated the silent, unending pit of utter darkness that was Arcadia Steelfur's reality. She could hear a soft, rhythmic thrum all around her, punctuated by sharp cracking noises like twigs breaking underfoot. *Wind? No, too warm, thought Arcadia dully, and no breeze.*

Fire! At this sudden realization, her eyes snapped open. She was lying on her back in the middle of a small clearing in what looked like a forest, but was unlike any forest Arcadia had ever seen. The trees grew this way and that, crisscrossing and intertwining with one another. Thick, ropey vines hung from their branches, trailing down into an impenetrable undergrowth of multicolored and vibrant vegetation. The flames that had awoken her appeared to be emanating from burning piles of charred wood and twisted bits of metal. *Are those airship parts?*

As she continued to take in her surroundings, Arcadia finally realized where she must be. *The Maguuma Jungle. But if I'm there, then-* her thought trailed off as she realized what must have become of the Pact's assault on the elder dragon Mordremoth's inner sanctum. Involuntary tears welled in her eyes, and she blinked them back furiously as she tried not to think about what might have happened to her fellow warband members. *Charr don't cry, Arcadia, get it together! They can take care of themselves. Right now, you need to focus on getting yourself out of this mess!*

As that thought crossed her mind, she realized she was unable to move. Looking down at her prone form, still clad in her Vigil uniform, she could see that she was trapped beneath an enormous pile of airship wreckage and smoldering vegetation. She struggled feebly to extricate herself from the oppressive mass, but her efforts met with little success. She slumped back in defeat, her long horns digging into the soft earth as she stared up into the impenetrable blackness of the jungle canopy.

What was that? Her four ears twitched as her heightened sense of hearing picked up the sound of multiple high-pitched voices drawing near. Lying still, Arcadia listened warily.

"The plan failed, Flune!" said a shrill, insistent voice; it sounded male. "The fleet is in ruins, Trahearne and Destiny's Edge, well, the members of Destiny's Edge that bothered to come along at any rate, are missing, presumed dead, and the likelihood that anyone else survived this mess is minimal at best! We need to evacuate the area, now!"

"We survived, didn't we?" Countered a new voice, female this time, her tone sharp, "I don't suppose you factored that statistic into your calculations, Mister 'dragon magic analyst expert.' If there are survivors, Drixx, we have to stay and look for them. It's our duty to the Pact."

"It's 'savant in applied magical analysis,' thank you very much. Not that you'd care, Miss 'glorified tree historian.'"

"For your information, the Priory considers me their senior-most authority on the Maguuma Jungle, which makes me imperative to this effort."

"Well thank the alchemy we had you with us, or else we would have really been in trouble. Oh wait…"

"I don't have time for your foolish antics, Drixx. I'm going to search the area for survivors and help anyone I can. I'll be sure to report your desertion when I regroup with what remains of our allies."

"I see no reason for that type of behavior. I –"

"Would you two stop squabbling like a pair hornless cubs and get me out of here?" Arcadia asked loudly, cutting off the conversation. She still could not see where the voices were coming from, but they were clearly with the Pact and at least one of them sounded like they would be willing to help.

"Who said that? Where are you?" shouted the female voice, clearly caught off guard by the sudden interruption.

"I'm in the clearing, underneath all this junk!" Arcadia shouted back, wincing at the effort.

Arcadia heard the muffled shuffle of hurried footsteps from somewhere behind her, and after a few seconds, two squat figures appeared through the gloom. Arcadia had assumed they were asura, and their large, floppy ears, disproportionate heads, and unusually short stature confirmed her suspicions immediately. Catching sight of her torn and soiled Vigil garments, they hurried over and knelt by Arcadia's side.

"Alright, let's get you out of here," said the female asura, whose bright pink hair shone merrily in the dull firelight, "Drixx, we need to displace the debris impeding this charr's mobility. Would you mind doing the honors?"

"Um, ah, yes, of course, stand back, Flune," said Drixx, flushing slightly. Brandishing a short staff with an odd, rectangular mechanism whirring at its tip, he pointed it at the immense heap of wreckage and waved it once. A powerful gust of wind emanated from the staff, causing Drixx's dark hair to stand on end and sending both the debris and Arcadia flying across the clearing into a nearby clump of vegetation.

"Drixx, you dolt!" Flune shouted angrily, "look what you've done now! We're trying to rescue survivors, not kill them!"

Drixx rolled his eyes as he retorted, "Relax, she'll be fine. The charr are very durable specimens. You should see what kind of punishment they can take in the lab."

At that moment, Arcadia staggered out of the trees, brushing leaves off her fur and looking disgruntled.

“You could have been more diplomatic about it,” she said huffily, “but thanks. I’m Arcadia Steelfur, Vigil Engineer and Pact Airship Technician. I’m from the Firefang, though I doubt it’s any more than a smoking heap of garbage at this point. I don’t remember much, one minute I’m in the engine room making sure everything’s ship shape, the next I’m waking up down here beneath a pile rubble. Do either of you know what happened?”

Flune walked over to Arcadia and shook her outstretched paw, wincing as she made contact with Arcadia’s razor sharp claws.

“I’m Flune, and this bumbling idiot is Drixx. We’re both with the Durmand Priory. We were aboard the Raithwyrm when it happened. We had been bombarding the jungle with everything we had for several minutes, when enormous vines shot out of nowhere and made lab fodder out of our ships! The fleet didn’t stand a chance. Drixx and I have been searching for survivors, but you’re the only one we’ve encountered thus far.”

Arcadia frowned and looked at the jungle floor, a pit of worry growing in her chest. Looking up at Flune, she said, “Vines, eh? If it weren’t some Durmand Priory know-it-all telling me, I wouldn’t believe it. I didn’t think they made bigger vines than the ones back in the Silverwastes. My warband were all stationed aboard the Firefang, and finding them is my first priority. Thanks for the save, but it looks like this is where we go our separate ways.”

“You want to go deeper into that deathtrap of a jungle?” Drixx cried, almost incoherent with disbelief.

Arcadia looked at him with dislike and remarked flatly, “You wouldn’t understand.”

Turning her back on the two asura, she began her trek into the Maguuma Jungle. As Arcadia disappeared into the dense overgrowth, Flune bit her lip, looking first at the retreating charr, then at Drixx.

“You can’t possibly be considering going with her…” Drixx asked incredulously.

Flune gave him a half smile, “She’s going to need our help, Drixx. She’ll die out there on her own. I’m going with her.” Turning away from Drixx, she scuttled off after Arcadia.

“Are you insane?” Drixx cried after her, not bothering to hide the panic in his voice, “That’s literally the home of an Elder Dragon! What you’re doing is suicide! Are you listening to me?! Get back here now!”

Flune merely waved over her shoulder as she continued after Arcadia, not even bothering to look back. Irate with indignation, Drixx stood alone in the clearing for several seconds before sighing and running after her.

PART II IS CONTINUED IN ISSUE 15
WWW.GUILDMAG.COM/THE-MAGAZINE





FICTION

A PURPOSE FOUND

WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH

Razah stood on the precipice of Hallowed Point, its sightless gaze boring into the abyss before it. All around it, the rocky grey landscape of the Desolation stretched endlessly in all directions, all jutting crags and sickly, sulfurous haze. Razor-sharp gravel grated beneath its feet as it leaned forward over the seemingly bottomless crevasse, probing outward with tendrils of magic. Could it have found it at last, after all this time? Was its search finally at an end?

No, it finally decided without the slightest trace of disappointment or weariness. It did not detect any trace of the immense magical energy the staff would surely emit. In fact, it sensed that the pit before it was not only bottomless, but also a portal of some sort, a fissure in the fabric of reality, linking one alien dimension to another. The staff would be somewhere on the other side.

Looking up from the pit, Razah contemplated what entering the abyss might entail. As a product of the seemingly random whims of the Mists, it was acutely aware of the danger involved in traversing them and their various worlds and planes of existence.

I must have the staff, it reasoned, for only it can provide me with that which I seek, registering the possibility of bodily harm briefly, then brushing it away, unconcerned.

All humans seem to have a reason for their existence. It is time I discovered mine.

Reaching up, Razah adjusted the swathe of fabric that covered his head and eyes, the bones and metal trinkets dangling from it jingling softly in the eerie silence of the Desolation. Then, stepping forward as casually as if it were out for an evening stroll, Razah plummeted downward into oblivion.

It felt the magic starting to work at once. Its heightened senses and numerous magical wards alerted it to the strands of magic weaving their way around its body, immobilizing it and holding it fast as it fell. Razah let the spells take effect without protest, registering with academic interest that the magic was completely alien in nature, unlike any force it had ever encountered. It wasn't magic, not in the traditional sense. It was something older, something far beyond its comprehension. Then Razah felt a sharp chill surge through the length of its body, and it knew no more.

When it awoke, Razah was faintly aware of a light breeze tickling its face, causing a few of the ornaments on its vest and leggings to rustle softly. It stirred, its mind hazy and slow, then began to remember entering Hallowed Point, and its reasons for doing so. Lifting its head, it slowly pushed itself to its feet.

It stood in the center of an immense golden plaza, its shimmering floors stretching for hundreds of feet in all directions and ending in shallow, sloping golden walls. Beyond the walls it could sense nothing but empty, white horizon. Immense, winged statues ringed the enclosure, their architecture finer than any Razah had encountered before. In the center of the vast golden plane was a raised dais with an ornate walkway leading up to it. Strange carvings were etched all along the thoroughfare, their origin and meaning unknown to Razah. Atop the platform stood a lone figure, too faint for Razah to make out. Razah could sense it was aware of its presence, though the figure made no indication that this was the case. Cautiously, Razah started toward the dais, probing and searching with his magic all the while, alert and ready to react to danger at a moment's notice.

As it walked, Razah thought its situation over. It knew it was no longer in Tyria; its attunement to the Mists told it as much, but beyond that, it had no idea where it might be. Nor did it have any idea as to who the figure atop the dais was. It recognized that an encounter with the figure could be fatal, but, it reasoned, there was a chance the figure knew something of the staff. Of course, there was no guarantee of this. Razah had no idea if the portal would have taken the staff to the same place when it was cast into the abyss at Hallowed Point all those years ago, and if it hadn't, Razah knew it could be stuck in this foreign plane of existence for an interminably long time, possibly forever. It went over all of this information quickly and matter-of-factly, a sentient being outlining its situation, nothing more.

As Razah drew level with the dais, the figure atop it turned to face it.

"Long have I awaited your arrival, Rift Warden."

"You know of me?" Razah asked, perplexed, but not surprised.

"I know of all, child of the Mists. In my mortal life, I travelled the Mists freely, traversing lands and realities no mortal being was ever meant to behold. I paid for my trespass with my life, and now it is my duty to guide those who seek greatness toward the proper path. For you, Razah, I am the end of one path, and the beginning of another. However, which path you choose to set foot upon remains a decision for you alone. Do you know who I am, Rift Warden?"

Despite its initial confusion, Razah found that it did, "You are Lord Odran."

"The very same. Do you know where you are?"

Again, Razah instinctively knew the answer: "This is the Hall of Heroes."

"Yes, yes, you are the one. You seek a powerful talisman, known in your world only as the Staff of the Mists. You hope it will provide you the answers you seek. You desire a path to tread upon, a way forward illuminated by fate. The talisman is fate incarnate, and will grant you what you seek."

"You know of the staff?" asked Razah.

"I am its protector, its warden, I keep it safe from those who would misuse it. As I once did." Odran replied, a faraway look in his eyes.

"You wielded the staff?" Razah asked, surprised.

"Long ago. The staff allows the user to traverse the Mists at their whim, though such activity incurs the wrath of beings beyond the comprehension of you or I. Misuse the staff, and you shall end up as I, a warden of destiny, a custodian of the Mists. You are fated to carry the staff, to use it, but only for a time."

"It is my fate? My purpose?" Razah asked, a strange feeling blossoming within it.

"It is. However, nothing is set, and what you choose remains to be seen. Know that your actions here will influence the fate of the world into which you were thrust."

"Will you give me the staff?" Razah asked, its body tensing, preparing for a confrontation. Odran radiated power, and Razah decided it would rather not engage in a contest of power with the ancient being.

"I shall give you a choice, Rift Warden. You may have the staff, as it is your right to possess it. However, know that in receiving it, you will never again return to the place from whence you came. You will become a Watcher, an entity fated to oversee and influence the physical realm from within the Mists. You will shape the fate of Tyria through the power of the staff, guiding and hindering the people of that world as you see fit. But you will never go back. Is that a fate you are willing to accept, Rift Warden?"

"And if I refuse the staff?" asked Razah.

"I shall return you to Tyria, and you shall continue to wander its lands in search of your place in that world. As for whether or not you will find it, I cannot say. Which shall you choose, Razah, child of the Mists?"

Razah hesitated for a moment, then spoke the words that sealed its fate, "Give me the staff."

Wordlessly, Lord Odran held out his hands, his palms facing upward, and in the next instant, a shimmering blue light blossomed from them, twisting and expanding as it formed into the shape of an impressive staff, its tip adorned with a large, pulsating blue stone. Odran's eyes opened, and he held out the Staff of the Mists to Razah. As it reached out to take it, Razah suddenly realized that the peculiar sensation it was feeling was the human emotion of joy. For the first time in its existence, it was happy.

"Wield this mighty talisman with honor and grace, Razah, Watcher of Tyria. Go now, begin your destiny, embrace your fate." With that, Odran's form began to fade, melting back into the fabric of the Mists to wait for another hero to come seeking their destiny.

Razah stood alone atop the golden dais, the Staff of the Mists held reverently in both hands. Then, turning to face the pale, empty horizon, it raised the staff overhead, turning sightless eyes toward the heavens as it felt the staff's power begin to suffuse it. It had found its purpose.

EPILOGUE

Rytlock Brimstone opened his eyes and looked around, his mane prickling. Where was he? Probably somewhere in the Mists, who could tell where that blasted portal had spirited him off to. The ground beneath him was rough and dark, composed of pitted, volcanic rock. The smell of sulfur hung thick in the air, and the sky above him was painted a dark, unsettling red. The landscape about him was dotted with jagged rock formations, mesas, plateaus, and cliffs. Far off in the distance, he could see a mountain spewing fire into the crimson sky.

"Long have I awaited your arrival, Rift Warden," said Razah from behind the big charr, causing him to whirl around in alarm and let out a deep, guttural growl.

"Who are you?! Where am I?! Where's my sword?! Speak, demon!" Rytlock spat, claws extended, ready to fight to the death.

"Come, Rift Warden. Follow me. I have much to show you, and we have little time." said Razah placidly, turning and beginning to walk down a narrow canyon. As it walked away, Rytlock noted the peculiar staff it wielded.

"Why should I follow you?" shouted Rytlock, teeth bared.

"You seek the sword Sohothin, do you not?" Razah replied, not looking back.

Without another word, Rytlock tore after it.

SCREENSHOT CONTEST

It's a new year, and with it a new addition to the GuildMag magazines: competitions!

Starting in this Annual, we'll be **giving away 800 gems** to one lucky winner in every future magazine issue. Keep reading to find out how to enter this issue's competition.

We love to fill our magazines with in-game screenshots, and that's what this competition is all about. We're looking for **a screenshot that best sums up your experience of *Guild Wars 2* in 2015**. As a celebration of the past 12 months, we're eager to see what everyone else gets up to in-game! Do you have a favourite moment of 2015 that you've taken a screenshot of? Do you spend all your time cooking up tasty treats, or maybe this was the year that you finally crafted that Legendary? Whatever 2015 meant to you in-game, we want to see it!

RULES

- Each individual may submit only **ONE** screenshot.
- The screenshot should be of ***Guild Wars 2*** **(including *Heart of Thorns*) ONLY**. No other games are eligible.
- The screenshot should not show any UI elements, or player names.
- The screenshot may not be enhanced in any way from the base game, including: post-processing effects (SweetFX, GEMFX etc); image modifications (Photoshop or any other image editing software); or any other changes from what's visible in-game.
- The image submitted may not contain obscene or offensive material. Any images deemed unsuitable for publication will be immediately discarded.

HOW TO ENTER

To enter, send your screenshot, along with your name and in-game account name, to **contest@guildmag.com** no later than **29th February 2016**. Entries sent after this date will not be accepted into the competition.

The winning entry will be chosen by a panel of GuildMag team members based on creativity, framing and general awesomeness. The winner's screenshot, along with additional special mentions, will be displayed in our next magazine issue, and the winner contacted through email.

If you have any questions about your entry, please email the above address. Good luck!





GET INVOLVED

Are you interested in becoming more involved in the *Guild Wars* community?
If so, then we're looking for you!

GuildMag is one of the longest-serving *Guild Wars 2* fansites, run entirely by volunteer gamers. We produce regular digital magazines, website articles and a weekly podcast, all about the world of Tyria and its inhabitants. All of this is made possible by our team of amazing, talented individuals working behind the scenes. If you fancy joining this team, we've got a tonne of different roles to suit everyone's skillset - read on below for more information!

WRITERS

Writers are the backbone of GuildMag. They're the ones who spend countless hours playing, researching and then writing about the game. Some specialise in one topic - such as lore or fiction - whilst others simply write about whatever takes their fancy at the time. To become a writer, all you need is a good understanding of the English language, and a passion for *Guild Wars 2*.

EDITORS

Without these guys, GuildMag would be awash in a sea of missing punctuation and mistyped words! Editors help writers clean up their articles, proofreading each for mistakes and ensuring that everything we publish is as good as it can be. Editors are our final line of defense in the endless war against bad grammar; to join their elite ranks, your English needs to be top-notch!

DESIGNERS

If you have an eye for good design, then this might just be the role for you. Designers are responsible for, you guessed it, designing each magazine article. It's a designer's job to make sure that an article looks pretty on the page; we give them a blank canvas, and they give us a masterpiece. We applaud bold design, and look for even bolder individuals. To become a designer, you don't need a qualification in graphic design - just show us what you can do!

WEBSITE DEVELOPER

HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP. If these mean something to you, then you could be our next website developer. The web dev's job includes troubleshooting issues, implementing exciting new features and aiding in the development of future website layouts. Think you have what it takes? Then get in touch!

HOW TO APPLY

If you're interested in one of the above roles, simply navigate yourself to **www.guildmag.com/join**.
You'll be able to find more information on each position, as well as an application form. If you do choose to apply, good luck!



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