ISSUE 19

GUILDMAG



FLAMES OF THE MANTLE

SAUL VS CAUDECUS

Who had the biggest influence on the White Mantle? We compare the two leaders.

WHY BALTHAZAR?

Why has Balthazar returned to Tyria? Explore the possibilities inside!

INTERVIEW WITH THAT_SHAMAN

We sit down with that_shaman to talk data-mining and more.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to GuildMag Issue 19! Episode 6 of Season 3 is just around the corner, so we're here to make sure you're caught up on everything you need to know before the epic finale.

It's almost time for the finale of Season 3 of *Guild Wars 2*'s Living World. So far, we've seen a resurgence of the White Mantle; the so-called mursaat Lazarus reveal himself as Balthazar, human God of War; and not to mention a plethora of new maps to explore and yet another season without much of Rytlock! As July 25th approaches, it's my pleasure to present to you GuildMag's 19th digital magazine: Flames of the Mantle.

In this issue, we explore everything you need to prepare for whatever may come in the finale. From lore on Balthazar, White Mantle leadership and the War in Kryta to our Season 3: Episode 4 & 5 recap and an exclusive interview with community legend that_shaman, there's plenty to keep you busy for the next couple of weeks. As always, we've also packed this magazine with hand-picked community artwork and thrilling pieces of fiction produced by our talented team of writers, all centering around this issue's theme. In "Faithful", a White Mantle Inquisitor's nerve is tested as she journeys to the bloodstone. Meanwhile, Kent Benson continues his series with parts two and three of "War Profiteers" - if you missed the first instalment, make sure to catch up in GuildMag Issue 17 first!

To close, I'd like to remind our readers that we're always looking for new volunteers to join our awesome team. From writers and copyeditors to designers and streamers, there's a position for any skillset; if you're looking for new skills to add to your resume, GuildMag is the perfect place! You can find more information at www.guildmag.com/join.

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Kekai Kotaki

TO HUMBLE A GOD

BY **DRAXYNNIC**



Like it or hate it, the reveal that "Lazarus" was Balthazar all along has dropped a bombshell on the *Guild Wars 2* story. While it would not be true to say that the twist was entirely without hints*, few expected that the human gods would be returning to the story any time soon, let alone that one already had in the guise of a mursaat. So, how is it that we come to find ourselves fighting against a god?

We can deduce Balthazar's motivations for the actions we see from the dialogue in the instances. If you stick around after the fighting ends in the Taimi's Pet Project instance to talk to NPCs such as Marjory and Taimi, a recurring theme is that Balthazar does not appear to be as strong as he should be - a human PC, in fact, will observe that viewing Balthazar's true form should have blinded all onlookers. In the Heart of the Volcano instance, we see the culmination of this - just before the destruction of Taimi's machine, Balthazar states "I was weak... I'm feeling much better now." So it appears that something had caused Balthazar to lose his power, and his reason for being on Tyria was to absorb enough power to renew himself - first from a bloodstone, and then from Primordus and Jormag.

This does raise the question, however: what caused Balthazar to lose his power, and what ramifications might this have for the story going forwards? We do have one hint to this: earlier in the final battle, Balthazar states that a mysterious "they" was responsible for "dimming his light". This suggests two things. First, it indicates that Balthazar's depowering was not accidental, or was at least the result of the actions of a third party. Second, unless Balthazar is using the singular "they" for an adversary whose gender is indeterminate, it suggests that Balthazar's depowering was caused by a group, not by a single entity. And his statement that "they will see me now" suggests that Balthazar will be looking for a rematch with his recently renewed power.

Another curious thing is that Balthazar states, "I have learned there is no honour in war." To put this in context, Balthazar has always been portrayed as a god that feels that there is honour and glory in war, and that wars should be fought in an honourable manner (as opposed to the deception and trickery employed by Menzies).

Something must have happened to cause this shift in character.

So, what caused Balthazar's depowering in the first place? Who are the mysterious "they"? In the rest of the article, I will consider three possible scenarios, and the possible directions the story could go in each.

THE DHUUM SCENARIO

The first possible scenario as to how Balthazar has been depowered is that he was supplanted by a challenger within the Fissure of Woe, in a similar manner to how Grenth deposed Dhuum. The prime suspect for this is, of course, Menzies, who has been attempting to supplant Balthazar since the original Guild Wars. However, it is possible that some new challenger has arisen in the intervening time, one who proved more successful

than the Lord of Destruction. If the challenger proved victorious through the use of some trick, particularly one that exploited Balthazar's sense of honour, this might also explain his changed attitude.

One flaw in this scenario is that Balthazar states that "they abated me" - the "they" indicates that a group was responsible, not a single entity. However, the precedent of Grenth had Dhuum being defeated not by Grenth alone, but by Grenth and seven companions, who would become the seven Reapers. Similarly, Balthazar may have been brought low by a group - possibly Menzies and a group of Shadow Army commanders and/or traitorous Eternals, or possibly some other group.

In this scenario, there are at least two possible directions the story could go. One is that we support Balthazar's replacement against the newly re-energised Balthazar. The alternative, however, is that despite the PC's current (and quite understandable) opposition to the former God of War, we will find ourselves supporting Balthazar to retake his throne; as distasteful as it may be, Balthazar may be better than the alternative.

THE ABADDON SCENARIO

A second possibility is that, to put it bluntly, the rest of the pantheon (or a substantial majority, anyway) had enough of Balthazar's shenanigans and pulled him down themselves.

Balthazar has always been presented as one of the most morally questionable of the human gods. According to the Orrian History Scrolls, it was Balthazar that encouraged humanity to go to war against the other races - against the explicit wishes of Melandru at least. The story of Kaolai gives another example: to spare a village from punishment for a breach of etiquette, Kaolai challenges Balthazar to a game of Nui.

What the breach of etiquette was, what the punishment was going to be, and even the



* One hint to Lazarus' true identity was his usage of fire. Previous appearances had indicated that his power lay in necromancy (Saul's Story) and air magic (the aspect in Justiciar Naveed), so his widespread use of fire could have been a clue. However, this could easily be overlooked since an aspect of Lazarus was already known to use air magic, which is a branch of elemental magic - it would be entirely reasonable that a long-lived being such as a mursaat might have mastered both necromancy and elemental magic, and might employ fire magic in situations where wide-scale destruction is called for.

nature of the game is not known - however, when Balthazar found himself defeated by a mortal seven days later, he slew Kaolai in a fit of rage. While he later repented and raised Kaolai's spirit to a place of honour in Tahnnakai Temple, these acts show a readiness to resort to violence that could well be viewed as a liability by the rest of the pantheon.

It's possible that, at some stage after Kormir's ascension, something caused the other gods to decide that the liability was too much. Perhaps it was a single act that was so outrageous that the other gods simply could not forgive him, or perhaps it was simply the cumulative effect of multiple such acts that made the other gods decide that it was the last straw. Regardless, the end result is with Balthazar cast down and the pantheon needing a replacement - perhaps this time, unlike Abaddon, they had one prepared in advance, or perhaps they are still looking. Balthazar's lesson, here, might be an ironic repetition of something that one of the other gods might have said to him as they were administering his depowering - one could easily imagine that one of the more peaceful goddesses such as Dwayna or Melandru might express such an opinion, especially if the trigger was Balthazar engaging on an otherwise unnecessary war over some point of honour.

One flaw in this scenario is, of course, Lyssa's mirror. Interacting with the mirror with a human mesmer in the Taimi's Pet Project instance indicates that Lyssa "must have helped Balthazar for reasons known only to her" - however, this may be the PC jumping to conclusions. The mirror might have been stolen, or it might have been a gift given before Balthazar's fall from grace. Alternatively, Lyssa might have given it to Balthazar for her own reasons (to taunt Balthazar with his depowered state, or to give him a means to assume a new identity to hide from any enemies that might take the opportunity to finish him off) without anticipating the use that Balthazar would put it to. Another possibility is that there may be dissent within the pantheon, with Lyssa still supporting Balthazar, possibly without the knowledge of the other gods.



If the decision to cast Balthazar down was unanimous among the gods, we're probably looking at another simple "finish off or contain the fallen god" scenario, similar to Abaddon and Dhuum. Alternatively, we may be looking at a the possibility of a struggle among the gods, where the fall of Balthazar is simply the first sign to be seen on Tyria. If so, it's likely that we'll eventually find ourselves in the position of supporting one side of the pantheon against the other.

THE RAGNAROK SCENARIO

The third possibility is that it isn't just Balthazar that has fallen - the entire pantheon is in trouble, and Balthazar is just the first we've seen.

I've seen theories linking the depowering of the gods to the rise of the dragons, but I'm not inclined to agree with those. The dragons, while powerful, are still fundamentally beings of Tyria, while the gods are... not. While the dragons do have some ability to influence the Mists, I don't think there's any direct connection that would allow the dragons to siphon power from the gods.

However, there are hints that there might be other threats in the Mists. The cause of the destruction of the human homeworld remains a mystery, that perhaps even the gods themselves had mostly forgotten. The Orrian History Scrolls state that "what passed beyond in the Mists, only (Abaddon) remembers" - perhaps this information was passed onto Kormir, but even if it was, it might have come with so much other knowledge that it would take time for her to sift through. The Mists also constantly create demons and other beings, some of which might rival the gods, or there might be other pantheons of gods, Elder Dragons, and similar beings from other worlds. In particular, the Forgotten Virashek in the Gate of Anguish passed on the rumour that the Ravenheart Gloom links to places "worse than the Realm of Torment", from which an attack might come. One of the battles against such a foe might have caused Balthazar's power to be drained, causing him to seek re-empowerment by whatever means necessary in order to re-enter the fray.

Human legend states that when the gods left Tyria, they left in order to shepherd other worlds. This may simply be an exaggeration of the actual responsibilities of the gods, as many human legends have shown to be - however, this might lead to a possible justification for Balthazar's seeming disregard for Tyria. If the destruction of one world allows for the ability to protect many more, that may well be a sacrifice worth making, although the inhabitants of that world may, of course, think differently. In this context, Balthazar may have reached the realisation that honour in war is something you can often only afford from a position of strength, where your existence is not truly on the line.

If the situation is truly desperate, any dirty trick or sacrifice becomes justified if it means that you, and the majority (or at least some) of those you protect, survive to feel bad about it later.

This scenario is probably the most interesting, as it could lead to an entirely new direction for the story. The concept of a 'mist war' has been in *Guild Wars 2* from release, but it has largely been portrayed as a simple battle for the resources of the Mists. Outside that, however, there may be a second Mist War, against a foe which might truly be out to destroy worlds... and we may find ourselves fighting alongside the gods and their servants to protect Tyria against this threat.

It's also possible that this scenario can be combined with one of the others - that the pressure of a conflict of this nature caused



Balthazar to do something that his peers saw as crossing a moral event horizon, causing them to depose him or to allow a third party to overthrow him.

I should note that there is also a theory floating around that the situation may be so bad that the other gods may also be hiding in disguise among the people of Tyria (including Lyssa being Jennah, or Jennah and Anise). While this theory cannot be entirely discounted, I consider it doubtful, at least without the additional factor of Balthazar having gone rogue. If the other gods are hiding on Tyria, it seems unlikely that Balthazar would have such a cavalier attitude towards Tyria's destruction as he shows in the Heart of the Volcano instance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

So, all up, we have three broad possibilities for what has happened: Balthazar was cast down by a direct challenger; by his fellow gods in the pantheon; or by some external force which threatens all of the gods. Whichever it is, there may be a good chance we'll see a revisit to Orr before it's all over, as the Season 3 Episode 6 teaser image released on July 12 suggests. It's possibly the best place to learn more about the gods, even if it probably won't help much with whatever is going on with the gods now.

While I generally try to be non-judgemental when discussing the lore, I do have concerns that a situation where we end up having to finish off Balthazar once and for all - or, worse, the entire pantheon if it turns out that they're fully cooperating with Balthazar - will feel like they've sacrificed a key piece of the game's lore for the sake of a boss fight (or six). What I'd prefer to see is a situation where, once we get the full picture, Balthazar's actions and his willingness to sacrifice Tyria become at least understandable. This does not mean that we won't end up bringing him down nonetheless - some of the best villains are people who genuinely think they're doing what's necessary - but it would put it in the context of things having gone so badly that we might at least consider that the risk Balthazar took was worth it. A parallel could be drawn to how many people believe that the mursaat were justified in sacrificing the Chosen to keep the Door of Komalie closed - while certainly a distasteful act, it may well be justified if it helps to hold back a threat which might destroy so much more.







SAUL D'ALESSIO

THE ALPHA & THE OMEGA

CAUDECUS BEETLESTONE

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

For those interested in the history of the White Mantle, the update of the 8th of February, despite its delays, certainly delivered. In Episode 4 of the third Living World story arc, we saw the culmination for Caudecus' plots to seize the throne of Kryta, leading to the downfall of the present Confessor of the White Mantle and, perhaps, the destruction of his faction of the White Mantle at the hands of the Seraph and the Shining Blade.

Meanwhile, in Bastion of the Penitent, raiders have the opportunity to learn of the fate of the founder of the White Mantle, Saul d'Alessio... and, if they have the skill and valour, to rescue him from that fate, if only to his death.

It says something about the evolution of the White Mantle that these two men almost could not be any more different. As much as the Shining Blade would like to paint things otherwise, the White Mantle under Saul were genuine heroes, a militia that saved Kryta in its darkest hour when its standing army and royal line had failed. If the mursaat had truly been



the benevolent beings that Saul had believed them to be, he would likely now be listed among humanity's greatest heroes. However, that was not the case, and Saul's removal allowed the mursaat to reshape the White Mantle into fanatics that would murder in their name. With the defeat of the mursaat and the White Mantle evicted from Kryta (openly, at least), devotion to the religion of the Unseen would fade and steadily be replaced by a determination to seize Kryta at any cost.

In this context, it seems worthwhile to look back over the lives of the two men, and to compare and contrast to see how this reflects on the White Mantles that they lead. Three areas in particular stand out as distinctions between the two men: their respective social standings before joining the White Mantle, their degree of faith, and how much they actually care about Kryta.

SOCIAL STANDING

We don't know much about Saul d'Alessio's social standing before his disgrace. It's possible that, prior to amassing his gambling debts, Saul may have been of higher standing, making his fall analogous to that of Kasmeer's family - however, one might suspect that if Saul had been a noble or otherwise of high station, this would be mentioned in the records of the White Mantle's founding.

Whatever he might have been, Saul arrived at the city of the mursaat from the dregs of society. Gambling debts had driven him to commit robbery to survive, and on being caught, he was sentenced to banishment - not simply by sending him to another nation, but instead his sentence was carried out by abandoning him in a region of hostile wilderness where he was expected to die. He stumbled upon the mursaat as a convicted criminal on the verge of starvation.

Given this background, it is surprising that a man who had effectively been sentenced to death was accepted so readily by the people of Kryta on his return.

> " Saul arrived at the city of the mursaat from the dregs of society [...] as a convicted criminal on the verge of starvation.

Perhaps it speaks of the transformation worked upon Saul by the mursaat - they had taken a broken man and leader, and replaced his rags with the white mantle that would give the name to the organisation he would found. Or perhaps it simply speaks of the situation of Kryta that they were willing to accept anyone who might be able to lead a defence against the charr, however dubious his past background might be.

By contrast, Lord Caudecus Beetlestone has likely never experienced a day of privation in his life. He joined the White Mantle as the holder of the second most powerful office in Kryta, and that only after his term of regency was ended by Jennah reaching her age of majority. His 'protective custody' in Jennah's palace was certainly an inconvenience to him, but little comparison to what Saul likely suffered in the jungle. Without having been formally accused of anything, his privilege among Krytan society remained until he openly announced himself as the Confessor of the White Mantle, and by then he was firmly ensconced among his followers that likely continued to serve his every need. In the

height of arrogance, he would even return to the manor he had been forced to abandon after his failed attempt on Jennah's life - and it was there, in his expansive mansion, that justice finally caught up with him.

FAITH

According to all evidence, Saul genuinely believed that the mursaat were divine beings who would protect and care for the people of Kryta in the absence of the Five Gods. He was the founder and, for a time, the strongest spokesman of the religion of the Unseen. However, he also demonstrated tolerance towards the old religion of the Five Gods - his decree that the Temple of the Ages and other holy sites be left unmolested was respected by his successors, and may have been responsible for the preservation of the Krytan royal line, although he could not have known it at the time. While his faith was not unshakeable, suffering a critical blow when confronted with evidence that the mursaat were not the benevolent beings he had believed they were, according to all evidence he genuinely believed in the mursaat as divine saviours up to that point.

For Caudecus, on the other hand, the beliefs of the White Mantle were just one more tool in his bid to ascend to the throne of Kryta. Not only does he fail to share those beliefs, but when it appeared that the more devout members of the White Mantle were close to returning a mursaat to life, he saw this as a threat to his power, actively seeking to sabotage Lazarus' return. Fortunately for Caudecus, it seems that enough members of the White Mantle agreed with his policy that he retained a significant army even after 'Lazarus the Dire' had declared him to be apostate.

MOTIVATION

It is, perhaps, in their attitude towards others that the greatest contrast between the two can be seen. Where one, for all his mistakes and flaws, seems to have been genuinely motivated by seeking to achieve the best for Kryta, the other was driven only by naked ambition.

Despite having been sentenced to be left to die by the judges of Kryta, Saul was willing to put his life on the line for its people. Even the small frontier village of Demetra was worthy of his personal attention, and it was there that Saul's faith in the mursaat was put into conflict with his desire for a bright future for Kryta... and lost. Saul recognised that in founding the religion of the Unseen, he had not been the saviour of Kryta but instead brought down a new doom. When the mursaat sensed this realisation, they took him to be tortured until he agreed to become their puppet. His refusal to help them maintain control of Kryta led to his torture being prolonged for hundreds of years, until death would come as a release. Even after being confined in the Bastion of the Penitent, it appears Saul did not give up - a note planning an escape attempt stresses that "they must know the truth" and is signed with the initial 'S'.

> " Saul genuinely believed that the mursaat were divine beings who would protect and care for the people of Kryta in the absence of the Five Gods.

For Caudecus, by contrast, the people of Kryta were merely pawns to be sacrificed if it brought him closer to the throne. In the human personal story we see his machinations: spawn a crime





wave in Divinity's Reach and Queensdale; sabotage Kryta's water infrastructure; and incite a centaur invasion. This caused significant loss to the people of Kryta in both lives and property, all in the name of undermining the Queen's reign in hope of having her declared unfit to rule. His disregard for the welfare of the people he would rule only becomes clearer after he is unmasked as the Confessor of the White Mantle and he declares that he would rather see Kryta destroyed than in the hands of anyone else... and backs up that declaration with a full-scale assault on Divinity's Reach. Even his own family was not immune - when his wife and daughter realised what sort of man he had become, he arranged for each to pay with their lives.

REFLECTIONS

While Saul rose from a convicted criminal that was effectively sentenced to death to become the *de facto* ruler of Kryta, Caudecus had already been the *de facto* ruler of Kryta before, and his life ended with execution for treason. Where one was empowered by his faith only to be broken anew after the revelation that his faith had been misplaced, the other acted purely on his own behalf, even to the point of sabotaging the resurrection of the one to whose religion he gave lip service. Where one suffered a fate worse than death on behalf of Kryta, never knowing if his sacrifice was in vain, the other was willing to sacrifice as much of the nation as it took if it meant he could rule over the ruins of what was left.

> " For Caudecus [...] the people of Kryta were merely pawns.

These distinctions echoed the changing face of the White Mantle. In Saul's time, it was a militia raised from the people, for the people, at a time when Kryta's traditional leaders had failed them. The White Mantle of Caudecus, on the other hand, was dominated by corrupt ministers seeking to preserve and expand their power and wealth at any cost, deliberately sabotaging Kryta in order to weaken the established (and, to all evidence, quite competent when not being undermined from within) government.

In one ironic fashion, however, the White Mantle seems to have come full circle. While Saul was a true believer in the mursaat, talking with some of his followers in the "Rise of the White Mantle" storybook instance yields responses that indicate that many of them are not in fact true believers, but joined the White Mantle as that was their best way of contributing to the defence of Kryta. Even in the time of *Guild Wars: Prophecies*, it's questionable how many of the lower-ranking members of the White Mantle truly believed or whether they were just serving in what was then Kryta's *de facto* national army. However, it is certain that, with Saul's death, devotion to the Unseen would become an increasing part of the White Mantle's identity. Over the centuries where Lazarus remained divided into aspects and all other mursaat were believed dead, however, this religious identity would dwindle, until for many the focus shifted from the service of the mursaat to the building of temporal power for themselves.


OBEY



DISMANTLE


EX


XIS

THE WAR IN KRYTA

A RECAP

BY VIAN DE BOD



Kryta, the last free nation of humans, has been plunged into civil war. Minister Caudecus, recently revealed to be the current Confessor of the White Mantle, has rallied his forces against the crown. Once again, the White Mantle has pulled Kryta into a bloody conflict. Once again, the human nation stands divided.

"Once again?" you ask? Indeed, for Kryta was involved in an inner conflict once before. Nearly two hundred and fifty years ago, the first Krytan civil war ended; a civil war that was, in fact, instigated by the White Mantle as well.

It is important to understand the events that transpired all those years ago. For those unfamiliar with the tales, it is valuable to understand history. When we understand history, it can be easier to assess the present and the future. For those who know the old stories, it is important to refresh one's memory. A gem, no matter how brilliant, can always benefit from a thorough polishing every now and then.

So then, what exactly happened in the war? What was it that transpired during this bloody time in history? It is a tale of fanaticism, betrayal, sacrifice, and loss. But it is not without hope. It is both complex and elementary. It is a cornerstone in the history of the human race. It is, as the old tomes call it, the War in Kryta.

THE WAR: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In order to understand the war itself, one must first understand the reasons for its occurrence. Back during the height of the war between the charr and the humans, the Krytan king fled the throne in order to escape the coming charr forces. When the charr finally arrived, they found themselves not facing the Krytan army, but the forces of Saul D'Alessio: the White Mantle.

After driving the charr forces back with the help of their "Unseen Gods", the White Mantle were made the official governing body of Kryta, with Confessor Dorian taking charge in the wake of Saul's disappearance.



With no known royal candidate to take the throne, the Krytan people gladly accepted the rule of their new saviours.

Unbeknownst to the Krytans and the Mantle, the former king had sired an illegitimate heir to the throne. Her name was Salma. The discovery of Princess Salma divided Kryta. Many people believed that Salma was the rightful heir and that the White Mantle had committed atrocities that were entirely unforgivable. Others believed that the Mantle were justified in their sacrifice of human lives in order to protect the inhabitants of Kryta, and that the Mantle had done well in protecting their people. Though limited to those who knew of the sacrifices, since the Mantle did well to hide these deeds, this divide made some inhabitants of Kryta unruly and difficult for the Mantle to control. In response, the Mantle established a force dedicated to keeping the country in a peaceful state. This force was known as the Peacekeepers.

The Peacekeepers, however, were little more than bandits paid for and sponsored by the Mantle. They constantly extorted people out of their money and harassed locals for their own gain or amusement. On top of that, travel bans were put in place, allowing only those with permits to travel between Krytan provinces. Unfortunately, very few permits were given to those who needed them, effectively placing Kryta in a self-imposed siege. The White Mantle seemed completely indifferent to the harassment of their people as well as the economic

impact of the travel ban, thus proving themselves corrupt in the eyes of many. Once-faithful members abandoned the Mantle and joined the ever-growing number of supporters under Princess Salma: the Shining Blade.



The conflict between Mantle and Blade escalated soon after, resulting in one of Kryta's bloodiest conflicts. However, many do not exactly understand the different forces involved or their motivations. Who were the Shining Blade? What did the White Mantle fight for? What, or who, exactly were these "Unseen Gods" or "mursaat" that the Mantle followed, and what exactly did they want from the humans? Questions such as these must be answered. We begin, then, with the most praised and better understood of these factions, the Shining Blade.

THE SHINING BLADE

The Shining Blade began as a movement among Krytans who had discovered what had been really happening to the Chosen. The ugly truth was that the White Mantle were sacrificing the lives of innocent Krytans upon a bloodstone altar. This was, however, unknown by the general public. The White Mantle had convinced them that these people, or "Chosen" as they were called, were gathered up by the Mantle in order to learn from the Grand Masters in the Temple of the Unseen. It's not known how the first members of the Shining Blade became aware of this, but they formed an insurgency from early in the White Mantle's reign, ambushing White Mantle convoys to rescue the Chosen and building their numbers to spread the word and launch further attacks.

Upon the discovery of Salma's existence, they flocked to her side; proclaiming her the true ruler of Kryta and opposed anything related to the White Mantle. At first they were a small force, nothing more than a minor nuisance for the White Mantle. That soon changed. After revealing the ugly truth of the White Mantle's operations and meeting with a group of Ascalonian refugees, their numbers grew and they were soon a threat with power to rival the Mantle's.

Though the Shining Blade's initial size made them little more than a nuisance to the White Mantle, their numbers steadily grew. Soon they were strong enough to pose a true threat and eventually became the major opposition to the White Mantle and their Unseen Gods. The Shining Blade had less-than-humble beginnings, but their determination to save the inhabitants of Kryta and restore the Doric bloodline to the throne helped them grow into Kryta's saving grace. Though they are now only a small force of personal protectors to the Krytan monarch, they boast a great history. Had it not been for the efforts of the Shining Blade, Kryta may well still have been under the oppression of the White Mantle and their deities.

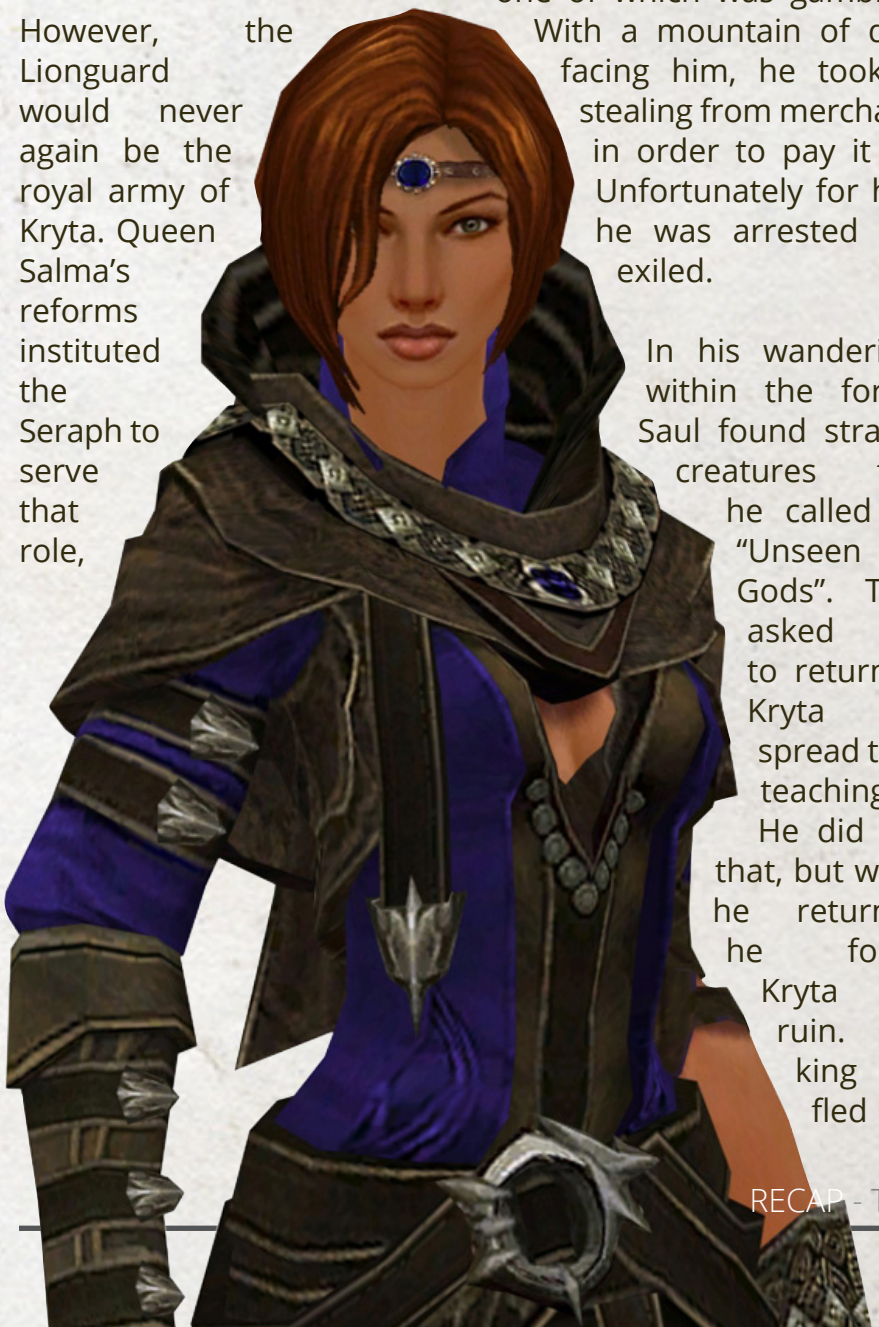
THE LIONGUARD

The Lionguard was originally the royal army and police force of Kryta. With the White Mantle's assumption of power, the Lionguard saw its jurisdiction and funding steadily eroded until it was reduced to a glorified city watch for Lion's Arch and some outlying settlements that the White Mantle lacked concern for.

While outwardly loyal to (if somewhat envious of) Kryta's new overlords, it was the Lionguard who sought the restoration of the throne, after discovering the lost heir, Princess Salma, with the aid of foreign adventurers. For much of the conflict, the Lionguard remained outwardly subservient to the Mantle, hiding the rediscovered heir

in the wilderness west of Kryta. However, they turned a blind eye towards enemies of the Mantle operating in the settlements that remained under their jurisdiction, including Lion's Arch.

The moment that the Lionguard declared for Salma was the beginning of the end for the White Mantle, as Kryta's most important city was turned to the rebels without a fight. Within the year, the White Mantle's strength would be broken by the city's defenders, and the White Mantle were forced to withdraw from Kryta.



However, the Lionguard would never again be the royal army of Kryta. Queen Salma's reforms instituted the Seraph to serve that role, which included former members of the Lionguard as well as the Shining Blade and reformed White Mantle. The Lionguard itself would continue to remain the city guard of Lion's Arch alone.

THE WHITE MANTLE

The origin of the White Mantle is quite the strange tale. An organisation that ruled Kryta started out with just one man; a man exiled for his crimes against the people. This man was Saul D'Alessio. Though he was not a wholly good man, he was not entirely evil. Saul was a man prone to his vices, one of which was gambling. With a mountain of debt facing him, he took to stealing from merchants in order to pay it off. Unfortunately for him, he was arrested and exiled.

In his wanderings within the forest, Saul found strange creatures that he called his "Unseen Gods". They asked him to return to Kryta and spread their teachings. He did just that, but when he returned, he found Kryta in ruin. The king had fled and the charr were in the middle of their invasion. The people were broken and scared. Naturally, they flocked to Saul, who taught them of these gods who would save them. His following grew as he defeated more and more of the invading charr. However, after one of the greatest victories against the invaders, these gods took Saul to their homeland, and he was never seen alive again.

From that point on the White Mantle, now under the rule of Confessor Dorian, grew. In the peaceful years after the invasion of the charr, they became the leaders and peaceful overseers of Kryta. This soon changed, as their fanaticism drove them to sacrificing innocent civilians upon a bloodstone for their gods. When the heir to the throne was discovered, their claim to power weakened even more. Since then, these once-peaceful Krytan heroes became one of the greatest enemies of the people since the charr invasion.

The White Mantle's beginnings are of a noble nature. Saul merely wanted to help his people. He was a good man, despite his flaws. Even the original leaders of the White Mantle at first tried to keep the peace and help their countrymen grow. This, of course, changed due to the influence of their gods. These unseen deities were powerful beings we now know as mursaat, but not much is

known of their race or their intentions.

THE MURSAAT

The mursaat were some of the last remnants of the ancient races of Tyria. Unlike the jotun, who had fallen from a great empire into savagery, the mursaat remained a powerful race. The previous rising of the Elder Dragons had worn away at their numbers immensely. They were a race on the verge of extinction, and thus were desperate to do what they had to in order to survive. This instinctual drive for survival pushed them to the extreme when a prophecy foretold their annihilation.

The Flameseeker Prophecies were written by an ancient dragon known as Glint. Within these prophetic writings, it was foretold that the mursaat would be destroyed by the Titans (great beasts immune to the mursaat's powerful magic). Out of fear, the mursaat used Saul D'Alessio to gather up as many humans as possible. These humans were called the "Chosen" and were sacrificed upon a bloodstone within the Maguuma Jungle. The purpose of this was twofold. First, the mursaat wanted to rid themselves of the "chosen ones" predicted to bring about their ruin within the prophecies. Second, the mursaat used the sacrifice of these humans to power large crystals known as soul batteries.

Soul batteries were sources of power meant to seal shut a doorway that kept their destruction, the Titans, at bay. This doorway was a portal called the "Door of Komalie" and led to a place called the "Foundry of Failed Creations". Within this realm, the Titans roamed. Their powerful magic, along with their resistance to the mursaat's greatest attacks, made them impossible for the mursaat to defeat.

Though much can be said against the mursaat and their arrogant, self-serving nature, one must remember that they did what they thought necessary. Though their actions were cruel and monstrous towards humans, they did not do it out of any hatred for the human race. The mursaat were merely doing whatever they possibly could to ensure their survival. They were fighting for their lives against a seemingly unchangeable fate. To them, the ends justified the means.

THE END

Four factions fought in the Krytan civil war, and each fought for what they thought was right. The Shining Blade fought to protect the Chosen and prevent the White Mantle from performing additional sacrifices. The Lionguard fought to empower the true heir of Kryta in order to keep the bloodline of King Doric on the throne. The White Mantle fought to remain in control and to appease their gods, who they believed sincerely cared for them. The mursaat fought in order to survive their



inevitable destruction, doing whatever they believed necessary to do so.

In the end, it was the Shining Blade and Lionguard that were victorious over all. The mursaat were destroyed as prophesied and the White Mantle faded into obscurity. Princess Salma became the Queen of Kryta and the Shining Blade became the guard of the royal line from that day on.

History is not something that can be looked at through a single lens. History is a prism that must be admired from all angles in order to appreciate the entire picture. Though there are disputes about which side was right in doing what was done, and though some claim that these factions weren't appropriately portrayed within the old tales, one must not forget that each side of a conflict has its reasons. Not every party is two-dimensional. There are technically three sides to a coin.





BY **MIKO**

THE COST OF SAVING TYRIA

S3 RECAP: EPISODES 4 & 5



THE HEAD OF THE SNAKE

Season Three of the Living World continues to pull on more plot threads with two of its most recent episodes: 4 - "The Head of the Snake" and 5 - "Flashpoint". Both these episodes make the fate of the human story a central concern. Episode 4, and the raid wing that released with this episode, focuses on the two characters responsible for the rise and fall of the White Mantle, while Episode 5 brings one of the human gods back to Tyria. As we look forward to episode 6 and the conclusion of Season Three, we're left with many more questions than we have answers.

A MEETING OF MINISTERS

The hunt for Caudecus Beetlestone began when I received an invitation from Queen Jennah to join her in the Upper City of Divinity's Reach. Before setting off, I checked in with Taimi to see if she's heard from Braham, his stinging remarks in Bitterfrost Frontier still fresh in my mind. It seems Rox was able to talk some sense into him which is a relief. He's formed an "exploratory committee" of sorts and is headed towards Jormag. Knowing that he isn't heading to face the Dragon alone is some relief; that he's calling his group "Destiny's Edge" though doesn't seem like he's thinking clearly yet. Taimi's worried about losing him to the Dragon and is determined to finish her Dragon minion research to confirm a "brilliant idea" she's had to deal with the next primeval force on our list.

Jennah's praise on welcoming me was flattering but also felt unwarranted given the mess our fledgling guild is in. I'm not feeling like much of a leader having gotten a piece of Jory's mind after we saved Aurene and borne the brunt of Braham's peevishness about not honoring Eir. The queen, on the other hand, seems to deal with her challenges with ease and grace. She disagreed though and said she envies my ability to "smash things" that stand in my way. I guess someone else's grass really does look greener. Needing my help to smash through something else for her, she confided that she expected a White Mantle attack on the city at any moment. Her plan: to suspend the Ministry until the White Mantle's threat and influence could be eradicated. To do this, she gathered the Ministers together in the Upper City hoping to bait



the Mantle into revealing themselves; my presence was meant to reassure the Ministers, but what I really did was some information gathering, hoping to find evidence of their continued interference and give the queen a public rationale for her actions.

Many Ministers with connections to Caudecus and the White Mantle were present, including Minister Arton whom Caudecus had set up to look like the mastermind behind the loss of Falcon Company, an elite Seraph squad that a childhood friend, Deborah, had been a part of and which was taken out by centaurs. Arton doesn't know that Caudecus was actually behind this. Minister and Lady Wi were also present, though many of their friends now saw them as traitorous as their daughter Valette, since word reached the Reach that she was in league with Caudecus and had helped him escape when Lazarus reappeared. To my surprise, Minister Estelle, whom Kasmeer and I had exposed as trying to blacken the queen's name by saying she was in league with Scarlet Briar, was also present. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, after all. The guests were unnerved by the presence of so many Shining Blade and Ministry Guards which makes sense when you've got a mix of people with something to hide and those who get jumpy at the show of force. After



dealing with an asura gate golem malfunction, I found a transmitter that resembled the communicator Taimi had given me. With Taimi's help, I used my communicator to ping and locate several other of these suspicious listening bugs guarded by Security Sparks, and reported back to the queen. The Mantle were eavesdropping and it was time for Jennah to make her move.

During the queen's speech announcing the Ministry's suspension, the city was suddenly attacked by the White Mantle! Jade Cannons fired bloodstone projectiles from outside the city, attempting to breach its walls. Meanwhile, from within the city, White Mantle mesmers began porting in Mantle troops including Jade Constructs and, with the assistance of many traitor Ministers, they began attacking the Shining Blade, citizens, the queen and me. Our monarch is a gifted and powerful mesmer herself so she easily conjured a barrier dome to protect the city. Inside, I protected the queen (not that she needs much protection) as she set up defensive barriers at the east and west entries to the Chamber of Ministers. We fought off many White Mantle soldiers, making our way to the throne room so Queen Jennah could construct her final barrier. As we reached the throne room door, the White Mantle's assassin finally showed herself: Minister Estelle, to no one's surprise. Tasked with the "honor" of regicide, Estelle found herself slain by me, the queen, and Seraph Captain Logan Thackeray, limping his way into battle, still visibly recovering from his detention in Mordremoth's blighting pod. The queen's battle prowess is impressive and I'd be proud to have her join Dragon's Watch should she ever give up her royal seat.

> "She confided in me that she expected a White Mantle attack on the city at any moment.

For the time being, however,

we turned our attention to Lake Doric, now besieged by White Mantle forces. It seems Logan wasted no time in rallying the Seraph before making his way to the Upper City to assist the queen. He'd seen to the setup of a command post and instructed me to speak to a Lieutenant Fores to gain access to Lake Doric; the citizens there needed help.

EYES ON LAKE DORIC

Once there, I rendezvoused with Logan at the Seraph command post in Doric's Landing. He introduced me to Legionnaire Nylia Steelpaw, a charr bent on protecting the alliance humans and charr have worked so hard to forge, no thanks to Caudecus and his campaigns to stir up the Separatists and their discord, built on the lies he fed them. With charr support, we turned to the three areas Logan needed scouting in order to help the Seraph's mounting forces to defeat and drive the White Mantle back: Harvest Cascades to the north; Saidra's Haven to the east and New Loamhurst to the south. He also wanted to know how Seraph supplies and ally forces were looking at Lakeside Bazaar. Since spies had infiltrated their ranks, he needed someone he could trust and asked me to take on the job. Before setting out, I spoke with Shining Blade Exemplar Caulden who told me about a new sigil Blade researchers had developed to help imbue wielders with the power of the mursaat and channel Spectral Agony ourselves whenever we find ourselves near death.

On that happy note, I headed over to New Loamhurst to see how the small fishing village was faring. There was significant damage and incursions by the Mantle, but the Seraph and its allies continued to force them out. In Lakeside Bazaar, I met up with an old acquaintance of Lord Faren's: the high-end paper maker Cin Fursurai. His testimony helped bring Minister Julius Zamon to justice for his many heinous crimes against the citizens of Divinity's Reach. Caudecus presided over the trial and, naturally, made sure to recommend to Zamon that he ask for a trial by combat, ensuring that Caudecus' role in Zamon's crimes would remain hidden from public scrutiny. Cin was as feisty and demanding as ever and seemed to have the challenging job of keeping the Seraph supplied in hand. The locals seemed to be jumping at shadows, accusing any neighbor of being in league with the Mantle, though.

> "We turned our attention to Lake Doric, now besieged by White Mantle forces.

Saidra's Haven, like New





Loamhurst, was dealing with incursions from the White Mantle. These were stronger in number and power since they had a Justiciar named Agatha apparently leading forces from an entrenched stronghold at Fort Evennia. Noting this, I head north to Harvest Cascades in search of refugees and found instead a heavily fortified house that the Mantle have taken an interest in, attacking it periodically as well. Just as I was about to return to Logan to report, Taimi checked in to share that her Dragon research was a success. Her "brilliant idea" to pit Jormag and Primordus against one another appears to be viable and the impulsive burgeoning genius is having the heart of Omadd's Machine transported to Rata Novus. She believes that by using it to study the Eternal Alchemy, she'll be able to manipulate the Dragons' energies and pit them against one another. As Trahearne would say, I have a bad feeling about this. Reporting back to Logan, we decided the next course of action was to infiltrate Fort Evennia and try to sabotage their operations there.

SABOTAGE FORT EVENNIA

Heading northeast towards the fort, I met up with the Shining Blade agent Logan sent me to and found her injured by some Jade Constructs. These were wreaking periodic havoc on the surrounding area and I had to act fast. The agent told me the White Mantle had taken Fort Evennia in a surprise attack while she was freeing Seraph prisoners. She'd taken a hit from a Jade Bow and was recovering, so she cloaked and disguised me as a White Mantle mage so I could infiltrate and finish her mission: steal some battle plans, free some Seraph prisoners, and poison the Mantle's food supply. I have no problem dealing with the Mantle this way; they sent agents to attack me in Divinity's Reach when I was still in training and it was then that I learned my parents were members of the Shining Blade who'd been murdered by the White Mantle. They do not deserve my pity. The raid complete, I reported back to the agent and then headed to Logan to report our progress.

> "The next course of action was to infiltrate Fort Evennia and try to sabotage their operations there.

BREAKING THE SIEGE

The Seraph's mission to oust the White Mantle from the region was well in hand. Before going after Caudecus, Logan wanted to strengthen that hold and break the Mantle's siege for good. Seeing this as another opportunity to "smash things," I volunteered to help the cause and deal the White Mantle another blow. It was while roaming near New Loamhurst that I came upon a vicious Jade Construct called Cairn the Queenslayer, who resembled another construct I defeated with my squad in the Bastion of the Penitent, the prison where the mursaat held Saul D'Alessio. The Mantle's ability to produce such bloodthirsty allies is worrisome. Nevertheless, we turned the tide in Lake

Doric and Logan left his subordinates in charge of the operation there. Queen Jennah had summoned us to the palace so we returned to Divinity's Reach to regroup with her.

> "It was while roaming near New Loamhurst that I came across a vicious Jade Construct called Cairn the Queenslayer, who resembled another construct I defeated with my squad in Bastion of the Penitent.

REGROUPING WITH THE QUEEN

In the throne room, we reported our success in Lake Doric and strategized with Countess Anise and the queen... it was time to take Caudecus out. Anise reported that she'd deployed Canach and a detachment of Shining Blade to Caudecus' Manor. Anise was anxious to get to the manor and put an end to Caudecus and also to make sure Canach fulfilled his contract to her. Queen Jennah, ever astute and cunning, then announced she had the perfect person ready to help our cause: Demmi Beetlestone, Caudecus' daughter. As fellow Order of Whispers agents, Tybalt and I had helped get Demmi out of Kryta with the help of her godmother, Lady Wi. Demmi knew a back way into the manor and suspected that he'd retreated to the house to unleash his "contingency plan." Reluctantly, Anise agreed to have Demmi collaborate with us on this mission, but Queen Jennah had other ideas and ordered Anise not to leave Divinity's Reach (though she knew Anise would anyway). In the meantime, Logan would regroup with the Seraph and make sure no one slipped out of the house from the front.

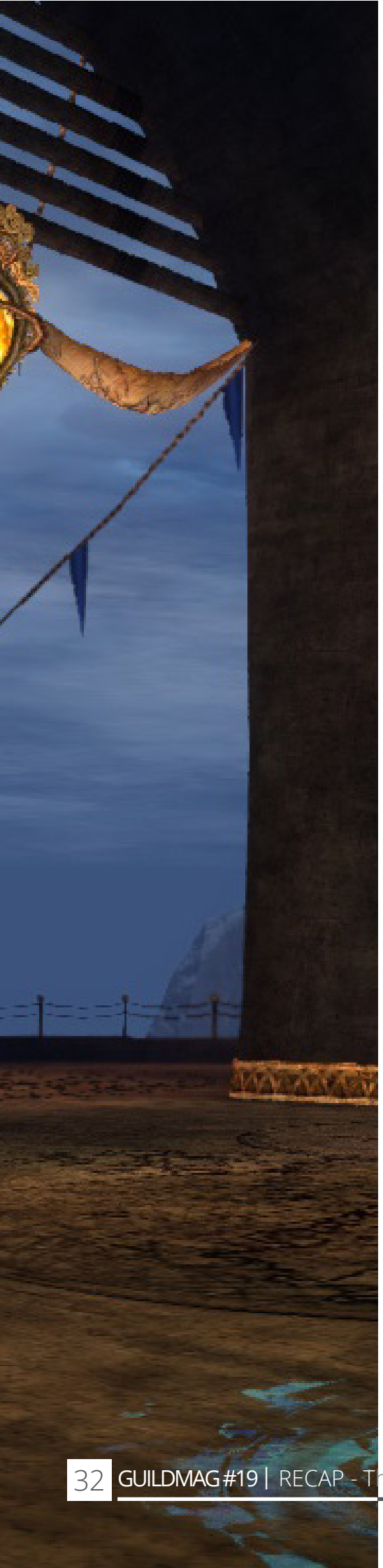
Before we set off, I approached Logan to see if he wanted to join Rytlock and me in Dragon's Watch. Surprisingly, he declined saying that General Soulkeeper had asked him to become the new Pact Marshall. Being unable to join on the frontlines in Lake Doric and the queen's seeming reticence towards him seem to have helped him make up his mind about accepting the position.

CONFESSOR'S END

I accessed Beetlestone Manor from its Hidden Falls Dock area and met up with Demmi. It was strange to return to the property after my previous adventures there. Just like last time, Caudecus had some surprise guards on hand to greet us, this time in the form of Jade Bows, White Mantle, and bandits; always fun. We were also met by Countess Anise, who claimed she couldn't trust Canach to let Caudecus get away again; it seems she'd really lost touch with Canach's squad hours before. After fighting our way past Caudecus' defenses, we ran into Canach who'd been biding his time in a crate. Demmi fought well despite dealing with her own feelings about facing her father and her friend, Lady Valette Wi, whom she wanted to try and talk round.

We found Caudecus in his library ready to do battle and with Valette at his side. He maliciously taunted Demmi, telling her he'd murdered her mother and that Valette was





his true daughter now. We weakened him enough to send him into his private hiding hole, but not before he'd mortally wounded Demmi. This act finally opened Valette's eyes to Caudecus' viciousness, and she decided to lead us to his hiding place in an attempt to make amends. After answering riddles to get past his security measures, we faced him again, now bloated and crazed from consuming bloodstone shards. This wasn't enough to protect him from our wrath though. After dealing the final blow to Caudecus, we headed out to Demmi and Logan just before she passed. Canach wasted no time in severing his ties to Anise and the Shining Blade now that his contract was completed, leaving Anise with a free spot on her payroll. Valette's now filling that role and I wish her well, especially after she helped us defeat Caudecus and gave us information to check his study. There we learned from Caudecus' older journal entries that Lazarus - our would-be ally and supposed mursaat - is nothing less than an impostor! Lazarus, having learned the hard way not to use living vessels to hide himself in, apparently re-split himself into artifacts - inanimate objects - to protect himself. Xera found four of these new aspects but Caudecus replaced one of these with a fake. Who on Tyria did she resurrect then? And where did Caudecus hide the aspect he stole from Xera?



TAIMI'S PET PROJECT

While we were off ensuring Caudecus' demise, Taimi was still hard at work trying to find a way to put an end to the threat of the Elder Dragons. We didn't have much time to digest that Lazarus was an imposter when Taimi contacted me to say she'd finished her dragon machine. Adventure and time wait for no one and we were off to Rata Novus again to see what surprises the asuran progeny had for us. Upon arriving, Kasmeer suddenly materialized through a mesmer portal! She was slightly upset that I hadn't had time to send her an invitation to Dragon's Watch, but agreed to join the guild nonetheless. She seemed to be taking Marjory's pursuit of "Lazarus" in her stride, though I could tell she was a bit worried that she hadn't heard from Marjory recently. As we made our way down to Taimi's lab, we found her surrounded by Phlunt and his flunkies who, yet again, were threatening to steal her research. After we helped Taimi regain control of her lab, she had a chance to show off and explain her machine. Marjory suddenly appeared with "Lazarus" hot on her heels. With news that he now had a band of mercenaries in his employ and a base on the Fire Islands to disguise the assault on the Elder Dragons he planned, we'd have to act fast to force him to reveal his true identity. Once Marjory shared that "Lazarus" kept a mirror by his side, Kasmeer came up with a plan to use some of the mirrors Taimi set up in her lab to help run her machine, Kasmeer proposed she enchant them to reflect "Lazarus" back onto himself and his mirror, thereby breaking the spell. While I collected the mirrors, Kasmeer and Marjory had a chance to catch up and work through Marjory's disappearance and lack of communication.



With mirrors and relationships sorted, Phlunt reappeared to tell us the asura gate leading into the lab was no longer working. It had to be "Lazarus"! Danger was sure to follow, so we evacuated Phlunt and his krewe. We reluctantly persuaded him to take cover in the secret Dragon Lab just in time to square off with the impostor. After exchanging tense pleasantries and agreeing to show him the dragon machine in order to trick him into Kasmeer's enchanted mirrors, he broke free of the restraint and ordered his mercenaries to attack us! Having dealt

with his lackeys, we lured him back into the crosshairs of Kasmeer's mirrors and finally shattered his illusion! "Lazarus" was none other than Balthazar, one of the Six human gods! Upon learning this, Kasmeer froze in shock, leaving Balthazar a window of time large enough to both injure Marjory and take off with Taimi's machine. Leaving behind his mercenary army to cover his escape, we were forced to fight their numbers, unable to pursue the human god. With Marjory incapacitated and Kasmeer unable to face the prospect of fighting one of her beloved Six, we had to act quickly to recover Taimi's machine. We'd be up against one of the gods; there wasn't a moment to lose. Luckily, Taimi had placed a tracker on her machine just in case Phlunt tried to steal it. We'd use that to track Balthazar while Taimi headed back to her simulation room to test out a new theory she had.

ARRIVAL AND SURVIVAL

Boarding a submarine from the Rata Sum docks, we made our way to the Ring of Fire Islands and Draconis Mons, a cavern at the base of a volcano with boiling water all around and an interesting biome. Upon arrival, First Mate Bilgefire and Scientist Viraddi confirmed that the machine, and presumably Balthazar, were here. Yet when we tried to examine the tracking machine, Viraddi and



the machine were suddenly pulled underground by a vine! Then, I heard a voice on the wind telling me that Viraddi was safe. I couldn't tell where the voice came from, but I had to find Viraddi. Leaving Bilgefire on shore to secure the beach, I headed into the cavern led by the mysterious voice.

Eventually, I found Viraddi near some rocks. He was shaken but otherwise ok. The tracker, on the other hand, was irreparably damaged, exploding when I went to check to see if it still worked. Just when I thought I'd have to track Balthazar by following his fire trail, an ancient nature spirit appeared! It was the owner of the mysterious voice I'd heard earlier: a druid spirit, I later learned, caretakers of the land. The druid urged us to leave this place and take our "god being" Balthazar with us, claiming that we were intruding on one of nature's purest gardens. Nevertheless, the druid told us Balthazar was in the apex of the volcano, far above the clouds. I had to hurry.

IN PURSUIT OF A GOD

Fighting my way further up the cavern, I found more of Balthazar's mercenaries and a base complete with a bloodstone crazed wurm. It seems that though Balthazar had no desire to continue the White Mantle's cultish pursuits, he'd definitely made use of their brawn and their knowledge of harvesting bloodstone fragments. Was he using these to increase his power even further? Near the apex of the volcano, not far from the mercenaries' base, I met another nature spirit who said Balthazar had entered the core of the

" We made our way to the Ring of Fire Islands and Draconis Mons, a cavern at the base of a volcano with boiling water all around and an interesting biome.

volcano. There was no way I could follow him without some sort of protection against the volcano's heat. Fortunately, the spirit told me of four of its kind that had been trapped by an asura named Zinn long ago. If I freed them they would grant me their protection to ward me against fire. It seemed this was my only option since the druid wanted us all gone from its garden.

ELDER DRUID PROTECTION

With the hint to free spirits from asuran vaults, I began exploring the area. In the process, I found an antique golem named M.O.X. created by Zinn. Along with another golem, Z.O.X., I learned that the golems were the only survivors of a battle and that their programming to care for living creatures meant they'd nurtured the area's spiders, whom they called "webbies." M.O.X. asked me to help it and, in return, it would help me. We struck a bargain and M.O.X. instructed me to find the key gem to Zinn's first vault inside one of the spiders. After killing the right one, M.O.X. set the access code on the key gem and directed me to Zinn's vault atop a tree root, as well as informing me where the remaining vaults were located: one near the apex, one near the Boiling Sea, and one that had been breached by Inquest - a sign we weren't the only ones who knew Zinn had been interested in Draconis Mons. I invited M.O.X. to return to civilization with me after I'd dealt with Balthazar and, if I didn't know any better, I'd say the golem was happy to have a "new user," as it called me.

With M.O.X.'s directions and access in hand, I set off to find and free the druids. After freeing the first one, Taimi cut in on the communicator saying that my temperature readings were fluctuating. She, however, didn't believe my story about the druid spirits and thought I was suffering from heat stroke and was delusional. You'd think I lost my sense regularly while adventuring. With Taimi promising to send help, I continued searching for the vaults and discovered Zinn's second city: Rata Arcanum, now home to the Inquest who are excavating it and trying to salvage Zinn's secrets. Finding the rest of the druids was far from straightforward in this inhospitable cavern, but I succeeded in freeing them all and gaining more of their protection.

> "I found an antique golem named MO.X. created by Zinn.

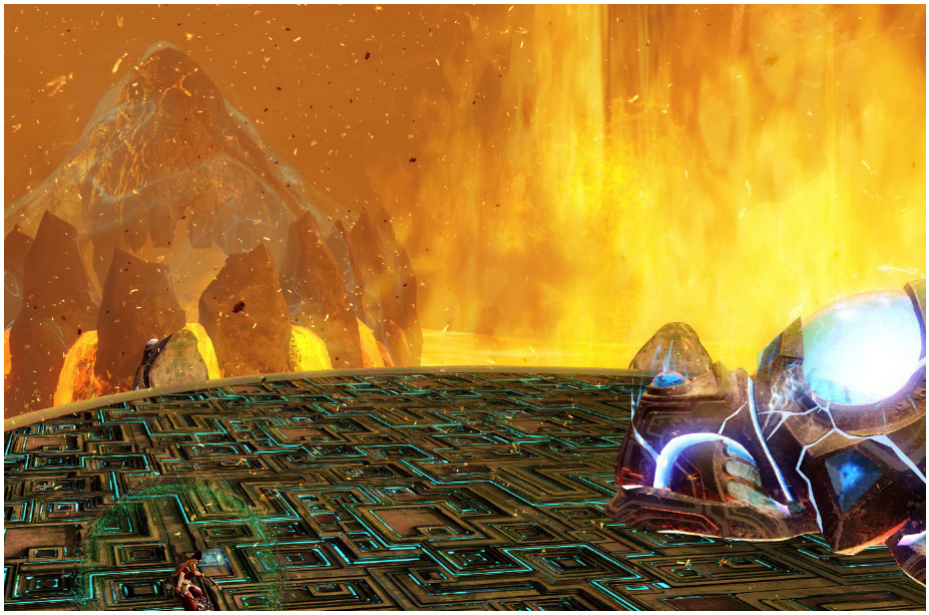
Meanwhile, Taimi's simulation revealed that killing the Elder Dragons was not a good idea, and that Tyria itself would suffer greatly. She contacted me and told me to plug into the holoprojector near the submarine's landing



point. I made my way back to the submarine after freeing the druids and plugged into Taimi's simulation. Killing the Dragons wouldn't just be bad for Tyria, it would destroy it! The only way to prevent this from happening now was to stop Balthazar from destroying Primordus. To make things that bit more interesting, Taimi hadn't installed a way to turn the machine off once it was powered on, meaning the only way to stop the machine once on was to overload and destroy it. Could we stop Balthazar and save Tyria from the destruction we'd begun? It was time to find out.

HEART OF THE VOLCANO

On entering the heart of the volcano, I discovered an energy barrier that blocked the way deeper into the caldera. I offered to describe it to Taimi to see if she had any ideas on how to get past it, but she surprised me by showing up in person, safely ensconced in Scruffy 2.0! It was time to pursue Balthazar. Taimi lent me a scanner she'd modulated to scan the barrier and trigger it to release anomalies that could be used to break the barrier. I made it past two barriers by using anomalies and when I was in the middle of disabling the third barrier, Primordus roared. Balthazar had powered on Taimi's machine. There was no turning back



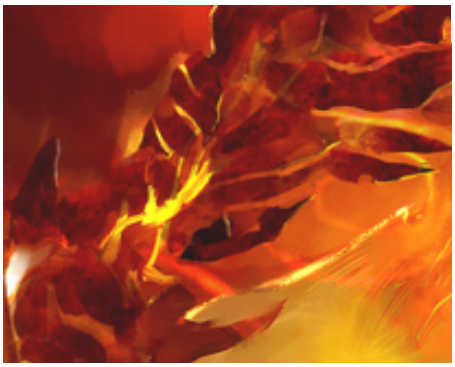
now; we either let Balthazar destroy Primordus and Jormag together, or we stop him by destroying the machine. We had to stop him; it was the only way to save Tyria.

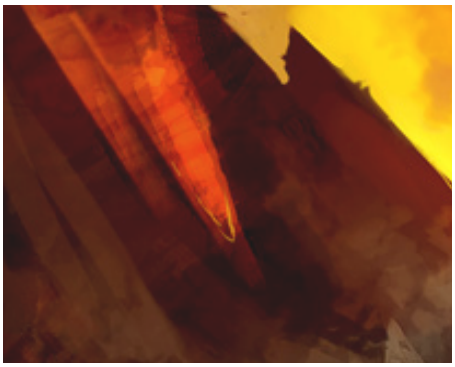
I managed to get past the final barrier and descend deep into the volcano's throat. And there, using Taimi's machine to power himself further with magic, was Balthazar facing Primordus in his own lair! While channeling magic, Balthazar appeared to be suspended between two realms. Taimi and Scruffy joined us on the platform to help me formulate a plan to stop the God of War. There was no reasoning with Balthazar. He didn't care if he destroyed Tyria by absorbing all the magic the two Elder Dragons held; all he cared about was exacting his revenge ... but on whom? We didn't have time for philosophical discussions though, so I tried appealing to his thirst for battle but he chose to remain in the magic channel while siccing his two hounds on me! With Taimi's help, we defeated the hounds by using the scanner to trigger clusters of magic from the machine and using them to corrupt the fiery canines. A few shots of Dragon magic did the trick and we were able to stop the hounds, giving Taimi an opportunity to overload the machine, seemingly vaporizing Balthazar in the process. This caused the machine to fire magic back to Primordus which appeared to wound the Dragon and put him back in hibernation. Taimi theorized that the same must have happened to Jormag as well. She plans on testing that theory after some well-deserved rest. Convincing the rest of our guild to save the Elder Dragons will probably be a hard sell, but hopefully they'll see it's a better idea than destroying Tyria. Now all we have to worry about is where Balthazar disappeared to and what he might do to us for foiling his plan.



LIGHT MY FIRE

BY **DRAXYNNIC**





Since the release of *Heart of Thorns*, a number of people have mourned the lack of lore relating to the elite specialisations. Revenant legends, by nature, come with their own built-in lore, and we've received snippets on some of the others: dragonhunters, for instance, are the result of guardians who decided to adopt a more aggressive and almost witch-hunter-esque approach to fighting dragons after the rise of Mordremoth, and the similarity of the name "scrapper" to a downtrodden scavenger caste among the charr was no coincidence. However, information on the origins of most of the elite specialisations remains noticeably missing.

With this being the case, I thought it could be an interesting exercise to look at the features of elite specialisations, the aesthetics of the equipment associated with them, and compare that with the broader lore of Tyria to see if we can deduce some answers. How do they fit within the world of Tyria? How could they have arisen?

Let's start with the berserker.



Where might the berserker have come from?

Channelling rage and anger has always been a part of the warrior's theme: *Guild Wars* gave us skills like Battle Rage, Berserker Stance and Frenzy in the initial release, with more anger-themed skills to follow in later releases. Whilst it is also possible to make warriors with a more disciplined, tactical theme, it has always been the profession to go to if you want a character oriented towards going crazy and smashing things. The berserker elite specialisation epitomises this. The primary distinction between the regular warrior and the berserker is that you have the choice of replacing the default adrenaline-themed "burst skills" with entering a fiery rage for a short period - and in the case of the berserker, the metaphor becomes literal. Somehow, the berserker's rage appears to infuse them with elemental power, granting the ability to unleash a flurry of fireballs or to summon a rock out of the earth in order to shatter it with a punch.

So how did a profession that had a healing cantrip derived from the popularity of Mending Touch among warriors in *Guild Wars*, but which otherwise has little overt skill in magic, become something that channels anger so hot that it literally burns?

Well, let's start by looking at their aesthetics. Like each of the elite specialisations, berserkers have three pieces of equipment associated with them: an armour piece (a helm, in this case), an ascended torch, and an exotic torch you get for free by unlocking the specialisation, which is effectively a kind of precursor to the ascended form. Can we get any hints at where the berserker comes from through the look of their equipment?

The berserker's headgear – a skull-helmet with protruding spikes – is quite reminiscent of Conan the Barbarian. Of the various playable races, the race whose theme is closest to that aesthetic seems to be the norn, so it seems likely that the berserker helm is of norn design. The Wild Abandon torch also appears to follow norn design elements: while the lion is an unusual artistic element among the norn, Wolf and Bear are the primary spirits revered by their warriors.

Continuing the norn theme, we also have the animation for Wild Blow, which shows an image of a lunging bear over the user, suggesting a connection between the skill and the Spirits of the Wild, and/or ranger skills that invoke animals, such as Maul.

So it seems likely that berserker teachings have at least passed through norn

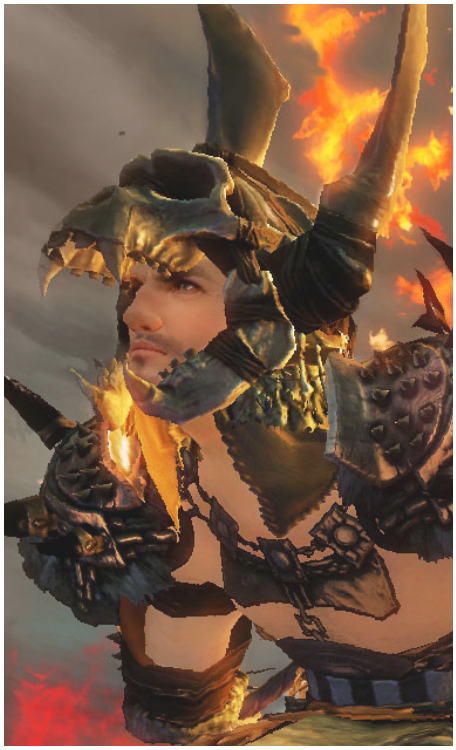


society before reaching the other races; but where did the fire come from? While it would be wrong to say that fire has no significance in norn culture (the invoking of the Spirit of Bear prior to the Blood Washes Blood mission in E*ye of the North*, for instance, involves lighting, stoking, and protecting a sacred flame), there is little reason to think that norn warriors would be inspired to develop a fighting style based around fire.

So who would?

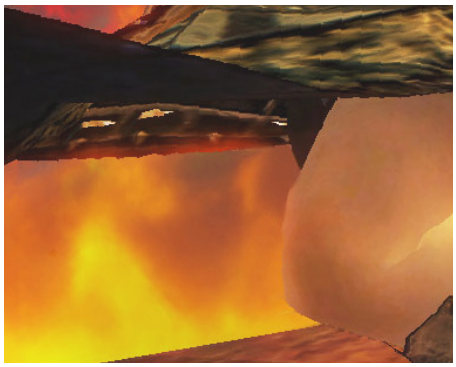
One possibility would be human followers of Balthazar. Since the patron of warriors among the human pantheon is also the God of Fire, it would be natural for a devout follower of Balthazar to want to emulate his or her god and wield fire in turn. In fact, this was a style that was quite possible in *Guild Wars* by taking a warrior with an elementalist secondary: a popular combination in the days before PvE skills. While this combination appeared to take a more scholarly approach towards fire magic, it is possible that this was refined (or possibly more accurately, made more unrefined) in the years between the games in order to become a better fit with warrior tactics, mindset, and training.

However, if the specialisation was developed by humans, this raises the question: Why doesn't the profession have more of a human aesthetic?











One answer is that it does have a human aesthetic... or, rather, a Balthazar aesthetic. Spiked skull-helmets are not generally associated with humans; instead, following Queen Salma's decree at the end of War in Kryta, Seraph armourers prefer to use winged motifs in honour of Dwayna. Spikes and skulls are, however, common motifs in depictions of Balthazar, so it would be fitting for his worshippers to adopt them as well. The lion's head on Wild Abandon could then be a reference to Lion's Arch.

However, the wolf and bear would not be intuitively associated with Balthazar. While wolves are related to hounds, the wolf head on Wild Abandon is very clearly that of a wolf and not a Hound of Balthazar. Among the human pantheon, animals such as wolves and bears would be associated with the harmony-seeking Melandru and not competitive Balthazar, so their inclusion is curious. They are, however, important norn animal spirits as mentioned above.

So this might be where the norn connection comes in.

FOOTNOTE

ArenaNet's explanation for why more exotic professions such as the ritualist and dervish disappeared from the continent of Tyria - apart from a few surviving techniques - is that the majority of the masters of those professions on the continent lived in Lion's Arch and were killed in the flood (see *http://www.wartower.de/artikel/images/5229/TTLS-Klassen.mp3*, from 25:00 to 29:30.) It stands to reason that some fighting styles that developed between the time of *Guild Wars* and the flooding of Lion's Arch might have perished the same way.

Followers of Balthazar have shown a rather norn-like attitude of wanting to test themselves against powerful foes. Kahmu, the dervish hero from *Eye of the North*, may be an example of this (he is not specifically identified as a follower of Balthazar, but he does use Avatar of Balthazar in the tournament), having earned enough respect among the norn to be regarded by some as a norn in the wrong body. It's possible that, at some time after *Eye of the North*, berserker follower(s) of Balthazar arrived at one of their tournaments and made enough of a name for themselves to entice some of the locals to want to be taught in the berserker tradition.

Since then, the norn could have taken over development of the specialisation, dropping the outright Balthazar-esque elements of the berserker apparel for aesthetic aspects more suited to their own culture, while keeping the lion in honour of the original teacher's place of origin. Meanwhile, it's possible that the human practitioners of the specialisation within Kryta were wiped out in the flooding of Lion's Arch*, leaving the norn students to choose their direction from there, while future holy warriors of Balthazar seeking to incorporate fire into their attacks may have been drawn to the new guardian profession instead.

There is, however, an alternative. In addition to followers of Balthazar, there is another group with an unhealthy obsession with fire. The Prophecies Manuscripts tell us that the charr as a whole worship fire, and three of the four legions are either named after fire or something that is produced by fire. While the Iron Legion is more concerned with its practical applications, it is the Flame Legion that takes this obsession to extremes, including combining fire magic with physical attacks in the cases of their archers and melee troops. We see this in particular in *Eye of the North* where several charr warriors and rangers augment their



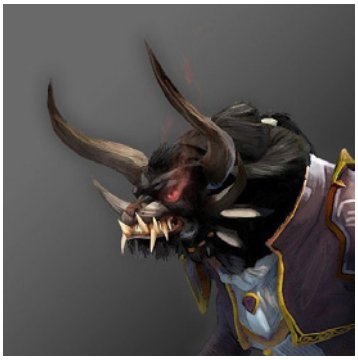
attacks with Conjure Flame, while Flame Legion archers augment their arrows with fire-based preparations across both games.

Presently, of course, the Flame Legion are hostile to all the playable factions – however, this wasn't always the case. Prior to the rebellion against the Flame Legion shamans, the informal détente between the norn and the charr applied to all charr, including the Flame Legion. As a result, it's possible that during this time, some norn learned the trick of combining fire magic with warrior techniques from Flame Legion soldiers. After the overthrow of the Flame Legion, this technique may have been deliberately abandoned by the non-Flame charr (if they had ever developed them in the first place), leaving it to the norn to preserve the tradition which eventually transferred to other playable races in the present day. Such a history would explain why the aesthetics are primarily norn-like in appearance – the part that doesn't fit (the lion head on Wild Abandon) might be a remnant of what was originally an homage to the Flame Legion charr that originally developed the berserker fighting style.

So, this gives us two possible sources for the berserker elite specialisation – both, essentially, being descendants of warrior/elementalists from Guild Wars. One is that the combination of warrior training with fire magic started among human followers of Balthazar in imitation of their god, and transferred to the norn through the participation of those Balthazar-followers in norn tournaments. The other is that the specialisation is a holdover from times when the norn maintained good (or at least occasionally peaceful) relations with the Flame Legion, giving some norn the opportunity to learn the skills from Flame Legion sparring partners. Either way, the norn appear to have given the tradition their own unique stamp as it passed down through the years until, eventually, this mode of fighting was passed on to the Pact and ultimately made available to warriors of all of the playable races... without the stigmas that may have arisen from the ultimate origin of the specialisation.







AN INTERVIEW WITH THAT_SHAMAN

BY **VIAN DE BOD**

What's it like being *Guild Wars 2*'s most renowned data miner? For this issue of GuildMag, I had the chance to sit down with that_shaman to learn more about his data mining hobby and how it all came about. Keep reading to discover everything worth knowing about the man behind the name.

Tell us a little about yourself. For those who don't know: Who are you and what do you do?

So I'm that_shaman, a 30-year-old old guy. Most people in the game might know me from either data mining posts, maps, or YouTube videos. I've been doing this for quite a while now (way before *Guild Wars 2* launched) and try to cover almost every patch that goes live.

That's interesting, and we'll be coming back to your data mining in a minute, but before we go on, I have to know: Where does your name come from? Perhaps it's just me, but I've been curious about your name since I heard it. Call me weird, but it is rather intriguing!

Ah yes, the name comes from the first *Guild Wars 2* beta weekend. During this event there was a specific Flame Legion Shaman that was broken beyond belief. Basically he would wipe new players that just logged in to the game over and over; he became known as "that shaman" in map chat. When I decided to create a reddit account in order to post I decided to use that name, and it stuck.

Ah, I love that there's an amusing story behind it! So to get back to data mining, I would like to uncover your "origin story" in a way. What brought you to the world of data mining?

Curiosity really. I've been messing around in game files for years and years trying to figure out how things work and if there are any secrets in these files. During the first *Guild Wars* game, I mainly focused on creating maps and not much else.

When I saw the tools that were developed for *Guild Wars 2* on the Xentax forum, I spent a lot of time messing around in the files, but I wasn't actively mining or writing my own tools. I just stuck with piecing together maps at first, just like I did with the first game. Somewhere around the release of Southsun Cove I decided to take a closer look at the other things that were added to the game.

From that point on I started working on some custom tools and released a few as open source projects. I also started doing my bi-weekly data mining posts, although at the time there were 2 posts, one for strings and another for chat-codes. I later combined these into one, and the format stuck.

Wow, so it was a pretty organic process. Do you enjoy what you do? Is it a hobby or do you see it as something more?

It's definitely my hobby! Basically it's an excuse for me to learn new things using one of my favourite games. I generally love doing the things I do but, like all hobbies, there are days when you don't have the motivation to write another post. But that's what I've signed up for.

I also have no intention to make a living out of this; currently this hobby is costing me quite a bit of money (hosting, software, etc.), but I refuse to run ads on my site or accept donations (if you do see ads, that happens because I'm using unlicensed music). There are several reasons why I don't like to run ads but mostly it's because I'm posting previews of content that isn't mine and I just want to keep it a no-strings-attached hobby.

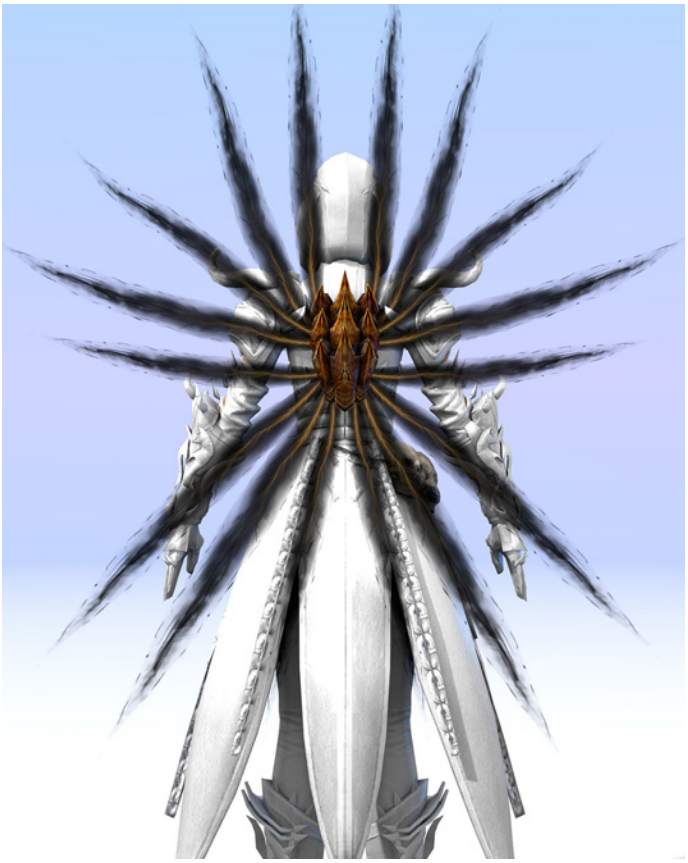
Ah, some would call that very noble of you and I admire your ethic. You say it's a hobby, but surely it must take more of your time than more conventional hobbies? For those of us who don't really know all the technical aspects of what you do, how much effort goes into your work?

It depends on the kind of post, but I schedule things in advance. For example, my friends and family know I've reserved Tuesday around patch time to do "that_shaman stuff". But to give you some numbers:

- A patch-time data-mining post can take 30 minutes up to 3 hours.
- An outfit video will take about 12 hours.
- An armour video can easily take up to 24 hours.

A PATCH-TIME DATA-MINING POST CAN TAKE 30 MINUTES UP TO 3 HOURS.

I also like to spread things out a bit. If I posted everything at once there would be huge gaps between posts and I would probably have a mental meltdown!



I really admire your determination, and I'm sure our readers do too. Now I'd like to get to the more controversial side of your hobby, if you don't mind. Do you feel like you get judged by others within the community for your hobby? Do you think it's mostly a positive or negative response?

Mostly it's positive, but of course there are a lot of people who really loathe data miners. I always try to be reasonable by having some self-imposed rules like no story spoilers, no spoilers in titles, don't spoil mechanics, etc. With all these in place it's really easy to avoid my posts although you'll always have people who will start shouting spoiler chat-codes in map chat.

I also understand it if employees of ArenaNet get a bit fed up with me from time to time, because I'm posting their work without



permission. But mostly people (including myself) see it as a sneak preview, something to speculate about, something to get hyped about.

I would imagine that it could cause some discomfort on ArenaNet's side. Speaking of reactions to your work, let's talk about consequences. Have you ever faced repercussions for your activities? Have you ever gotten in trouble or have you ever faced backlash because of it?

Never, to be honest. Of course, they can't condone what I do, but as long as I don't do anything crazy (like spoil an entire living story chapter in advance), they won't take action against these kind of posts. And the worst backlash I had from the community was when I posted some of the revenant legends that weren't revealed yet. At that time a lot of YouTube videos and articles popped up about how "data miners" ruined the game for everybody without mentioning my name.

Ah, yes, I do remember that. Unfortunately, it can be hard to predict the reaction of any community, but let's move on shall we? Let's get a little philosophical. In your opinion, how does data mining affect the *Guild Wars 2* community or the community of any MMORPG as a whole?

Personally, I think the data mining posts have a positive influence on the community.

PERSONALLY, I THINK THE DATA MINING POSTS HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON THE COMMUNITY. IT KEEPS SPECULATION AND DISCUSSION GOING.

It keeps speculation and discussion going. It also takes away the feeling most of the infamous "fixed a server crash" patches have that there's nothing new coming for the next few weeks. It's an indication that there's more coming "soon". It's something that players can look forward to.

I wholly agree. For many players, having some news can be very important. Speaking of the community (and by extension the game itself) what about *Guild Wars 2* has made you so invested, and kept you invested enough to become the famous that_shaman in the community?

It will sound cheesy, but the community itself. The majority of the people I've met through this game are friendly and fun. So being able to do the things I like to do with them as an audience is very rewarding.

I can totally understand that! I often find myself logging in just to spend some time with the friends I've made in the community. Speaking of which, how long have you

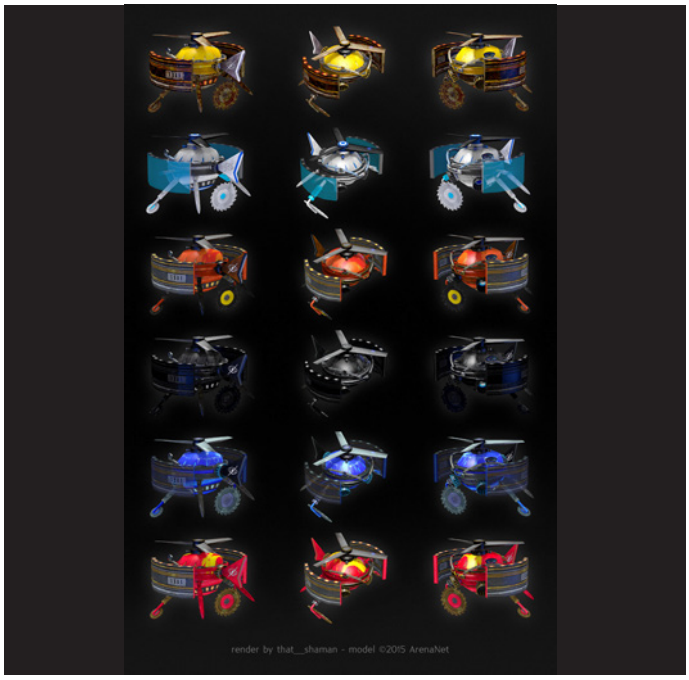
been a part of the *Guild Wars / Guild Wars 2* community?

A very long time. I've been playing since the last *Guild Wars 1* beta weekend (April 2005). I took a short break between *Eye of the North* and *Guild Wars 2*'s beta. So I've been active for almost 12 years now!

Incredible! You must be one of the last true "veterans" out there! In all your time playing this franchise, you must have had quite a few memorable experiences. What has been your most memorable moment playing the game so far?

There are so many moments to choose from, but the launch of each new expansion pack (be it *Guild Wars 1* or *2*) and the beta weekends leading up to it have always been special to me. When the entire community doesn't know how things work or what to expect; then everything is still new!

I have to agree with you there. I find that the excitement of discovering all the things in a new expansion can be quite amazing. Shaman, you've been great so far and I really appreciate your time spent here. Before we wrap this up, I do have one last question for you. If you could tell the community at large or ArenaNet one thing on behalf of yourself and other data miners, what would you say?



Something a lot of people tend to forget: It's just a game, go have fun and be nice to each other!

A very important point that I think can never be repeated too many times. I want to thank you for your time and I look forward to seeing more from you in the future!

Thank you as well!

You can find that_shaman on his blog: *www.thatshaman.com.*



GUILD SPOTLIGHT

RELICS OF ORR



How does a podcast evolve into a worldwide guild with 390 members? Focus on fun, invest in the people in the guild, and commit to spending time with them. That's been the magic recipe for Relics of Orr, a guild originally created by a group of friends, while playing the original *Guild Wars*, as a friends and family guild. The former leader decided to create a podcast (named after the guild, Relics of Orr) and open the guild up to the listenership of the podcast and to the wider community. Since then, the original founders have moved on from the *Guild Wars* franchise but, as current guild leader Spirit tells us, "those of us who were still interested in playing GW2 stepped up and took over officership and leadership roles to keep it going because we loved the guild and the people involved. We're all still in touch too. Many of us have made lifelong friends in the guild and allied guilds that now span multiple games."

As a primarily social guild, guild officer Christian says that "Relics of Orr is an open and inviting place for a diverse group of people to share their experience of playing, primarily, *Guild Wars 2* and other online games together." The guild has an unofficial motto - "Life is but a dream" - that reflects their desire not to take themselves too seriously. This approach serves



BY **MIKO**



Relics of Orr [RO]

Leader: Spiritface.5089
Server: Northern Shiverpeaks (NA)
Size: 390+ members
Preferred game mode: PvE
In-game contacts: Spiritface.5089; Csquirrelrun.3108; Shongaqu.5279; Vrabin.2875
Quirk: We have a lot of couples. Not on purpose, it just happened. Roughly speaking, we have at least 15 active couples, meaning around 30 of our 50 most active players are partnered with someone else in the guild

www.relicsoforr.com

them well. As guild officer Shongaqu puts it, "Relics of Orr has always strived to be an open community of gamers with a podcast on the side." Their podcast recently celebrated its 200th episode, and their laid back and fun style continues to draw in new guild members who end up inquiring about joining the guild after listening to one of their episodes. And while Spirit shares that RO doesn't actively recruit, longtime guild member Jebbers categorizes recruiting as "doing anything at all." He clarifies that they've "found great players who were doing the same stuff as us (LFG Fractals, meta-events, LFG dungeons, guild missions, etc.)." Their model is simple: have fun and don't hide this fact. " When you play with somebody new," Jebbers adds, "it's a great experience to see what they do and how they respond to what you do. People have asked to join after seeing how well us guildies work together and have fun while doing it."

RO's only requirement is that you be age 16+ to join their guild. Spirit says RO welcomes all types of people, having "a fair amount of quite outgoing members and a decent amount of very shy ones, as well as players who log in daily, and players who log in only for big patches." Regardless of how vocal or active in-game a person is, RO members of all stripes are welcome to participate in any



of the guild's events including but not limited to: weekly activities like guild missions, minigames like Asuraball, and even something as simple as checking out new content together or helping guildies farm things or achievements they need. Still, Spirit thinks that, in general, "people who are proactive about getting involved in a gaming community and getting to know other members of the guild are generally going to have the best experience with us."

They also attract players by running community events, sometimes organized and offered by Relics of Orr alone and sometimes in partnership with other guilds like Rock, Paper, Signet. Some well known events have been "The World vs. Orr," on which they partnered with RPS; "Plants vs. Zombies," an all necro minions Silverwastes event; and a King's Labyrinth. Often, these events begin as requests. Spirit enthuses, "I really enjoy people coming to me and saying 'Hey Spirit, I have this crazy idea, what if we...' and then going, 'Well then let's make it happen!'"

Her leadership and hard work are greatly appreciated by the guild's members, so much so that Christian highlighted the guild's recent collaboration to surprise Spirit with an in-game Christmas gift as thanks: a Permanent Hair Stylist Contract. Keeping coordination a secret was tricky, Christian admits, since they also live together, but the effort was worth it. "I was blown away by the response I got and quickly had to work out ways of dealing with the in-game gold limits. Safe to say, it was a roaring success and Spirit was deeply moved by our combined effort ... and now I'm super jealous of her styling looks!"

From goofing around with Slubling tonics one minute to focusing on the task at hand the next, RO tries hard to respect the fact that many of its members are working adults from timezones that span the globe. As Spirit put it, "we've got one short window to get as much done as we can, [so] let's gooooooooooo." They achieve being efficient and having fun by creating a community culture where people feel comfortable hanging out and chatting, bringing a good sense of humor to the mix. "I really enjoy hopping into a game and seeing/listening to people chatting," Shongaqu tells us. "We have gotten away from voice chat of late but the text chat keeps on rolling and it is a lot of fun to both lurk and participate." This atmosphere encourages guild members to collaborate together in games like Minecraft and Warframe, as well as in *Guild Wars 2*. "Each person contributes something different," Jebbers explains, "whether it's a dissenting opinion or whole hearted agreement, or a simple quiet

> " Relics of Orr is an open and inviting place for a diverse group of people to share their experience of playing, primarily, *2* and other online games together.

observation ... The people I've gotten to play with turned some monotonous tasks (such as Daily Fractals) into something I'd look forward to. You never know when you'll be teleported into the ceiling of Thaumanova, then fall to your death. Or when you betray a friend by picking up their crystal on Jade Maw (or for you eles, dropping an Ice Bow right next to one). It's the people that have kept me playing this game for years, otherwise I would have moved on a long time ago."

Recently, however, Relics of Orr faced a challenge when Heart of Thorns came out, bringing along challenging content in the form of raids. Until the expansion, the guild was "very much built on a premise that we will never judge you for your preferred build or playstyle," Spirit shares, "and because content in the game up until that point was pretty easy, we never had issues getting through it together. We could always bring people along even if they weren't experienced or didn't have a great build." Then raids dropped and Fractals began getting upgrades as well and, suddenly, "we were facing an issue where we had a bunch of people who were really into the harder content and another group of people who felt they couldn't participate in that content due to time constraints, skill or gear required, or whatever reason." The guild, known for being pretty unified, had some decisions to make - split up or find a balance?

"It's taken a lot of work," Spirit continues, "and I wouldn't say we've been perfect about it, but by being really proactive about keeping both raid events and open events going, we've managed to create a situation that I'm mostly happy with." Christian adds, "We have developed 2-fixed raid squads that meet up once a week for 3-4 hours for progression and weekly boss kills," and these teams have been "incredibly kind and patient with players new to the content," Spirit expands. What's more, "people who don't like to raid cheer [the teams] on and even support the raiders by donating consumables and things like that for them. I'm really proud of both sides."



Cecil, King of Antioch
Our guild mascot. He gets decorated during festivals, and is fiercely guarded by guild member Festy.



RO's success is built on the fundamental premise of engaging with guildmates as much as possible. As Jebbers put it, "Play with people you know and don't know, and

have fun together. Make experiences, because they don't make themselves." If you're looking to grow your guild or improve its community, Christian's advice is try and do things better than RO does. Perhaps "formalise a leadership structure for your guild. Relics of Orr has always managed to sustain itself thanks to the dedication of the guild leader at the time. But the responsibility for solely running a large guild can leave an undue burden on that person, which could lead to problems when it's too much to deal with alongside their other commitments." Having guild officers to share that load can be helpful. "Being part of a guild should be a fun time," he continues, "and while committees and meetings don't really sound like fun, neither is bearing the responsibility for everyone else's fun - so I'd recommend finding a happy medium that you are comfortable with." Finding that happy place is easier if you take the time to get to know your guildmates. "Whether it's cheering them on for their achievements, personally helping them out, or just having a chat with them about what they're up to," Spirit explains, "all those little interactions add up and help create a friendly environment and memorable experience." Building a community and forming friendships takes time; the rewards, though, are worth it. "I never thought I could have a second family online," Jebbers finishes, "but somehow that managed to happen through the personalities I've gotten to know over the years."







BY **STARCONSPIRATOR**

THE CENTAUR TRIBES

Ages ago, centaur tribes could be found throughout Tyria. Their territories stretched from the Maguuma Jungle, across the Shiverpeaks, and as far away as Elona and the Crystal Desert. The historic records include four distinct tribes: the Harathi of Maguuma, the Losaru of the Crystal Desert, the Veldrunner of Elona, and the Modniir of the Shiverpeaks. Stories tell of their enslavement by humans; however, it is unclear who would have attempted to enslave the centaurs and if there was any success in doing so. Today, the majority of the centaurs are found only in Kryta where they wage war against the human settlements, raiding outposts and havens for supplies, and even enslaving humans on occasion. While recent developments have shed further light on the conspiracy between the centaur tribes and the Krytan Ministry, with only a handful of exceptions buried deep within the history books and one known peaceful tribe today, centaurs have always been a warlike people and have targeted humans for centuries.

The only known peaceful tribe at the moment is that recently found in the Maguuma Wastes. These centaur, while they took in survivors of the Zephyrites and allowed our forces to pass through their territory, did not offer aid in the fight against Mordremoth. Because of this, it can be assumed that they are descended from the most famous of the peaceful centaurs, Ventari.

Ventari left his Harathi tribe and sought solitude in the



canyons of the Maguuma Wastes at some point in the distant past. There, he set up a refuge and lived peacefully until the discord of Kryta's civil war spilled over into the area. Even when surrounded by the White Mantle, the elderly centaur refused to fight. Instead, he retreated further from human conflict and created a sanctuary along the Tarnished Coast where he tended the Pale Tree, setting the stage for the eventual birth of the sylvari race. Sadly, Ventari's belief in peace did not spread to most of his fellow centaurs. Interestingly, the sylvari race may owe its existence to the historic centaurs' penchant for living near large trees. Ventari initially set up his refuge near one of the largest trees in the arid desert. When he retreated further into the jungle, he once again settled near a tree. His distant cousins, the Veldrunners, also lived near their large ancestral tree in Elona. The Veldrunner tribe itself also played a part in human history when they allied with humans against Abaddon during his attempted escape.

Today, the three main centaur tribes -- the Modniir, the Harathi, and the Tamini -- have formed a loose association led by the Modniir, Ulgoth the Mighty. Together, they continue their war against the humans with a Ministry-backed focus on Divinity's Reach. The tribes' wartime footing has affected the daily lives of the centaurs themselves. Previously, gender roles were well defined within the centaur tribes. Female centaurs were often in their homesteads raising children and caring for the home, while male centaurs hunted and fought throughout their territory. As the war effort against the humans continues, female are now called to the frontlines more often.

The camps we come across in Kryta reflect that war. They are often surrounded by bulwarks of heavy spikes. The shelters are utilitarian in form and often consist of an arched framework of wood covered in hides; although some of the more permanent dwellings have added floors



made of wooden planks. Typical camps of each tribe share a number of aspects. For example, the Tamini of Queensdale occupy a number of simple encampments. Their nomadic nature can be seen in their sparse camps and most are little more than a handful of buildings arranged in a rough circle. However, larger camps like Holdland Camp, which is constructed in the hollow of the earth and partially built into a cave, is roofed by a patchwork of hides. Centaurs also construct walls of hide and wood. The buildings they do construct are generally large enough for several centaur to occupy with wide doors and wide paths. Encampments with multiple levels and towers will have sloping walkways instead of stairs. Although the Tamini use fire, the focus on wood and hide as their building materials suggests that the Tamini do not smith their own metal nor use foundries and

" The Veldrunner tribe itself also played a part in human history when they allied with humans against Abaddon during his attempted escape.



smelters. If they did, these would be more prevalent in their frontline war effort. Tamini warriors wear leather, metal armor, barding, and fight with hide shields, swords, and bows made of bone. It is possible these weapons come from the Modniir rather than being crafted by the Tamini themselves. The hides they use in their building likely come from their hunting efforts. However, other supplies used by these centaur come from their raids on human settlements. These stolen supplies, in crates and finished barrels, sit in stark contrast to their own rough woodwork.

Traveling further north, away from Lion's Arch, are the Harathi and their camps. One of the larger camps, located along the Witherflank River, showcases Harathi architecture; although Tamini forces are also found in the area. Unlike the simple structures of the Tamini camps, Harathi build weaponry, including catapults and ballistae, and their warriors are more likely to use metal weapons such as maces, spears, and even firearms. The smelting of iron and crafting of more advanced weapons leads to a need for more permanent settlements.

Therefore, it would be likely to find more female Harathi in the camps of north Kryta. The Whitherflank contains supply carts constructed of bone and wood, enclosures for war beasts and rock dogs, and plank buildings with ramps, along with a suspension bridge, and a smokestack that presumably houses the furnace where their metal is smelted. Although bone and wood are still prevalent, weapon racks here bustle with wood and metal weaponry. As with the Tamini camps, the more permanent Harathi settlements are utilitarian and have very little in the way of art or leisure crafting. Pressing further north into the territory of the Harathi, the Harathi Hinterlands, we find larger permanent camps. Here, in camps like Shorebluff, we do find primitive art such as bars and dabs of paint along with bone decorations that are most likely meant to intimidate human enemies. The Harathi structures found here are more elaborate, though still constructed of only rough wood, bone, and hides. In these areas, female centaur are also more prevalent, aiding the war effort while wielding staves and firearms. Additionally, the most recently discovered camp located near the shores of Lake Doric is a typical Harathi camp... well, except for the presence of the bloodstone crazed victims...

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Like the Harathi of the Hinterlands and the Lake Doric area, all Modniir-led tribes spend little time farming and likely only hunt on occasion. Instead, they gather supplies by raiding villages, mines, and farms near their encampments, returning with food, weapons, and even slaves. The war camps of the Modniir themselves are functional in style. They mimic and incorporate the building style of the Harathi, but the roofs of the buildings



are steep angles rather than the arches seen in Harathi camps located near Lion's Arch. It is possible that this steep style of building has made its way into southern, temperate climates from the Modniir's ancestral home in the Shiverpeaks where a steep building style would help to limit the amount of snow that piled up on the roof of the structure. The Modniir also raid settlements and enslave humans. Unlike the Tamini and Harathi, the Modniir seem to have a greater understanding of magic, and Modniir sages are a common sight in the war camps of the Hinterlands as we travel further north toward the Woodland Cascades. It is quite possible that, like the charr of old, those who wield magic are the ruling caste. What will happen in the future as the bloodstone-crazed Harathi exert their new-found power, and could it shift the centaur alliance?

As we push further into centaur territory, it will become increasingly important to understand how their societies functions. It is important to know that they are hunters, gatherers, and opportunists. Their limited resources could provide a bargaining chip during negotiations. Yet, because of their warlike nature, it is unlikely we will find very many centaur to ally with, even with the threat of the Elder Dragons. Knowing that they are willing to ally with humans if it ultimately advances their goals or the goals of a ruling caste, we may be able to negotiate with some of the more enlightened members of the tribes.







ZINN: SUPER GENIUS

BY STARCONSPIRATOR



The history of asura-human interaction is littered with sightings of the plucky golemancer Zinn. Known by many names, ranging from the Zinnsational Zinn to Mister Zinncompetent, the genius golemancer was last seen by humans fighting with the Shining Blade over 250 years ago. For decades, most scholars believed that his story ended with the War in Kryta. However, we have recently learned that Zinn went on after the war and founded the great asuran city, Rata Novus. Zinn continued to influence the world until his untimely death in 1175 AE.

ZINN, GOLEMANCER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Zinn touted himself as the greatest golemancer to ever live and often argued with his former mentor, Oola. From what we know of Oola, the arguments must have been quite the battle of wits and insults. Striking out on his own, Zinn built a successful business creating custom golems for eccentric clients until one day he was hired to construct three murderous golems that were made to be let loose to attack the world's leaders. He would eventually be held captive

by his client who we later find out is none other than Palawa Joko. Concerned for his reputation, the asura built the golem M.O.X. and sent it in search of people capable of stopping the assassins. Luckily for Zinn, the heroes recruited by M.O.X. were able to deactivate P.O.X, the first of the murderous golems, before it could kill the Princes of Vabbi, and N.O.X, the second killer golem, before it reached Emperor Kisu of Cantha. When the defeat of the first two was discovered, R.O.X, the third assassin, took all of Zinn's remaining golems from Zinn's lab in the Maguuma Jungle and marched towards the Temple of Ages, intent on destroying Krytan Princess Salma. Luckily, R.O.X. was also defeated. It is not known how Zinn escaped Palawa Joko after the three assassin golems were destroyed, but the consequences of their actions influenced Zinn's future.

Despite all his effort to maintain an impeccable reputation, Zinn was brought to trial in Rata Sum in 1079 AE. At the trial, he was accused of several "crimes" including reckless mayhem without a permit, and others such as possession of an overdue library tome. After the Arcane Council heard oral arguments from both sides, Zinn was found guilty on all counts, including sending the murderous golems on their assassination quests and burning Oola's Guide to Golemancy. His punishment for these transgressions was a ten year exile from Rata Sum and its subject territory. Rather than disappear, Zinn resurfaced on the battlefield with the Shining Blade during the War in Kryta.

WAR IN KRYTA

Zinn and his cohort Blimm, one of Oola's former employees, allied with the Shining Blade against the White Mantle and the Unseen Ones during the War in Kryta. It was rumored that the two asura were working closely with Livia, the Shining Blade necromancer, to develop weaponized golems for Princess Salma's forces. Given the assassin golems he had created previously, it is likely that Zinn was able to reuse those schematics and make amends for his unfortunate past. Historians have recorded his aid at the Battle for Lion's Arch, the final battle of the War in Kryta, and have made note of his key contribution: Using the body of a Seer to create Spectral Resistance and grant Salma's forces a defense against the mursaat's ultimate weapon. After the war, it was believed that Zinn returned to Maguuma to exact revenge on the Arcane Council who had exiled him from Rata Sum. However, recent discoveries show that Zinn instead delved deeper into the jungle and founded the grand underground city Rata Novus, and later, Rata Arcanum.



HIGH COUNCILOR ZINN



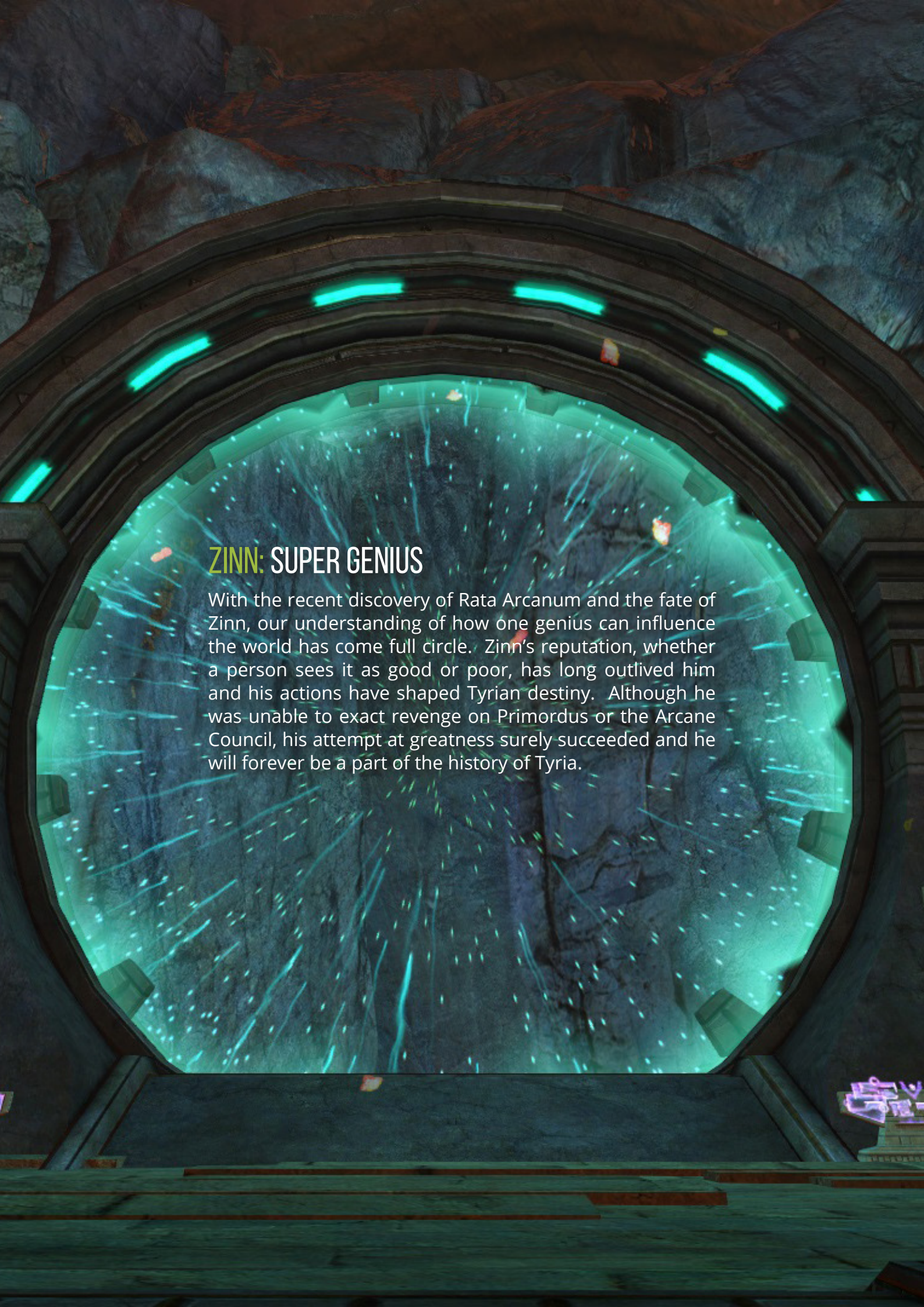
Zinn and his krewe first set up the city of Rata Novus atop a heavy concentration of ley-line energy. As they worked to secure the city and rebuild a life even greater than the one that had been taken from them in Rata Sum, their activity attracted hungry chak, Maguuma insects that fed on ley-line energy. It was during this time that Zinn turned his ire toward Primordus. The dragon's stirring had unleashed its destroyer minions, which had in turn driven the asura out of their beloved underground cities. Although they reestablished their civilization above ground in Rata Sum, Zinn and others longed to return to the tunnels they loved. Rata Novus and its underground location was a fitting setting to combat the awakening Elder Dragons.



And to that end, the asura partnered with the Exalted of Tarir in hopes of defeating them. Yet, Rata Novus also held the seeds of its own destruction - ley energy.

As the city increased its defenses and harnessed more energy, it became an irresistible feast for the chak. Increasing the power output of the defenses, without realizing that the chak were feeding off the energy, meant that soon the city was caught in an undesirable feedback loop: The more the chak attacked, the more energy was put toward the city's defense which then caused more chak to attack. Despite Zinn's best efforts and the best defenses the asura could construct, the city was overrun and most of the asura were killed. Zinn, along with a handful of the researchers from Rata Novus, were able to teleport to Rata Arcanum in the Fire Islands before the final defenses of the city collapsed and the chak took over.

Despite his hasty departure from Rata Novus, Zinn remained focused on his goal of defeating Primordus. In his recently discovered recordings in Draconis Mons, we found out that he saw his exile from Rata Novus as another set-back, but he was determined to fight his way back to the top. However, once again, his experiments found him standing against unknown forces, which he quickly dismissed and later became his downfall. Zinn's attempts to terraform the cavern and feed his krewe led him to experiment with the natural order of the cavern. His desire for greatness led him to harness the druid's nature magic, which angered the druids of the cavern. They eventually attacked, killing Zinn and his remaining krewe members.



ZINN: SUPER GENIUS

With the recent discovery of Rata Arcanum and the fate of Zinn, our understanding of how one genius can influence the world has come full circle. Zinn's reputation, whether a person sees it as good or poor, has long outlived him and his actions have shaped Tyrian destiny. Although he was unable to exact revenge on Primordus or the Arcane Council, his attempt at greatness surely succeeded and he will forever be a part of the history of Tyria.

THRIFTY THREADS

Budget outfits for White Mantle wannabees and Draconis Mons explorers

While everyone's been focusing on the White Mantle's radical changes in Krytan politics, no one has mentioned what they've done to shake things up in Krytan fashion. Villainous organizations always seem to have the coolest-looking uniforms, and the White Mantle are no exception. But with the White Mantle Outfit listed at 700 gems, and Exemplar Ylan bound to Fort Evannia, what's a Thrifty Threader to do? We use the next best things of course!

WHITE MANTLE OUTFIT

BY ANTHONZ

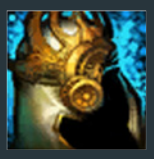
THE OUTFIT

Looking at the options available in the Wardrobe, I decided that the class that gets the closest to the White Mantle design are female light armor classes. I used my female norn mesmer, but I imagine female humans will benefit from this look as well.

HEAD

F

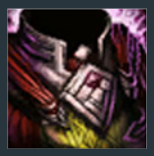
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CHEST

F

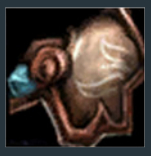
F S



SHOULDERS

LZ

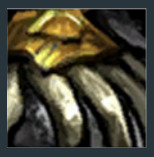
LZ



HANDS

S

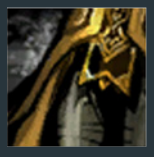
LZ S



LEGS

F

S S



FEET

LZ

LZ



SCARLET (S)

LEMON ZEST (LZ)

FOG (F)



COMPONENTS

HEAD: Inquest Circlets
Obtained from completing the Crucible of Eternity Dungeon for dungeon tokens, this headpiece has the right shape and proper dye slots to resemble the helms of the White Mantle. You'll need 180 tokens to make this headpiece yours.

SHOULDERS: Student Mantle
This easily-obtained shoulder piece is a common drop from mobs throughout Tyria, and can also be purchased at the Trading Post for about 3-6 silver.

CHEST: Soul of Koda
Another dungeon armor piece, this time from the Honor of the Waves. The chestpiece is 330 tokens, a small price compared to the amount of time you'll need to wait for other party members to join you.

HANDS: Acolyte Gloves
If you're a tailor, you can craft this piece, or purchase it from the TP for 4-6 silver.

LEGS: Acolyte Pants
Just like the gloves, you can craft this piece, or purchase it from the TP for 4-6 silver.

FEET: Diviner Boots
For these Diviner Boots, you'll have to travel to the Mists to offer up 208 Badges of Honor, 2 silver and 8 copper.



DYES

Any bright red dye will do, but the whitest dyes tend to be expensive. Here are some options that I've found work the best:

Red: Scarlet (94c) or Autumn (free)
Gold: Lemon Zest (9s) or Antique Gold (free)
White: Fog Dye (2s)

Granted, if you want the closest color match, I'd recommend Celestial dye, but at about 17 gold on the Trading Post, it is disqualified from being a "thrifty" option.

With these pieces and dyes combined, you'll be able to fool even the most discerning White Mantle guard. It might not be an exact match, but this get-up should be enough to help you break into White Mantle territory without breaking the bank.

THE RAGING RITUALIST

BY XEROE

Hello readers and hail heroes! It's time to delve into a new look for the oh-so-fabulous class known as the revenant. This outfit really shows a good example of how to properly make heavy armour look bulky, fashionable and epic. It's especially easy to make themes for armour with revenants because you can easily make it embody a legend they possess, e.g. Shiro, Jalis, Ventari, Glint.

I found a mix between the purple dye Midnight Violet and the red dye Black Cherry. Midnight Violet is 37 silver 86 copper, and Black Cherry is 37 silver 80 copper.

THE OUTFIT

This look depicts a Mallyx devoted revenant. Mallyx the Unyielding is the Margonite overlord of the Domain of Anguish. The Margonites were humans that worshipped Abbadon the God of Water and Secrets. Abbadon turned his followers into demons eventually. My idea to go along with this is to find a good balance that works well with the Mallyx legend, while incorporating lore when & where I can. This idea fits that whole "revenants are pretty new, theoretically speaking" classification. The possibilities are endless when it comes to revenants.

HEAD

MV

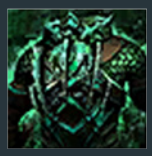
MV BC



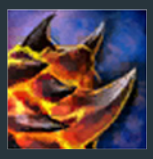
CHEST

MV

BC MV



SHOULDERS



HANDS



LEGS

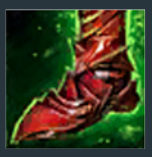
MV

BC BC



FEET

MV





MIDNIGHT VIOLET (MV)

BLACK CHERRY (BC)

COMPONENTS

HEAD: Resplendent Curtain

When you create a revenant, you have the choice of three different blindfolds. This is one of the choices. It's pretty easy to acquire so long as you have the necessary character slot to make one.

SHOULDERS: Hellfire Mantle

More difficult to acquire because it requires a fair amount of playtime. You'll have to obtain 6,000 achievement points (or 15,000 if you chose the Radiant set). Both sets are awesome in their own way, but choosing Radiant pieces makes it a lot harder for you.

CHEST: Bladed Breastplate

Not much time is required for the Bladed armour set. The main method is by simply playing on the *Heart of Thorns* Verdant Brink map and making sure you do the meta event. During the meta event (the night cycle) you must get your map instance to tier four, and you must have 100% map participation. The Bladed armour pieces are particular to that map so if you work towards the meta event (or events in general) you can strap on that pointy- yet-dashing set of armour in no time at all.

HANDS: Hellfire Vambraces

Like the other Hellfire counterpart of this set, it requires a vast amount of achievement points and playtime. Not nearly enough as the Hellfire Mantle, but you'll need to acquire 3,000 achievement points for these molten mittens (or 12,000 if you chose the Radiant glove skin instead).

LEGS: Mistward Leggings

Obtaining any piece of the set requires a level 80 revenant, and a multi-step achievement to complete the Mistward armour set. You will have to get four different leg skins (Scale, Barbaric, Gladiator, Draconic), as well as the Mistward legging lining, panel, and insignia. The lining drops from any Sons of Svanir enemy while the panel will be awarded to you after you defeat the Mark II Golem boss event in Mount Maelstrom. The final piece required is the insignia, which you can purchase from Exalted vendors for 150 Aurillium and 10 silver.

FEET: Mistward Warboots

As with the Mistward Legguards, you have another achievement to fulfill (OH JOY!). You need to obtain the four boot skins (Scale, Barbaric, Gladiator, Draconic). But wait! There's more! You need to acquire the Mistward Warboot casing, lining, and insignia. The casing drops from any Inquest enemy, and the lining requires you to fight and destroy the Karka Queen in Southsun Cove. The final piece, the insignia, is bought in The Silverwastes for 150 Bandit Crests and 10 silver.





BY STARCONSPIRATOR

FAITHFUL

I pulled myself to the top of the escarpment and stared out at the red rock jungle beneath us. Leaning on my hefty wooden staff, I took a moment to catch my breath as the apprentices clambered up behind me. The trek through the jungle these many days had left us all bedraggled and the once-pristine whites of our uniforms had faded to match the homespun our traveling companions wore. Alithe and her bandits stood just ahead of me, also staring down at the jungle. Beneath us, a maze of red rock canyons traced jagged lines through the ripe green vegetation, spires piercing the thick jungle undergrowth here and there. The air around us refused to move - there had been no breeze for days - and everything sat sweltering in the heat.

“I don’t know how much more jungle I can stomach,” an apprentice complained under her breath as she stopped beside me. I glanced at her disapprovingly, smiling when she seemed taken aback by my glare.

“We are called to this mission, apprentice. The Unseen Ones will smile upon us and salve our weariness,” I said.

She bowed her head, “Of course, Inquisitor. I am weak in my faith.” She sighed. “I pray that this mission will bring me greater faith.”

“Stand fast, apprentice,” I encouraged. I shouldered my staff and joined Alithe. “What

do you see?" I asked.

"Inquisitor Thiery," she greeted. "We can rappel down from here, of course, but there's no telling how tall the cliffs are and what we will be dropping into. Or we can make our way along this ridge," she pointed the direction, "and, as you can see, it looks as if it descends through the trees. We can at least get closer to the ground before trusting to the drop."

I looked where she pointed and nodded, "Yes, let's go along the ridge. After hacking our way through that last vale, I'm happy to keep to the high ground for a time."

"Very good," one of the nearby bandits responded before chivvying everyone along the ridge, glancing disdainfully at the three apprentices who had dropped to their knees in prayer.

"I still do not understand why we need this rabble, Justiciar Bauer," I thought, remembering his chastisement when I had initially refused this calling and his insistence that I take the bandits with me. It was on order of the Confessor he had explained, after showing me the error of my ways. "I am still praying for understanding," I thought, trailing behind Alithe as we hiked along the top of the ridge.

The Confessors and Justiciars trusted the bandits and they were a nicely expendable ally, I had to admit. Their lack of understanding regarding the Unseen Ones and our faith was tolerable under most circumstances. In addition, many of the newest, most fervent apprentices came from their ranks. As they worked with us, they witnessed the glory of our gods and wanted nothing more than to dedicate their remaining days to them. In fact, the three apprentices with me were once bandit scouts. Luckily, the other two White Mantle with us had grown strong in their faith, spending years in toil out in the Maguuma Wastes, searching for the rumored passages that led further west. If the apprentices faltered, I was sure we'd still succeed.

As the ridge descended, trees grew closer, their branches laced with vines and wildlife. After a time, we reached the end of the ridge. Below us, intertwined branches shielded the ground from view. Alithe and I stared at it a while and stood in silent thought. Off to our right, hidden by the jungle, a large body crashed through the brush. "Probably one of those cursed armoured drakes," I muttered.

Alithe smirked and replied, "Send your apprentices down first."

"Hah! Your scout and blade should drop first, then my apprentices."

"I think it's their turn. We climbed the escarpment first."

I studied the bandit's tanned face, the sharp gleam in her eye suggesting that she was deadly serious. I shrugged and signalled for the apprentices and one of the veterans. "Down you go," I instructed. "The Unseen Ones protect you." With curt nods and few words, the three apprentices and Tomas set up a line and rappelled down the cliff face. We listened to their progress, waiting for the sound of attack, waiting for screams. Not so long ago, there had been five apprentices and three veteran soldiers with me. The last time we'd taken a turn rappelling down into the unknown, it had not gone well and I'd lost the three-man team - slaughtered by an accursed tribe of tree hylek. Giving chase through the branches had done little good as the frogs vanished almost instantly. All I could do was pray over them and wish them speedy journey through the

Mists and into the service of our gods.

This time, there were no screams or sounds of battle. After a moment, Tomas whistled and the bandits happily clambered down. Alithe punched my shoulder, “Your luck has turned,” she said, following the others. I waited for her to disappear over the side, then sent Kim after her.

At the bottom, I left the apprentices to collect the rope and moved to a defensive position, looking around. The bandit scouts had spread out in a half-circle. The canyon floor on this side of the escarpment looked the same as what we’d left behind - sparse vegetation lining the numerous game trails, birds calling in the trees, and unseen beasts shuffling in the undergrowth. I didn’t see any sign of hylek and relaxed.

It took me a moment to realize that Alithe and my soldiers were waiting for me; waiting for me to find the path. I smiled to myself, remembering the moment I had been called to serve the Unseen Ones as a Pathfinder. After the Justiciar sent me west to meet the veteran soldiers Tomas, Kim, and Michel out in the wilds, my soul had filled with doubt. The soldiers had been out in the desert for months, arguing with bandit lackeys, fighting off hostile creatures, suffering for the cause. But they had found no passage through the canyons and no hint that there was even a reason to continue the westward exploration. Disheartened, I’d knelt in prayer, and that’s when I heard them. The Unseen Ones whispered in my ear, telling me to walk forward and not fear. They would protect me, they would lead me, and I would find the way. From that moment, I had felt the Unseen Ones calling to me, leading me onward. First, we crossed the desert, discovering a hidden passage through a cliff. On the other side, we’d found a ruin that opened out onto a new area, and the jungle lay beyond, twisting over the red rock canyons and slowly pulling the sandstone down into rubble. As we’d travelled, I’d insisted that we stay on the path the Unseen Ones laid before me and it tended to climb over cliffs instead of tracking around them. Now, I closed my eyes and called out to my Unseen guides.

“Follow the game trail, there,” a half-heard voice whispered in my ear and I looked off to my left.

“That way, follow the trail,” I said. With directions, our force moved out; Alithe and her bandits took the lead and the apprentices brought up the rear. The trail trended westward and northwestward through the jungle, wrapping around cliffs and spires. Here and there, ruins peeked out from the vegetation. Like those in the Silverwastes, they were nondescript and I saw no value in them. We passed by a stream, and everyone stopped to refill their canteens. Kneeling beside the water, I reached down and cupped some in my hand, lifting it to my lips. Peace filled me as the cool water did and I took a deep breath, smiling at the world around me, refreshed.

“Keep moving,” the Unseen One hissed, “You’re nearly there.”

“Where?” I thought, surprised by my temerity. There was no answer. The game trail we’d been following continued north after crossing the stream. “Let’s go,” I said aloud. “There’s still enough light to keep going.”

“We can set camp here and have water,” Alithe said.

“We keep going.” I stated bluntly, treating her to a glare. She held her hands out in surrender and shrugged before nodding to the scouts and starting north along the trail. I followed.

Another hour north brought us to a large clearing and we stopped, suspicious of any open space in a jungle. The scouts spread out to flank the clearing, searching for danger. “This is different,” one of the apprentices said at my elbow. I nodded; we waited.

“We don’t see anything,” Alithe informed me after her scouts returned. “After you, Inquisitor,” she said, gesturing for me to lead the way out into the clearing.

I sneered, “We rappelled. It’s your turn.”

She sniffed and then started out into the clearing, her scouts and blades surrounding her. Ten steps in, one of the blades simply vanished in mid-stride. Everyone stopped and stared at where he’d been. I rushed forward, skidding to a halt as the hole he’d fallen through grew visible.

“Wait,” I said, holding my hands out, stopping the others. I studied the hole for a moment.

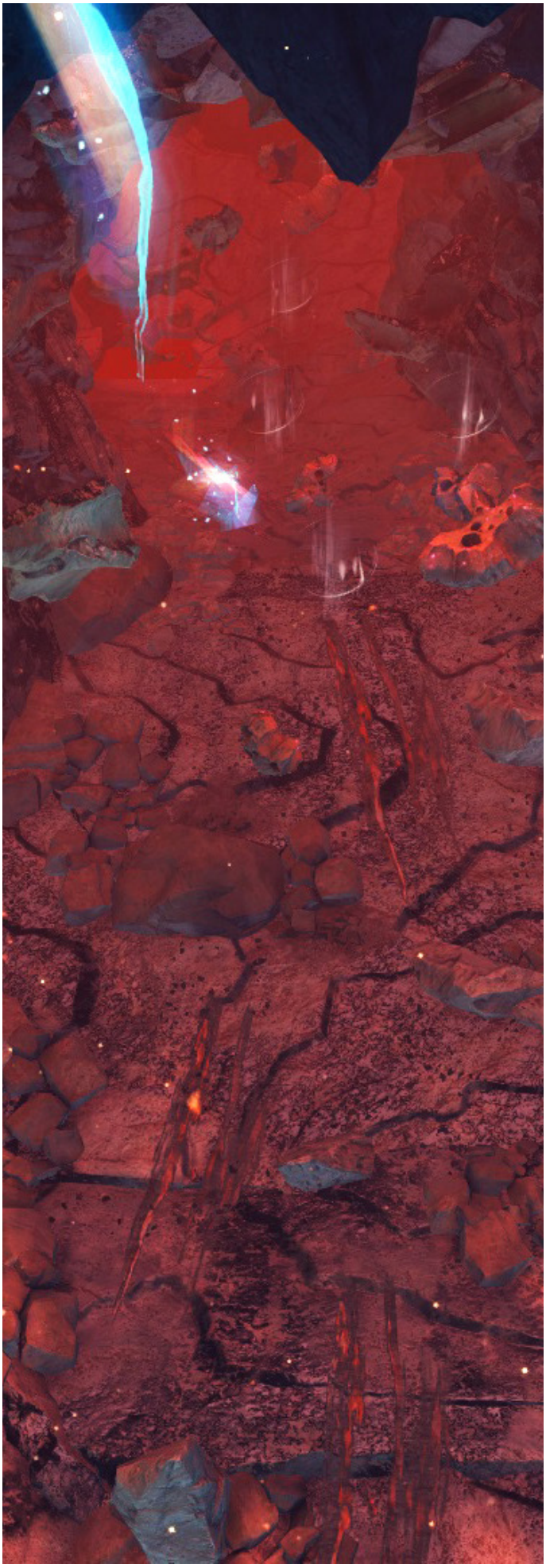
“Swift?!” Alithe shouted. There was no reply.

I knelt gingerly at the edge of the hole and studied the ground around it before glancing into the darkness of the hole. It was too dark to see anything. The air drifting from it was dry and stale.

“Yes,” I heard the Unseen One say. My heart leapt to my throat. Shaking, I closed my eyes and praised my gods for leading me to this.

“It’s a cave,” I said, not quite certain if it was truth that I knew, or if it was truth that the Unseen Ones were causing me to know. “The ground is iffy here. We should climb down,” I said. Tomas set up the rope and held it while the apprentices and Kim clambered down, dropping to the cavern floor about twenty feet below. Alithe and the bandit mage followed, leaving everyone else on the surface. When I reached the bottom, the bandits were tending to the broken body of Swift. He seemed to be alive, although injured and unconscious.





"Inquisitor?" Kim asked, waiting for orders. I looked around, nodding.

"Make camp above us, begin building scaffolds and stairs. We'll need to widen the opening and explore this cave system." He saluted and rushed to carry out his tasks, conscripting the apprentices and bandit scouts still above us in the process. Alithe approached contemplatively, waiting for me to speak. "We've found it," I said under my breath, as if speaking too loudly would make it untrue. "How is your blade?" I asked as an afterthought.

"He'll recover. I'll send the other back to the Silverwastes with a map and a request for reinforcements."

"Excellent!" My voice travelled through the cave, echoing far away, suggesting the cave ran deep. Alithe motioned for the mage and the three of us walked the circumference of the cave. A quarter of the way around, we found a tunnel that led deeper down, falling away into darkness. With the help of the mage's fire, we could make out the first twenty feet or so. A path ran downward, clear of debris but dotted with stalagmites and columns. At the edge of the light, it seemed to me that a right angle existed, suggesting the corner of a wall. I pointed it out to Alithe, "Ruins?" I asked.

She frowned, "Possibly."

"I need to keep going," I said. "You will come with me."

She nodded and glanced at the mage before adding, "Bring one of yours."

"Apprentice," I called, motioning to the young lady who'd spoken to me at the top of the escarpment. "We're going down."

"Yes Inquisitor Thierry," she said, leaving the others to help people down into the hole and joining us, short sword drawn.

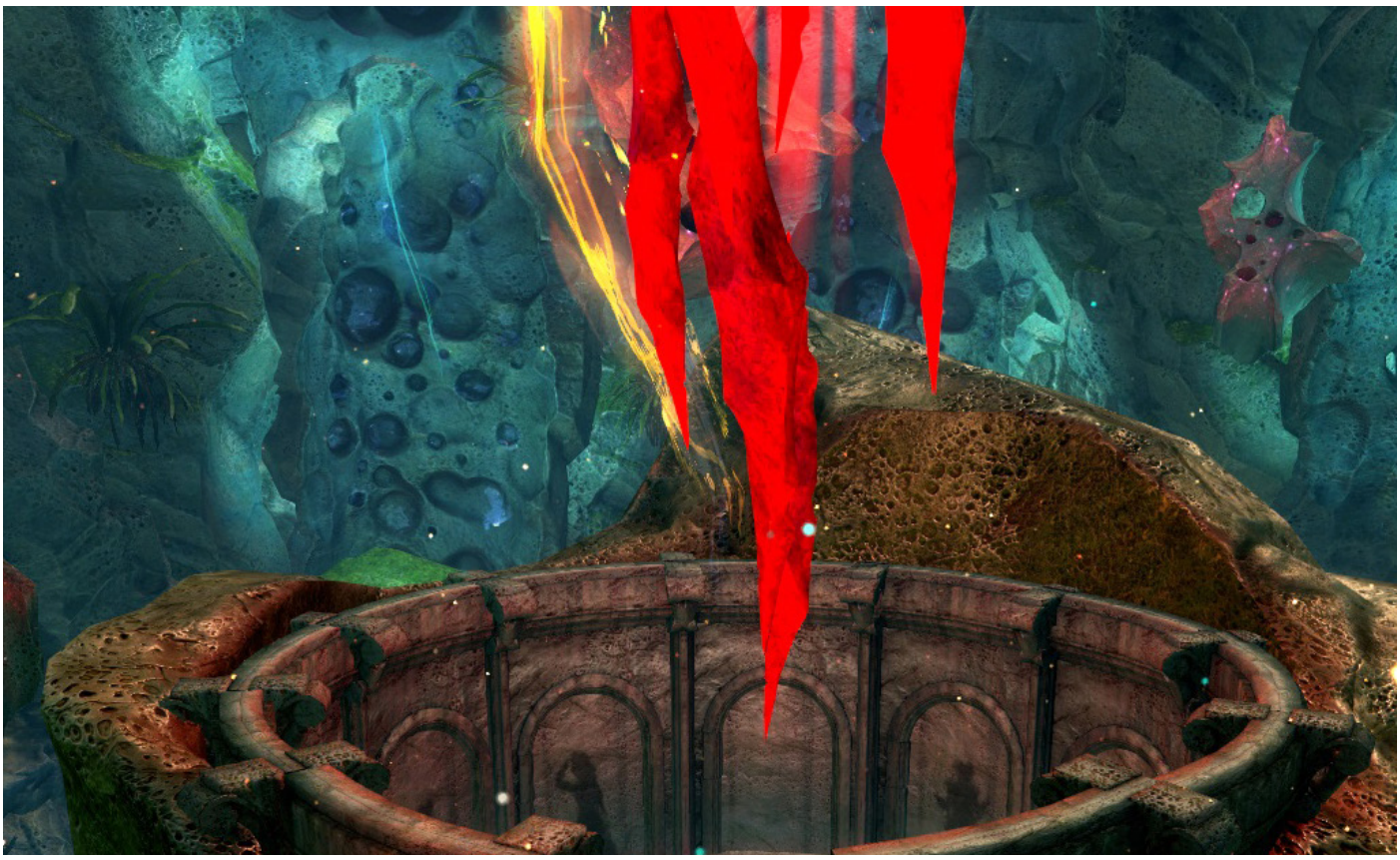
“Put the sword away, there is no threat here. We are in the presence of the Unseen Ones.” Blinking, surprised by the revelation that the gods were near, she obeyed. I motioned toward the path, and she smiled as she took the lead; Alithe, her mage, and I followed.

We stopped at the sharp corner I’d seen and examined the ruins a moment. Even to my untrained eye, they were obviously different from those of the surface. There was something intangibly older and darker about them; and they felt steeped in magic. My heart began to race and we hurried down the steep path as quickly as we could. After a time, the path straightened and a large, round ruin rose from the rock around us. Once, someone had carved odd human faces into the walls. Protected by being underground, they had weathered the centuries intact. We passed between two of them and into the round room.

“Here,” I said under my breath, the Unseen Ones whispering in my mind in unison.

“This is what you are looking for, Inquisitor?” Alithe asked, studying the empty chamber. “It doesn’t look like much.”

“It is powered by blood,” the Unseen Ones said through me, “Apprentice, your sword.” The young woman offered her blade. I took it from her and plunged it into her heart, the sudden surprise blooming across her face mirroring my own. She dropped and the blade fell from my hand to clatter on the stone floor beside her. The apprentice’s blood flowed from her onto the stone and the air filled with power - an electric promise building around us, below us, and above us. Alithe and her mage backed away, hurrying from the room, back up the path we’d travelled. “They won’t get far,” the Unseen One whispered, the voice growing stronger and distinct as the power of the bloodstone built. I dropped to my knees beside the apprentice and prayed, thanking the Unseen Ones for bringing me safely through the desert and jungle to witness their greatness.



THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK



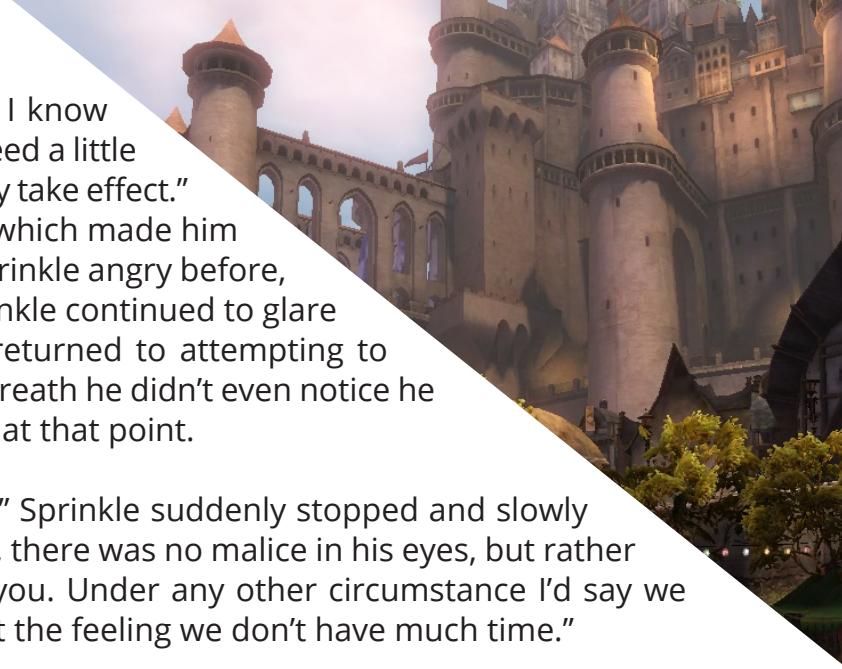
BY
ANGELIKA LESHER
KIT THE TRAVELER

Traveling east from Divinity's Reach, Kit and Mr. Sprinkle have been tasked with delivering a cache of weapons to Lion's Arch. They start by going southeast from Saidra's Haven and plan to continue through Melandru's Refuge. However, before they are able to exit Lake Doric, they're beset upon by a group of bandits. No big deal, Kit and Sprinkle take out bandits all the time. Kit readied her bow and nocked an arrow. The bandits, 5 in number, circled around Kit. She should've taken one out before they moved in, now she'll be hard pressed if they decide to attack her. Suddenly, her body became very heavy and her vision began to blur. Kit sank to her knees, fighting to remain conscious when she heard a dulled voice say, "What do we do with them?"

"Take the weapons to the armory and bring her in for questioning. 'The One' will want to have a word with her." Kit slipped into unconsciousness.

"Rookie, man the fort while I'm gone. Rookie, sweep the floors. Rookie, clean up Sprinkle's mess," Watson complained. "I'm going crazy here! They've been gone for days and no other orders have come in." A loud bang on the door interrupted Watson's bickering; he ignored it. Another loud bang, and another shortly after. Finally deciding to stop being lazy, Watson checked the door. He found Mr. Sprinkle standing outside, looking ragged and breathing heavily. "Sprinkle? Where's Kit? Is she not with you?" Watson asked. Sprinkle collapsed as Watson questioned him. Only then did Watson notice Sprinkle's wounds. His back legs were bound with iron manacles; the fur surrounding them was drenched with blood. Watson quickly inspected the wounds, then ran off to find a healer.

Mr. Sprinkle woke up a day later in Kit's barn. Watson was asleep on a nearby hay bale. Sprinkle managed to stand up and make his way to the closed barn doors. Sprinkle's attempts at opening the doors woke Watson, but he kept on trying.



"Sprinkle, you really ought to keep resting. I know you were healed and all, but your legs still need a little bit of time for the healing magic to completely take effect." Sprinkle half-turned and glared at Watson, which made him incredibly uneasy. He'd never really seen Sprinkle angry before, but if there ever was a time, this was it. Sprinkle continued to glare at Watson for a few more seconds, then returned to attempting to open the barn doors. Watson released the breath he didn't even notice he was holding. A thought occurred to Watson at that point.

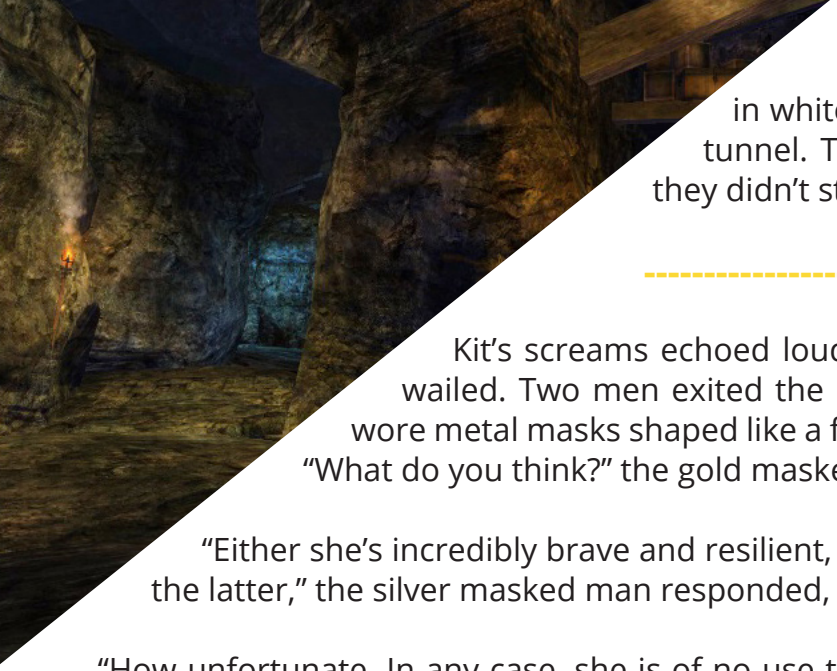
"You're trying to get back to Kit, aren't you?" Sprinkle suddenly stopped and slowly turned to Watson again. This time, however, there was no malice in his eyes, but rather a deep, painful sadness. "I'm coming with you. Under any other circumstance I'd say we gather a group of people to search, but I get the feeling we don't have much time."

Watson donned his light armor, swords and bow, and set out with Sprinkle. They traveled through Divinity's Reach and back out the east gate where Kit and Sprinkle were originally ambushed. Sprinkle was moving much faster than he usually did, so Watson nearly had to run to keep up. Instead of traveling south and east, where the duo had gone before, Sprinkle turned immediately north outside of the east gate, passing Saidra's Haven and moving towards Mantle's Breach. That seemed odd to Watson because there wasn't really anything there; just a busted wall and the earth surrounding it. Sprinkle led them to a northern section of the wall and stopped.

"What?" Watson asked. "There's nothing here." Sprinkle looked to Watson, then continued straight into the wall, disappearing into it. "An illusion..." Watson held his hand out to the "wall" and walked through just as Sprinkle did. The illusion hid an entrance to a man-made tunnel which led steeply downward. The tunnel was slightly larger than Sprinkle himself, only allowing about three humans to stand side-by-side. Determination filled Sprinkle; he continued on, not waiting for Watson, who had to run to catch up. Magical orbs lit the tunnels every few dozen feet.

"What is this place?" Watson asked, not directing the question at anyone. The dull thuds of the yak's hooves were his only response. The tunnel leveled out and then split into a fork. Sprinkle sniffed the air and continued down the left tunnel. The distant echoing of voices could be heard around the next bend. Multiple men were heading their way, loudly complaining about having to patrol the tunnels. Sprinkle and Watson stopped in an unlit section of the tunnel and waited, listening to the heavy metal footsteps and complaining grow louder. Three men garbed in white armor adorned with golden etchings rounded the corner, two in front and one trailing behind them about a dozen feet.

Without warning, Sprinkle roared and broke into a charge. The leading man was trampled and the second slammed against the wall with bone-cracking force. The third stood staring, in shock from what he'd just seen. Sprinkle roared again and charged at the man, who panicked and ran as fast as he could. Watson sprinted after them, glancing at the mangled bodies of the men Sprinkle just obliterated. The tunnels were only about 8 feet high, which limited Sprinkle's speed, but anyone who dared come at him had nowhere to run. Sprinkle was out of Watson's sight by now, but he heard screams erupt from ahead. More men unfortunate enough to be in Sprinkle's way, he assumed. A few seconds later he was proven right. Four more men



in white and gold armor and chainmail littered the tunnel. Their weapons were still in their scabbards; they didn't stand a chance.

Kit's screams echoed loudly off the cavern walls. "I don't know!" she wailed. Two men exited the room through a flap in the tent. Both men wore metal masks shaped like a featureless human face; one gold, one silver. "What do you think?" the gold masked man asked.

"Either she's incredibly brave and resilient, or she actually doesn't know. I'm leaning on the latter," the silver masked man responded, cleaning his dagger.

"How unfortunate. In any case, she is of no use to us. Dispose of her immediately," the gold masked man ordered. The silver masked man bowed silently. Commotion erupted outside of the tent. One man was frantically screaming about "some guy and his beast" barreling through the tunnels and killing everyone they came across.

The gold masked man sighed. "Looks like you're needed elsewhere first. Take care of this problem immediately." The silver masked man bowed silently while the gold masked man retreated through a portal.

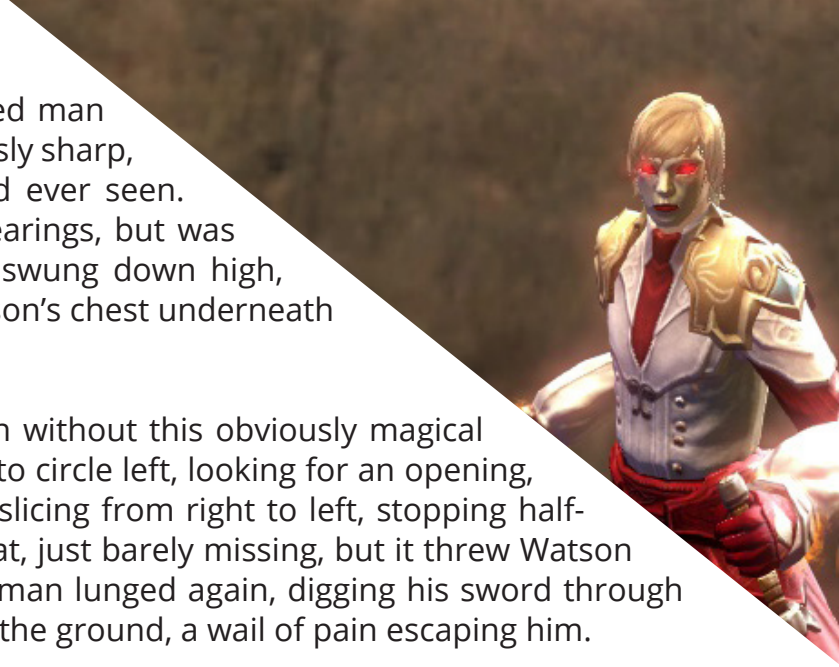
Watson ran as fast as he could, but could not keep up with Sprinkle, especially with all the bodies impeding his progress. He could still hear Sprinkle rampaging. More men screamed and Sprinkle roared, but suddenly all went silent. Watson stopped dead in his tracks, then doubled his efforts to catch up to Sprinkle, fearing the worst. The tunnel opened up into a small carved-out cavern. It was well-lit by the magical lanterns, allowing Watson to scan the area. Bodies of men littered the ground, but so too did Sprinkle. He lay silent, unmoving, with a man in a silver mask standing over him, his sword coated with blood.

He wore a black tunic with white cloth straps crossing his chest, small golden pauldrons, black leather pants with white embroidery, and golden steel boots. He cleaned his sword on Sprinkle's fur and spoke, "Insolent fools; unable to take down even a simple beast. I suppose that's why He only allowed them to be foot soldiers." He looked at Watson. "And who are you? The rescue party?"

"What have you done?!" Watson screamed.

"Isn't it obvious?" the silver masked man answered cooly.

"Rrraaaagh!" Watson flew into a rage, drawing his sword and sprinting at the man, who moved away from Sprinkle and stood still, waiting for him. With fury behind every strike, Watson struck but the masked man simply parried or dodged. Watson lunged his sword forward at the man's throat, but it was parried high and thrown wide to the right, exposing Watson's chest. Even in this mental state, Watson knew he had pushed too far. He stopped himself and jumped back, but not after the masked man nicked his left thigh; not deep, but just enough to break the



skin through the leather armor. The masked man was incredibly fast, and his sword dangerously sharp, sharper than any forged steel Watson had ever seen. Watson tried to take his time to get his bearings, but was immediately pressured. The masked man swung down high, feigned left then stabbed right, cutting Watson's chest underneath his left armpit.

Watson was dangerously outmatched, even without this obviously magical sword the masked man wielded. He began to circle left, looking for an opening, but the masked man darted to him again, slicing from right to left, stopping halfway and stabbing up toward Watson's throat, just barely missing, but it threw Watson off-balance and he stumbled. The masked man lunged again, digging his sword through Watson's left shoulder and throwing him to the ground, a wail of pain escaping him.

"You fools just don't get it. Nobody can stop Him from ascending! He will become even more powerful than the dragons themselves!" the masked man ranted. He pulled the blade from Watson's shoulder and rose it high. "You will be one more sacrifice in His na-Hrrk!" the masked man jolted, an arrow ripped through him and burst out his chest. Struck through the heart, he died instantly. The masked man toppled over, revealing Kit hunched over with her bow.

"Kit!" Watson shouted. "Check his body," Kit ordered through gritted teeth. "He should have a pouch with some green substance in it. Watson did as he was told and found what Kit described. He rushed over to Kit, nearly tripping over his feet. "No!" Kit shouted and pointed to Sprinkle. "Help him first. They used that to keep me alive while they tortured me, rub it on Sprinkle's wounds." Watson rushed to Sprinkle; he was alive, but breathing in fast, shallow breaths. Watson quickly applied handfuls of the green substance onto Sprinkle's wounds, which began to close almost as soon as it touched Sprinkle's skin. His breathing leveled out, but he was still unconscious.

ABOUT THE WRITER

I do in-game community content for *Guild Wars 2*. I play/write quests for the community to do, then I reward them gifts in return every weekend. It's a tradition from Nicholas The Traveler in *GW1*. However, it's done by me: a fan of the game! You can catch me streaming on Twitch, or hosting my podcast!

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COMMUNITY ART

BY KENT BENSON



Since the end of *Heart of Thorns*, magic has been running off the rails around Tyria; and wouldn't you believe it, in true villainous fashion, the White Mantle are having something of a sinister second coming. There's nothing quite like the explosion of a bloodstone to shake up the status quo, and even though the world is facing a double dragon crisis, the heroes of Tyria are here to answer the call.

This issue, I shine the spotlight on newer pieces that feature places and events in the wake of the White Mantle menace, as well as a couple of pieces that feature the indomitable spirit of Tyria's heroes. Of course, this is art. My opinions and perspectives are subject to my preferences and the limits of my artistic knowledge, but are ultimately bound to one important rule: I'm here to have fun.



“ASURA MESMER” BY SAYAEL

www.sayael.artstation.com

What we have here is probably one of the most stalwart asuran mesmers I’ve ever seen. Honestly, I don’t usually consider heavy armor looks for mesmers and other spellcasters, if only because they’re restricted to light armors; and following that, I don’t typically bother with the Outfits feature when creating a look for a character. That said, this piece sells the idea to me as the artist serves up an image of shimmering knightly chronomantic fearlessness through pose, color, and composition.

The asuran mesmer is wearing the Sentinel Outfit armor, which is unmistakably a heavy armor by design. When one envisions a heavily armored character, it invokes ideas of resilience, protection, and stability. However, it’s not just the armor that presents these ideas, but also the figure’s pose. Here, the pose is dug-in; there is a certain weight to it that tells the viewer that the hero is rooted in his stance. It feels heavy, if that makes sense.

Also worth mentioning is the artist’s conservative and effective approach to color. I think one of the better techniques for painting magic, especially brightly colored magic, is to paint the rest of the scene and character with more neutral and pastel tones. This way, the mesmer magic pops, making it impossible to be lost in the other detail. The contrast of colors also provides depth for the character and the scene, making clear distinctions between the foreground and background.

The composition of the piece is pretty standard of many character portraits, which is a critique only so far as to say that there is room for experimentation in perspective in the future. It’s well done as side profiles go, and I like that the pose is positioned in a way to give the figure its own levels of depth from the front arm and greatsword to the lifted arm in the back.

My only real criticism would concern the size and positioning of the back ear in comparison to the front ear as well as the stiffness/straightness of the asura’s neck in relation to its head. Overall though, a great piece of character-driven action and attention to character detail.



“THE ELEMENTALIST” BY DIRA-CHAN

www.dira-chan.deviantart.com



Photography by www.terobesarts.de



“BLOODSTONE CAVERN” BY AHO

www.next-lvl.tumblr.com

It's not an art spotlight without an entry for cosplay, and this issue's piece is exemplary to a point. Here we're getting mysterious elemental seer realness in the fancy and fine lace and trimmed embroidery of the female cabalist armor set.

As someone who's used a few pieces of this set for my necromancer in the past, I greatly appreciate the detail that went into this cosplay outfit. This set has a certain level of regality and ornateness that, at least in my head, would take a ton of work to properly convert into a costume, but here it is. I will say, my first reaction is to critique the color scheme as being too safe or too common, but that has more to do with having seen so many characters in the game run around in with black, red, and white as their dye scheme. I would like to clarify that "safe" isn't "bad", and if the cosplayer likes it, that's what really matters. It works, especially with regard to giving the character that darker and mysterious aesthetic.

Regarding the overall compositions, the photography does a splendid job with framing and focusing on the subject of the images. The surrounding blur on each photo is enough that the world around the cosplayer is still discernible for contextual details but doesn't steal much attention away from the subject matter. Additionally, I appreciate the differing levels of light for each photo. I imagine the added fire effects in the first picture would have been more difficult to add and blend into a photo with darker tones, so they went with something lighter and warmer, but with the pose, it still reads as powerful. Meanwhile, the darker toned photo, paired with the pose and expression of the cosplayer, really brings out these combined themes of secrecy, confidence, and a hint of fear that poses me to beg the question; what happens next?

My first thought when I first saw this piece was how reminiscent it was of some of the loading screen artwork from the Season Three maps and story instances, from the color palette, to the abstraction of detail, to the signature blue-ish green ribbon of ley line magic through the scene. One the big similarities is the contrast between brighter shapes and lines of saturated color against terrain with a more subdued color scheme so that the magical elements stand out, the same technique I spoke about in Sayael's character profile earlier. Here, the transitions in color are more subtle, blended softly to demonstrate a deeper field of view and the changes in light sources in the foreground (which are few), and the background. This is aided by the inclusion of the glow light from the asura figure's staff, which perpetuates the notion that the foreground is dark enough for the staff's light to be seen on the face and arm.

I think what I love most is this slight McQuarrie-esque quality to the the asura character that reminds me of some of the concept art for the character of Yoda of Star Wars fame, though mixed with a slightly more minimalistic and painterly approach. That said, I like that the character's outfit is simple and mostly exists as a silhouette to frame the body, pushing my attention up to the scarf, the head, and outward from there. This piece is less about the featured character and more about the scene as a whole; it's illustrative of a time and place familiar to those that have played the first episode of Season Three. It does a wonderful job at reminding me of those initial emotions of shock, awe, and fear that I know I felt when first entering Bloodstone Fen.



"BASTION OF THE PENITENT" BY GEARS2GNOMES

www.gears2gnomes.tumblr.com

Yes, it's another asura. Is it because I feel guilty for having no asura characters of my own? Maybe a little, but that's really neither here nor there. Like Aho's illustration, this scene by knight-mj is driven by a bright and colorful visual narrative in true comic-style paneling.

Here we have Tamiara facing down raid guard dog, Cairn the Indomitable, just outside the Bastion of the Penitent. The composition of this scene speaks volumes about the visual flow and the thoughts and feelings conveyed as well. In this case, there is this classic artistic tradition of placing the viewer to the main subject's back with the subject facing away that's often meant to convey this sense of enigmatic stoicism where we as viewers cannot see a subject's true expression. However, we can gain some amount of context through the figure's stance and object of their attention, allowing us to better imagine what we can't see. In addition, not being able to see the subject's face is often the best way to control the viewer's attention and point them towards other details that would have normally been looked at second or third. For instance, the first thing my eyes are drawn to when I see this scene is Tamiara's hammer and all of its small mechanical details writhing in strands of blue electricity that arc off in different directions. Even the tiny glowing triangle of the Eye of Janthir in the distance draws me into the background from the foreground, which, speaking of alluring details, has its own tiny magical specks and soft lens flare line that I love.

Another thing to consider when viewing is how perspective directs how the viewer is supposed to feel in terms of the conflict; by placing Tamiara in the foreground, she is larger, her presence is larger, and that helps convey a sense of confidence and courage, whereas if you flipped it, we'd likely see a massive Cairn looming over a small asura in the back. Of course, even with Cairn so small in the background, his tiny form still manages to convey a certain threat level, as if he's silently inviting the raid party to dare an approach. Also consider the tilt of the scene, and how it directs the eyes to eventually slide down past the asura and onto the platform in the background. This piece is all about the visual narrative flow and it's something I've really come to enjoy from knight-mj's work.



WAR PROFITEERS

PARTS II & III

BY **KENT BENSON**

"Is he waking up?" Iyone said as the captain made a conscious groan. She had stayed by his side for as long as she could.

The human, Rilana, gave Iyone a single nod, tying off a fresh change of bandages around Greer's arm. "Seems like. The antidote worked. The poison should be completely out of his body in a little while."

"I owe him a million apologies," Iyone said, crestfallen as she whirled a shimmering orb of elemental water around the bandages to continue the charr's healing. With her free hand she dried her glowing golden eyes. Exhaustion hung from her face; it'd been a long day.

The two had taken shifts looking after their captain while the other would trek back to their small camp to pack and relocate supplies to the nearby ledge where they'd originally spotted the Nightmare Courtiers. Once Greer had been properly sedated, they slowly and carefully moved him to higher ground, out of the open.

The engineer rose from her squatting position before placing a hand on the sylvari's shoulder. "You're a good kid, Iyo. The captain will forgive you, given enough time."

With a heavy sigh, the Pact recruit dismissed Rilana's comforting words. "Charr have a deeply ingrained respect for the chain of command; it doesn't matter if it's for their legion or for an organization like the Pact. The smallest insubordination is... unacceptable. I risked our safety and the mission's success for petty revenge."

"Well, I've known Greer longer; the captain's softened a bit since his warband days --his words, not mine-- and he lets a lot slide when it comes to squad fraternization, at least, outside of combat. In battle, he's all business because he has to be. We're his responsibility and our actions reflect on his ability to lead," the engineer replied, placing the old bandages in a small pot of boiling water next to a second of simmering stew. She spotted her glider prototypes bundled up next to her bedroll, relieved that the sylvari remembered to bring them.

Iyone noted her squadmate's relief. "You didn't think I'd leave your pet project behind? You've been working on those gliders for weeks; it was the least I could do."

"Do you think they're good enough that Marshal Trahearne will requisition a manufacturer to make them for the Pact?" Rilana replied with a touch of doubt.

"Considering you built two working prototypes from sticks, rope, and salvaged Zephyrite ship sail, I'd be surprised if they didn't," the elementalist reassured.

Rilana smiled warmly. "Thanks."

A grumble rose from the charr lying near the campfire and the two broke conversation for dinner, ladling up bowls of the raptor meat and vegetable stew. Iyone ate hers on her bedroll while Rilana brought the captain his, letting it cool some before running it under his snout. The charr's nose twitched at the warm and seasoned aroma, eyes opening slowly. "How long have I been out?"

"Well, it's dusk now, so pretty much all day," the human replied. "Can you sit up?"

"Maybe," the captain groaned, wincing briefly from the pain in his arm as he moved to prop himself up.

"Well, you better. I don't need you choking to death because you thought it'd be a good idea to eat stew while lying down," Rilana jeered before shooting Iyone a look. "Hey! Think you can work some of your elemental magic here? I don't want to drag him up against a tree."

Without a word, the earth underneath the charr captain rose and curved into a makeshift lounge seat, condensing into a hard and stable shape. Iyone lowered her arm, allowing her spell to end, and started back to her bedroll.

"Recruit! A word," Greer barked toward the sylvari before glancing at the engineer. "Rilana, go eat your stew."

Silently, Rilana ladled herself some stew and ate; she sat and listened to Captain Bladewind reprimand their subordinate. She looked over in their direction. Iyone stood stiff, at attention. Her face, tense, but struggling to maintain its stoicism.

His tone was gruff, angry, but even then, restrained. "When I let you join us at Fort Trinity, Rilana vouched for your character as well as your combat skills. The latter is not in question, but the former... recruit. Do you have any sense of combat protocol, the chain of command, or did your Pale Tree drop you from your pod a little too early?"

The sylvari quivered. "N-no sir."

"These things were covered in your orientation when you signed up, and if it'd been up to me, you would've spent a year or two longer on outpost duty with the other recruits so... this is your first and last warning. Overstep my command again during a combat situation and you'll be

scrubbing Pact copter turbines for as long as you've been alive."
Rilana knew Iyone wanted to burst into a flurry of apologies, but all she could do was respond with "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." Eventually, the captain dismissed the sylvari and called the engineer over; he watched as the sylvari curled up on her bedroll, facing away from the two of them.

"We're headed back to Camp Resolve in the morning. Marshal Trahearne will want to hear about the presence of the Nightmare Court this far into Maguuma. I assume you'll be presenting your glider to him to secure a manufacturer requisition?"

Rilana sat in front of the campfire, leaned back, hands and arms bearing the weight. "That's the plan, boss, and who knows, if we're lucky, we'll be in Lion's Arch for a couple of weeks before we have to head to the warfront."

"Which means I won't get to fly in the first attack on Mordremoth," the charr growled. "You're lucky I think your little project is valuable for the Pact."

"Only you would see missing frontline combat as a bad thing," she replied with a laugh before inhaling the rest of her stew and wiping her mouth the back of her hand. "So..."

"No. I'm not discussing that. She is on probation; that is final. If you don't like it, you can speak to my superior when we debrief. It wouldn't be the first time you've gone over my head," he snapped.

With a sour expression, Rilana stood and walked over to the captain and tightened the knot that tied-off of his bandaged. The charr winced at the sharp jolt of pain in the wound, and watched somberly as the engineer took first watch above the bluff.

* * *

The three had arrived in Lion's Arch via asura gate after a Pact airship dropped them off in Divinity's Reach. The flight from Camp Resolve was a quiet one. Iyone avoided interaction with the captain after his reprimand in the jungle. Rilana had accompanied Greer to his debrief at the camp to make sure his report was accurate, and interjected on several points to the captain's chagrin. Even so, Iyone remained on probation. After a few sunny days in the port city, however, the three were speaking again.

Rilana hadn't been to Lion's Arch since Scarlet Briar had laid waste and ruin to the city over a year earlier, not even to mourn the dead. The Pact had reassigned her and Greer to Fort Trinity after just a few days of cleanup.

"It's nothing like the old city. I mean, what kind of architect stows the bank vault inside a giant concrete octopus, or builds a shipyard that's the shape of a giant lobster? It's ridiculous," Rilana fumed, hands waving about before letting them flop to her sides. "I guess the memorial was nice, at least."

"I liked the glass pavilion over the piazza, personally. It reminds me of The Grove," Iyone said with a wistful smile, her stare, distant, lost in memory.

"It's a hazard," the charr captain replied. "All it would take is one well-placed explosion or earthquake to shatter that glass over dozens of people. Art is fine, but should always take a backseat to defensibility. Any charr engineer worth their salt will tell you that."

"Sure, but then you end up with a city like the Black Citadel, a dark, ugly, heap of scrap," Rilana said, every word dripping with a sarcasm. Even so, Greer sneered at the engineer, but she shrugged it off with a laugh. "C'mon, Captain. That was too easy."

Greer spat to his side before stopping to take a seat on an open bench along the streets of the Trader's Forum. A small flock a seagulls fled the area, squawking and screeching at one another. The mid-morning sun was blotted out by an overcast of clouds. The air was cool, uncommon for the tropical climate of southern Kryta. A blanket of fog whorled over the harbor and the docks that lined the alabaster wharfs of the city. Still, the residents appeared unmolested. Characteristic of people who had endured far worse than inclement weather.

Rilana took a seat next to the captain, letting out a long sigh. "Well, we have a day or so to kill before our scheduled meetings with some of the city's major manufacturers; the Consortium, the Black Lion Company to name a few. Remember, Marshal Trahearne told us to drive a hard bargain and, fortunately for us, my father taught me how to haggle with the best of them."

"I thought your family was nobility? Why would you worry about saving money?" Iyone said with a puzzled expression.

"One of my fathers was nobility, but one was a commoner, a painter. He was lucky to get the commissions he did. Nobles love a good portrait of sailing ships, wild horses in the country, their own families; you know, to preserve the memory of their dynasties," the human explained. "Of course, when he and my other father married, he didn't have to worry about making ends meet, but he still paints, still haggles when shopping. Old habits die hard, I guess."

"Does your father... take commissions from charr?" Greer followed, his claws scratching at the fur around his chin.

Rilana's eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Oh. Uh. Just curious," the captain replied, now scratching at the mane along the back of his neck.

A bright grin spread between her lips."You want a portrait of yourself? Your warband?" She watched as he remained silent, fidgeting with his claws. "You do, don't you? That is so cute!"

The charr was about to reply, when Iyone suddenly staggered on her feet as if she were about to faint.. "Agh..."

"Iyo? What? What was that?" Rilana said, still smiling, thinking the sylvari had a dizzy moment.

"It's... I can hear something. It's buzzing, clawing at my mind, through the Dream. I don't know... no. NO! It can't—," the sylvari burst out loud, hands gripping the side of her head.

“Iyone?! What is happening?” Rilana’s smile vanished. She stood, grasping the elementalist’s bare but ridged shoulders.

Greer stood as well. “Let’s get her out of the open. There’s an alleyway just over there,” he said, pointing to an opening between two rows of newly constructed housing complexes. As they moved her, the charr spotted a couple of other sylvari street-goers behaving similarly, passerby’s rushing to their sides. “What is going on?” he mumbled under his breath. The fit ended just as quickly as it began.

Iyone stood her ground, stopping her two comrades, both staring at her with concern. “It stopped, the voice, but the buzzing, the buzzing is still there, it’s quiet, though.”

Rilana sighed again.“Do you have any idea what that was? Some of the other sylvari in the street looked like they were experiencing the same thing.”

“I… it was loud, only for a moment. Whatever it was, it was calling me… to serve, to give myself to it. It wanted me to kill you. Just—” Iyone gasped, raising a trembling hand to cover her mouth. She broke into a sob, eyes wide, filled with terror. “Just like the Nightmare Courtiers.”

“What? Iyone, that’s insane,” the human assured her.

“I didn’t think much of it then, I thought the voice was just my conscience, but as I killed them, it pushed me to go further. If the captain hadn’t snapped me out of it…” she paused, her face downcast. The petals that that formed the back of her head partially shut. “This is what happened to Aerin,” she whispered.

The captain raised an eyebrow. “Aerin? You mean that weed you traveled with to meet the Zephyrites who then blew up their ship? He killed a score of innocent people. You may have disobeyed my orders, but don’t compare yourself to him. It’s beneath you.”

“Aerin was my friend, my brother! How could you say that?”

“You’re not helping, captain,” Rilana hissed.

“Sorry… I— I didn’t know,” that charr muttered, backing away from the two them, opting to usher curious city goers away from the alley entrance. Only a few minutes passed before Iyone rallied and Rilana suggested they retreat to their room in the Black Lion Inn.

As the three walked hurriedly along the streets, something had changed. A number of sylvari were seen sitting on benches, on the ground. Some leaned on the walls of buildings. All looking like they’d come down with dizzying headaches. Some had friends to comfort them, others did not. As they reached the inn on the corner, there was a loud crash as a body flew through the inn tavern’s large window. The bloodied, bruised, and unconscious body of a sylvari rolled into the street in a shower of glass and wood splinters. A charr and a norn ran out onto the street and over to the sylvari’s body, but not before Rilana got there first.

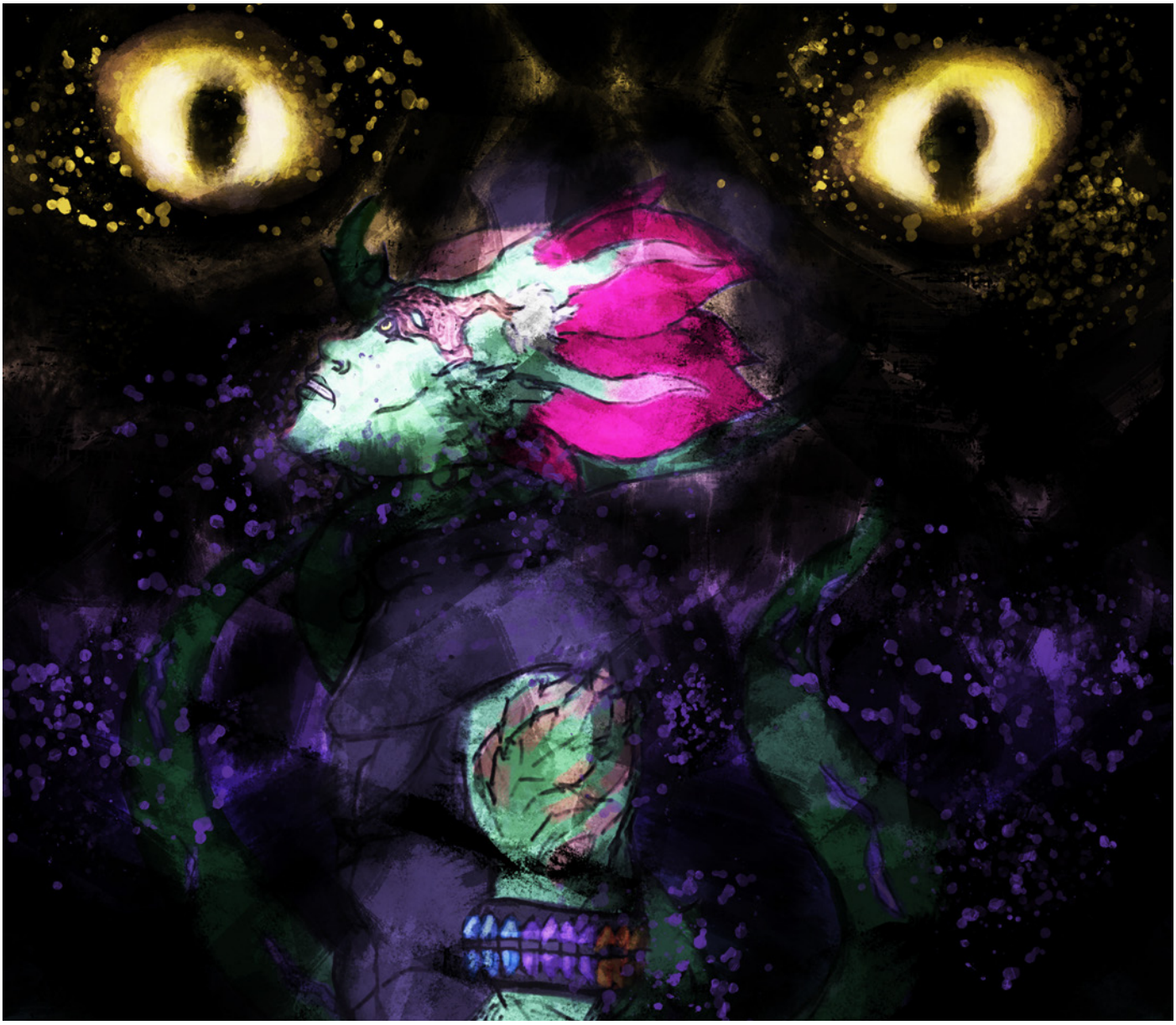
“Hey! What the hell is going on?” she demanded.

The two strangers, also bruised somewhat, spat at their feet. “This sylvari was busy getting drunk at the bar. The barkeep cut him off and he went berserk, tried killin’ him and anyone who tried to stop him,” the norn said.

“It’s none of your business anyway. This happened in Evon Gnashblade’s inn, which means you should get out of our way and let his security do what we’re paid to do,” the female charr continued, looking past the human engineer to the charr captain. “Hey, Pact. Get your mouse to stand down or I’ll do it myself.”

In an instant, Rilana had a pistol drawn and pointed between the charr enforcer’s eyes. “You’re going to make me move? Honey, I’ve killed things far scarier than a couple of paid bouncers,” she jabbed.

The norn gave his charr partner a small nudge. “Aye. It’s not worth it. Leave the crazy bloke for the Lionguard; we’ll still make our report to the boss,” he said, his focused stare connecting with Rilana’s. “And he won’t be pleased.”



The last swig's worth of firewhiskey had spilt out of its flask and onto the small desk of Captain Greer's room in the Saltspray Dragon Inn. The single small window's curtains were pulled shut, still allowing for the faint glow of the morning light to illuminate part of the room. The tepid spirits pooled around half a dozen other empty bottles, some knocked prone, others still standing - liquid stains having already formed on the desk. A sizeable wooden pail had been left by the captain's bed. It sat half empty, filling the room with a pungent smell that mixed with that of the spilled firewhiskey.

A knock wrapped at the door. A minute passed, and another series of knocks followed, louder this time. "Greer? You awake yet?"

From the hall, Rilana pressed an ear to the door; there was no sound. She cursed under her breath while reaching into her satchel, pulling free a small bundle of intricate tools. Within minutes, and the click of a lock, Rilana pushed her way into the room, grabbing the fresh pail of water she brought, filled a little past halfway with water. The immediate shift in smell gave the human a brief moment of pause before her expression grew irritated.

"Wake up, Greer." she spoke, louder now. Her demands were simply met by a low, guttural, groan and a slight shift of the charr's large form underneath a mess of bed sheets. With his small movement, Rilana watched as an empty bottle slid out from under the sheets and onto the floor.

"Oh, for Faren's sake!" In a moment of piqued frustration, the human lunged forward with the water pail, the clear liquid splashing hard against the captain's partially covered head.

The cold and sobering wash shocked the charr awake and alert. Immediately, the charr reached up to cradle his head, now keenly aware of his hungover state. He could hear his engineer speaking angrily at him, but her words were drowned out as his vision spun in a dizzying motion. A familiar lurching feeling filled his gut as he instinctively shoved Rilana away as he reached for the pail.

A few minutes pass, Rilana stood off to the side amidst Greer's scattered Vigil armor, her expression awash with a mixture of discomfort, sympathy, and disappointment. Arms crossed, she waited for her captain to regain some semblance of his composure.

"Greer... It's been over a week," she spoke softly but pointedly.

"A week?" he replied, grogginess hanging from his deep voice, claws itching a spot on his head. "The meeting with the Black Lion Company?"

"Cancelled. I thought it best given the circumstances," Rilana paused for a second. "And because I shoved a pistol in the face of Mister Gnashblade's employee."

The captain nodded slightly. "Any further word from Camp Resolve?"

"Yes, actually. Vigil command has received reports that a good number managed to survive and that the Commander has pressed on into the jungle in Marshal Trahearne's absence," she

relayed, her features softening from her initial irritation. “Meanwhile, Iyone has been playing messenger between the Vigil barracks and the Order of Whispers Headquarters to keep her mind off of… well…”

“You shouldn’t let her wander about the city,” the charr grumbled. “For everyone’s safety… and her own.”

“Excuse me?” Rilana’s expression grew flustered. She turned away and walked to the door. With a quick jerk, she angrily wrenched the knob to open it, the thick dark wood swinging open fast enough to create a burst of air. “I’ve left you to your grieving for a week, but Abaddon be damned if I have to play Captain for you!”

Greer’s somber stare fell unseen on his subordinate’s back. “Lana. Please.”

She stopped in the doorway. “If you want to relieve Iyone from active duty, do it yourself.”

The door closed shut with a half-hearted slam. A female asura in the dimly lit hallway jumped at the noise and looked on with concern as Rilana stood still for a moment, releasing an uneasy sigh. She glanced up at the small figure a few doors down. “Apologies, miss.”

* * *

The call had diminished to a low hum over the passing days, but the simple knowing of its source filled Iyone with dread. Her gaze would often fall on other sylvari wandering the streets of the maritime city. Many of their expressions hollow, pained, and confused as they stared back. A few times she would stop to embrace those that looked especially distraught, and provide them with words of resolve. It was the most she could do for now. At the moment, she was returning to the inn after an uneventful day as message courier. The early evening sun, sitting just above the cliffs on the western side of the city, cast long shadows against the warmly lit white stone that made up most of the streets and some portion of the newer buildings.

“About time you got back from Vigil HQ. Any word from Maguuma today?”

Iyone looked up from the smooth stone road to see Rilana, waiting outside the inn, seated atop a sealed barrel, one of several that lined the outside wall. A pair of norn sat a few paces away, howling over a joke. The second of the two gliders she’d made sat tightly bundled in her lap. A sobering smile crept across the human’s lips. The sylvari returned the same pleasantry, joining her on a second barrel. “Nothing we don’t already know, I’m afraid.”

“Could be worse, I guess. At least there wasn’t any bad news,” the engineer said with a drawn out sigh, adjusting her headband only slightly.

Iyone shifted. The barrel wasn’t particularly comfortable. “Maybe… I’m not really probing that hard for information, to be completely honest.”

“Oh?” Rilana’s full attention shifted to her squadmate.

The sylvari's face was averted. "I see how the cityfolk look at me, even The Vigil soldiers. They don't trust me, and I don't imagine they will for some-"

"Screw 'em, Iyo," the human cut in, her fierce amber eyes fixed on the back of Iyone's head, watching as the sylvari's eyes slowly came around. Rilana pushed off of her barrel, grabbing one of Iyone's hands before pulling her along.

"Wha- where are we going?"

Rilana did not bother to stop. "Out... to get a drink."

"It's not even dark yet," Iyone replied.

"Since when has that ever mattered?" Rilana laughed.

After a good hour of wandering and asking for directions, the two were pointed towards what appeared to be a rather discreet hole-in-the-wall tavern not far from the Black Lion Trading Company Vaults. The establishment, despite its rather unassuming exterior, was lavish, from the finely carved and stained wooden furniture with plush cushioned seating, to the gold-trimmed fabrics that hung from the bannisters. Ornate rugs lined the polished marble floors and walls, while the thick scent of a floral incense blanketed the room. Iyone glanced around nervously. Most of the bar's denizens were dressed rather formally, meanwhile she traipsed around in her Vigil uniform and Rilana in her own casual wear with a bundled glider fixed to a harness that hung over her right shoulder.

"Relax, Iyo. I may not be dressed up to the nines, but they know nobility. They can see it in my walk, how I carry myself. That and the unholy amount of money I can throw down at the drop of a hat," Rilana spoke softly as a freckled brown dimple rose with her coy asymmetrical grin.

Just like that, Iyone's anxiety waned, suddenly enthralled in Rilana's change in character, as if it was something she could simply turn on and off without a thought. If the sylvari hadn't known better, she might've thought her friend a mesmer. The two arrived at the bar and took their seats. The barkeep, a well-dressed male norn, eyed the two with mild suspicion. When it became clear that the two were staying, he finally lumbered over.

"Can I help you two ladies with something? You look a little... lost," he said, standing high above them and looking down with a less-than-subtle air of snobbery.

Rilana, slid her bundled glider off of her shoulder and handed it to Iyone with a quiet "hold this for a second." She pulled a finely decorated gossamer purse with golden thread trimming and jewel embedded metal clip, her coy expression unwavering as she pushed a few gold coins in the norn's direction. "Not lost. We just came by to relax a little and admire my father's work."

The norn raised a brow. "Oh?"

"That fine painting of Captain Gnashblade in the foyer bares the signature of one Jeramie Dejar and the crest of his husband, Minister Rashid Dejar," she hummed, producing a broach from

her pouch that bore her family crest.

Leaning in and eyes narrowed, the norn stroked his bearded chin. “Huh... so it is. Apologies, my lady. What can I offer you?”

As Rilana put in orders for the two of them, Iyone caught the glance of a familiar female charr as she disappeared into a backroom. The sylvari nudged her human friend’s arm with an elbow.

“Yes?” Rilana spoke quietly, leaning in.

Iyone kept her voice to a whisper. “Remember that charr you threatened?”

“Which one? I’ve lost count, really,” Rilana replied with a long cackle.

“About a week ago. She was hired muscle for Gnashblade, yeah?” the sylvari asked.

Two small glasses were placed gingerly in front of the two as the barkeep filled the glasses with a clear yellow but sweet smelling liquid. “Two glasses of honeywine.”

Rilana broke her conversation with Iyone, glancing up at the norn with an almost flirtatious grin. “Thank you, dear,” she said, sliding a few more coins to the barkeep for a tip before leaning back to the sylvari. “I remember, yes.”

“I saw her a moment ago. I think she saw us before stepping into one of the back rooms,” Iyone continued, her unease returning. “Rilana, we need to go.”

Throwing down her liquor in in a few gulps, the engineer nodded. “Alright. Drink your wine and we’ll be off.” Rilana watched as the sylvari drank it as fast as she could, ignoring the taste and placing the glass on the counter so quick that it tipped and nearly rolled off the edge before the barkeep could catch it. The norn scowled at the two of them. “Sorry,” the human smiled with faux embarrassment, “she’s a lightweight.”

A single thick eyebrow rose on the norn’s face with a smirk. “I can tell.”

Iyone was already walking back the way they came in, tightly gripping the glider bundle. Rilana walked fast to catch up. The two cross the threshold of the exit when the crackle of elemental magic swirled around them, forming a circle of lightning.

Quickly, Rilana grabbed Iyone’s shoulders, the sylvari’s fearful gaze meeting her own. “Take the glider, find Greer, and get back-up. Go!”

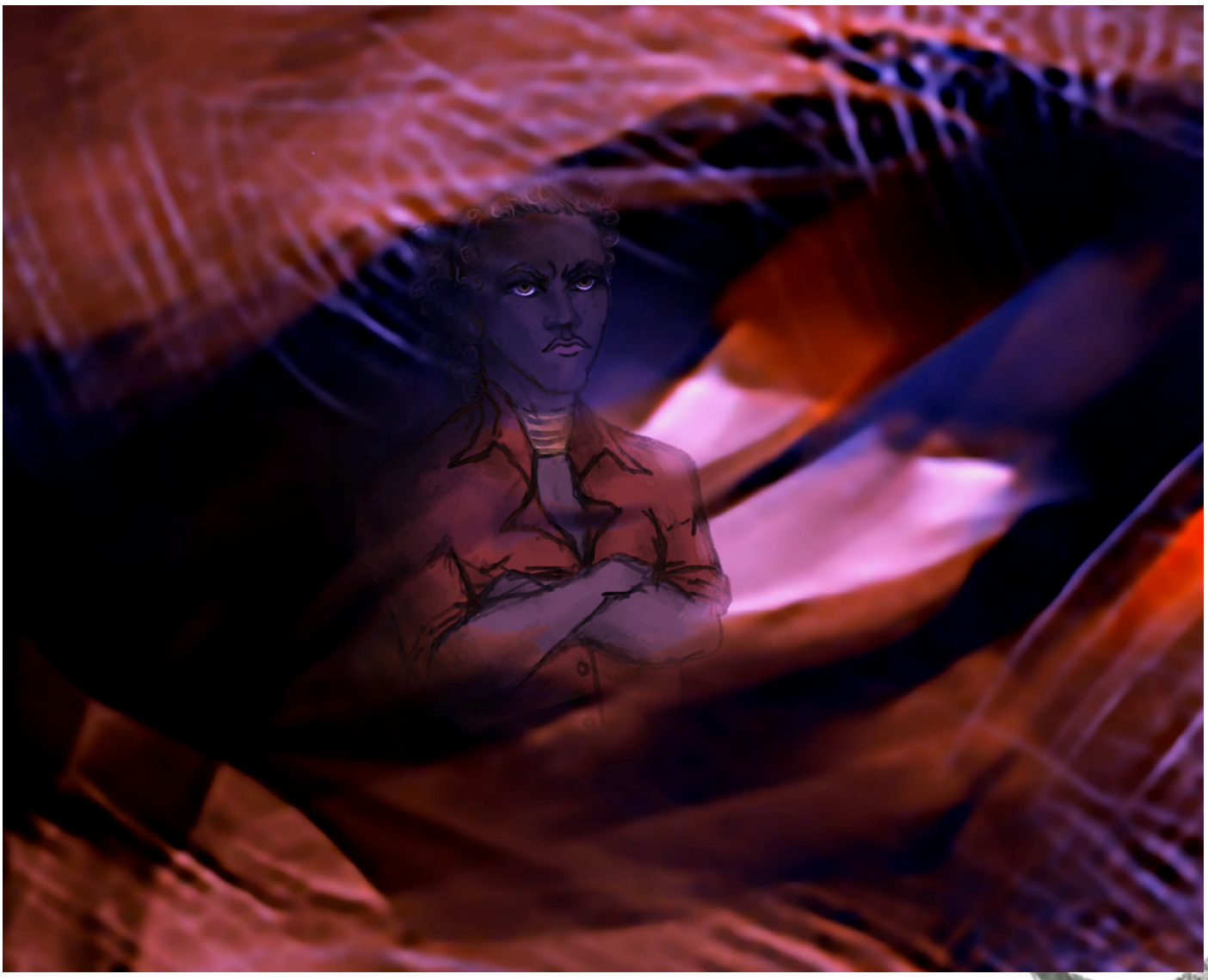
Without much warning, one of the blue crystals on Iyone’s armbands shimmered to life and she leapt high into the air, landing somewhere amidst the construction scaffolding above. From the ground, Rilana could see a quick glint of purple light before her friend bounded away in a ball of Zephyrite lightning. Through her captor’s aetheric barrier, she could see two figures approaching. One was a male asura in lavish, brightly colored arcane robes - the one who appeared to be responsible for the trap, while the second was the female charr Rilana had the

pleasure of meeting days earlier. After a few silent moments, a third figure emerged from the adjacent alleyway. He was a medium-sized charr with black and white fur sporting red leather pauldrons adorned with golden chains and studded around the edges, and a well-tailored coat and pants. His prominent grin of sharp teeth stretching from cheek-to-cheek came into view as he stepped closer to the magical barrier.

“Crusader Rilana Dejar, Pact engineer, I presume?” he growled, cupping his clawed hands behind his back.

“Captain Gnashblade. You know that by detaining a member of the Pact that you’ve put yourself in a rather precarious situation,” Rilana replied, her iron gaze locked with his, every muscle in her face focused on maintaining an unwavering stoicism. To her surprise, the charr simply chuckled.

“But Crusader, you are mistaken. Our previously cancelled meeting has been rescheduled,” Evon said, his own grin, unflinching. The lightning wall slowly dissolved as two more of his guards walked up from behind the engineer. The captain approached from the front, offering a single clawed hand to the human in invitation. “Shall we do business?”





LEGACY
PROLOGUE

The bite of the bitter-cold air stung Zachariah's lungs with every breath. Of all the things he hated since coming to the Durmand Priory, the cold was the worst. He often found himself reminiscing of days playing in the warm sun as a child. Today, however, all memories of Kryta and his past brought a stab of pain to his heart. He gave a sigh and pushed forward.

He was headed through the long passageway that led to the outer terrace of the Priory. Each step made the air colder and befouled his mood further. The pained expression on his face made him appear much older than his actual twenty-three years. Even his auburn hair had seemed to lose much of its shine in the past few days. With a shrug, he hitched the satchel he carried to a more comfortable position. It carried all his worldly possessions; mostly just some clothes and a book.

"I've been waiting for an hour!" his thoughts were brought back to the present by a high-pitched voice. Ahead of him sat a small asura upon a small, well-maintained golem; no taller than Zachariah's hip. The asura had large yellow eyes and a pair of very floppy ears. His bald head and grey skin almost made him seem like a statue, but his habit of tapping his fingers on the head of the golem broke the illusion. Ravi only did that when he was annoyed.

"Sorry, Ravi. The paperwork took longer to do than I'd initially thought it would," Zachariah said as he approached.

"You should have filled it in last night." the golem jerked to life as if by telepathic communication and walked closer to Zachariah.

"I guess. I assume you're ready then?" he gave the satchel another shrug. The asura's expression softened as the golem reached Zachariah.

"I should be asking you the same thing. Are you ready, Zach?" Zachariah nodded without hesitation. Ravi's golem jerked to life once again as they started walking to the asuran waypoint near the Priory's exit.

"You promise it won't hurt?" Zachariah asked. Ravi's expression returned to its usual annoyed gaze.

"For someone who has an asura for a friend, you really seem to doubt our technology, Flynn." Ravi only ever called Zachariah by his last name when he was annoyed. Despite Zachariah's current state of mourning, he was glad that Ravi did not treat him like some delicate flower. Everywhere he looked, there were stares of pity and remorse. He hated it and appreciated Ravi



BY
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even more for still treating him like he usually would.

“It’s not that I don’t trust your technology, I just don’t like the general nausea and disorientation that comes with it.”

“You wouldn’t experience that if you made your body used to the activity. It only happens for the first few trips, but of course you use it so rarely that every time is like the first.” Ravi tapped his golem’s head once and it sped up, making Zach take longer strides to stay alongside Ravi. He was trying to annoy Zach, but it only brought a smile to his face. Ravi was the only one who helped him forget the troubles he had faced recently.

They were quickly approaching the waypoint. Zach felt uneasy, but pushed on. He slipped his hand into his pocket as they walked. He withdrew it; some money clutched in his palm. It was not much, but it would be enough to get him to where he needed to be. The floating, blue asuran construct came into view. Once they were below it, he would not be able to turn back. Only a few more steps now...

“Flynn!” a familiar voice came from behind them. Both he and Ravi stopped so suddenly that they nearly fell over. Ravi groaned and Zach knew why. Only one person annoyed Ravi more than Zach did. Ravi turned around before Zach could.

“What do you want?” Ravi said not too kindly. Zach turned to see a young sylvari approach. His rose foliage went well with the similarly coloured robes he wore. His name was Lorian and his thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. Ravi had always found him insufferable and since the Mordremoth crisis, even Zach had become weary of him, though he never showed signs of corruption.

“Magister Tassi spoke to Steward Gixx and they both agreed to let me come along!” Lorian’s rose tinted leaves seemed slightly pale in the light of the waypoint nearby. His blue eyes were large and excited.

“What? Why!?” Ravi seemed ready to throw a fit. Zach didn’t really mind Lorian’s presence, but he agreed with Ravi’s outburst; there was no reason for Lorian to come along.

“Well as a Novice of the Priory, I’m not allowed to go off to gather experience or knowledge on my own. But Magister Tassi believes that I should be fine under the protection of two Priory Explorers. Primarily, I’ve been assigned to work under Explorer Flynn. Here is the paperwork!” Lorian held out a sealed letter to Ravi who snatched it violently before tearing it open. The asura

scanned it and read through it within a record time before sighing.

“Apparently Lorian here needs field experience before being allowed to advance in rank. With everything going on, we’re the only party that they can afford to put him with. Everyone else will be travelling to places far too dangerous. This is supposed to be a personal trip for you, Flynn. Why would they do something like this?” Ravi turned an annoyed eye to his friend. Zach sighed.

“I couldn’t get clearance for a personal trip with everything going on, so I had to file a request for a research trip. We have to write a report on all the happenings within Kryta when we get back.” Zachariah admitted.

“You could have told me that earlier.”

“I didn’t think it would be a problem!” Zach yelled. Ravi rubbed his temples and squeezed his eyes shut.

Lorian seemed uneasy, but did not try to leave. He was determined to get field experience. Zach couldn’t blame him. With all the Elder Dragon problems recently, the Priory had been struggling to field-test new recruits since almost everyone going on expeditions were going somewhere too dangerous lately.

“Fine. But officially he’s under your custody. You handle him,” Ravi said before turning to the waypoint. Zach sighed and nodded. He didn’t need this right now. Having to take care of a greenhorn Priory member was the last thing on his mind, but if the higher-ups spoke, he had to listen. He was, after all, using research as an excuse for a personal trip. Zach straightened his back and walked to the waypoint, not even bothering to look at Lorian, though the young sylvari immediately followed suit.

Within seconds the three of them were bathed in the blue light of the waypoint that floated right above them. Zach held out the coins he withdrew from his pocket earlier. Ravi and Lorian dug into their own pockets and followed suit. He held his hand with the palm sticking straight up; the money balanced in a small pile on top. He did not look to his side, but he knew that the other two were doing the same. Instead, he gave the Priory one last glance; sympathetic faces of pity and remorse stared back at him. He hated it. He felt Ravi and Lorian’s hands on his shoulders; they needed to be touching him to go to the same destination since they had never been to that waypoint before.

“Lakeside Bazaar,” Zach said clearly. Within a second the money disappeared; whisked off to some asuran inventors or lab responsible for all the waypoints and their maintenance. Less than a second after, Zach felt a strong tug at his shoulders. Then all physical feeling disappeared.

His mind felt stretched and his consciousness broadened. For a very brief moment, he felt like he could glimpse into the Mists. The gods appeared to him, brilliant and emitting an almost blinding light. Then he saw all of Tyria stretched before him. Within it, he felt multiple sources of immense power radiating energy





in a steady rhythm. Then Tyria disappeared and he was in a dark void. He saw his mother's grave. Then his sister's. Grenth's voice boomed in laughter all around him. His eyes closed tightly and the voice immediately vanished. When he opened his eyes, he was standing beneath a waypoint in his homeland of Kryta. Though he tried to fight it back, he fell to his knees and emptied the contents of his stomach.

"You didn't focus, Zach. You need to focus on your destination or this is bound to happen every time," Ravi's voice came from behind him. Zachariah wiped his mouth on his sleeve and slowly stood up.

"I saw the gods," he said as he felt his head swim.

"Of course you did. If you don't focus, your mind gets affected by the Ley Energy that connects the waypoints. You'll see all kinds of delusions. Asura are taught how to focus their minds from a young age, but you humans seem almost incapable of that." Zach ignored the jibe and tried to steady his dizzy mind. When the ground started feeling less like a turbulent sea, he looked around him.

The warm summer sun was baking the wooden houses of the town. Some farmers and townspeople were going about their business. A few people stared at him; most likely because he defiled the ground below a waypoint likely used by many people. His cheeks turned red, but he didn't let it bother him too much.

"I saw the dream!" Lorian said with clear joy, bringing Zach's thoughts back to their situation.

"Of course you did. Never met a sylvari that could focus for more than a few seconds." Ravi was clearly getting more annoyed by the second. Quite familiar with the asura's bursts of anger, Zach tried to divert his attention.

"What time is it Ravi? We need to be there by noon," he turned to his friend. Ravi looked flustered at first, but then pulled a small device from his pocket. It projected a small hologram of a clock.

"We have ten minutes," Ravi said. Zach sighed with relief. Their destination was a mere five minutes of walking.

"We should go then," Zach said and started walking. Ravi's golem quickly followed, carrying its creator. Lorian seemed unconcerned about where they were headed, but there was no need for him to be. Technically he only needed to accompany them to get some field experience. He lazily walked along. Some people eyed him with suspicion, but did nothing; they knew that no sylvari posed a threat anymore. It was still a bit difficult for Zach to be around Lorian, but his rational mind would remind him why that was folly.

"So is this the hometown you've told me so much about?" Ravi asked.

"No. I lived in Saidra's Haven a few miles northwest of here, but I came here regularly as a child," Zach replied. There were no more questions from Ravi after

that; each step closer to their destination made Zach feel more and more solemn.

They walked through an alley that led to a tunnel carved into the cliff that lined the back of the town. It was much cooler in there and Zach was grateful for that much at least. The walk through the tunnel was quick and, before they knew it, the end was in sight. Upon leaving the tunnel he finally saw it.

This was one of the oldest temples dedicated to the Six Gods that Zach knew of; not counting those in Orr, of course. It was composed of a statue of each god and some stones laid in two large circles that made a small pavilion. An overhang created by one of the cliffs that encircled the temple along with some tall trees kept the area in cool shade.

Only a few people stood within the temple's borders as well as a few priests. It was the priest of Grenth that made Zach's heart start pounding in his chest. He took a deep breath and tried to calm it, but to no avail; even his hands were trembling. Slowly, he and his companions walked closer. An old priest of Melandru came closer and put his hands on Zach's shoulders.

"The gods will help you during this troubling time, child. Seek refuge in them," Zach nodded, but could not look the old man in the eyes. Slowly they pushed past the few people that were there, most of whom he did not recognize. Standing at the edge of the centre-circle that made up the pavilion, he saw it.

A stack of wood was neatly packed. Bushels of leaves and dry wood had been stuffed into the pile wherever possible. Some wads of cloth reeking of flammable oil also stuck out in places. His eyes slowly moved up to the top of the pyre. A simple white sheet covered what was clearly a human body. The sheet was neatly folded around the feet, legs and torso. Only the head remained uncovered. When Zachariah laid his eyes upon the face of the dead man who looked so much like him, his knees buckled beneath him.

For the second time that day, he fell to his knees. Tears streamed down his cheeks in an unending torrent of sorrow. His stomach convulsed as the sobs shook him to the core. It came so suddenly that he did not even have the time to prevent a wail from escaping his lips. He felt Ravi's hand on his back, but it did not help. Nothing could help now.

He heard the priests move to the pyre and start their chant of the Six, asking the gods to welcome their child back into the Mists with a loving embrace. This made Zach sob even harder. His hands clenched into tight fists; his nails drawing blood from his palms. His teeth clenched and broke the skin of his lower lip; the taste of blood filled his mouth. None of these things bothered him.

The chant stopped and Zach heard the crackle of a torch as the torchbearer, usually a young priest-in-training, walked past him. He wanted to stop them. He wanted to pull the pyre apart with his bare hands and wake the body up with a violent shake. This couldn't be true. They couldn't just burn him away. They couldn't. Another fit of sobbing took him accompanied by another wail of despair.





He heard the crackle as the flames started eating away at the dry wood of the pyre. Zach felt like a child again. Alone and afraid. A whimper escaped his lips as the sound of the fire grew, yet he dared not look up.

“Papa… Papa please… Papa don’t. Please Papa, come back. Why are you leaving me? You said you’d always be there for me. I’m all alone now. I don’t want to be alone… Papa…” he whispered in a whimpering voice.

* * *

The pyre had burnt down to a small pile within an hour. The guests, now slightly more numerous, slowly made their way closer to the flames to pay their respects. Zachariah was sitting on the ground between Ravi and Lorian with his head resting on his knees. Ravi’s hand never left his shoulder and even Lorian laid a comforting hand on him. He was grateful for their support, but it did not take away the deep feeling of loss. The hole that the passing of his mother and sister had created within him was even wider now. He felt hollow and empty; a drained man.

“Come Zach, you need a drink. I think I saw a tavern in town,” Ravi’s voice came from his left. Zach wanted to hug the asura, but he knew that it wouldn’t go well. Ravi was more understanding of human emotion than most of his race due to his time working closely with them in the Priory, but he was still an asura with a clear bias against most other races. Zach nodded and let Ravi and Lorian help him up. They slowly walked to the tunnel entrance when two of the guests stepped in front of them.

“You’re Darion’s son aren’t you? You poor thing,” one of the two ladies said. Zach wanted to reply, but before he could, the other one started talking.

“Such a dreadful disease to have taken him. We were such a fan of his books. We heard that he was working on one, but that he left it with you. Is that true?” she spoke rather quickly. Zach thought of the book in his backpack, but wondered how they knew of it.

He was about to ask them when a thunderous explosion ripped through the air. Zach looked around and saw that some people were looking at the sky. Large, red crystals flew through the sky, leaving strange pink trails behind them. They were headed in the direction of Divinity’s Reach! Another explosive sound came followed by more crystals flying through the air.

“Such a shame. We had hoped we could get it the easy way,” the voice of the first lady drew Zach’s attention. Right before his eyes, red magical energy enveloped them. Their clothes were replaced by white and red robes, emblazoned with a symbol Zach had only seen in history books before; the emblem of the White Mantle. Before he could respond, he felt Ravi push him to the side; the blade of a sword missed his heart and cut his arm.

They were trying to kill him.



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