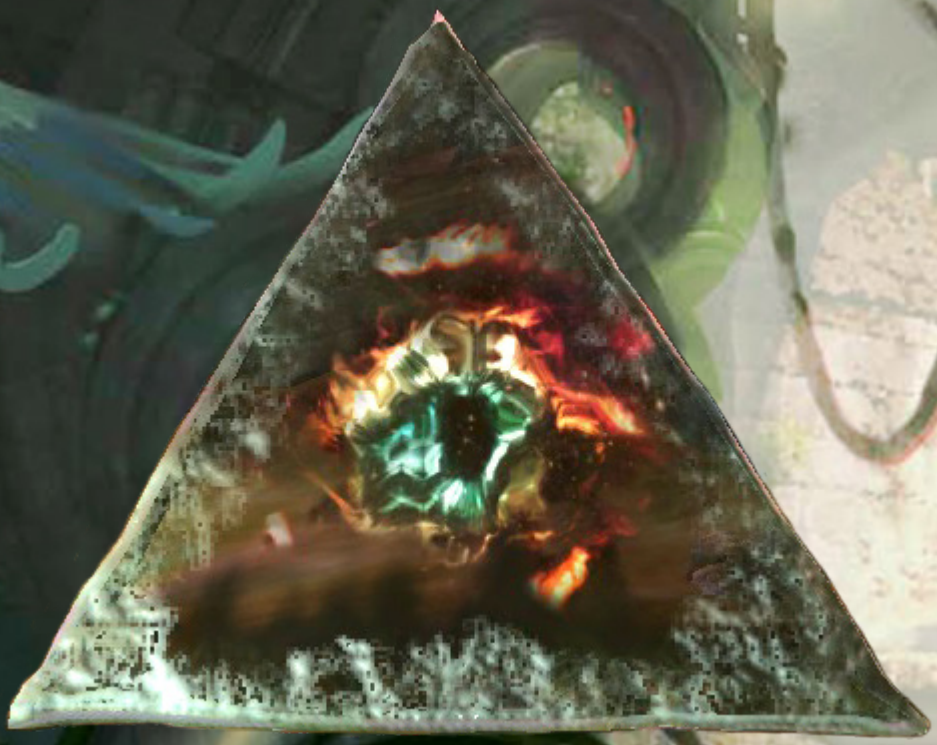
ISSUE 20

GUILDMAG

SEASON'S END



SEASON 3 REVISITED

The secrets hidden in Season 3 laid bare for the first time at GuildMag.

PARABLES OF THE GODS

Explore the meaning behind *One Path End*'s sacred texts of the human gods.

COMPETITIVE FEATURE PACK

We uncover the impact of June's PvP update with Jebro and Gladomer.

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURED

06 **SEASON 3 LORE: THE IMPORTANT PARTS**
There were many plot threads in Season 3; here's the important lore you missed.

22 **INTERVIEW: COMPETITIVE FEATURE PACK**
We interview popular streamers Gladomer and Jebro on the latest PvP features.

EDITORIALS

16 **CHASING DRAGONS**
How does Season 3 compare to its predecessor? Miko takes a closer look.

59 **THE DIFFERENCE ELITE SPECIALISATIONS MAKE**
With *Heart of Thorns* truly over, Draxynnic explores how elite specs changed the professions.

ART & FICTION

76 **COMMUNITY ART**
Delve into this issue's collection of inspiring art, curated by Kent Benson.

86 **LEGACY**
Zachariah's story continues in *Inheritance* as he comes across an old face...

90 **WAR PROFITEERS: PART IV - FINALE**
War Profiteers concludes in Kent Benson's last piece of writing for GuildMag.

COMMUNITY

72 **GUILD SPOTLIGHT**
Looking for a casual-friendly guild? *Minions of Grenth* might be just what you're after!

LORE & HISTORY

30 **SHADOWS & FLAMES**
Recap the entirety of Season 3 with Starconspirator.

39 **WHO ARE THE DRUIDS?**
Draconis Mons revealed more about these ancient spirits, as we uncover.

54 **TO SOW THE WIND**
What might the origins of the tempest be? There's more lore than you may think...





EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to our twentieth magazine issue! *Path of Fire* is extremely close, so in this issue we're taking a retrospective look at Season 3 in preparation for the expansion!

It's happening - *Path of Fire* is almost upon us! The game's second expansion is just about to hit, and although we're releasing this magazine later than planned, the content inside is just as relevant as ever. In this issue, we delve into everything Season 3 has to offer: Draxynnic reveals the important lore you may have missed; Starconspirator recaps the story in its entirety; and Miko explores how this latest season compares to that of its predecessor. On top of that, you'll also find insights into each of the parables of the human gods scattered throughout the magazine. Both Draxynnic and guest writer Kora (@GuildLores on Twitter) have worked hard to decipher the meaning behind these sacred texts uncovered in Siren's Landing – so start flicking through these pages to find them!

Just as in previous issues, art and fiction also feature in this magazine. Kent Benson presents his last ever round-up of community artwork (don't worry, we'll continue publishing awesome pieces in future issues!), this time featuring pieces inspired by Season 3. He also continues his *War Profiteers* fiction series with its fourth and final chapter, whilst writer Vian advances *Legacy* with its second instalment. We've also lined up an interview with Gladomer and Jebro – two popular *Guild Wars 2* streamers – taking a look at June's updates for PvP and WvW and the effect on the competitive community.

Finally, I'd like to thank you for continuing to support GuildMag. Our next magazine will be our 2017 Annual, with proceeds going towards charity - so stay tuned to guildmag.com!

THE TEAM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Valiant

SENIOR WRITER
Draxynnic

SENIOR COPYEDITOR
Tauz

WRITERS
Kent Benson,
Starconspirator, Vian de Bod

COPYEDITORS
Talus, Kalabajooie

DESIGNERS
Xeroe

CONTRIBUTORS
Miko, Kora

Join our awesome team
www.guildmag.com/join

FAREWELL TO FRIENDS

In this issue we say goodbye to two veteran team members: Miko and Kent. As both move on to bigger things, we wish them the best for whatever the future may hold and thank them for their years of dedication to GuildMag.

MIKO
CONTENT MANAGER

When *Guild Wars 2* launched, I was oblivious to the fan community out there and the amazing talent to be found amongst its content creators. As I leveled up my first characters to 80, I started searching online to see what other players might be discussing about the game and what builds they were experimenting with. Then I found GuildMag.

The fansite caught my attention in three ways: its weekly community round-up posts; its podcast; and its digital magazine. GuildMag was my gateway to connect with players creating builds and theorycrafting their effectiveness; it brought me in touch with fan fiction writers and fan artists; it helped me understand *Guild Wars* lore; and it helped me find players excited by the ways Tyria changed because of the Living World ArenaNet created. Of these three types of content, it was GuildMag's podcast - called Dynamically Spoken in those days - that made me a fan of this group of content creators.

So when a call went out on Twitter that they were looking for writers, I jumped at the chance to see if the admins thought I could help them tell Tyria's stories. I joined the team in the winter of 2013 with GuildMag *Issue 10: Frozen Tales*, writing the opening exploration article of one of my favorite areas of the game: the Shiverpeaks (and stealing my character's name for my penname). A year later, Valiant asked me to become the content manager for the site as he began his tenure as sole administrator and the team set forth on a new chapter of our history. I never imagined in 2013 that I'd get involved with so many of GuildMag's productions from website articles, the GuildMag Podcast, to magazine editorship and print magazines.

It's with a heavy heart that I walk away from GuildMag eleven issues later, but I'm proud of the team I've worked with, and how everyone has grown and become stronger in the content we've created. I'll miss collaborating with this wonderful team who I know will continue to delight all of us with their professional and fun magazines, and so much more. I'll especially miss collaborating with Valiant who's taught me so much about magazine design, podcasting and streaming, and indulged a lot of my craziest ideas for the site, and who, in the end, has made a raider out of me. Thank you GuildMag! You'll forever have your biggest fan in me. <3



KENT BENSON
WRITER

I've never liked endings because of the uncertainty that follows afterwards, but here I am at such a point. I joined GuildMag over three years ago, and wrote my first magazine article for *Issue 11: Scarlet's Journal* titled "Lightning Strikes: The Rise of the Aetherblades." It was a lore piece detailing what we knew about the group, which I took because I found the Aetherblade pirates so interesting. I think what I was so impressed with back then was the digging I had to do through interviews and articles for lore on the group because there wasn't a lot. I had to dissect the facts and attempt to decipher what their origins were and where they were going and it's still a loose thread to this day. Mai Trin is still at large and who knows what the Aetherblades have been up to? I'd love to see those high-tech tough customers again, honestly.

See what I've done? I've distracted myself with all of this nostalgia, though I'm not sure it can be helped. I've enjoyed much of the work I've done for GuildMag over the past 10 issues I've been a part of, sans my totally NOT awkward interview with Colin Johanson and Isaiah Cartwright at PAX East (they were still gracious about it, thank the gods). Ultimately, things changed a bit when I started my work in QA, so I turned to writing "Thrifty Threads," "Community Art Spotlight," and my fan-fiction "War Profiteers." That's where I'm choosing to close this particular chapter in the *Guild Wars 2* fandom, with Rilana, Iyone, and Greer's own finale. I'm shooting for slightly further stars and I need all the time, energy, and focus to get there. I'll miss all of you readers and I'll definitely miss the GuildMag team. There's nothing quite like GuildMag in the community, at least, not that I've seen. So if you're a fan of the game looking to write about *Guild Wars* and its lore, I recommend applying. They're always looking for fresh faces and new stories.

See you in Tyria,

Kent B.

SEASON 3 LORE: THE IMPORTANT PARTS

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

As the third Living Story season reaches its conclusion, we have seen a number of revelations being dropped about the lore of Tyria. Some of these have been tied directly to the main plot and are difficult to miss; these include the spectrum theory of the nature of magic and its interactions with the Elder Dragons, and the apparently final conclusion of the long-running plot thread of the White Mantle and the last of the mursaat. However, the third season has also been filled with a number of various lore tidbits that can be found through letters and conversations within the instances and the maps of each episode. In this article, I seek to highlight some of these side pieces of lore in each episode that might have been missed, and the ramifications that these items might have for future storylines.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

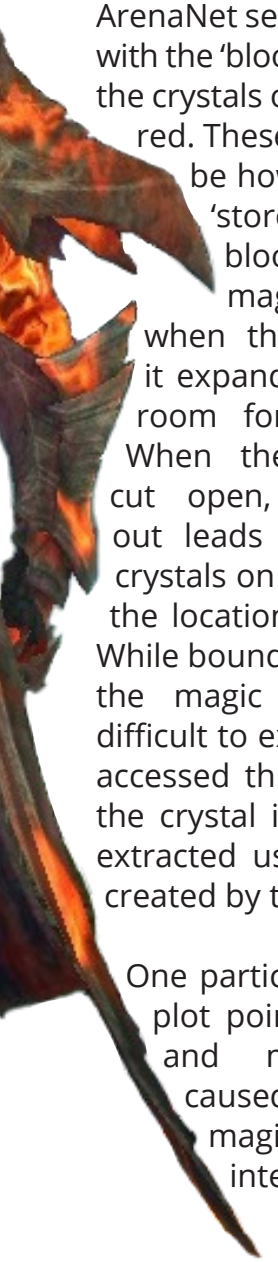
The primary focus of the first episode of Season 3 is the bloodstone and, accordingly, most of the lore that came in this episode related to the bloodstones, mostly through the journals of Bauer, Valis, and Kasandra.

For a start, we received confirmation of something that had been long suspected: the White Mantle have a means of transferring souls trapped in the Bloodstone into an otherwise unidentified 'auxiliary storage device' (possibly similar to those used by the Iron Legion). This would explain how souls sacrificed on bloodstones close to Kryta



could be transferred to the 'soul batteries' that locked the Door of Komalie in Abaddon's Mouth.

In addition, we get our first real description of what a bloodstone physically is. In the journals, the bloodstone is described as having a rocky exterior (which is what we see in *Guild Wars: Prophecies* and *Eye of the North*), but the inside is described as being like a geode, hollow and filled with red crystals. It would be interesting if bloodstones of other magic schools had different colours, but ArenaNet seems to have gone with the 'blood' theme, making the crystals of all of the stones red. These crystals seem to be how the bloodstone 'stores' magic - as the bloodstone absorbs magic (as it did when the Dragons died) it expands, likely to make room for more crystals. When the bloodstone is cut open, magic seeping out leads to formation of crystals on the outside, near the location of the opening. While bound up in the crystal, the magic appears to be difficult to extract, but can be accessed through implanting the crystal into a subject, or extracted using special tools created by the Seers.



One particularly interesting plot point is the insanity and magic addiction caused by bloodstone magic, which raises an interesting question: is it bloodstone magic specifically that causes this addiction, or is it a property of high concentrations of magic generally? If the latter, it might explain the behaviour of the Elder Dragons: while dragons appear to have higher tolerance for magic than humans, charr, and asura do, it is possible that the Elder Dragons were once less destructive beings that overgorged themselves on magic.

RISING FLAMES

Most of the revelations from Episode 2 were made in the form of major plot revelations, which have been discussed elsewhere. Namely, that magic appears to be divided into a 'spectrum'; and that the surviving Elder Dragons have been absorbing parts of the magical spectrum that had been released by the deaths of Zhaitan and Mordremoth.

One interesting revelation from the lore tablets scattered around the mursaat ruins is that the Forgotten and mursaat worked closely together before the latter's desertion, launching a joint attack on Zhaitan that failed due to lack of support from the other races. From the perspective of the mursaat, this lack of support was itself a betrayal, which justified their later abandonment of the cause. However, this does support the theory that the similarity of appearance between mursaat armour and Forgotten constructs may be no coincidence, but may be a consequence of the time when the mursaat and Forgotten cooperated against the Elder Dragons.

Perhaps more significant, however, is what we see on the dwarves. While the dwarves have been presented as being relatively light on magic compared to the mursaat and Forgotten (although still competitive against modern races at the time of the original *Guild Wars*), in Rising Flames we see that the dwarves have devices capable of holding back a volcanic eruption. If they can do so here, could there also be other places which are held back by similar means? And could the technology being used by asura in Mt. Maelstrom be related in some manner?

More interesting, potentially, is the fact of Rhoban's survival despite having been literally broken to pieces. While the dwarves have generally been considered to have fought their way into effective extinction, this does render the possibility that any stone dwarf could be rendered totally unable to fight or move on his or her own accord, but still 'alive' enough to interact with other races if found. Might there be other similarly immobilised dwarves in the Depths, with further knowledge to impart if they were to be located and recovered?

A CRACK IN THE ICE

Episode 3 brought a considerable amount of new lore, mostly related to the kodan. While we've known for a while that the kodan believed that their role in ancient times was to shepherd the ancient spirits of Tyria in Koda's name, here we have the first case where this belief has evidence to back it up. The kodan of Sorrow's Eclipse were apparently tasked with guiding the 'Spirit of Fire', teaching it to balance the destructive and creative aspects of fire until it had learned all it could from the kodan and moved on from Tyria. The ancient magic of Koda's Flame is formed from the flames the fire spirit left behind, which have been maintained by the kodan of Sorrow's Eclipse ever since.

The departure of the Spirit of Fire from Tyria does raise for an interesting line of speculation, given that the plot of Season 3 has now turned out to be the return of a powerful entity of fire to Tyria from the Mists. Could there be some connection between the spirit of fire once tended by the kodan and Balthazar? Might the spirit have then gone on to be the first god to take Balthazar's role in the pantheon, having been replaced and absorbed by new entities over time until Balthazar came to be the most recent holder of the mantle?

Furthermore, this is not the only spirit that has been guided by the kodan. The Flamebearers mention that other kodan tribes have guided other spirits; those of stone, water, plants, birds, and "creeping things" - and this list may not be all-inclusive. This raises the possibility that other spirits, including the animal spirits of the norn, might once have been raised by kodan.

In turn, this raises up the possibility that we have seen evidence of past conflict between the kodan and the norn. Players of *Eye of the North* may remember Egil Fireteller describing spirits of "mountains, seasons, fire and darkness" as adversaries to be fought. Such a description may indicate that there have been hostilities between the norn and the tribes of kodan responsible for guiding those spirits in the past, leading the norn to believe that those spirits are hostile. This may lend some credence to the kodan story that the norn originated from a band of fallen kodan.

With regards to the current band of kodan, we note that the Flamebearers appear to be training quaggans to take their place. An aquatic species seems a curious choice for a race to safeguard their holy fires, but perhaps desperation has resulted in this move. Relatively few kodan are to be seen around the Sorrow's Eclipse sanctuary - the kodan there might fear that they may soon be extinct, and thus they



need to pass on their legacy to another race to avoid it from being lost forever.

And that may be an important legacy to maintain. While Taimi believes that Jormag and Primordus are each other's weaknesses, her research seems to indicate that it is fire magic that is Jormag's weakness, not Primordus specifically - the other Elder Dragon is simply the biggest concentration of fire magic around.



The flames left behind by the Spirit of Fire, however, might also be sufficient to destroy Jormag, should a scenario arise where that is better than the alternative. It may be no coincidence that the resting place of the scroll Braham used to enchant Eir's bow was found nearby.

HEAD OF THE SNAKE

Similar to Episode 2, most of the lore that came in Episode 4 was part of the main plot and thus difficult to miss. The letters found in Caudecus' Manor confirm that he was pretty much responsible for everything bad that has happened to Kryta in previous years that were not related to the Dragons or Scarlet. This included some things that had not previously been clearly linked: the Floating Grizwhirl, the attempt on Jennah's life at Caudecus' Manor, and possibly even the intensification of the centaur war through the massacre of the Ulgoth's family.

Interestingly, it also turns out that Caudecus might have been partially responsible for saving the life of the human orphan PC, by giving E warning of the attempted assassination - an action apparently motivated by Caudecus' desire to eliminate Confessor Esthel so he could claim the title for himself.

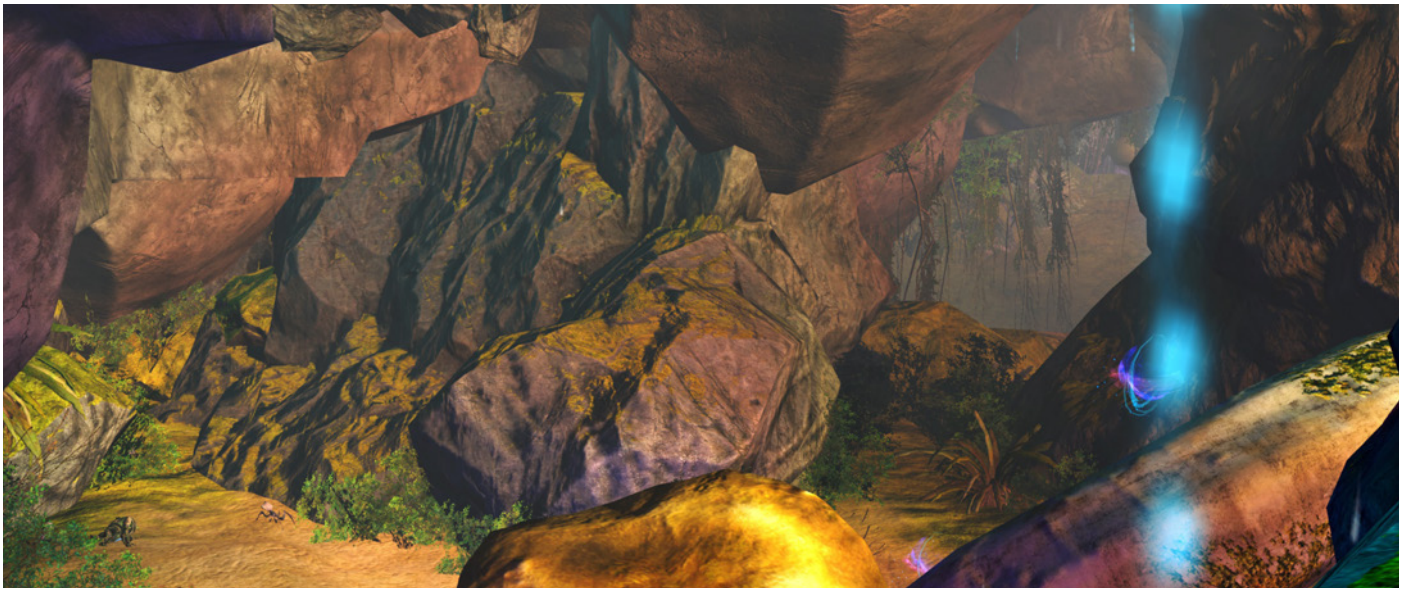
Speaking of E, we also get another hint as to their identity and history, in their usage of Order of Whispers codes: suggesting that E is either a Whispers agent, or someone who has worked with (or infiltrated) them before.

FLASHPOINT

Most of the obscure new lore that came with Season 5 related to the druids. Since this represents a full topic entirely in its own right that expands on a mystery that was presented in the original *Guild Wars*, readers are referred to the article "Who Are The Druids?" on page 39. This article explores the druid's origins as once-corporeal beings that ascended to spirit form and their beliefs in the balance of nature, drawing on material from the original *Guild Wars* and earlier *Guild Wars 2* material as well as Episode 5.

Questions can be raised about Zinn's terraforming device and his means of arrival, however. Zinn apparently evacuated Rata Novus into Draconis Mons via asura gate, but gates normally require a receiving gate, especially in Zinn's time. Did Zinn have a gate that did not require one, or had he sent an expedition to Draconis Mons in advance? If so, how did it get there to set up a gate? Did they come in through the water, as we did, or did they dig their way in through the rock?

If Zinn's terraformer is recovered, it could prove to



be a threat or an asset in the future, depending on whether it is retrieved by the Inquest or the Pact. Zinn maximised its power by fuelling it with captive druid spirits; if the Inquest were to build their own, they may seek to power it through similar means, and possibly to use it as a weapon rather than Zinn's more constructive goals (however devastating those goals might have been to Draconis Mons' pre-existing biome). Conversely, if the Pact was to obtain it and find a suitable power source, it could be valuable in restoring locations that have been corrupted by Dragons or devastated by other disasters, such as the ruins of Orr.

ONE PATH ENDS

Speaking of the ruins of Orr, the final episode gives us our first real look at what has been happening in Orr since the fall of Zhaitan and the archaeological expeditions into Arah that followed.

Here, we see efforts of the sylvari (including the Firstborn Dagonet, formerly the Pale Tree's ambassador to Divinity's Reach) not only to restore Orr, but to redeem the Risen. The interesting thing here is that we've known for some time that a means to do so does exist in Orr, using the Altar of Glaust within the Forgotten path of the Arah explorable dungeon. So why aren't the sylvari using that? Is it out of reach? Has it already been used on the captive Risen, but the Risen still cling to their old loyalties despite now having the choice to do otherwise? Or is it simply that the Altar can only process so many Risen, and the sylvari are looking for a faster alternative?

Whatever their motivations, what we see suggests that most of the sylvari experiments have been failing.

Also taking center stage is the reliquaries themselves. It is suggested that the reliquaries were veiled during the time between the Exodus and the Cataclysm, hiding the statues of Abaddon that are, apparently, an inherent part of the system. However, we see clear evidence that Balthazar has visited the reliquaries at some point, and in fact, this is why one of Lazarus' aspects was here. If this was not the first time Balthazar visited the reliquaries, could this, as hypothesised by the Shadow of the Dragon podcast, be how he acquired one of Lyssa's mirrors with which to perform his deception?

Possibly more interestingly, could the reliquaries have been visited by a mortal just prior to Orr's fall? The reliquaries are, after all, positioned reasonably close to Khilbron's tower, and as a powerful spellcaster and, apparently, a secret follower of Abaddon, it seems quite likely that he had the means to penetrate the veil that once protected the reliquaries. Could the reliquary of



Abaddon be where Khilbron found the forbidden scrolls he employed to invoke the Cataclysm?

Beyond Orr itself, the final episode of the season did put the spotlight on two important artifacts, both of which have ramifications for the history of Tyria - even if the one that people were expecting to see with Livia's return, the Scepter of Orr, remains conspicuous in its absence.

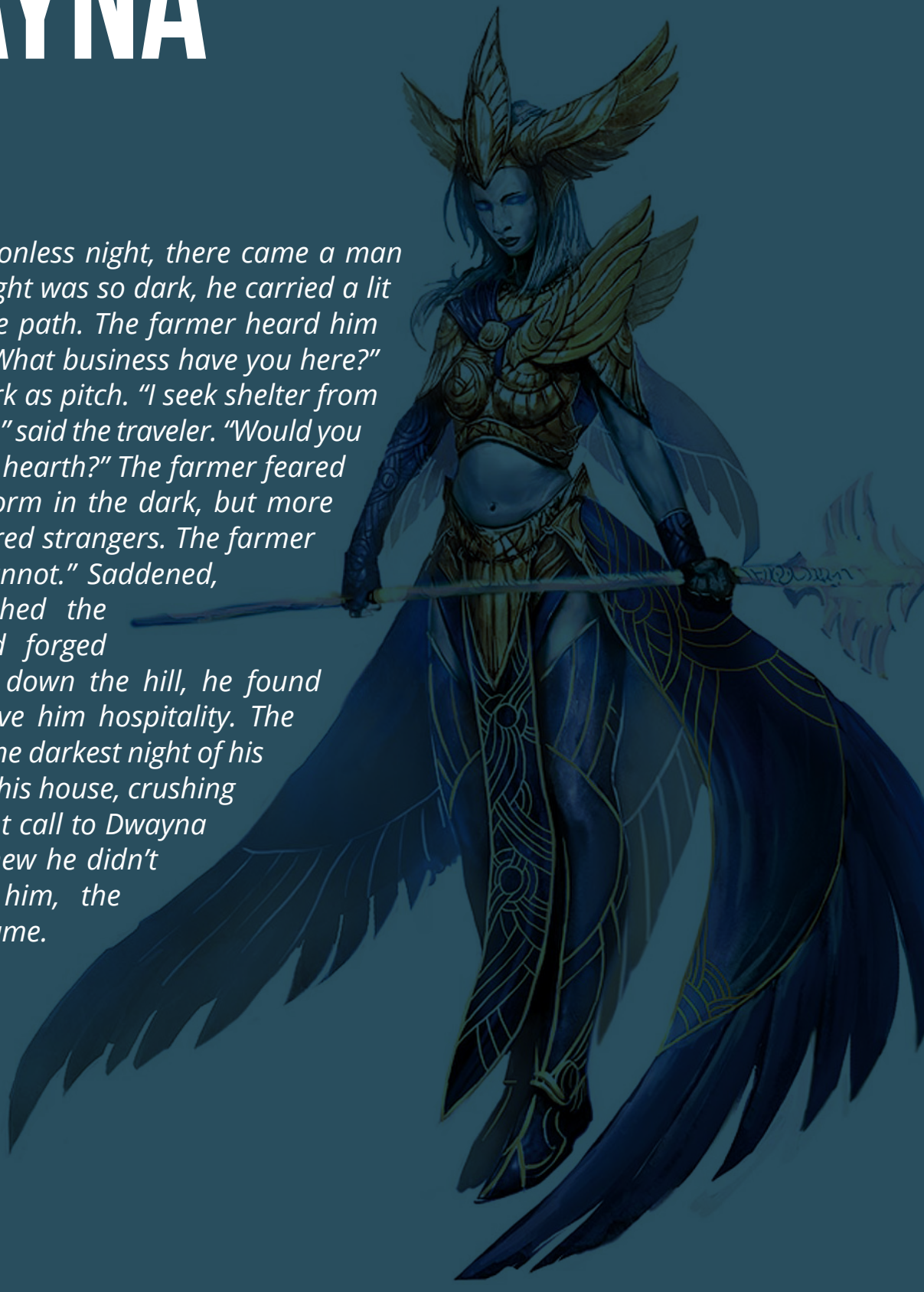
The first artifact is the Shining Blade, which also serves as the model for a newly-introduced legendary. It is mentioned, quite casually, that the artifact was passed onto the Shining Blade by the last of the Seers in order to be used to kill the last mursaat, before the death of the Seer.

This revelation casts new light on a question that has been hanging since the War in Kryta. During that content, a Seer could be seen in the back of the lab being used by Zinn and Blimm, apparently being experimented on in some fashion. Questions have been raised since on whether the Seer was a voluntary part of the experiment, a captive, or simply a body that had been obtained by the Shining Blade. The reference to an artifact being gifted to the Shining Blade, one that seems to be custom-made to match their symbol (not the other way around, as the Shining Blade was formed before they first encountered the Seers), suggests that the Seer was a willing ally.

The second, of course, is the Eye of Janthir itself. Where previously the Eye had only been known to perceive what is in its general area, in the final scene we see it being used as a scrying device. While the exact method of its use is different, could there be some connection between the Eye of Janthir and the scrying pool at the heart of the Eye of the North?



THE PARABLE OF **DWAYNA**



Upon a cold, moonless night, there came a man to a farm. The night was so dark, he carried a lit candle to find the path. The farmer heard him and called out. "What business have you here?" The farm was dark as pitch. "I seek shelter from the coming storm," said the traveler. "Would you invite me to your hearth?" The farmer feared riding out the storm in the dark, but more than that, he feared strangers. The farmer replied, "No, I cannot." Saddened, the traveler wished the farmer well and forged onward. Farther down the hill, he found a family who gave him hospitality. The farmer suffered the darkest night of his life. A tree fell on his house, crushing his leg. He did not call to Dwayna for help as he knew he didn't deserve it. For him, the morning never came.

DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

At first glance, the parable of Dwayna appears to be a simple morality tale. The farmer disobeyed Dwayna's strictures of mercy and compassion, and therefore he could expect no help from the goddess in turn.

However, there are aspects to this tale that might indicate that something deeper is happening here; a context that the devout Orrians might immediately recognise when Krytans today might not. While the storm might appear to simply be the context for this tale of morality, it may be significant that the danger which threatened the traveller and claimed the farmer's life was a storm and not some other threat. After all, Dwayna is most commonly worshipped as a gentle goddess of life and healing, but she is also the goddess of air, wind, and storms. Thus, the presence of one raises the possibility that this series of events was no mere happenstance, but instead a story of Dwayna taking vengeance on the farmer.

Both Lyssa and Dwayna have been known to disguise themselves to test mortals. For instance, the Canthan hero Karei was chosen for greatness by Dwayna after he refused payment from the noble she had disguised herself as, and a similar test in the Scripture of Lyssa is well known to any scholar who studies the gods. To the Orrians, this might have been interpreted as another test with Dwayna having created the storm herself and taken the disguise of a male traveler in order to verify the farmer's compassion... or lack thereof.

Thus, the farmer's choice not to beseech Dwayna for help may not simply be out of a general awareness that he could little expect help after denying it to another; instead, it may be because he was brought low through a means related to the goddess so soon after refusing hospitality. Thus, he may have concluded that he had been tested and found wanting, the tree falling onto his house as Dwayna's punishment. And if a god sees fit to punish a mortal, can the mortal really expect the god to help him through the punishment?

In truth, perhaps he could have received that help had he asked if the stories of Dwayna's mercy and compassion are true. Maybe if the farmer had called out and asked forgiveness for the wrong he had committed, Dwayna would have relented. Alternatively, perhaps Dwayna had known of the possibility that the tree would fall on his house, and had sent the traveller so he could have someone to help him in his time of need. Either way, the farmer did not call for help, and for him, the morning never came.



KORA'S INTERPRETATION

The story starts off by providing the setting: a cold and dark night. There is no moon in the sky to illuminate neither the path nor potential danger. Traditionally, societies instill a fear of moonless nights as times when monsters, both real and imagined, roam freely. Yet, this night, a man travels alone as he searches for a place to rest. With him, he carries a candle, a symbol of his hope that he will be kept safe and find his way to safety.

As the traveler approaches shelter, the farmer who lives there hears the man and calls out to halt the traveler. To venture out on a night like this is dangerous, but the farmer doesn't ask if the traveler is in need of help. Instead, his phrasing is only concerned with what the traveler seeks to gain from the farmer. The words the farmer uses, while not especially harsh, are also not inviting nor kind. The farmer expresses no concern for why this traveler would be out on such a hazardous night; his only concern is for himself.

Here the traveler not only makes a request for aid from the farmer, he also offers a gift. He gives the farmer a warning: a storm is coming. The implication is that by asking the farmer to share the warmth and safety of his home, the traveler, in return, offers the farmer the safety of not being alone when the storm hits.

However, the farmer is ruled by his fear: of the unknown; of the storm; of the dark; and most of all, of strangers. The farmer turns away the traveler and in doing so turns away his own hope that the world is not so dangerous a place. The traveler too could allow himself to be ruled by these same fears. He could have stayed wherever he'd been before the start of the story and tried to weather out the storm there, but instead, he lit a candle and let his hope guide him so that he would find safe refuge.

Moreover, rather than resent the farmer and throw curses at him, the traveler wishes the farmer well and continues down the path, hoping to find shelter. A family does end up taking the traveler in. We don't know the specifics, but based on the word "family," we can assume two parents, perhaps a child or two, and maybe even an elder living in the residence. The old and young could be easy victims to a stranger with violent desires; if the traveler wished to do so, it wouldn't be hard to wait until the family slept to do them harm or steal from them. And yet, the family takes the traveler in. They see his hope and meet it with their own. A hope that they all survive this night unscathed.

But for the farmer who turned his back on hope and gave into his fears, this night would be his last. The traveler's warning came true. The storm arrived and brought wreckage down upon the farmer's home. Injured and alone, the farmer could not escape, but he also chose not to call out to the gods for help; even from Dwayna, who was known to be merciful. He felt undeserving of her aid due to the fact that when the traveler came to him and called for help, he turned the man away. In his mind, why would the goddess help someone who refused to give help to others?

If we look back at the definition of what a parable is, "a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson," then one could say the lesson is to not give into fear, or perhaps to not turn away a person in need of help; however, there is also another lesson. Dwayna is the goddess of light and life. It is hard to believe that had the farmer called out to her - asked for her aid, and promised to spend the rest of his life providing aid to others - that she would have ignored his plea. So, perhaps the real lesson in this story is in believing in your own self worth - in believing that everyone deserves to be saved and to have a second chance... even one's own self.

CHASING DRAGONS

BY **MIKO**

Comparing the storytelling across Living World seasons.

We're heading back to Elona! And with *Path of Fire* nearly upon us, many players are taking alts through Living World Seasons 2 and 3 as they get ready for the expansion's story and farm materials and gold for any more surprise legendary trinkets ArenaNet may have up its sleeve. Replaying these stories provides a striking contrast in how the Commander's guild came together before *Heart of Thorns* and then seemingly fails to stay together once their objectives diverge and become less clear.

DISCOVERING SCARLET'S IMPACT

One of the most frequently heard opinions is that Season 2's story is more cohesive and interesting, and does a better job of setting up the expansion that came after it. Throughout Season 2, the Commander and the rest of the main characters worked together to solve the mysteries and dangers which Scarlet Briar's destruction of Lion's Arch unleashed. From the first episode, "Gates of Maguuma," the group is forced to come together and rely on each other to try and figure out why massive vines are invading areas and how, if at all, this is connected to Scarlet's mayhem. Right away, the characters become a bit more invested in the Seraph outpost they help to defend in Tangle Root since Belinda Delaqua, Marjory's sister, is stationed there. This reliance on





character relationships becomes a common thread throughout the season.

As the group move out to Dry Top, their investigation shifts to open up two narratives: the story of Scarlet's motives and the story of the Zephyrites. These two threads continually intersect so that learning more about Scarlet's motives and origin weaves and helps drive the player's desire to know more about why the Zephyrites were attacked by another sylvari, and why their leader, the Master of Peace, has fled. As Mordremoth's power and reach grow, so does the story build as the Commander's group discovers the Ley-Line Hub, Omadd's Machine, the effect of magic on the Waypoint Network, and confirmation that an Elder Dragon has awoken.



Even side stories like Rytlock's attempt to cleanse Ascalon of the Foefire Curse, his subsequent disappearance into the Mists after Sohothin's descent, and the still unexplained detail that the Priory holds a relic connected to the current heir of the Krytan throne, serve to create greater tension through what they foreshadow and also reveal about the season's main plot. Players felt the shock of Rytlock's disappearance, and while Belinda's death might not have touched them deeply, its effect on Marjory did. Season 2 made us care about these characters. We cared about how they hurt and, when the guild was seemingly betrayed by Caithe and her theft of

Glint's egg, we felt that betrayal.
Chasing after Caithe and learning where she might be by learning about her past indirectly - through memory imprints left behind - cleverly made the Commander (and through the Commander, us) sympathetic to her. We could see how Caithe and the Firstborn sylvari struggled to understand the world and how their nearest neighbors, the asura, regarded them. We could feel Caithe's growing unease with Faolain's obsession to unearth Wynne's secret. And, finally, we felt her pain at killing Wynne in order to protect her from Faolain, and protect the secret that the sylvari are actually minions of an Elder Dragon. And this moment made the earlier attack by the Shadow of the Dragon on the Pale Tree all the more poignant. By the time the Commander wrote in the Story Journal at the end of "Point of No Return" that "Saving Glint's offspring is paramount to Tyria's survival against the Elder Dragons. I must recover it," players were all in. The cinematic trailer surprised us at the end of the season because, not only would we continue the story, but it would be through an expansion to the game, leaving players elated. We wanted to know where the story was going, how we could find Caithe and Glint's egg, and what had happened to Rytlock.

"We could see how Caithe and the Firstborn sylvari struggled to understand the world and how their nearest neighbours, the asura, regarded them.

With *Heart of Thorns*, we got answers to some of those questions. We saved the egg, called a reluctant truce with Caithe for the benefit of the greater good - killing Mordremoth - and we got Rytlock back (though he refused to tell us anything about his time in the Mists). Season 3 of the Living World, then, began with cemented bonds between the Commander's friends, born by the trials and triumphs they endured and shared in the jungle. Yet unlike Season 2's cohesive two-pronged narrative, Season 3's two-pronged focus had many side shoots that seemed to detract from the story. Ironically, this is not unlike the seemingly scattershot approach that left many players baffled by Season 1 while it was happening. And just as that first season's heavy foreshadowing was completed through the endpoints in Season 2 and *Heart of Thorns*, I believe we won't understand the full impact of the various side threads Season 3 began pulling until we get through *Path of Fire*, and perhaps into Season 4.

RE-ENTER THE HUMAN GODS

The major story arc of Season 3 is centered on the machinations of one character, Balthazar, human god of fire and war. And just as it took time to unmask Scarlet as the main plot driver in Season 1, it took until the penultimate episode in Season 3 to learn that Balthazar was the shadow we'd been chasing all along. To dispel that shadow, however, the Commander had to follow two disparate narratives: the White Mantle and the truth behind its leaders and impact; and the growing power and threat of the Elder Dragons. What one had to do with the other is still not fully apparent.





To get to the end of the final episode, "One Path Ends," the Commander had to learn things both within the major episodes and also via optional gameplay like Current Events (now called Side Stories in the Achievements section of the Hero panel) and raids. Of these two, raids provided the greater narrative affecting the Commander's main story in Season 3: the story of the White Mantle's fortress in the Forsaken Thicket, and the truth about the disappearance of the founder of the White Mantle, as revealed through the Bastion of the Penitent. Through these we learn that the White Mantle never truly disappeared, and that Caudecus Beetlestone of the Krytan Ministry was their current leader; and that the Eye of Janthir still exists. And though out-of-raid, in-game narratives are available for those who didn't pursue this content; the narrative impact of encountering these story details firsthand, in my opinion, adds a bit more flavor to a player's experience.

Compounding the disjointedness of Season 3 is how the Commander's group begins to splinter almost from the minute they choose a name for themselves. Rytlock is arrested by the charr legions and disappears (again) for the rest of the season; Caithe's timing continues to be awkward, choosing to apologize for her past behavior while investigating the exploded bloodstone in "Out of the Shadows"; Marjory decides to keep "Lazarus" company against our advice; Braham is ticked off the Commander and Rytlock chose to start a new guild for everyone ***and*** that we're not chasing the Dragons with him; Rox doesn't have much to say for herself other than she's watching over Braham; and Kasmeer doesn't appear until the penultimate episode - with her noble title restored (which is not shown on screen or commented on) - only to disappear again when we unmask Lazarus as Balthazar. Even Dragon baby Aurene hatches, is bonded with, and then seemingly forgotten. The only constant in Season 3 is Taimi, who has slowly earned the Commander's respect and trust, particularly since Season 2.

Much to many players' dismay, however, the disappearance of the guild's main characters was made worse by the fact that Taimi was used heavily as a *deus ex machina* device rather than fleshing out her character more interestingly. Of course, the counterargument to this is that it's natural that Taimi would be the one to solve the mysteries of the excess magic released by two dead Elder

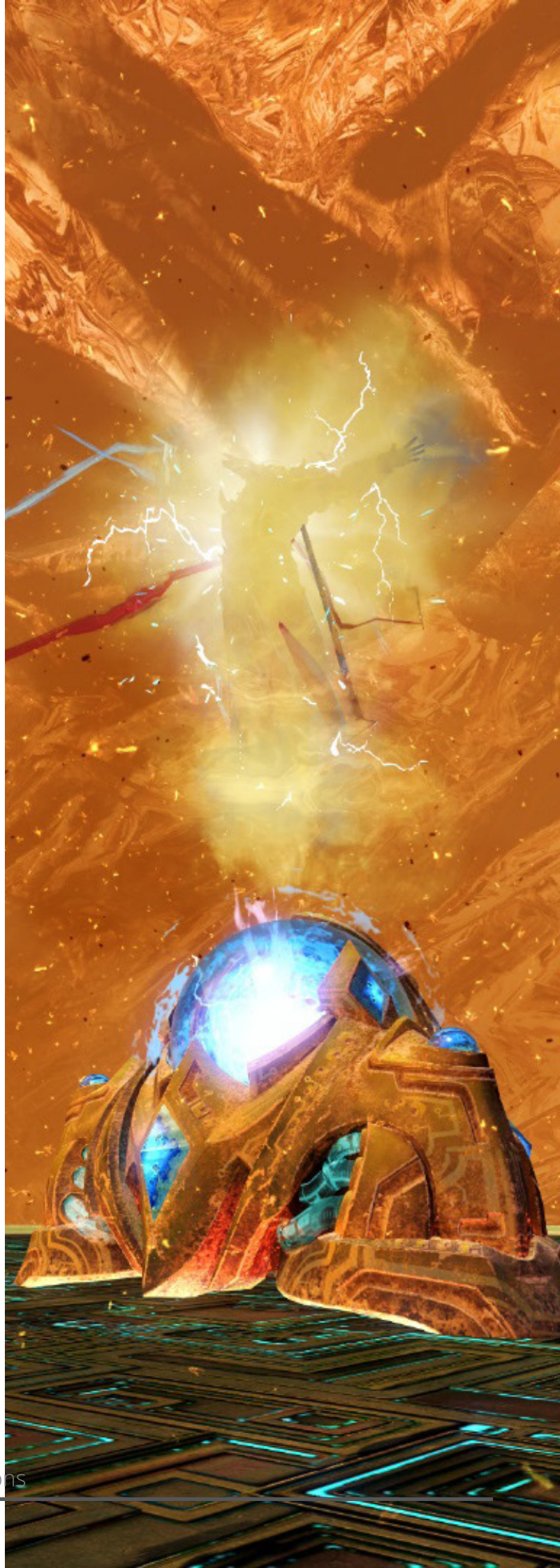
Dragons and an exploded bloodstone: she's a scientist and an asuran scientist at that; her character as an eager, incorrigible genius is legend! Both of these arguments have some merit, and both fail to recognize that Taimi is learning from her mistakes and is now taking steps to rectify or atone for these. "This is my fault," she tells the Commander near the end of "Flashpoint," after Balthazar pinched her machine in order to use it to destroy the Dragons for his own reasons. "I wasn't going to let you go it alone."

The cohesion of Season 3 is strained again in its finale episode, "One Path Ends." If Balthazar's reappearance in the *Guild Wars* story wasn't enough of a nostalgic shock for some players, in Episode 6 the Commander gets to close off the White Mantle thread by tracking down the real Lazarus with help from another *Guild Wars* surprise: Livia. Why this reveal is saved for the final episode is still unclear. After all, the Eye of Janthir shows us where Balthazar has gone: the Crystal Desert.

Where Season 2 left us feeling satisfied and eager to pursue a Dragon, Season 3 ends with too many questions unanswered, the two most important being:

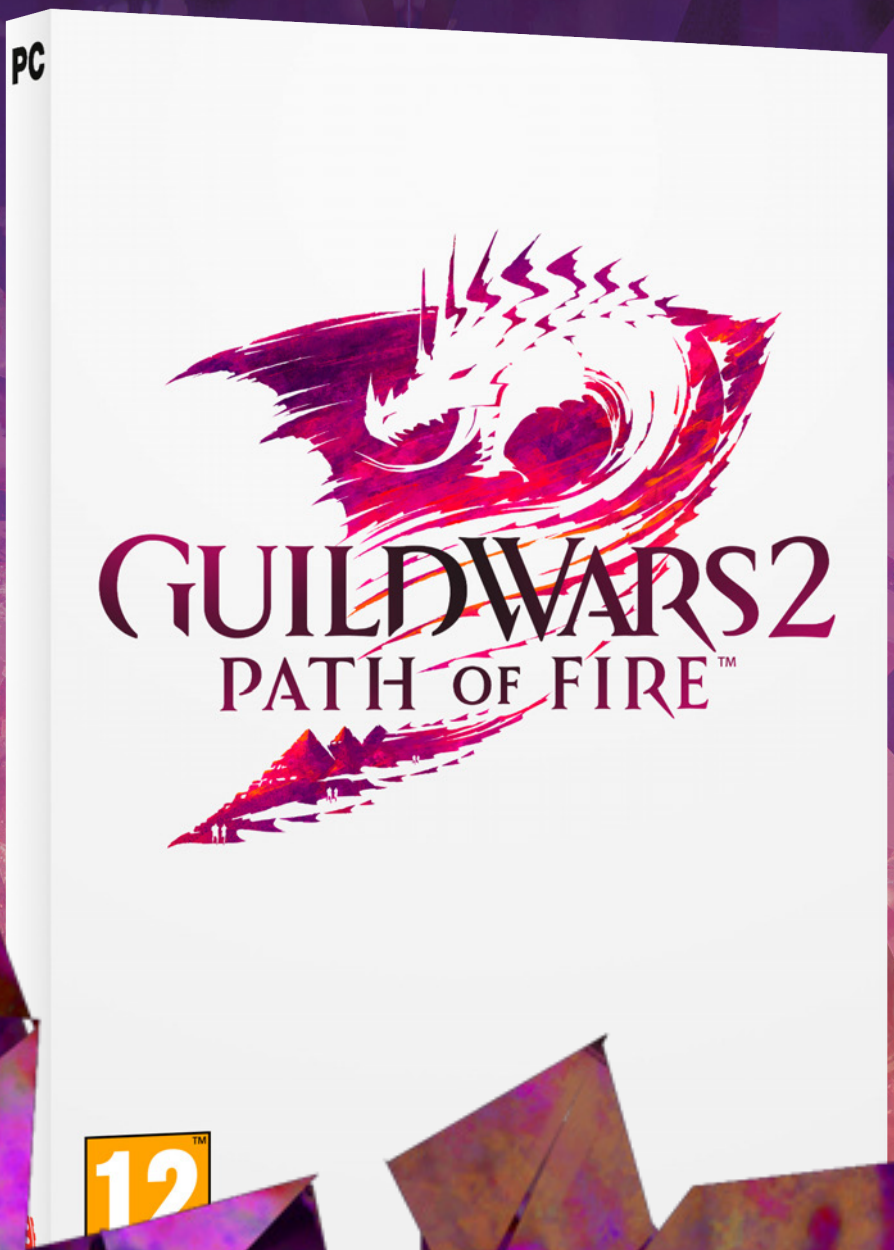
• Why did Balthazar have to disguise himself as Lazarus, of all people?
• Why were the White Mantle and the mursaat the vehicles necessary to re-introduce the human gods into Tyria's story?

Luckily, we will only have had to wait six weeks to, hopefully, get some answers in *Path of Fire*. We may not have the same hype we had before *Heart of Thorns*, but we also don't have to wait 10 months to get back into the story. Let's hope we'll see Season 3's crinkles smoothed out when we get there.



SUPPORT GUILDMAG

GUILDMAG.COM/EXPANSION



INTERVIEW
COMPETITIVE FEATURE PACK



BY XEROE

With the release of an update intended to remedy some of the issues involving PvP and WvW, we felt it was time to ask the community affected by these changes and see what their thoughts are. In this interview, we spoke to two prominent members of the PvP and WvW community: Jebro and Gladomer.

GLADOMER (WVW)

Has the feature pack given you more content to utilize and make your time more enjoyable?
I think the feature pack gave me more stuff to do and spend my time on. It gave me more stuff to go after as far as skins.

Have you seen a higher population of players return to the Mists?
I did see a lot of returning and new players come back to WvW after the feature pack.

Do the new WvW sets represent the grandeur and style you would associate with skirmishing in the Mists?
I think the WvW sets look ok; I think the top tier WvW set is amazing with the effects and with the high level requirement it's not as easy for newer WvW players to just come in and get, which is nice.

Is it on par with where the rest of the game is at for rewards?
I would say WvW is in a better spot now than before the feature pack in terms of rewards, but I think it should have been added to WvW sooner. I think it's in a decent spot compared to the rest of the game.

Was the addition of the new legendary backpiece for WvW something you thought should have been added long ago?
The addition of the WvW backpiece should have been added a long time ago back when other modes like PvP were getting the updates to its reward tracks and when they added the other legendary backpacks.

What future improvements or features would you like to see in your respective game mode?
I'm not sure what I'd like to see as most of my thoughts were implemented with the feature pack. I think mainly for me, being a roamer, I would like to see some incentive for roaming-type gameplay groups of 1-5 instead of most just zerging.





Warbringer
The New Legendary World versus World Backpiece introduced with the Competitive Feature Pack.

What future improvements or features would you like to see in your respective game mode?
I'm not sure what I'd like to see as most of my thoughts were implemented with the feature pack. I think mainly for me being a roamer I would like to see some incentive for roaming type gameplay groups of 1-5 instead of most just zerging.



JEBRO (PVP)

What are your thoughts on the new PvP lobby? Compared to its previous version.
The new lobby is definitely a breath of fresh air. I don't really think a lot of it is used for perhaps the purposes they envisioned; the dueling area is all vs all, which is fun to a degree but is rarely visited now the novelty has worn off. Added to this, only a certain amount of players have access to the controls for the area, such as the monthly AT winners. Those controls are fun, adding bosses from the forest map and other effects to the dueling area.

The addition of the llama hunting was a fun addition to the lobby but again lasts 30 mins or so and that's out the way. Really it's about the gliding I suppose, but more often than not you see the same people everyday standing in the map waiting for a queue pop. There is also a daily jump puzzle, but again it's not likely that many PvPers are using that on a daily basis; I know I'm not. All in all it's a vast improvement on the last area, but really I'm not sure what they could add to improve it further. Possibly a queued dueling area where the winner stays on or several mini rooms that could offer the same thing.

Have the new tournaments given you a satisfactory amount of replayability and reward?
Personally, I have enjoyed them. I have been able to form teams via the LFG and through my stream, and even map chat is fairly active with people looking for other players. That said, I can only speak for NA at present as that's my current region. Obviously since they were introduced there are less teams, but also it's summer which, as we all know, is a pretty quiet time in MMOs generally! We've also seen more players since the daily AT tourney changes to gold rewards.

Has the addition of the new styles of PvP (2v2, etc.) been surely needed since PvP has been in play?
To be honest, I have barely tried the 2v2 - I prefer the 5v5 game mode personally. We are thinking of running 2v2 tournaments should the interest be there for the Unity Gaming Org. I think Arenanet learnt their lesson with Stronghold; players love that conquest mode, but it doesn't mean a 2v2 ranked mode should be overlooked. Possibly a 2v2 AT tournament could really bring more interest, especially in the down time between the daily 5v5 ATs.

Do you think the new 2v2 deathmatch map will be turned into another form of ranked play?
From my previous question, at present no. I believe they will want a few more maps or community tournaments to really see if the community's interest is there. 2v2s are a tough one, it's really going to have to be a community driven thing in my opinion presently.

Since ranked is only on the 5v5 scale, do you think something like the arenas was needed to keep some of the community around?
I don't think it was introduced to keep people here per se. Players want the 5v5 game mode the most, but arenas give players the option for that 2v2 death match alternative. Also because of Stronghold, I feel they are testing the waters. More 5v5 competitive maps are really what the community wants.

Do you think it's a better idea for competitive updates to be bundled with other content or stick to feature packs?
Feature packs are good. The argument has always been to have more frequent balance patches to mix up the meta;. this really keeps the mode from being stale, rather than playing the same build for 1 year+ and slight balance changes having little or no impact on gameplay. Frequent balance changes in any PvP game are important to bring variety which keep the player active and interested.

What future improvements or features would you like to see in your respective game mode?
AT tournaments having a solo/duo join ability. ATs at present only allow a 5-man team to enter. This might be tough, of course, but perhaps a player assembly option so if you do queue up solo or duo, you are then matched with other players in a team and are put into the tournament, giving more players access. Genuinely, I want more balance patches more frequently, but I know this isn't something that is viable. The other main feature would be spectator mode for ATs so that I or others can showcase matches. This would be restricted though as it could be taken advantage of, unless of course there is a significant delay in spectating.



Triumphant Armour
New armour sets introduced with the Competitive Feature Pack.

COMPETITIVE CRAFTING (GLADOMER & JEBRO)

Does the addition of needing to craft certain tokens for the new PvP and WvW rewards help or hinder the experience for acquiring them?

Glad: I think the tokens you need to craft for the armor are only there for the sake of trying to balance all the ascended armor vendors in the game modes. I don't think it hinders the experience since it makes it more of something you just walk up and get, compared to something you put a little bit more effort into getting. To me it makes it a little fairer between the game modes.

Jebro: I think an addition of being able to craft legendary armour is great! It makes sense to not have the skin as it's primarily a PvE reward. That being said, the crafting tokens were a steep nerf to season 5 where we were easily able to gain access to ascended armour - I think there was a happy medium that wasn't reached with that system. However, it makes more sense now that legendary armour can be crafted using those pieces. I myself have chosen the PvE route; this is Fashion Wars after all.

Does it make you want to do more PvE content to acquire crafting materials needed rather than just simply working in a reward track or resource nodes?

Glad: I don't think the addition of the tokens makes me want to do PvE to get crafting materials needed for them since I get most of these mats in WvW.

Jebro: Yes! I enjoy the game in its entirety. So going to PvE can really mix it up. I'm not a hardcore farmer of items, but it is a nice break especially in off-season. But I'm not farming for the items for PvP, it's more the PvE armour. I WILL be doing it for my alts though which wear heavy armour.

Do you feel it's on par with crafting through the PvE means?

Glad: I would say I think it is good they added the token to it to somewhat make the armor priced similarly to doing it the PvE way, so I feel it's at least close to being on par with the PvE way.

Jebro: That I am not sure; I can probably answer this better when I have been able to craft both. Really it will vary for most because it's about time/gold, and how much you have of both, and which you enjoy. If you enjoy PvPing and you can get a legendary just through that means then cool. If you're in a rush, PvP might not be the main option for most. There's time gated items for both, as you are limited in gaining certain rewards in PvP per season. I think you'll have to come back to me on this one!





Overall it sounds like the changes have been well received and both modes of play are ascending to a better state of being! As with any form of competitive play, all you can do is implement changes and take feedback; but ArenaNet has turned that feedback into yet another excellent feature pack. We'd like to thank both Gladomer and Jebro for taking the time to answer our questions - make sure you visit their awesome streams!

GLADOMER
twitch.tv/gladomer

JEBRO
twitch.tv/jebrounity



THE PARABLE OF BALTHAZAR



Walking upon a battlefield strewn with the dead, Balthazar, the god of war, blessed each of the corpses for their valor, until he came across one who had not fought but had cowered. Balthazar could smell the stink of fear, and so he reached into the man and pulled forth his soul. He held it in place as he scrutinized it. The soul was no more courageous in death than it had been in life, and it trembled and whimpered. It bowed its spine and hid its face. "You," said the god, "do not belong here. You sully these brave men and women who died in honorable combat. You will cower behind them no more." Balthazar folded the soul, bent it and broke it, crushed it until it was hidden inside his clasped hands. Then he opened his mouth wide, and shoved the soul in, consuming it whole. Once it was gone, Balthazar shouted to the dead, "You carried this coward when he lived. Now, I carry him, for he serves as my reminder that strength and courage are never to be taken for granted."

DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

On the surface, the message of this parable is clear: Balthazar hates cowards, and punishes one by consuming his soul; however, there may be more to the story. In the context of recent events, this may have been a warning about how unstable Balthazar may have been becoming even then.

The first aspect here is that Balthazar's chosen punishment is the consumption of a soul. This seems to be a significant escalation in punishment. Eating souls is something that is normally associated with demons, not the gods or their servants. Grenth, for instance, is known for the harsh punishments he has given out to the guilty, but he is not known for destroying souls (in fact, it is possible that preventing the destruction of souls was part of his motivation for bringing down Dhuum). This may have been an early warning sign that Balthazar was close to crossing a moral event horizon.

A second aspect is that we know nothing about who the coward was. Was he a deserter? Had he joined the soldiers willingly, or had he been forced? Was he even a combatant, or was he in a noncombatant role, possibly even a person that the soldiers had laid down their lives for in an attempt to protect, an effort that was rendered futile by Balthazar's actions? We don't know, and the parable shows no evidence of Balthazar trying to find out. Perhaps he did know, and this was simply not mentioned in the parable. Perhaps Balthazar simply didn't care. Finding a coward among those who had fought and died bravely may have enraged Balthazar to the point that he did not bother to find out whether the soul he was punishing had betrayed the valiant dead by refusing to fight... or whether it was, in fact, Balthazar who betrayed the ones who had fought by taking the life and soul of one whom they had sought to preserve.

Finally, if we do take the perspective that the soul was every bit the dishonourable scoundrel that Balthazar had assumed, there may still be something more significant here than the fate of a coward. In light of recent events, including Balthazar's newly adopted stance that there is no honour in war, could the soul that Balthazar consumed have actually had a stronger effect than intended? Perhaps the soul itself influenced Balthazar from within, wearing away at his sense of honour and transforming him from the violent and quick-tempered, but otherwise honourable, being in history, to a deceiver willing to destroy a world if it would grant him more power? While it seems the parable is about the fate of cowards, this may actually be the beginning of Balthazar's own fall.



KORA'S INTERPRETATION

Balthazar, the god of war, blessed every corpse of every soldier that fell during battle. He didn't favor one army over the other; he saw all soldiers who fought as valiant and deserving of his respect. Then he came upon the corpse of one who hadn't fought, but hid. The text doesn't give us specifics about the man - all we know is that this person's fear had prevented him from fighting.

To Balthazar, fear is a powerful stink upon the soul, marking that soul as unworthy. Fear of battle and of dying in battle is not something that Balthazar understands. In some ways, he is like the norn: to die fighting for what you believe is right. It is the mark of a life well-lived

Balthazar judges the soul to have been "no more courageous in death than it had been in life," but it's unknown if the way this god judges courage is solely based off of willingness and eagerness to fight. It's unknown if Balthazar even recognizes that there are other types of courage a soul can possess, but maybe the god sees this particular soul as lacking in any type of courage, and so judges it on that lacking.

The god, after examining the soul, sees that it is not that of a warrior. While others around him fought for their cause, he hid, thinking only of saving his own life. In the end, hiding did not spare him and instead brought harsh judgement upon him in death. Bravery is not the absence of fear, but it is taking action even though fear is felt. Many of the soldiers who died on that battlefield had to have felt fear: fear as they charged into the fray; as they slew their enemies; and as they lay dying. Still, they ran toward the fight because they believed their actions would lead to a better future for those who lived on after they were gone.

The man hoped to avoid pain and suffering by hiding from the battle, but death still found him and in death, his cowardice led to his judgement. Found wanting, the god removes the unworthy soul, punishes it, and then takes it inside of himself. But, it's important to note the text doesn't say the soul is destroyed.

The god then talks to the dead that occupied the battlefield. He acknowledges the burden they shouldered by having the coward among their ranks. A coward who instead of helping protect his fellow soldiers, had to be protected by them. In taking the coward's soul into himself, Balthazar chooses to give himself a permanent reminder that not everyone is capable of bravery, and that the "strength and courage" it takes to be brave is a virtue that should always be respected.

Moreover, from this day on, Balthazar carries cowardice within himself, but no one ever judges him for holding fear inside of himself as he never lets fear stop him from the battles he must fight.

This story teaches us that being fearful is not a fault to be judged. Instead, it is only when we let fear stop us from doing what is right that we become cowards.





BY **STARCONSPIRATOR**

SHADOWS & FLAMES

SEASON 3 RECAP

Even after the death of an Elder Dragon, stories in *Guild Wars 2* move inexorably forward. The story that followed *Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thorns* took an interesting turn: what we thought would be a simple, constant fight from one Elder Dragon to the next ended up being a much more complicated matter. Odds were good that there would be no actual fight against another Elder Dragon this soon after the death of Mordremoth, but few, if any, players could have guessed exactly who we would end up fighting as the season came to an end.

WRAPPING UP LOOSE ENDS

The third season began with an invitation from Knut Whitebear asking us to attend Eir Stegalkin's memorial. Reporting to Hoelbrak, we had a chance to revisit Eir's legacy and recall her fate and the treachery that had stolen her from us. Reuniting with Rytlock, we learned that Braham had left Hoelbrak shortly after arranging the memorial; it is implied that the young norn was out killing dragon minions as a salve for his mother's death. Braham's emotional reaction to losing Eir shows how close the estranged son had grown to his mother in the short time they were together. Rox and Garm also made an appearance and we learned that they had stayed behind after Mordremoth's death and fought their way back from the jungle. Ever-loyal Rox set out to find Braham after dropping off Garm to recover. The celebration of Eir's life ends, bringing us several beginnings. One of the most significant being the new guild that Rytlock proposes, Dragon's Watch. With Logan and Zojja still recuperating from their ordeal in the jungle, Snaff and Eir dead, and Caithe M.I.A., this proposal seems logical. Braham, however, sees joining Dragon's Watch as abandoning his mother's memory. Nevertheless, building this new guild becomes one of the storytelling threads of Season Three. At this point in the story, Kasmeer, Marjory, and Taimi remain unaccounted for; although, Taimi soon reaches out and begins the next phase of the story.



Throughout the season, the plucky asura plays the role of moving the story forward with her letters and radio communications signalling nearly every new phase, many of them triggered by the asura's scientific discoveries and experimentation.

SETTING THE STAGE

The third season also opened up a number of maps. The first of these, Bloodstone Fen, is dominated by the crater left behind when the bloodstone there exploded, catching us in the blast. Luckily, an unknown force or being absorbed much of the energy released by the explosion. The map also introduces a new line of masteries, Ancient Magics, along with some expanded glider warfare mechanics and various collection items.



In Bloodstone Fen, the player searches for clues and survivors among the wreckage left behind by the explosion. The White Mantle and their Jade armor greet us here and the idea of the return of the mursaat is promising. At the bottom of the crater, we find the remnants of the White Mantle's camp and mining operations. Inside lies the center of the explosion and we learn that something was resurrected, absorbing the power of the bloodstone as it exploded; however, at this point, we do not yet know what or who absorbed so much power. While exploring the crater, we discover that the missing leader of the White Mantle, Caudecus, is in the area. Fearing that he may have been the one who absorbed the bloodstone's magic, we confronted him along with Marjory and Rytlock, who reappeared before the final battle.

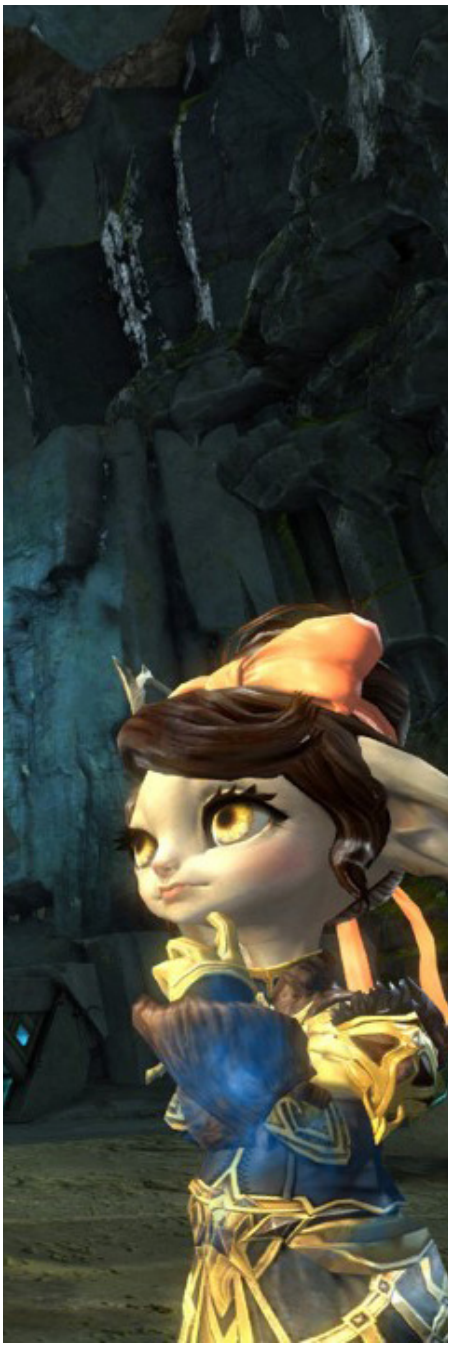
> "In Bloodstone Fen, the player searches for clues and survivors among the wreckage.

The fluidity of the team's lineup continues throughout the season, although Marjory and Kasmeer only appear from time to time. Mid-season, Rytlock too disappears, escorted back to the Black Citadel to answer for insubordination. Caithe, having appeared briefly in the bloodstone crater, is absent for most of the season. There are times during the season when it feels as if there is little substance to the new guild because of this fluidity and the loss of a number of regular characters.

The episode ends with a faceoff between us, and Caudecus and his forces. However, we soon discover it was not Caudecus who stood at the center of the explosion, but Lazarus the Dire, the last mursaat, now resurrected with the power of the bloodstone. In the final battle, Lazarus turns on Caudecus, uninterested in the petty struggles of the former human worshippers. Solving the mystery of why the mursaat spared us and our allies becomes one of the main focal points of the unfolding season. The other more important focus is Primordus, the Elder Dragon who was awakened as we confronted the White Mantle.

AND THEN THERE WERE TWO

Returning to Taimi, we discovered that both Jormag and Primordus were active at the same time, possibly awakened by the sudden rush of magic after Mordremoth's death. The asura informs us that Primordus has moved from the Shiverpeaks to the Fire Islands, where magic energy has pooled. We soon follow the dragon to the new map, Ember Bay, where, we find a new form of destroyer that has absorbed both plant and death magic. We also discover that Primordus' presence and the pooling energy is contributing to seismic activity in the area. In order to stop the earthquakes and save the island, we take up a side-quest to reinvigorate a series of dwarven artifacts. This, in turn, brings us to the mursaat fortress, where we learn some juicy tidbits of mursaat history.



The new maps include a number of similar mechanics, many of them initially seen in *Heart of Thorns*. These include: bouncing mushrooms, fast travel tubes, thermal tubes in the Fire Island and the Shiverpeaks, along with continued ley-line gliding and updrafts throughout all the new areas. Beginning in Ember Bay, repeatable hearts also became part of the maps, increasing the sense of each map being a "slice of time" as mentioned by Game Director Mike O'Brien in a recent news post.

BABY DRAGON



At the end of the second episode, we receive a vision of the egg in Tarir and hurry there to discover its fate. There, we witness its hatching and Lazarus the Dire joins us in protecting the newborn dragon Aurene from Primordus' forces who have invaded the sanctuary. This is an unexpected plot twist with Lazarus first sparing a group of humans and then aiding Glint's hatchling when all hope looks lost. For those keeping score, Glint, who was once Kralkatorrik's lieutenant, predicted the downfall of the mursaat in the Flameseeker Prophecies. For one to now aid her offspring seems very odd. After the battle, Marjory shoulders the responsibility of looking into Lazarus and investigating his claims that he has changed for the better and wishes to ally with those fighting against the Elder Dragons in order to save the world.

> " Glint, who was once Kralkatorrik's lieutenant, predicted the downfall of the mursaat in the Flameseeker Prophecies.

Although the story takes us far afield, we do return to Tarir to check on Glint's progeny, Aurene, and help the Exalted with her upbringing. These sections of the story, full of cuteness overload, are a sharp contrast to other threads of the tale, which focus on the increasing power of the White Mantle, Jormag, and Primordus, along with the mystery of Lazarus. While Marjory is away with Lazarus, we start the third episode playing a series of games with Aurene, hoping to instill in her several good characteristics, such as charity and compassion.

FIRE AND ICE

Despite the strange behavior of Lazarus, and Aurene's upbringing, Taimi remains focused on the two Elder Dragons. She asks us to search for an Icebrood, Jormag's minion, that has been affected by both death and plant magic. With a sample from that corrupted Icebrood, she hopes to discover a way to pit Jormag's and Primordus' energies against one another and destroy both dragons at once. Such a journey takes us far to the north to the new map, Bitterfrost Frontier. Here we find the kodan and their magic flame, along with their allies, the quaggan. Together, the quaggan and kodan hold Jormag's forces at bay. However, with the demise of Zhaitan and Mordremoth, Jormag has grown more powerful, and the corrupted Icebrood have reached a point to where they have nearly overwhelmed the allies' defenses. The desperate situation in the north may be in danger of





being downplayed and lost in the shuffle of intertwining stories as the threads continue to build toward the climactic ending with the attack on Divinity's Reach by the White Mantle and a faction of centaurs... and, ultimately, the discovery of Lazarus' true intentions.

An important plot point unfolds in the third episode which brings us back into contact with Rox and Braham. After collecting a sample from the corrupted Icebrood and returning to the nearby sanctuary, we hear that the local Svanir are hunting Braham, believing that he is the one causing trouble. Perhaps spurred on a bit by a guilty conscious - as we were the ones causing all the trouble - we hurry to find Braham and Rox. When we catch up to Braham, he is less than thrilled about the new guild and chooses not to join. Upon completing his search for a scroll that will enchant his mother's bow, he and Rox then return to Hoelbrak where Braham uses the new bow to chip the tooth of Jormag in the Great Lodge, setting up Braham to fulfil the legend of the hunter who breaks the tooth leading the norn people to victory over Jormag.

> "When we catch up to Braham, he is less than thrilled about the new guild.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE CASLE...

Leaving Rox and Braham in the far north, the story takes on a sidequest to Divinity's Reach where the White Mantle and centaur tribes have attacked! Upon returning to the city, Queen Jennah welcomes us to her garden party and we are able to mingle with the finest. As with so many of the queen's parties, it ends in destruction. However, this episode gives us a chance to have another course of court intrigue and politics, an aspect of the game that may not be to everyone's taste. Luckily, for those who do not find this aspect of the game enjoyable, it is short-lived and we return to the front lines soon enough.

Before leading the fight against the White Mantle, we are able to pay our respects to Trahearne, whose memorial is found in The Grove. We learn from Taimi that Braham has taken a small expeditionary force north to test Jormag's strength before committing a larger force to the task, buying us some time for Taimi to come up with a brilliant idea that will save the day. In the meantime, while she continues her experiments we are able to pass the time by saving civilians from the White Mantle and their centaur allies, aided by Logan, who has returned to command despite feeling changed by Mordremoth in some obscure way.



The battle against the White Mantle soon leads us back to Caudecus and we are able to resolve the situation, infiltrating the Minister's mansion and confronting him in a frenetic final battle. There, we discover the most

disturbing news... Lazarus was not actually resurrected! Something else came back from the Mists and absorbed the bloodstone... something that is now masquerading as Lazarus the Dire.

AND ALL SHALL BE REVEALED

With the revelation about Lazarus fresh in our minds, the story returns to Taimi, her experiments, and the dragons. At the Rata Novus lab where Taimi has completed her dragon magic-harnessing device, we are reunited with Kasmeer, who agrees to join our new guild, Dragon's Watch. Taimi has been busy while we were gone and has commandeered the heart of Omadd's machine to create a device that will allow her to manipulate the Eternal Alchemy and pit opposite Dragon energies against each other. However, before much can be done with the device, Marjory resurfaces, bearing information about the fake Lazarus: he has built an army of mercenaries, and Marjory suspects its purpose is not to fight the Elder Dragons. Together with Kasmeer and Taimi, we devise a plan to strip the fake Lazarus of his disguise using magical mirrors. While setting up these mirrors and enchanting them, Marjory and Kasmeer argue over Marjory's disappearance, providing a moment of character development, which people may miss if they are busy flying about looking for mirrors and stands. It isn't long before Lazarus appears and asks to see Taimi's device, and when we refuse, he attacks. By the end of the battle, Lazarus' illusion falls to Kasmeer's spell and the human god Balthazar is revealed. He lashes out at Marjory before departing with Taimi's device.



Kasmeer is visibly shaken by the human god's reappearance (something that shouldn't be surprising given the disappearance of the human gods from Tyria for hundreds of years). In fact, she is shaken to the point that she can't continue the fight and departs. Although she leaves, her reaction seems the most genuine of all those who confronted Balthazar in this episode and I feel this major reveal is a missed opportunity to expand on character dialogue and development. Confronting the human god of war leaves the humans shaken and questioning, but there isn't much dialogue variation between character races, leaving them all with a similar reaction. Instead, there is some cautious curiosity from Taimi and a bit of subdued disbelief from Marjory, which is in character for her.



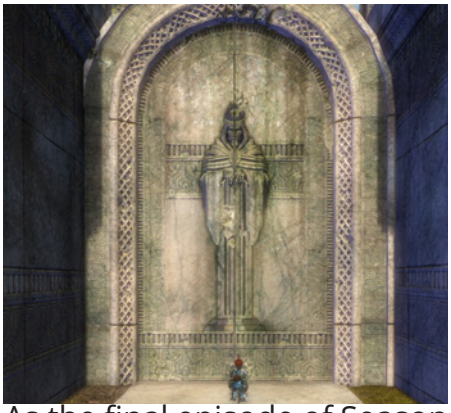
AT THE HEART OF THE VOLCANO

Following Balthazar in his weakened state gave us a chance to travel to another map, Draconis Mons. This map features a jungle environment hidden inside a volcano, with map mechanics we have grown used to. Even so, it can still be confusing and daunting, and on more than one occasion I was reminded of Tangled Depths and how difficult it was to decide which level of the map I was on and which level I needed to be on. Yet, it is full of spectacular scenery and the sulfuric water is a nice change of pace. Here, nostalgia of the original *Guild Wars* returns and we find druid spirits, ancient golems, and the final end to the golemancer, Zinn, a recurring character from the original game.

While searching for Balthazar, we receive word from Taimi concerning our original plan to thwart two Elder Dragons at once. According to her simulations, doing so could mean the end of Tyria! Although we aren't sure of a clear path forward, we Balthazar and return Taimi's device. After allying with the druids, we are able to follow the renegade god into the heart of the volcano, where we find him with Taimi's device, using it to attack Primordus. After a lengthy battle against Balthazar and his hounds, the device overloads due to our interference and Balthazar retreats. As an added bonus, the Elder Dragon appears to fall asleep again. This leaves only a few loose ends and seems to bring most of the main story threads to a close; the White Mantle has no leader with both Caudecus and Lazarus gone, Primordus is asleep again, and Divinity's Reach is relatively safe for now. What started as quite the conundrum has neatly resolved into just a few remaining problems left for the *denouement*.

SECRETS, NOSTALGIA AND ANOTHER BEGINNING

With the disappearance of Balthazar, we decided to check with his local priest to see if he could give us some insight into where the god of war may have gone.



As the final episode of Season 3 begins, Taimi has little to offer, which is unusual since she's been driving the plot forward with her experiments and machinations. Returning to Divinity's Reach, we find that Balthazar's followers are rejoicing in the streets, as only those dedicated to the god of war can, by brawling. Countess Anise and her new helper, Valette the Treasonous, greet us as well. When the priest of Balthazar assures us that he doesn't know where the god is, Countess Anise informs us that the Eye of Janthir is looking for Balthazar as well, thinking the god has one of Lazarus' aspects. We follow Anise's lead to Brisban Wildlands, searching for a Shining Blade operative who'd gone missing. When we find her; she's caught in a trap inside a White Mantle stronghold.



After helping her escape, we discover that this mysterious stranger is hunting the aspects of Lazarus and has been following the Eye of Janthir. The fights and puzzles in the White Mantle hideout are straightforward and enemies are not constantly harassing you while you attempt to

figure them out, which is nice. With the White Mantle dead, the Exemplar finds herself caught in yet another trap, allowing us to grab the aspect instead.

However, although we are able to retrieve the aspect of Lazarus, the Eye of Janthir escapes. In order to find out where the Eye had gone, we returned to Divinity's Reach to speak with Countess Anise at the behest of our new mysterious friend, the Shining Blade Exemplar. She instructs us to meet her at the mausoleum in Divinity's Reach. There, she shows us the hidden entrance into the Shining Blade's headquarters, and that's when things get really weird.

> "We discover that this mysterious stranger is hunting the aspects of Lazarus and has been following the Eye of Janthir.

We find ourselves deep underground where a large, stone fortress has been built. This is where Countess Anise and the other Shining Blade members pass the time when they are not protecting the Queen. We finally learn the Exemplar's name, Kerida, and discover that her mission is guarded by a sacred oath. In order to find out the truth, we must join the Shining Blade and take the oath as well. Concerned that we will be tied to the Queen, we are hesitant to take it, but Countess Anise assures us we will have the freedom necessary to come and go as we please. Joining the Shining Blade and suddenly having to take a sacred oath seems to require a bit of forethought and deliberation; however, Anise takes us directly to the initiation where we are inducted into the order of the Shining Blade.

The first step of the induction appears to be, at best, a hazing of sorts, with the player being set on fire, doused with water, and then beaten with stones. Afterwards, the second step of the induction ceremony delves into the history of the Shining Blade. With Countess Anise and Kerida playing the parts of Kiera and Shadow - characters familiar to those who played the first game - we witness the betrayal of Markis and the fall of the Henge of Denravi. Afterwards, we face a manifestation of our own self-doubt - a tricky battle where the recharge time on all our skills is increased as our crushing guilt increases. For those who wish, apparitions of Destiny's Edge members appear to aid you in battle. After defeating our manifestation, we are sworn to secrecy and give the aspect to Anise. It is only then that we learn Exemplar Kerida's mission: to assemble all the aspects and summon Lazarus the Dire - the real Lazarus the Dire - and destroy him. Although it is a crazy idea, we can only hope to find Balthazar by aiding her in her search for the Eye of Janthir.

Kerida sends us to Orr, one possible location for the Eye of Janthir, while she searches the Fire Islands. We are able to reach the final new map of the season, Siren's Landing, by boat from Lion's Arch. Here, we find a host of sylvari working to cleanse Orr.



death of Zhaitan so long ago; we were told that the land would heal, but now we know it's going to take some time before this is accomplished. While the new map mechanics we've been using so far are still found here, they seem less abundant. Bouncing mushrooms and ley lines are fewer. There also seems to be less unbound magic about. The Ancient Magics mastery, Siren of Orr, allows you to buff your allies in combat, while the skills required to complete the hearts in this area are granted by killing ley-line scavengers and using their ley-organs. Reclaiming the undead and completing other tasks help to reclaim Siren's Landing and fill the hearts given out by each of the long-dead rulers of Orr that you discover in this map.

> "Kerida sends us to Orr, one possible location for the Eye of Janthir, while she searches the Fire Islands.

Speaking to Dagonet, a Firstborn sylvari, we learn that the Eye of Janthir has gone inside Abaddon's reliquary, which is now sealed. The only way to open it is to light the other reliquaries in the area, which is done by harvesting ley-organs and completing tasks in each region. Only when the heart is filled can you move on to the next . Luckily, any number of actions will fill the hearts, including hunting down Risen and simply killing them the old-fashioned way. For those tired of the core game's Orrian maps, this final new map may not be a welcome sight. Alternatively, if you're like me and haven't really played much in Orr, the map is a reminder of the lost glory of the once-sunken land. I think the rulers as heart-NPCs is a nice touch, showing them as caring for the land now that it's free of the Elder Dragon Zhaitan.

After the hearts have been completed for all five gods - Grenth, Dwayna, Balthazar, Melandru, and Lyssa - the magical energy flows freely and we travel to Abaddon's reliquary to enter it, rejoined by Exemplar Kerida. She leads the way as we fight through a series of traps left behind, though none of them very taxing. After a few battles, we find ourselves in the presence of the Eye of Janthir, but Balthazar is nowhere to be seen. Instead, we have all of Lazarus the Dire's aspects in one place and can summon the true mursaat. After placing the aspects on the corners of a pentagram, Lazarus appears and Kerida reveals her true self: the necromancer Livia. A lengthy final battle then ensued, and after casting a number of spells, dodging a great deal of lightning and slaying the five aspects of Lazarus, we were able to strike the final blow against Lazarus with the original Shining Blade sword, destroying the last of the mursaat once and for all.

With the death of Lazarus, Livia reveals that she has been prolonging her life using the Scepter of Orr, fighting through centuries to rid the world of the mursaat and avenge Kryta. Of course, we are sworn to keep her secrets as fellow members of the Shining Blade. With the mursaat truly gone, we only had to ask the Eye of Janthir where Balthazar had gone. The vision received is full of flames, pyramids, and monolithic sculptures... the Crystal Desert calls.



WHO ARE THE DRUIDS?

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

A primer on the history and beliefs of the druids, penned by Scholar Eleanor Draxynnus in the Season of the Phoenix, 1330 AE.

With the Pact's recent expedition to Draconis Mons, a topic that had once been solely the interest of students of Tyrian history has suddenly become of critical importance to the Pact. With many Pact soldiers and agents being unaware of the background of the arboreal spirits they are now encountering, the Durmand Priory considers this knowledge valuable for Pact members deployed to regions in which druids may be encountered. With luck, hopefully this pamphlet will assist Pact officers in understanding what they are interacting with when encountering druids and, hopefully, avoid hostile encounters.



HISTORY

In the beginning, we worshiped Melandru, and through our devotion we learned to become one with nature, but that was not enough for the most devout. Those of us truly dedicated to Melandru chose to leave behind our physical forms and achieve a harmony with Tyria. In those early days, we all transformed once in a heartfelt ritual beneath a full moon. We amazed even ourselves and vowed to forever be the defenders of unspoiled nature. Over the centuries, others joined us, drawn by an innate urge to be one with nature, and we welcomed them to our Henge. After a time of blissful harmony with Melandru, we druids sensed changes in the very bedrock of Tyria. Some chose to sleep, seeking solace in the Mists. Others chose to continue creating and strove to preserve a measure of balance in nature. Our time in the Henge was idyllic but when faced with the unbalancing of Tyria, we left to tend to the very elements of magic. We traveled to all corners of the world, creating areas of harmony in nature. And there we have remained, tending our gardens, hoping that our quiet good work will help restore balance to magic.

- Kodama (Druid Spirit), 1330 AE

The history of the druids is, perhaps, one of the most mysterious of the human cultures. What is known is that, at some point in the early days of human civilisation, a fellowship of followers of Melandru abandoned that civilisation and took up residence in the Maguuma Jungle. They took up the role of stewards of the jungle, creating structures out of the plants and cliffsides that were common in the region. The greatest of their places of power was the Henge of Denravi, in the western part of what is now known as the Brisban Wildlands.

" The greatest of their places of power was the Henge of Denravi, in the western part of what is now known as Brisban Wildlands.

Then, sometime before the Searing, the druids disappeared - or so it was believed by the histories of the time. When the heroes of the Flameseeker Prophecies entered the jungle, initially at the behest of the White Mantle, it is said that an avatar of Dwayna revealed that the druids still existed, but they had "surrendered their mortal flesh to become one with the jungle." The avatar invited the heroes to witness a gathering of druid spirits, before the heroes travelled deeper into the Wilds for their fateful meeting with the Shining Blade. It has since been discovered that the abandonment of the Henge of Denravi occurred so that the druids could disperse, tending to locations across the Maguuma Jungle and beyond.

Nevertheless, the druids played little part in the outcome of the Flameseeker Prophecies and the Krytan Civil War. The records indicate that the heroes of the Prophecies enacted a ritual near Bloodstone Fen, using vine seeds to invoke the druids in order to establish their protection over the jungle. What effect this had, if any, is unknown. A druid spirit named Dark Oak was consulted on the matter of a possible traitor in the Shining Blade ranks - however, the cryptic prophecy that the spirit



provided could not be interpreted until after the mursaat had revealed themselves.

More significant was the hiding place that the druids had left behind. At that time, the warding magic over the Henge of Denravi still held strong, making it impossible for anybody to find the Henge of Denravi without having been there before. The key to this enchantment was a portal in Aurora Glade which could be activated by placing crystals on a trio of pedestals; the Shining Blade was able to claim the portal and, through it, the Henge, granting them a hiding place which they believed would be safe from the White Mantle. Disastrously, their suspicion that there was a traitor in their ranks proved to be true - their haven was short-lived before the traitor led a White Mantle army to the Henge, forcing the Shining Blade to disperse.

Since then, the Henge has continued to decay, and the protective wards have failed altogether. Despite this, druid spirits can still occasionally be encountered by adventurers in the wildlands, anchored to oakheart-like husks that serve them as physical bodies, or to various places of power within the region.

Despite their association with the Maguuma Jungle, the druids would play only a small role in the campaign against Mordremoth. Scholar Keenwit of the Priory, with the aid of Pact soldiers and an Exalted Sage, was able to summon an elder druid spirit at the Font of Maguuma near Northwatch. The spirit revealed that the removal of Mordrem from the Font was only a beginning step - each of the springs in the Auric Basin region resonated with the others, and to fully restore the Font would require the purification of the other springs as well.





The purified springs regained the magical properties of the Maguuma waters, but did not play a major role in the defence of Tarir, and no such purification occurred elsewhere in the jungle before the fall of Mordremoth. Recent events, however, have uncovered one of the hidden sanctuary of the druids, as the pursuit of the apparently rogue god Balthazar led the Dragonslayer to the secret garden beneath Draconis Mons.

> Druid spirits can still occasionally be encountered by adventurers in the wildlands.

From discussions with the druid spirits there, Draconis Mons was originally a volcanic, hollow proto-island beneath the waves, which they saw as an excellent place to hide

a garden. Unfortunately for them, a volcanic eruption - possibly the one that followed the defeat of the Lich Lord in 1072 AE - caused their sanctuary to rise above the waves and become a true island that could be located by others.

The first such interloper was Zinn, the disgraced golemancer and founder of Rata Novus. After the destruction of Rata Novus by the chak, the refugees located Draconis Mons by means unknown, and saw it as a suitable location for a new settlement which they would call Rata Arcanum. They quickly came into conflict with the druids, who objected to the introduction of "unnatural" asura magitech and other constructions which disrupted the harmony of their garden. This conflict would escalate over time, with Zinn imprisoning a group of druids in order to power a terraforming device. He attempted to use this device to transform the entire cavern into a farm to feed his city, but this was too much for the druids - they united to destroy the asura of Rata Arcanum, including Zinn, before the empowered device could be activated. They have since been attempting to restore the balance that Zinn disrupted.

Their efforts were set back by the recent arrival of Primordus and Balthazar. The presence of these beings of fire intensified the fiery energies in the garden, upsetting the balance between the elements that the druids had cultivated there.

Given this history, it is not surprising that the druids of Draconis Mons were reluctant to welcome the arrival of Pact forces. Many have proven to be openly hostile, assaulting Pact forces on sight. Others have been more tolerant as long as they see the Pact forces as helping to remove those that create greater imbalances, even assisting the Dragonslayer to pursue Balthazar into the heart of the volcano. However, they have made it very clear that they would prefer that the Pact, too, vacate Draconis Mons as soon as possible.

" A volcanic eruption - possibly the one that followed the defeat of the Lich Lord in 1072 AE - caused their sanctuary to rise above the waves.

With some coaxing, the druid Kodama has also revealed that, like her still-living human worshippers, the druids have not heard from Melandru in quite some time.



BELIEFS

All that exists is all that must be.
We are renewed by these waters. We are unchanged by these waters.
All that exists is all that must be.
Time moves neither forward nor back. Time is the lens of perception.
All that exists is all that must be.
The spirit beholds the truths that the eye cannot see.

It is not often that we allow mortals to witness our rituals, but we see in you the seeds of the divine. To be divine is to realize that we are all one. That the self is an illusion. Through this do you understand your own immortality. Through this are you freed from the illusions of the flesh.
Do not rush your understanding of these mysteries. Allow them to take root and mature gradually within you as the seedling in the soil.

- Druidic ritual as reported by the heroes of the Flameseeker Prophecies, 1072 AE

As far as we know, the druids never interacted with the kodan, but they espouse a philosophy of balance which appears to be very similar to that taught by Koda. While the druids are stewards of nature, they do not fight against forces of destruction unless they threaten to upset the balance - they see destruction as a natural part of nature.

This can be seen in the stories regarding the guardians of some of the druid's sacred places during the time of Krytan Civil War. While it is unsurprising to find followers of Melandru employing plant creatures such as Oakhearts to defend their groves, according to the stories this was only the first line of defence. Destroying one of the guardians serves as the alarm to awaken shadow creatures known as 'Ravagers', which employ necromantic powers to eliminate the attackers as quickly as possible. Another connection between the druids and powers of death is shown in the stories of Dark Oak - the prophecy obtained by the Shining Blade, for instance, was granted after the sacrifice of a centaur chieftain's heart.

The druids take this philosophy a step further than even the kodan. They believe that the concept of 'self' is an illusion - that everything in the world, from the land itself to the plants and animals and even the sapient beings that build civilisations across Tyria, are all part of a single, undivided whole. For the druids themselves after their ascension, this certainly appears to be true - the druid spirits are closely tied to the land they inhabit, to the point where it could be argued that they have become the spirit of the land. Whether they are correct about other sapient beings, which have seemingly distinct souls that travel into





the Mists upon their death, is not so clear.

Regardless of their beliefs about maintaining balance, the druids maintain a series of hidden gardens within Tyria. Draconis Mons is clearly one of those, and conversations with one of their spirits there suggest that the hidden garden we know as Deirdre's Steps may be another, which has currently been abandoned by the druids in order to focus on restoring the balance upset by Zinn and Primordus in Draconis Mons.

According to another of the spirits, the druids hope that the gardens they seek to preserve may help to maintain the balance of magic in Tyria. However, they still accorded a special significance to the Maguuma, which they regarded as "the heart of Tyria". Why they attributed such importance to the Maguuma is currently unknown.

Finally, one report from the Dragonslayer indicates that the druids have not approved of the Dragonslayer's activities thus far - according to the druid spirit known as Rosewood, our field of vision has been narrow and has resulted in harming the natural world rather than helping to heal it. Despite the damage done to nature by the dragons, it appears that the druids believe that slaying them is not the appropriate response - although what the appropriate response might be, they have yet to say.

> "The druid spirits are closely tied to the land they inhabit, to the point where it could be argued that they have become the spirit of the land.



RECOMMENDATIONS

This is what happens when outsiders come. We lose. You lose. Tyria loses. Please, take your people and go.

- Druid Stormknot, Eternal Pool incident, 1330 AE

When interacting with druids, or with places where druids may be present, it is important to remember: they, like us, are working for the preservation of Tyria. While it is naturally expected that Pact personnel will defend themselves if attacked, it is probably not in our long-term interest to bring further destruction on the druids. When conflict does occur, it is better, when practical, to find some means to contain a hostile druid spirit rather than to destroy it. Both the charr and the asura have developed technomagical devices capable of containing spirits - making use of such devices might allow for a battle to be ended without permanent harm to either side.

Regardless, it is preferable that the Pact avoid any conflict with potential allies. Pact officers should learn to recognise sites which may be of importance to the druids, and Pact magic-users should familiarise themselves with the 'feel' of druidic magic in places that have been verified as not triggering a hostile druidic response, before being posted to locations where places sacred to the druids might be present. An unknown location that is identified as possibly druidic should not be entered uninvited if it can be avoided, even if no druids are immediately obvious to be present. We do not want any repeats of the Eternal Pool incident in Draconic Mons if it can be avoided.

> "When interacting with druids [...] it is important to remember: they, like us, are working for the preservation of Tyria.

Naturally, any druid spirit that should choose to manifest to Pact forces should be shown respect, and any requests made by a druid should be heeded, unless doing so would conflict with wider Pact directives or would expose Pact personnel to excessive danger.





THE PARABLE OF MELANDRU

One day, the goddess Melandru came upon a den of foxes, and she heard within the hungry cries of kits. She bent her ear to the ground and learned that the mother fox had been killed by a farmer. The cubs were doomed to starve to death, and thus was the way of nature. Melandru sought out the farmer, and asked him why he had killed the fox, thus condemning its kits to sure death. The farmer explained that the fox had killed one of his chickens, and therefore he had taken his vengeance upon the fox. "Thus," said Melandru, "is the way of nature." Later that year, the farmer prayed to her, calling her name in his darkest moment. In his presence, she saw that he was in mourning and asked what had happened. "Wolves," he said, "have taken my daughter. Can you not bring her back to me?" Melandru was not unkind as she said, "No. Thus is the way of nature."



DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

One interpretation of the parable of Melandru is that it is simply a reflection of Melandru being passive and accepting of whatever happens, as long as it is in line with the way of nature. She accepts that the fox cubs were doomed to starve. Then, she also accepts that the farmer had killed the mother fox to protect his livestock. Finally, she accepts that wolves had taken the farmer's daughter, because each event was part of nature. She might have interceded more forcefully if any of the interactions had been unnatural, as is seen in the case of Ewan's tribe, but as long as something is within the way of nature, however tragic, she accepts it. Thus, the parable teaches the acceptance of tragedies that come with life, as both tragedy and triumph are part of existence.



However, there is another interpretation where Melandru is far less accepting. In the parable, Melandru does not simply ask the farmer why he killed the mother fox, but also points out that he has condemned the fox's kits to death. He could have offered to raise the kits himself, or expressed remorse that the kits would also suffer for his vengeance, but he justifies his actions as the fox and her kits being worth no more than his chicken. Melandru appears to accept this, but her words of acceptance will come back to haunt him. While Melandru does not appear to be vengeful in the parable, if her intent was to make the farmer experience a similar feeling of loss that the fox's kits had suffered, she may have seen no need to twist the proverbial knife. As long as the lesson is learned, she can still offer comfort to the farmer, and the true course of events remains ambiguous in the mind of both farmer and reader: Was the farmer's daughter taken in an ordinary wolf attack? Or were they an instrument of Melandru's will?

KORA'S INTERPRETATION

Melandru is the goddess of nature. She is uniquely attuned with the cycle of life and death, and its beauty and savagery. When she hears the kits crying out in distress, she's curious and stops to learn what event has led to their mother not returning. She discovers a farmer has killed the kits' mother, and without their mother, they will die. The goddess cannot bring the fox back; or rather, perhaps she could, but understands it's important that she does not. To try and save every life is impossible; by saving one, you condemn another to death. If she saves every field mouse, then every owl will starve. She understands the kits will die, but their bodies will provide nourishment to others. Life will continue on in spite of their deaths - this is how the laws of nature work.

Melandru goes to the farmer, wanting to know why he killed the mother fox. As a farmer, he is also a man of nature. He must know when the breeding season is and when the forest is full of the next generation of life; young lives still dependent on their mother's to survive. Even with this knowledge that he possesses, he still killed the mother fox.

The farmer reveals the fox had killed one of his chickens, a source of food for himself and his family. Angry that his food source was attacked, the farmer lashed out and killed the fox, ensuring that it wouldn't threaten his food source again.

The goddess understands it's natural for an animal to lash out when feeling threatened. She understands the man was only acting as any animal would when its family and food source was under attack. She does not judge the man for his actions for he only acted on his animal instinct; he acted within the laws of nature.

The story takes us forward in time and we see the man, now in great despair as he calls out to the goddess, beseeching her aid. She appears before him and asks what has happened. He tells her that wolves have taken his daughter. The implication here is that the wolves will kill and consume his child unless the goddess intervenes. He asks if the goddess is able to return his daughter - to pull her from the hungry jaws of the wolves back to the safety of the farm. But the goddess cannot bring his daughter back, or rather, perhaps she could, but understands that having already allowed the kits to die, and finding no fault in the farmer for killing the fox mother (for he was protecting his food source), she must continue to abide by the laws of nature.

She could not save the kits without condemning other creatures to hunger and death. And she cannot save the farmer's daughter without condemning the wolves, who were only acting on animal instinct in seeking out prey to feed on. She understands the daughter will die, but her body will provide nourishment to others. Life will continue on in spite of her death and the farmer's grief. Such are the laws of nature.

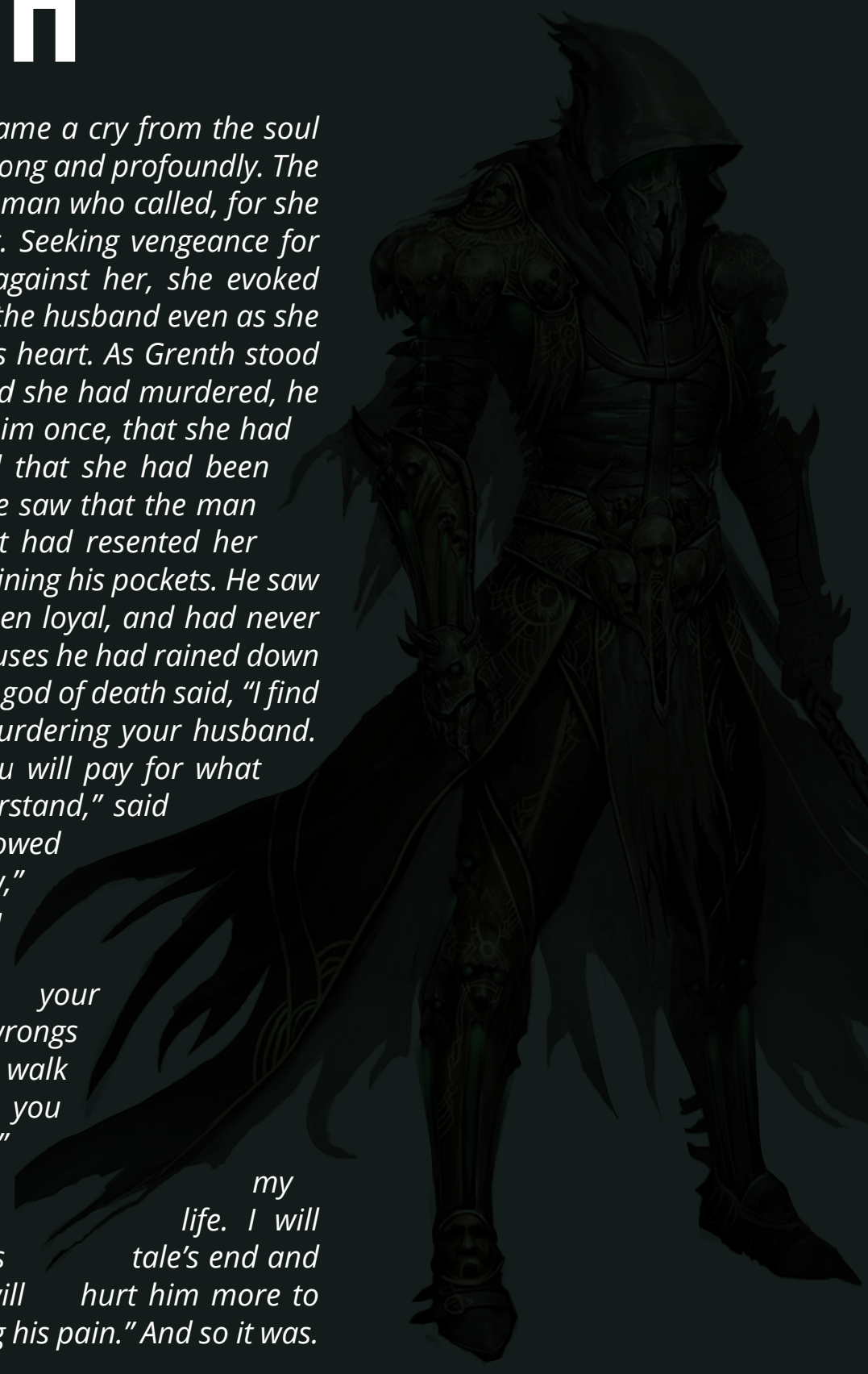
It should also be noted that wolves are not mindless predators. They are an important part of nature: they thin herds, weeding out the sick and the weak. Their presence keeps the grazing animals from over-consuming foliage and destabilizing rivers. When wolves are present, all of nature flourishes.

This parable teaches that life and death are natural and unavoidable, but it also teaches us that suffering, while something to be pitied, is only one side of the story. The kits suffer without their mother, but the farmer's family will stay safely fed. The farmer suffers the loss of his daughter, but the wolves - and perhaps their cubs - will be fed. Melandru sees there is a bigger picture: she knows that life and death are constantly struggling for balance, and that she, and we, cannot act in a way that upsets that balance.



THE PARABLE OF GRENTH

To Grenth's ears, there came a cry from the soul of one who had suffered long and profoundly. The god was drawn to the woman who called, for she had no mercy left in her. Seeking vengeance for her husband's violence against her, she evoked Grenth's judgment upon the husband even as she plunged the knife into his heart. As Grenth stood over her and the husband she had murdered, he saw that she had loved him once, that she had borne him children, and that she had been a good and loyal wife. He saw that the man had never loved her, but had resented her and their children for draining his pockets. He saw that the man had not been loyal, and had never been kind. He saw the abuses he had rained down upon his wife. And so, the god of death said, "I find you guilty, woman, of murdering your husband. When it is your time, you will pay for what you have done." "I understand," said the woman as she bowed before Grenth. "And now," said Grenth, "I give you a choice. You may come with me now and watch your husband suffer for the wrongs he has done. Or you may walk away, and I will claim you only when it is your time." The woman said, "I gave my husband my love and life. I will come now, to see this tale's end and to share his suffering. It will hurt him more to know that I am witnessing his pain." And so it was.



DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

In the Parable of Grenth, we see Grenth's justice in action - yet, interestingly, the focus is on the one who was arguably the victim, not the abuser. Grenth weighs the merits of the case and appears to pass judgement on the wife along with the husband, but gives the wife the choice between living out the rest of her life, or paying the consequences for her husband's murder immediately in exchange for being able to watch him suffer.



The parable ends there, leaving the question of the actual fate of the wife's soul unanswered. She says that she will come now "to share his suffering." Does this mean that she is actually suffering the same fate that he is, ameliorated only by the pleasure that she feels from his suffering? Such a result paints Grenth as a harsh judge, but it would be fitting with his character. Both have committed crimes, and both should pay. Or is she only "sharing" his suffering by observing it, while facing a lesser punishment herself? Might Grenth even have considered the ledger balanced by the forfeiture of the rest of her life?

The fact that Grenth offered her a choice is also interesting. Perhaps this was simply what it appears - Grenth's offer of compensation for the woman's unjust suffering by granting her the choice of taking pleasure in her husband's punishment, or living the rest of her life - a life unblighted by his abuse. Another possibility, however, is that the choice was offered as a test. If so, was the test to see if she could let go of her anger or if she would be willing to give up her life for her vengeance? Or was the test to see if she was willing to face her own punishment immediately, or attempt to put it off? If it was a test, by choosing to be part of her husband's punishment instead of living out her life, did she pass or fail?

KORA'S INTERPRETATION

Grenth is the god of darkness, ice, and death, with domain over mortality and judgment. Moreover, he is a patron of strict ethics, of right and wrong being black and white. This woman who calls for him has known a life of suffering, and has no more compassion or forgiveness left in her towards the one whom she wishes Grenth to punish. Rather than wait, unsure if the god will hear her and come deliver a judgement she finds suitable, the woman kills her husband, ensuring that his soul will be judged and that she is freed from his violence against her.

When Grenth arrives and begins his judgement, he sees how this woman - a wife and mother - was good and loving, and had been loyal to her husband despite all his failings.

Next, the god casts his eye upon her husband and sees how the man had never given love or respect to his wife or their children. He had not been a faithful husband and resented his family for using the money that he wanted to spend on himself and his own pleasures. His resentment led to anger, and in anger, he turned his fists to his wife.

Grenth finds the woman guilty of murdering her husband and tells her that when it is her time to die, she will face punishment for her crime. The woman doesn't beg or plead for Grenth to "understand." She accepts the god's judgement as fitting of her crime; she knows she is guilty and accepts her fate. She then shows respect to the god and his judgement by bowing to him.

But Grenth is not unkind. He knows she lived a righteous life, but received only pain from her husband. He gives the woman a choice, a gift, if she wants it. She can go with the god now and watch her husband endure his punishment for his crimes against her and their children, or she can live out her life and, upon her death, face her own punishment for her crime. The choice is hers and hers alone, but in giving her this choice, the god gives her back the agency that her husband stole from her.

The woman chooses to go with Grenth. She will watch him suffer, knowing it will cause him even greater anguish to know that the wife he once abused sees proof that he too feels pain and fear. And perhaps, she feels that the memories of watching her abuser receive his punishment will help her endure her own punishment when the time arrives.

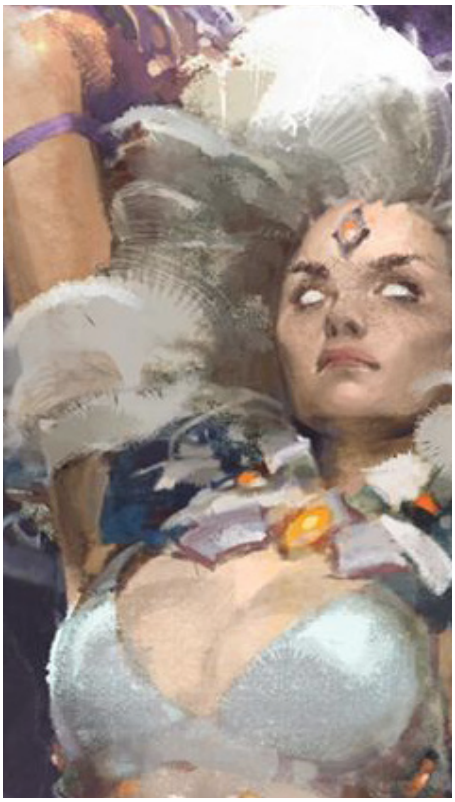
The first lesson here is a reminder that all actions have consequences, and one must be ready to accept the consequences. The husband chose to act in violence against his family, never thinking about the consequences he would face for his abuse. The woman chose to end her husband's violence against her knowing that she was committing a crime, and knowing there would be consequences and accepting them. The final lesson is that of questioning one's self on whether the consequences of one's actions are worth one's crimes.



TO SOW THE WIND

BY DRAXYNNIC

Exploring the origins of the tempest



Last issue, we began a series that attempts to delve into the possible origins of the various elite specialisations with an in-depth look at the berserker. This time, we turn our proverbial lens on the tempest; what might the aesthetics and abilities of the tempest tell us about its origins and how it fits in with the wider lore of Tyria?

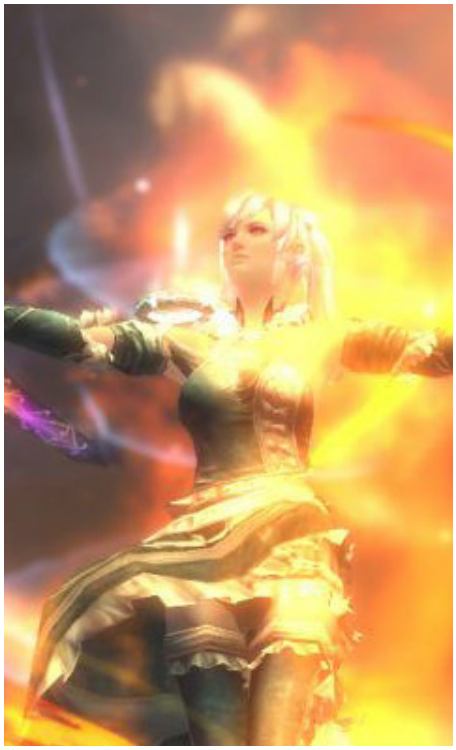
As with the berserker, we'll start be looking at the special tempest items and see if they can shed some light on the question. First, let us consider the Tempest's Loop shoulder item. When worn, this item comprises a simple loop that levitates over the wearer's right shoulder. A lightning effect plays over the outside of the loop, with the strongest effect being seen on the inside of the ring. At first glance, this could be a reference to asuran technology; levitation is a common theme in asuran devices, as are rings that channel an effect through their center (asura gates provide one very visible example, as do the focusing rings on asuran megalasers). However, there is another possibility: ring-like cyclopean structures are common in Orr, both reaching into the air and impacted into the



ground. The function of these great circles is unknown - it might be religious (notably, the Cathedral of Zephyrs has a number of such rings on and around it) or, given that Orr appears to have been the most magical of the human kingdoms, they could have been a means of channeling magic across Orr.

Moving on, the specialisation weapon of the tempest is the warhorn. There appears to be little that can be gleaned from the warhorn skins themselves - they're pretty much what you'd expect on a warhorn for a profession themed around storms and wind. Some hint could potentially be taken from the name of the ascended warhorn - "The North Wind" - suggesting that the specialisation may have arisen from a location where storms usually came from the north. However, we don't know enough about Tyrian weather patterns to be able to draw conclusions from that assumption.

A more interesting connection could be drawn, not through the skins themselves, but through the simple fact that the weapon is a warhorn. Great horns have been associated with generating magical storms since the initial release of *Guild Wars 1* - the horn Stormcaller plays an important role in beating back the charr invasion in the early stages of *Prophecies*, and the Kurzick superweapon God's Vengeance takes the form of a giant trumpet. The Tempest's Warhorn feels like a portable cousin, or even a descendant, of these devices, generating elemental effects when activated through the breath of their user.











While the asura also have weather control devices, the use of a horn does seem to place the tempest's origins, one way or another, in human magic. One of the distinctions between human and asura traditions is that asura take a very scientific approach to magic, which carries through in their artifacts, tending to appear as technology that is powered by magic. Humans (and most other races, for that matter), however, tend to view magic through a more intuitive, even artistic, lens, and thus are more likely to create magical devices whose properties are not obvious until they are used - such as imbuing magic in a simple wind instrument. Given the precedent of humans enchanting great horns with elemental power, it seems likely that the tempest derives from human magic - possibly directly, possibly through another race studying one of their artifacts such as the broken Stormcaller.

Further hints could, perhaps, be gleaned through the items that need to be collected in order to obtain The North Wind. Some are effectively the mirrors of requirements for other elite collections, and can probably be safely ignored, while others are clearly storm-related. Most interesting, however, are probably the Saurian Roar and the Itzel Singing Techniques items, which suggest that the tempest's connection to sound may go deeper than simply blowing horns. Proper use of the elementalist's own voice appears to be an important part of mastering tempest techniques: in this context, shouts may be something deeper than simply a convenient way to give tempests a set of area utilities centered on the caster.

To investigate this thread, let's look back at *Guild Wars* history. Chants and shouts relating to fire and healing are staples of the paragon profession; it's possible that the original tempests, whoever they might have been, found a way to combine paragon vocalisations with elemental magic, resulting in the tempest shouts we see today. This would give tempests a similar origin story to the guardian - the combination of paragon skills with a more magically-focused profession. Hylek Cuicani in *Eye of the North* were also paragons - it is possible, then, that if the tempest tradition has links to paragons, that a tempest may have an interest in studying hylek singing in order to pick up new techniques they can incorporate into their own traditions.

This gives a potential origin story for tempests which, as noted above, is similar to that of guardians. At some stage, elementalists may have looked to combine paragon skills with their own, allowing them to further increase their potential for healing and allowing them to mix paragon chants into elementalist spells, creating shouts that apply auras to their allies while harming and hindering their enemies. Such elementalists may have been inspired by the existing links between sound and storms coming from magical instruments, including Stormcaller, in order to find means to make use of these instruments themselves. The end result is an elementalist with expanded support





options drawn from paragon techniques.

One question this does raise is that of how overloads come into the picture. Here, though, it is worth noticing that the use of most overloads also come with vocalisations: it's possible that overloads are, in fact, the ultimate result of mixing the magical chants of paragons with elemental magic. An overload, then, could potentially represent a chant that gathers elemental energy to the singer until it is released at the end of the chant. Paragon animations in *Guild Wars 1* established that the magic in paragon chants could create glowing wings that lift the paragon into the air - in this context, the effects associated with overloads do not seem too farfetched when elemental magic is also brought into the picture. It is worth noting, however, that overloads are not that different in behaviour from previous long-casting-time elemental spells like Meteor Shower; it's possible that the original tempests simply started by refining such spells into overloads, and only afterwards were inspired by the example of Stormcaller (and God's Vengeance, if they knew of it) to draw a link between the storm magic they had discovered and the magic that can be activated through song and sound.

Another possibility for the connection between storms and an otherwise fairly



support-oriented specialisation could, similar to the berserker, come from religion. In human religion, Dwayna is both the goddess most associated with storms (wind and lightning, at least) and with healing... and it's difficult to overlook that the tempest we see in the game is also strongly associated with storms and healing. While the tempest makes use of all the elements, it's worth noting that many of their abilities come from the effect of wind on another element.

With the apparent disappearance of monks from Tyria, the nature of Dwayna's clergy also appears to have changed. Priests and priestesses of Dwayna are still fairly common - when provoked to fight, however, their preferred means of defending themselves (best seen at the Ebonhawke delegation in the Fields of Ruin during the wasp event) is with an orb of lightning that would not be out of place as an air attunement skill, and which may have been originally designed as such. So it appears as though the clergy of Dwayna might have switched from being predominantly monks to predominantly elementalists... with a preference for air, of course.

With this being the case, it's possible that some of Dwayna's more devout followers may have gone further, and sought to develop a tradition that embodied Dwayna as much as possible. During the time of *Guild Wars 1*, the separation of healing magic and air magic into different schools would have complicated such a goal, leading to most of the clergy of Dwayna considering healing magic to be the more important consideration and studying the magic of monks. Now, however, the



decreased importance of the bloodstones and advances in elemental magic allow elementalists to heal as well as practice air magic... if not necessarily at the same time. The tempest specialisation may well be the closest a mortal could reach to matching the powers attributed to Dwayna - bestowing comfort and healing on the one hand, while calling down destructive storms to strike down her enemies on the other.

The previous discussion regarding the possibility of tempests being a combination of elementalist and paragon disciplines may even fit in with the potential connection of the tempest specialisation to followers of Dwayna. In *Guild Wars 1*, Dwayna was one of the patrons of the paragon profession, so it's likely that some of the members of the paragon profession that took refuge in Kryta would have been followers of Dwayna. Some of those paragons, then, might have pooled their knowledge with Dwayna-worshipping elementalists, laying the foundations of a tradition that would ultimately give rise to the tempest.

Of course, elemental magic does not care about who (or if) you worship, and the clergy of Dwayna do not seem likely to hoard knowledge that could save lives. We see in Orr that at least one priestess of Dwayna (Priestess Amelia) is supporting the Pact's goals - it's possible that in the lead-up to the attack on Mordremoth, the clergy of Dwayna began teaching the basics of what would become the tempest to their Pact allies. While the followers of Dwayna might have focused on the healing and air-related aspects of the specialisation at the expense of other elements, once the techniques they had developed were stripped of their religious aspects and put into the hands of their more practical allies, it likely would not have taken long for those techniques to be applied to any of the elements that the followers of Dwayna might have neglected.



THE DIFFERENCE ELITE SPECIALISATIONS MAKE

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

With the new elite specialisations from *Path of Fire* around the corner, I felt that it might be worthwhile to take a backwards look at the professions from the original *Guild Wars 2* and how they have been affected by the elite specialisations that were introduced in *Heart of Thorns*.

There are probably people who can perform better analysis than I on how these specialisations have affected the relative power rankings of the various professions, and on the impact they have had on various game modes. Instead, I have focused simply on how much enjoyment I, personally, have been having with each profession, first in the original *Guild Wars 2*, and then after the release of *Heart of Thorns*. Naturally, this will be a highly subjective discussion, and your mileage may vary. Wildly.

After discussing each profession, I've given each a ranking, with 4 being for those I enjoy the most, and 1 for those I enjoy the least. Like the rest of this discussion, this ranking is subjective, and mostly indicates how much I enjoy each profession, not which is better by any objective measurement. Primarily, they have been included as a tool for comparison of how much certain professions have risen and fallen in the order. Note that this is a relative scale, so a profession that drops in the ranking does not necessarily mean that I think it has grown worse, merely that it was not as improved as the competition.

ELEMENTALIST

Elementalists are an archetype that I've enjoyed playing in previous games, including the original *Guild Wars*, so the elementalist was one of the professions I was most looking forward to playing in *Guild Wars 2*. While I was a little disappointed that the option to specialise in using one or two elements had been forfeited in exchange for the attunement-switching mechanic, in turn it promised a flexibility and adaptability that I was looking forward to using.



The core elementalist was a profession that I was fairly slow to get the hang of. It probably didn't help that it was one of the first professions I tried to make work, but the combination of low defensive stats with a high reliance on mobility and cycling through skills in order to maintain a good offence and defence made it feel overly fragile while generally lacking in offensive capability in turn. As a result, elementalist was one of my less preferred professions in the vanilla game, although over time I did get more of a hang of making the most of inter-attunement combos.

Part of the effect of tempest was to reduce the emphasis on weaving combos through attunement-switching. A lot of elementalist players were quite upset at this, and as it turned out that most of the elite specialisations proved to be straight-up upgrades rather than the sidegrades they were advertised as, I think this was justified - the playstyle they had developed had essentially been replaced. For this reason, I'm not sure it was the best choice for the elementalist's first elite specialisation. From my perspective as someone who had not committed to learning the full 'piano' playstyle, however, it provided an opportunity to have the flexibility and adaptability (not to mention the opportunity to destroy one's enemies with storms of fire and lightning) that the elementalist had initially promised, without the requirement to switch attunements every few seconds to get those inter-attunement skill combos to work. Those skill combos are still there to use, however, if you don't feel the need to use an overload at that moment.

As a result, I've found that in the time since the pre-HoT balance patch, my enjoyment of the elementalist has increased. I'm not, however, sure how much of that has been because of the tempest itself, or how much it has been simply that I've been getting better at playing elementalist.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank





ENGINEER

My experience with the engineer could be said to be somewhat the opposite of the elementalist. Initially, I genuinely felt that the engineer basically had everything that I really wanted out of the elementalist, while having a bit more durability. The no-recharge switching between kits felt like it was both more accessible and, when I really got into the 'zone' of switching between the kits in order to set up combos, simply more exciting to play than elementalist's fixed attunements. I can't say I ever really enjoyed ground-targeted auto-attacks, but I could set up builds that didn't use them and genuinely still enjoy what I was doing.

Over time, however, my enjoyment of the engineer has waned. Part of it was the removal of some aspects I enjoyed: sending exploding, piercing pistol bullets through a closely-packed mob was fun until it didn't work any more, and the heavy nerfing of turrets in the HoT balance





patch was disappointing. More importantly, however, was the increasing feeling that a kit I didn't particularly enjoy - grenades - often felt like the option that engineers were balanced around; the mortar kit made that mechanic more important to the engineer, and the builds I was using were feeling increasingly stale.

Because of this, when the scrapper announcement rolled around, I was essentially looking for it to be something that could revive my interest in the engineer. For a while, it did - even simply having a melee weapon underneath the kits opened up new choices. However, it hasn't lasted - I've found that gyros are useful tools but generally aren't all that active in their use, and once the novelty wore off, it quickly went back to feeling stale.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank



GUARDIAN

While I generally don't think in terms of having a 'main', guardian is probably the closest to it. I've always enjoyed fighter-mage type characters, particularly ones where the magic is actually interwoven with their fighting capabilities, and the guardian is probably the best fit to that archetype among the core classes. Mechanically, I've found the guardian to be a good match with my playstyle as well, rewarding good use of active defensive skills and including enough control and punishment-oriented skills to satisfy my inner mesmer. Over the years, guardian has always felt like a reliable choice - it generally didn't get changed too drastically in balance patches and made for a good first character to go through new content, as it generally had the ability to cope with whatever the world threw at it.



Because of this, there wasn't anything that I was really looking for out of the guardian's elite specialisation. The guardian/ranger nature of dragonhunter was a bit of a surprise, but I essentially regarded it as being an additional set of skills that could be used with a profession I already enjoyed. As a result, I don't think that either dragonhunter or the balance patch that came before it has substantially affected my enjoyment of the guardian - although I do have to admit that the trap meta that developed in PvP for a while was quite different to how I had ever envisioned the dragonhunter.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank





MESMER

I've said a few times, going back to the original *Guild Wars*, that 'even when I'm not playing mesmer, I think like one' - for me, shutting an enemy down and turning their strengths against them can often be more fun than simply killing them. While the mesmer of *Guild Wars 2* certainly feels quite different to that of *Guild Wars 1*, it's certainly still one of my



preferred professions, and I have a few fond memories of tying up an enemy by getting them to fight illusions when they would otherwise hit too hard to attempt to fight solo. A few things, however, kept it from being my flagship character. The first was that the mesmer has proved quite volatile in balancing, with entire builds being torn down by balancing on a regular basis. The second was the fragility of illusions in some content - as a result, I generally didn't feel like it was the right character to go through new content first, as going through with a guardian first meant that I could identify if that was going to be an issue (such as content with lots of AoE, before illusions, minions, and similar entities were buffed to be stronger against such attacks) and plan for it. The third was that, for vanilla mesmer, some of its abilities seemed anti-synergetic: you couldn't shatter if you were looking to keep your phantasms up, and you couldn't expect your phantasms to do much if you were shattering.

Chronomancer provided a big fix to the final problem. Chronophantasma meant that, while you might not necessarily be able to faceroll the shatter keys, as long as you used them reasonably intelligently you could usually expect at least some of your phantasm skills to be ready to replace those that have been shattered for the second time. This meant that shattering actually became reasonably compatible with a phantasm build (unless you were looking to maintain multiples of a specific phantasm), which in turn led to the chronomancer feeling like it had a much more active playstyle than the core mesmer did in PvE.



In addition to this, the addition of wells also helped to ameliorate one of the Achilles heels of the mesmer, namely being able to deal with a large number of weak enemies (pocket raptors...). Meanwhile, the mesmer also became a lot less reliant on dodge-rolling to generate illusions, allowing endurance to be saved for its intended defensive purpose. All in all, it felt like a significant addition to the mesmer's toolkit - albeit somewhat dampened by its comparatively low DPS relegating it to support roles in a lot of high-end PvE content.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank





NECROMANCER

The necromancer concept is one that I've generally been more interested in fighting rather than playing myself - while I play them, it's rare that I spend enough time on them in order to master them, usually focusing more on other classes when they are available.

As a result, it's probably no surprise that I didn't have a high regard for it in vanilla *Guild Wars 2*. In hindsight, this was probably largely self-inflicted. My concept for my necromancer character was of a minion master, and that was what I played through most of the core game's life. It's a build that can be effective, but let's face it, it's not the most exciting thing in the world. At the time reaper was announced, however, I had already started experimenting with different builds with more active playstyles, which had been resulting in a greater enjoyment of the profession. Compared to the relatively basic minion master playstyle, once I started experimenting with alternatives such as the well bomber builds and those designed around using spectral skills to maintain high shroud uptime, I started finding the necromancer to be more active to play and, as a result, a lot more fun. Because of this, the vanilla rank that I've given it is probably undeserved, coming more





from not having given it a proper chance myself - however, since most of this experimentation came after the pre-*Heart of Thorns* patch (and, thus, after the cutoff I've set), I'm ranking it according to what I thought of it beforehand. Suffice it to say that it was already rising in my ranking before *Heart of Thorns* launched.

The reaper, however, really kicked the necromancer up. Dervish was one of my preferred professions in *Guild Wars* after its introduction in *Nightfall*, and the reaper really felt like ArenaNet had recaptured the feel of the Grenth dervish, with the chill-oriented traits and close-range effects of the shouts adding to this. Beyond that, simply having a melee-oriented shroud just gave the necromancer more options to play with in general.

Vanilla rank



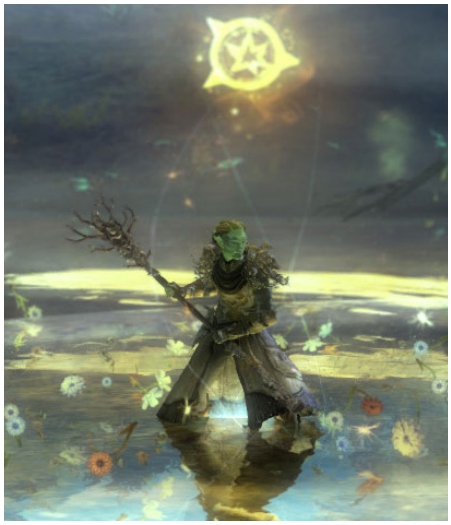
HoT rank



RANGER

While I like the idea of pets (particularly ones that aren't competing for space on your bar like those in the original *Guild Wars*), the vanilla ranger generally struck me as a fairly dry profession; generally solid but with relatively few really interesting mechanics to play with (well, I guess the original version of sword was 'interesting', but not in a manner that I actually enjoyed). Early on in the experience, I simply regarded this as being a case of the pet being the interesting mechanic that was intended to carry the ranger, but even taking that into account, it didn't feel as active as other professions.

The build I came up with was largely based on traps. Throwing a trap to go off beneath the feet of your enemies (back when you could do that) was quite fun, feeling a bit like throwing a grenade at the foe before charging in (and using the resulting fields to pull off skill combos). Unfortunately, in the leadup to *Heart of Thorns*, this was removed, and simply dropping them at the enemy's feet didn't feel the same.



The addition of longbow and traps to guardian with dragonhunter provided the deathblow there - a lot of what I was enjoying on ranger was then also available on a profession I enjoyed a lot more otherwise. So there was a lot leaning on what the new elite specialisation would turn out to be.

Unfortunately, for me, the druid just hasn't 'clicked'. I felt, quite early on in that final preview weekend, that druid seemed like it would be a powerful option, but I just wasn't enjoying playing it. That feeling has continued up until now, with the ranger currently being my least played profession. While the new pets are a solid addition to the profession, they simply don't make up the difference.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank



THIEF

Thief, rogue, and assassin-type archetypes have never been ones I've particularly enjoyed, generally preferring spellcasters and more direct warrior types. As a result, the thief was the last of the professions in the core game that I played. Perhaps in part because of that - and my greater experience with the



game in general - I found the thief to be a pleasant surprise. Jumping around evading attacks was fun, there were enough evades and means of replenishing health to cover for the attacks you couldn't dodge if you knew what you were doing, and the Initiative mechanic was a nice change of pace from the recharge mechanics of other professions. This made it one of my favoured professions, and from being the last core character I created, it was the third (after guardian and mesmer) to obtain full map completion.

Long-term thief players will probably know what happened next: the defining feature of the Acrobatics traitline (extra dodges) was removed, provided with additional mechanics, and repackaged as the defining feature of the daredevil.

Putting aside the optics of removing something from the core game and repackaging it in an expansion, I can see why they did this. Extra dodges that might be perfectly balanced on the vanilla thief could prove to be horribly broken when accessed by a future elite specialisation (such as the upcoming Deadeye) - repackaging it in an elite specialisation is a good way of avoiding this. And, with the other things added through the daredevil specialisation, logically the thief with the daredevil should be something more than it



was before.

But to me, it's lost a certain *je ne sais quoi.* Perhaps it's because a third dodge is not actually the same as refunding 25% endurance on a dodge. Perhaps it's because the daredevil dodges just don't feel as smooth. Perhaps it's the loss of some synergy I have since forgotten. Or maybe it's purely that the other professions have moved on with interesting new abilities and mechanics, and the daredevil was, basically, just giving back something that had been taken away. Whatever it was, however, the magic I initially felt is gone.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank

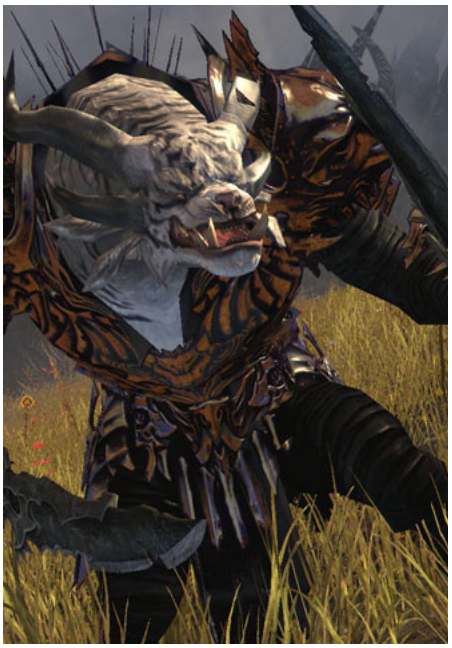


WARRIOR

Along with the necromancer, the warrior was at the bottom rank of professions in my preferences in the core game.

Part of it is that it was competing with the guardian for attention - I do enjoy the heavy combat style offered by the warrior, but I found that I enjoyed the guardian a lot more. Another part of it, though, was the largely passive-feeling nature of a lot of the utility skills - most seem to exist primarily to be a buff that makes you stronger (and/or gets you out of conditions or a CC) without having to think of them much. Thanks to the power of Healing Signet, good armour, and a high health pool, a warrior could bruteforce its way through most situations... but there was often little you could do to up your game if those strengths proved to be insufficient. The real killer, though, was that I simply didn't enjoy the adrenaline

mechanic. It felt that you were often spending your fights building up a mechanic that you might be able to use once before the battle was over and it drained again.



The berserker was the solution to (or at least a significant amelioration of) these flaws. The rage skills feel much more interesting to use and, perhaps more importantly, they build up adrenaline so you can berserk more quickly. Once you do berserk, you can keep triggering that burst skill on a regular basis. On the whole, it turned the profession from one where you were often waiting until you could do something cool to something that approached the feel of Dragon Slash warriors from *Guild Wars*, unleashing a continuous stream of powerful attacks.

It probably also helps that the berserker is the King of Fires, and fire warriors are another concept I like... but the concept probably would not have held up without a change in playstyle to back it up.

Vanilla rank



HoT rank



EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Thus concludes my thoughts on the impact of each of the elite specialisations. Some I feel have significantly increased my enjoyment of the professions - reaper and berserker fit into this category. Others, I feel have done little to improve the profession, causing those professions to fall in the ranking compared to those where the elite specialisation was more impactful.

While I considered including the revenant here, I did not feel that it was appropriate to do so, since our only experience of the revenant without the herald was during the preview weekends. If I do a follow-up article in the wake of *Path of Fire*, however, I may analyse the present revenant against the renegade then. (For anyone keeping score, I'm currently assigning the revenant to rank 3.)

Looking forward to what we have seen thus far of the new specialisations for *Path of Fire*, there are some that I'm quite looking forward to (scourge, holosmith, and firebrand particularly come to mind) and others with which I have my doubts, although I am sure that other players will find enjoyment in them. Time, however, will tell which of the new elite specialisations will have major impacts, and which will not.



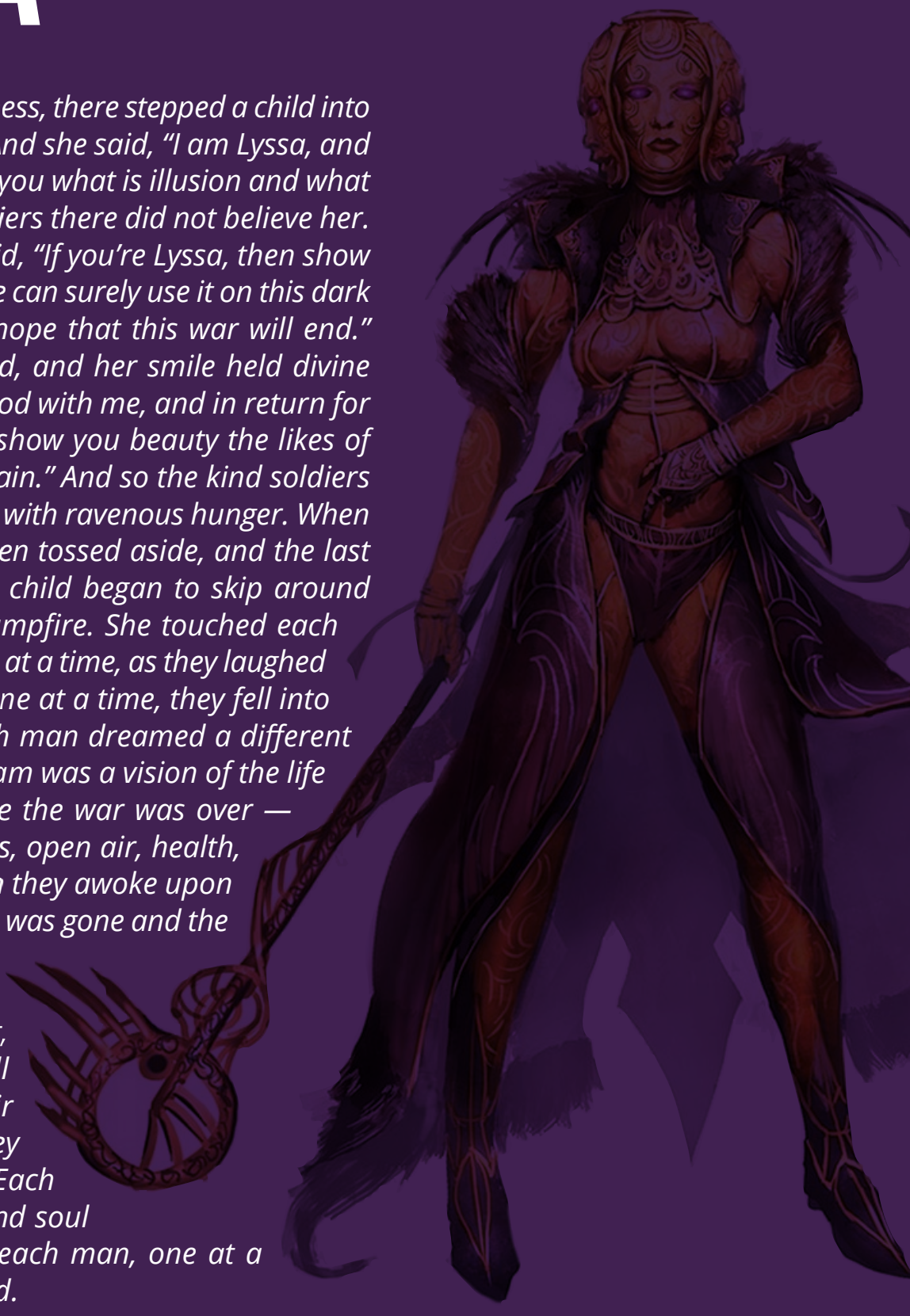






THE PARABLE OF LYSSA

From out of the darkness, there stepped a child into the campfire's light. And she said, "I am Lyssa, and I have come to teach you what is illusion and what is truth." But the soldiers there did not believe her. They laughed and said, "If you're Lyssa, then show us your beauty, for we can surely use it on this dark night. We have lost hope that this war will end." The child approached, and her smile held divine grace. "Share your food with me, and in return for your kindness, I will show you beauty the likes of you will never see again." And so the kind soldiers did, and the child ate with ravenous hunger. When the last bone had been tossed aside, and the last bean swallowed, the child began to skip around the outside of the campfire. She touched each man on his head, one at a time, as they laughed and jibed her until, one at a time, they fell into a deep slumber. Each man dreamed a different dream, but each dream was a vision of the life they would lead once the war was over — wives, children, riches, open air, health, and peace. And when they awoke upon the morrow, the child was gone and the enemy had arrived. They fought joyfully, with all their might, because they all remembered their dreams and knew they would win the war. Each man put his heart and soul into the battle, and each man, one at a time, was slaughtered.



DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

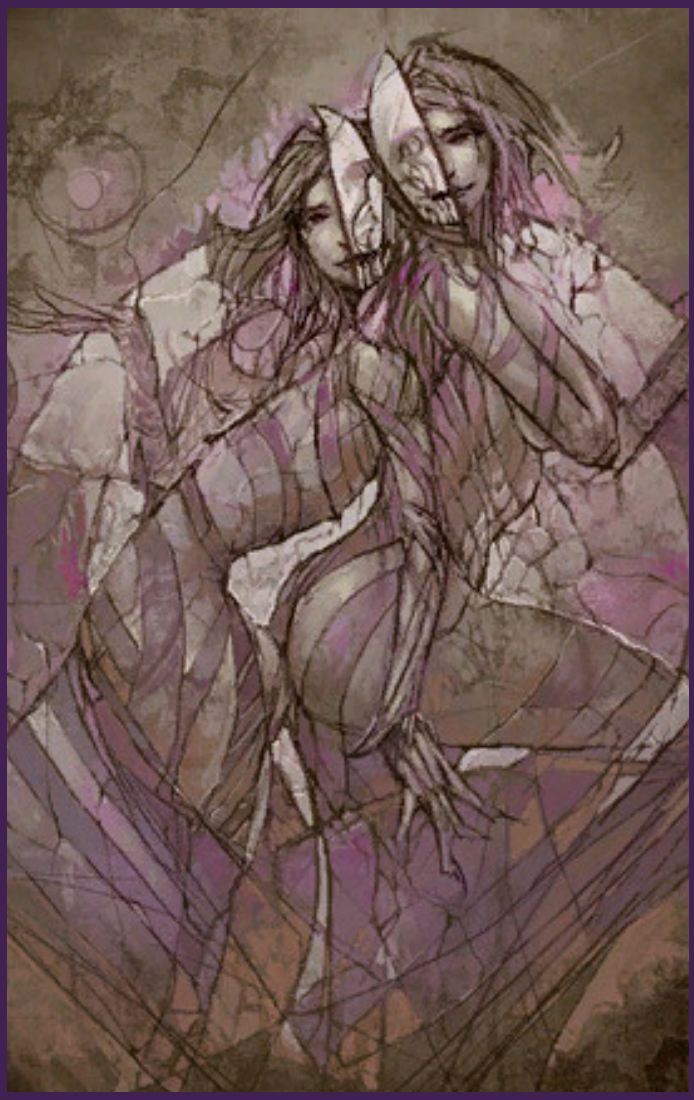
At first glance, this appears to be the darkest of the parables. Each soldier is fooled into believing that they will survive and live happily ever after, but dies in battle the following day. However, as is fitting with the duality of Lyssa, out of all the parables, this might be the one that most shows genuine compassion from the deity.

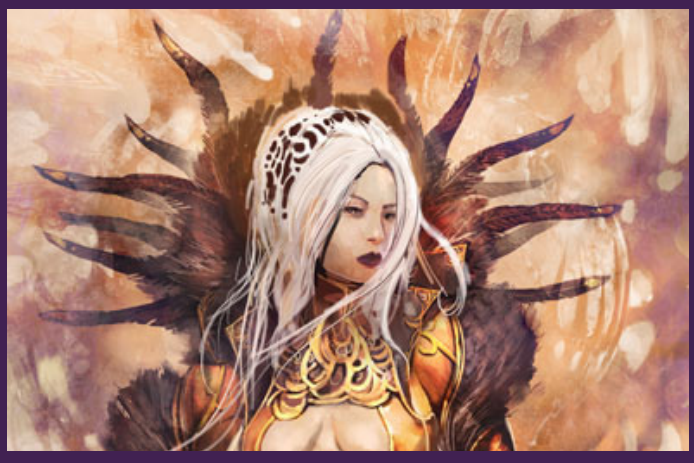
A careful reading of the parable reveals that Lyssa gave fair indication of what she is doing. First, she tells them that she will "teach [them] what is illusion, and what is truth." Here, the dreams are the illusion, while the soldiers' deaths in battle are the horrible truth. Later, she is more direct when she tells them "[she] will show [them] beauty the likes of which [they] will never see again." She is telling them that the lives she shows them in the dream are something that they will never enjoy again, but the soldiers failed to recognise that.

So is this an act of cruelty, granting the soldiers hope of a normal life after the war only to be killed one by one, or was this an act of kindness?

Granted, Lyssa's visit did not improve the soldier's fates. Perhaps her actions saved other lives elsewhere as the reinvigorated soldiers were able to resist more than they might have otherwise, preventing the enemy from striking elsewhere or causing them to be caught by allies of the soldiers before they could do more harm. Or perhaps her actions that night had no effect on the bigger picture. However, there is one difference that her visit certainly did make.

According to the parable, the soldiers had lost all hope when Lyssa arrived. They had nothing to look forward to but endless war. Lyssa's dreams, while proving to be mirages in the end, gave them hope, and her visit brought light and laughter to what otherwise would have been a night of despair. While they were still doomed to die, Lyssa's illusion made all the difference to the final hours of their lives. Perhaps this was Lyssa's goal - to grant one last respite from the bleakness of war before the end.





KORA'S INTERPRETATION

Lyssa (in actuality, twin goddesses Lyss and Ilya, who are often depicted as intertwined) is the dual-faced goddess of beauty, water, and illusion. In this story, Lyssa steps out from the darkness as a symbol of hope coming during a time of great despair. She does not present herself as the female epitome of sexual beauty for which she is known, but that of an innocent child. She approaches a group of soldiers offering to teach them the difference between what is illusion and what is truth

However, the soldiers believe the child is lying. They tell her to prove her identity by transforming into the mature and sexual Lyssa, as they want to see beauty after enduring a long and seemingly unending war. They do not recognize the innocent beauty of the child before them.

The child approaches the men with a smile filled with divine grace. Divine grace is widely believed by theologians to be a source of godly influence that operates to regenerate and purify, to inspire virtuous impulses within oneself, and to impart strength to endure trial and resist temptation.

Lyssa does not transform as asked. Instead, she gives the soldiers another chance - another test. She asks them to share their food with her, and promises that in return for showing her kindness, she will show them beauty like they will never see again. It's important to note she doesn't say she will transform into her mature sexual form - even she knows that sexual beauty is limited. She offers a vision of something more, but her words also carry a warning, one that the soldiers do not perceive. Yes, she will show them great beauty, but it is a beauty they will never be able to see again. The glimpse she offers is all they will ever know.

The soldiers, still not knowing that Lyssa is truly before them, feed the child, showing her kindness when so easily they could have shown her scorn. As soon as the food is gone, Lyssa skips (an action closely associated with innocence and a sense of being carefree) around the campfire. She touches each man on the head, and the men, who only a short time ago had been filled with despair, laugh and enjoy themselves before they fall into a deep sleep.

In their sleep, each man dreams a unique dream specific to the life they want to live after the war. They dream of rich and full lives, of getting married and raising children, of having enough money to support themselves, of having a home, and of a life full of peace. While the men had jokingly asked Lyssa to show them physical beauty in exchange for their kindness, she instead showed them true beauty.

When morning arrived, the child - who perhaps they still did not believe to have been Lyssa - was gone, but their enemies had arrived. The soldiers, regenerated by Lyssa's divine grace and the gift of beauty she bestowed upon them, fought nobly, giving all their strength to endure the trial of battle and resisting the temptation to flee. It was the visions of beauty they saw in their dreams - in Lyssa's gift to them - that allowed them to fight on... believing they would win. Instead, all the soldiers were killed in battle.

But Lyssa had never promised the soldiers their dreams would come true. Indeed, she warned them they would never see such beauty again.

And so the words she spoke were truth: she taught the soldiers of illusion - that physical beauty is an illusion with no substance; and she taught them of truth - that a life filled with love, family, and peace is the true beauty worth fighting for.

GUILD SPOTLIGHT

BY MIKO

MINIONS OF GRENTH



Often, you hear the term "casual player" batted about in the *Guild Wars 2* community as if it should be a badge of shame. Minions of Grenth [MoG], however, have taken that badge and turned it into one of honor by creating a welcoming guild with the motto: "family first, we'll be here when you get back!" And they mean it. Guild leader Gallios co-founded MoG as "a place for casual gamers, with real lives, real responsibilities" to be "a safe haven that is populated with like-minded, family-oriented gamers." While other guilds kick players for not participating in guild activities and events, MoG only turns away players who can't adhere to their code of conduct, which is posted on their website, http://mognation.enjin.com, particularly points 2 & 3:

- Be nice. Seriously, be nice.
- Don't act like a butthead. Most of us are parents, we don't need more children.

You'd think this might be a recipe for trouble, but as guild officer Gord shares: "We rarely have any drama or issues within the guild." In fact, the greatest challenge they face is having all members on at the same time. "We have so many people from all walks of life, that it can, at times, be difficult. Family, work, etc, have priority in our group, and yet we still stick together,"



Minions of Grenth [MoG]

Leader: Gallios Shardblade
Server: Jade Quarry (NA)
Size: 155+ members
Preferred game mode: PvX
In-game contacts: gallios.8142; winters.3521; Gord.8654
Discord contacts: Gallios#3334; Gord#4133
Quirk: We are a guild that caters to the folks that lead real lives, with real families, and real responsibilities. It's always been that way since day 1, and will stay that way until Gallios hangs up his leadership hat. No drama allowed.

Gallios proudly explains.

As a PvX guild, with many members preferring PvE and WvW, MoG does not shy away from trying all the new content *Guild Wars 2* offers. As Gord puts it, "We strive to learn together, grow together, master the game together, and defend our Tier 3 keeps together!" This attitude is what keeps their guild united and helps them have fun *and* achieve success in any game mode. They may not clear content faster than other guilds out there, but that isn't their point. Instead, MoG seeks to nurture their guild members, empowering them to take their time as they reach their goals, be that in low- and high-level Fractals, raids, or WvW - they'll be there to make sure members are having fun with each boss they down and keep they take.

MoG's approach to their gaming community is also reflected in their recruitment style: organic word-of-mouth. "We do not really advertise, except maybe a few times on our podcast, Shadow of the Dragon," Gallios tells us. There, he's mentioned running missions or WvW with his guild which has prompted some listeners to contact him to learn more. As guild member Tenken shares, "listening to Gallios, Gord, and Kora, I found myself either yelling at my stereo or nodding in agreement. After a while, I told myself I had to start



playing the game with these wonderful people." Another avenue for recruitment comes from within the game itself. "People see us in-game or do a PUG activity, like the vibe, and join in!" Gord tells us. "I love it, mainly because I don't have to spam recruitment messages in Lion's Arch."

Their membership requirements are just as straightforward: adhere to their code of conduct and represent the guild during guild missions to ensure the game gives you credit for participating. Other than that, have fun and join whatever events you prefer, or ask for help for whatever achievement you need or game mode you like. The guild is very diverse and has "some very knowledgeable members in each arena, so we also have small groups that will gather for things daily. We help each other every single day," Gallios points out. Some recent examples are running daily Fractals together and raiding. Gord shares that he's also planning *Guild Wars* Hall of Monuments runs "in order to help people get those sweet HoM points, achievements and skins!"

Guild activities like these originate from the members themselves. As guild member Xandros explains, "If you want to do some event, it's likely you will find enough people that want to do the same." This happens organically too, with someone suggesting an activity in guild chat or on their Discord server, which usually gets others' attention. "Sometimes we have so much fun that it becomes a regular guild activity," Gord elaborates, "like our Fractal nights and, more recently, raid nights." Activities like WvW nights and guild mission days were set long ago according to members' schedules and availability.

Together, they have teams that have mastered Fractals and are good enough to have some notoriety in WvW. Other achievements include having a maxed out guild hall, starting a podcast that's doing well, and helping each other finish Living World and Current Event (now Side Stories) achievements. However, the most significant achievement for Gallios is that "we have kept our core."

The reason for this is simple: they treat each other like the best kind of family. "We laugh together, annoy each other, have an occasional spat, but we always end on a positive note and look forward to our next play session," Gord confides. "Surprisingly," he continues, "in my opinion, there is only one clique and that clique is the entire guild. It really does feel like playing with your brothers and sisters to me!" And he's not the only one who feels this way. The best part of MoG are the people. "Most of the fun we have is when we are all together, playing, laughing, crying, singing, you name it," Gallios expands. "There is never any fear of

> "We strive to learn together, grow together, master the game together, and defend our Tier 3 keeps together!



being excluded, regardless of playing background. Just starting? Then you are welcome, and we will do everything we have at our disposal to help you get where you need to be. Our members are more than generous with their time, especially to the newly initiated." Xandros goes a bit further: "No matter what's going on in-game or in real life, you always know you can count on the other moggers. Need to take a long break? No problem; they keep the lights on and when you come back it's like you never left." Gord sums it up: "I always feel welcome, like truly welcome. There is a deep camaraderie between us; if someone has a personal issue we really do all feel it. If someone needs help, just ask and you have it. It really is a group of caring people that genuinely enjoy spending time together."

Working together, MoG knows they can achieve anything. This is captured best in a story Gord used to tell his karate students: The Sun and the East Wind were in the sky together when the East Wind told the Sun, "See that man down there? I can make his coat come off." The Sun disagreed, so the East Wind began blowing at the man, but when the wind blew, the man frowned and held on to his coat tighter and tighter. After many tries, the East Wind gave up and said it was impossible. The Sun said, "Let me show you how." The Sun came out from behind the clouds and gently shined upon the man. The man looked up, smiled, and took off his coat. You will always fail when you try to force someone, but work with them and you will succeed.

If you're thinking of starting a guild like MoG, these friends who happen to be in a guild together have this advice: Find what you care for, or is appealing, and then invite people that have the same mentality to play the game with you. "It can seem daunting at times," Gallios admits, "but perseverance will win out." Especially, Xandros continues, if you "find good people and keep them around you. No one person can do everything to keep the guild functioning." This approach works for them and leaves veteran MMO players, like guild member Geroz, feeling like MoG is a refuge. "By far, MoG has been the closest thing to family I've found in any game. Sometimes, real life can be tough, thus the importance to have an oasis from everyday life to fall into. That is what MoG is for me, an oasis. A group that, no matter what you are going through, will always have individuals who look beyond themselves to help and encourage each other."

> " No matter what's going on in-game or in real life, you always know you can count on the other moggers.



COMMUNITY ART

BY
KENT BENSON

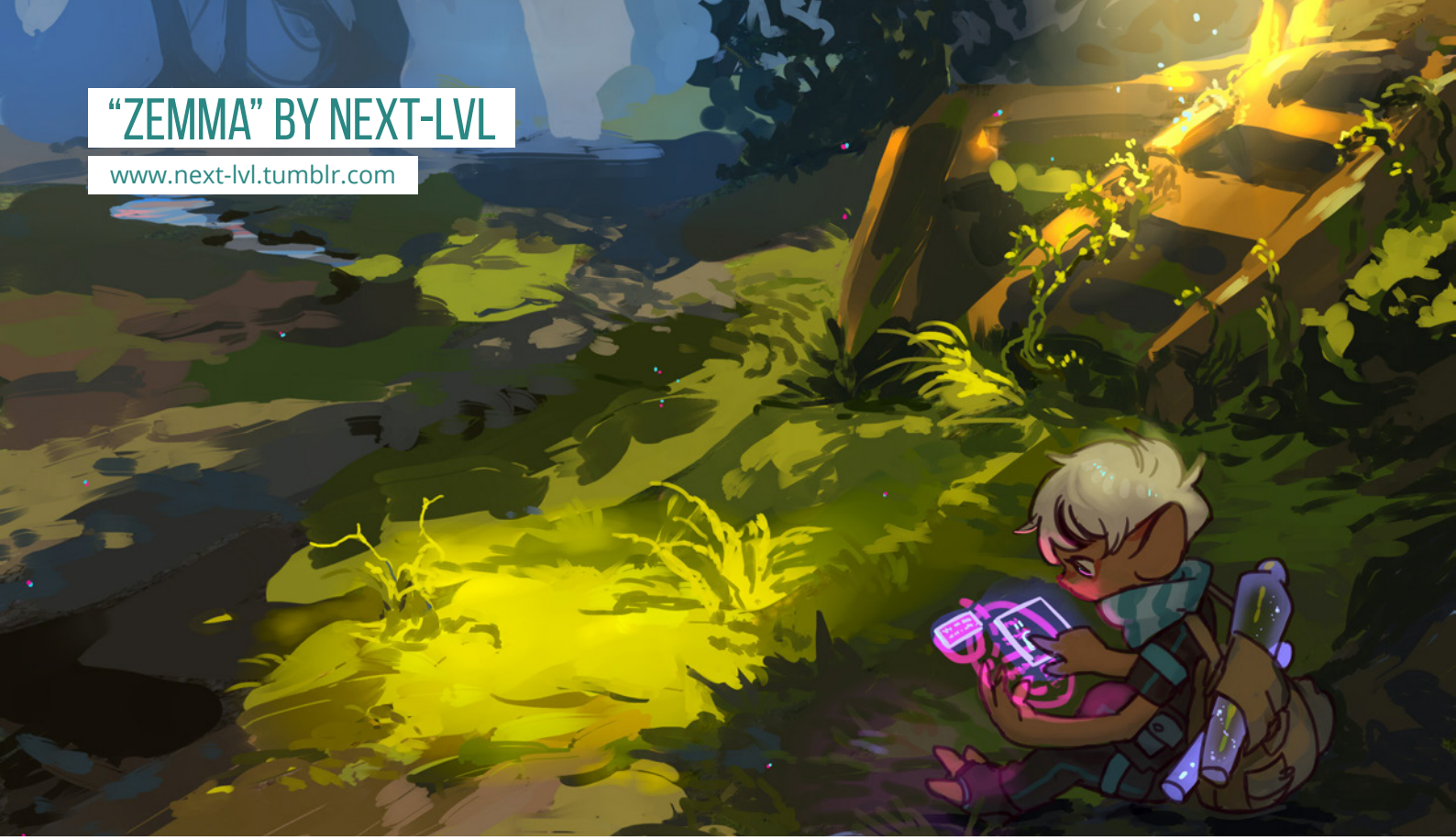


The third season of the Living World has come and gone and with an expansion on the horizon, all eyes are fixed on The Crystal Desert and Elona. Still, it would be a shame not to reminisce on the journey there; it's been barely over a year since Episode One, "Out of the Shadows," released in July 2016 and in that year we've seen a lot of interesting new places and concepts explored through every new map that was added with each major release.

This issue, I'm going to look back through the year and talk about pieces that invoke a sense of journey or that I personally feel are relatable to what I've seen in the past year. 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.

“ZEMMA” BY NEXT-LVL

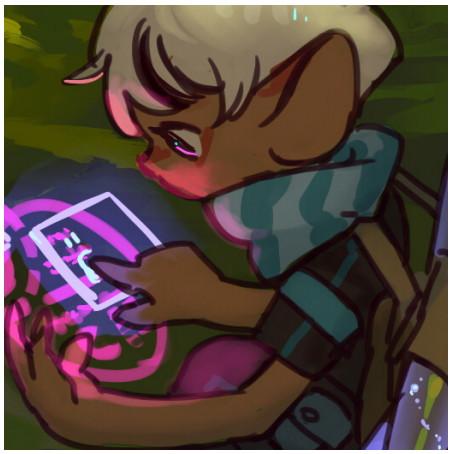
www.next-lvl.tumblr.com



After their debut in our previous issue’s art spotlight, I’ve chosen to visit another one of Next-LVL’s pieces. What has appealed to me most about this artist’s work is the illustrative and scenic qualities; how this painting’s detail is determined by depth and distance from the subject at the same time, and how those more distant layers/figures are still recognizable even as simple shapes of color.

For this particular piece, it looks like someplace around Tarir in Auric Basin or even Metrica Province. I love how the blue hues present in the background sort of flow out from the small brook running through the middle-ground of the painting, providing soft contrast with the foreground of the painting, which is much warmer. It’s a common way to show distinction in depth. As for the figure, I will say that the comic-style lining helps the character pop out more from the environment they’re in, though, at the same time, I also like that the outlines are more subdued colors rather than a stark black. Finally, I love the little holographic details. The use of a warm color with inner and outer glow helps draw the eyes from the bright sun-lit center.

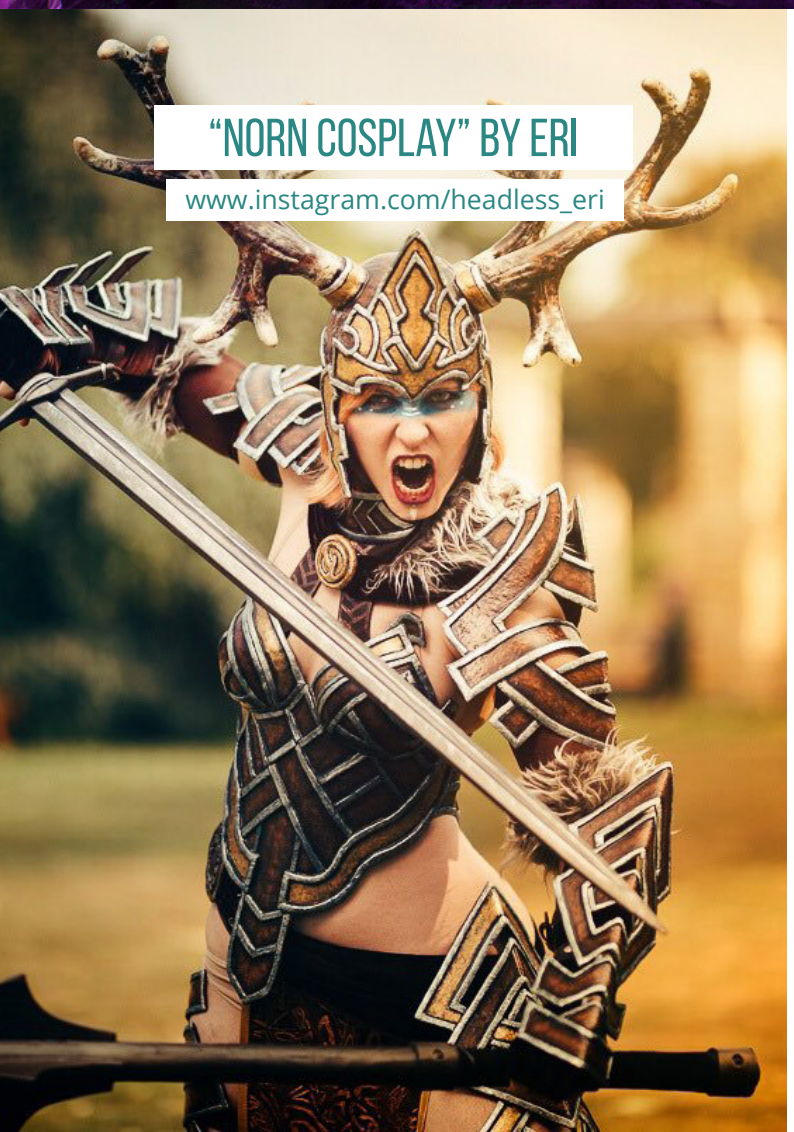






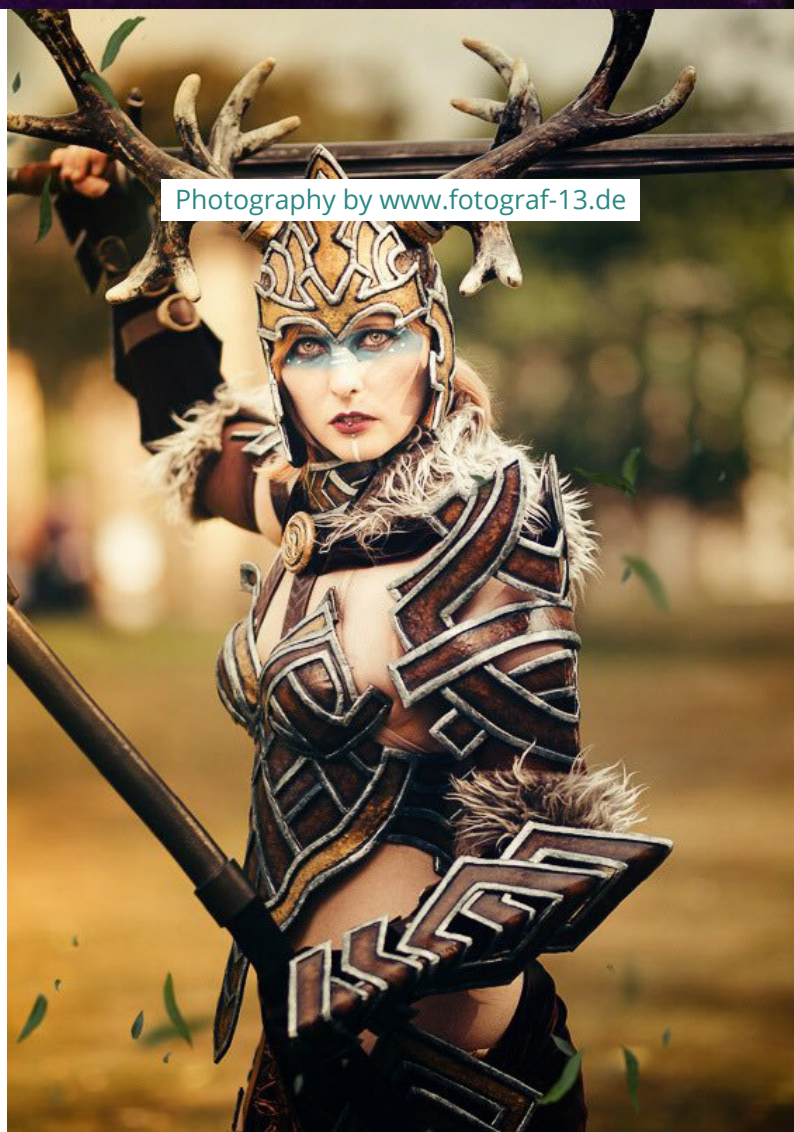
“FISSURE OF HOPE” BY MOHQ

www.artstation.com/mohq



“NORN COSPLAY” BY ERI

www.instagram.com/headless_eri



Photography by www.fotograf-13.de

There's been a lot of mesmer action this Living World season, in addition to many old ruins - lots and lots of ruins. At first glance, this piece made me think of Siren's Landing, specifically Lyssa's Reliquary, and it is stunning. It shares many similar elements, and yes, there is a brighter and sunnier ambience in this piece that Orr typically isn't known for, but let's be real; Orr probably doesn't exist under perpetual haze or overcast as the game likes to show.

Unsurprisingly, I loved poring over the details of this piece. The realization that the grassy areas were purple and that the green areas appeared to be floating plants atop the watery surface of a marshy pond made me instantly think of Claude Monet and some of his paintings of ponds that played with the illusion of reflection. Meanwhile, the level of detail in the stonework in the ruins, the textures, and even the stone silhouette that forms the asymmetric frame of the piece had me spending several minutes exploring.

I think what I found most compelling were the emotions I drew from this scene: whimsy, hope, fear, power, and sadness were the among the strongest, many of which are conveyed by the haunting and almost tragic presence of the spirits that glide just above the grass.



The top tier of norn heavy armor is a popular choice for cosplayers, but Eri takes its fierceness to new levels with help from Fotograf13's photography. Not satisfied with an idle pose, Eri aims to slay the onlooker with her combat-ready vigor and norn-ish ferocity and, at least for me, is triumphant in doing so.

The costume armor itself is superb. I love the rough textures of the pieces that would normally be made of metal in-game, as well as the chosen color scheme. I'm a bit of a purist when it comes to natural material colors, so this particular costume speaks to me on that level. Of course, I have to give props (for the props!) for the antlers, which I imagine are one of the more difficult parts to do as they have this twisting organic form in addition to the coarse and grained texture of wood.

As for the setting, it made me think of Lake Doric for some reason. Whether it's the dark rocky shapes on the left or the idyllic woods seen in the Krytan highlands, it's hard to be sure, but my imagination quickly brings a personal clarity to the blurred background that serves my own "head-canon."





"ARTESIAN WATERS" BY FAVENA

www.favena.deviantart.com

While painted recently, this piece was clearly meant to depict one of the last few chapters in the initial personal story than the final Season Three map, though narratively, Siren's Landing is sort of a follow-up to the seeds that were sown in that particular story instance. Like Siren's Landing, the Artesian Waters have a shared significance to both the humans for their ties to the gods and to the sylvari as Trahearne's ultimate legacy.

What I love about this painting most is the softness of the lighting and the gentleness of the details. This is unmistakably the risen ruins of Orr - even with the slight abstraction of form and figure - but in a moment of triumph and peace, as if the painting captures the long relaxing sigh after the first breath the land had taken since Zhaitan's rise. The colors used contrast in a way that conveys this feeling of waking from a deep dream to the first light of dawn (if "Fear Not this Night" were a painting, which coincidentally happens to play during the cutscene in the story instance. SO MANY LAYERS!). The mysterious but hushed purples fade into the darker vignette that borders the picture only to be sharply cut by the warm and hopeful rays of a golden yellow, emanating their soft glow around the painting's center. Just looking at this piece makes me sleepy, not because it's boring, but because it shows a brighter tomorrow at the end of our dreams.





"THE RAVAGED RUINS" BY MSPPICE

www.msppice.deviantart.com

What waits for our heroes in the Crystal Desert? Well, while I can't answer that in any spoilery measure, I can say that there are mounts, a weird shattered pyramid (it's in the promotional material, just so we're clear), and lots and lots of sand. This is the next step in the journey, and artist mSppice is ready to dive in.

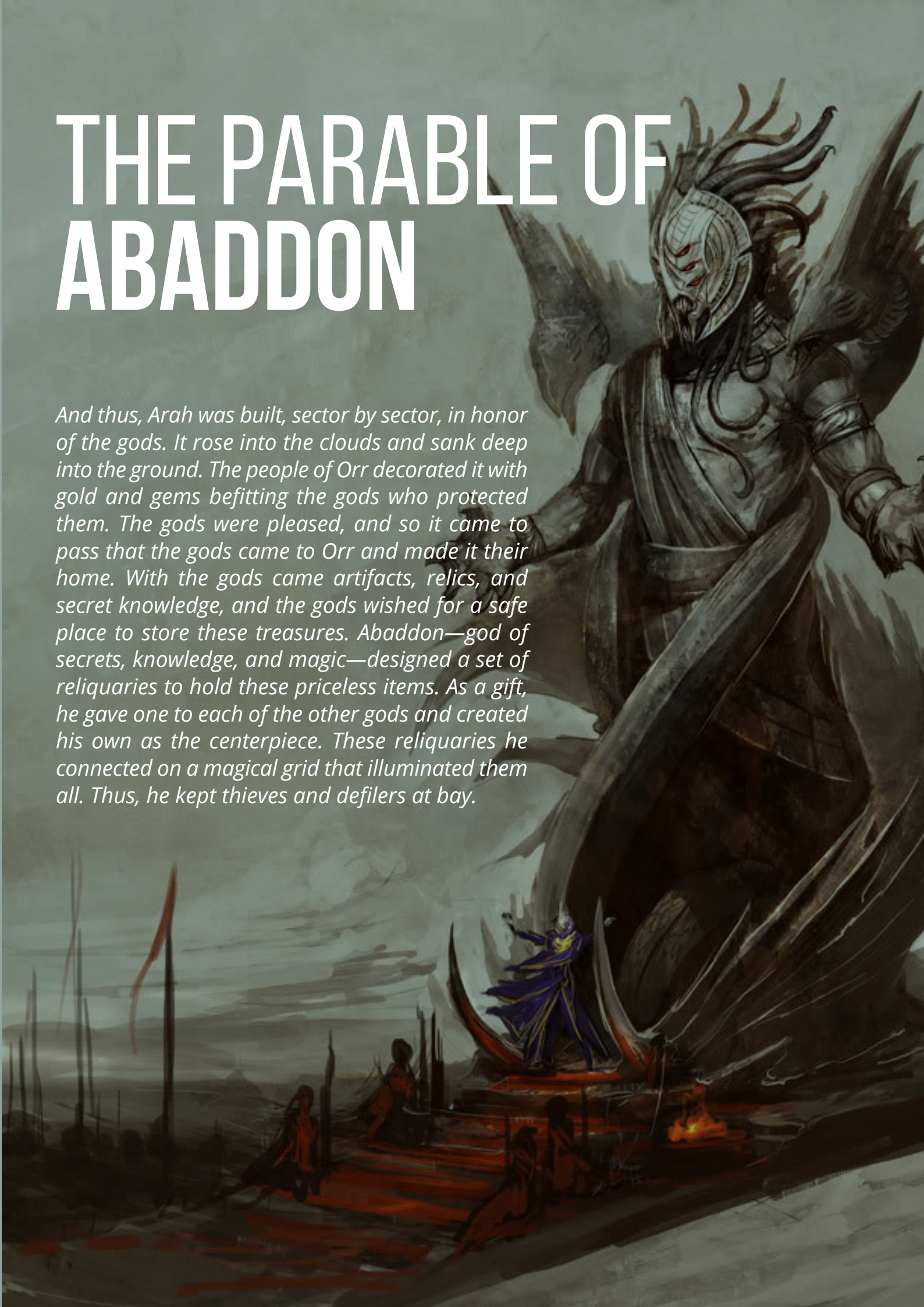
My unhindered bias for "sand doggo" aside, I'm a sucker for a Branded landscape (so long as it's not trying to kill me) and the shattered pyramid makes for a great painting opportunity, one that the artist takes on with mastery (look at that craggy rock texturing). The landscape is unmistakably Branded, and not just because it's purple-ish pink, but also because the artist captures that sort of glassy sheen of the Branded crystals with terrain that's been fractured, torn-up by Kralkatorrik's massive storm in his passing over (there's even lightning!). Like the last painting, this artist pairs the purple of the Brand with the soft golden hue of yellow that makes up the hazy and dusty desert sky - a combination that's equal parts inviting and alien at the same time.

The stoic figure and his mount are not the main focus, but serve to convey these adventurous and daring feelings in a physical manifestation. In fact, the mount almost appears to emerge from the darkness of the corner as if it were part of the cliffscape itself. In passing, the man bares a resemblance to the classic portrayal of Don Quixote of 17th century Spanish lore and artwork and, whether intentional or not, a comparison can be drawn. The Brand has its own windmill giants to conquer, and this guy looks up to the challenge. Overall, I like where this painting takes me: the road ahead is dangerous, but at the same time it also makes me think that I'll be able to handle it, and that's reassuring.





THE PARABLE OF ABADDON



And thus, Arah was built, sector by sector, in honor of the gods. It rose into the clouds and sank deep into the ground. The people of Orr decorated it with gold and gems befitting the gods who protected them. The gods were pleased, and so it came to pass that the gods came to Orr and made it their home. With the gods came artifacts, relics, and secret knowledge, and the gods wished for a safe place to store these treasures. Abaddon—god of secrets, knowledge, and magic—designed a set of reliquaries to hold these priceless items. As a gift, he gave one to each of the other gods and created his own as the centerpiece. These reliquaries he connected on a magical grid that illuminated them all. Thus, he kept thieves and defilers at bay.

DRAXYNNIC'S INTERPRETATION

While included as the "Parable of Abaddon," this appears to be more of a scripture or historical record than a true parable. There is no lesson to be learned from the 'parable,' and has little room for hidden meaning. It simply tells it as it was.

More interesting, however, is the notes in the margin, possibly made by the Priest of Abaddon:

Abaddon sent away. Gods with the records of him. Childish! Why so many Abaddon relics here if true? Is this even a parable? No mention of reliquaries in the history books. Gods hid it with a magical veil? Did they sink it too? But post-god maps show the region existed. May never know truth. Orr gets sunk, then rises. Veil shredded? Reliquaries revealed. Hehe. Abaddon, Keeper of Secrets, has the last word.



Here, ArenaNet lampshades the question that people have been asking since the Episode 6 trailer: if Abaddon was supposed to be hidden away from the world, then how did a set of Abaddon's statues survive in Siren's Landing, a location close to the land routes into Orr (between the Shark's Teeth Archipelago in the north and the Scavenger's Causeway to the south)? The theory, as presented in the margin, is that the gods placed a veil over the statues and reliquaries to hide them, which collapsed in the sinking or subsequent raising of Orr.

While certainly a reasonable theory, we should also consider why the gods hid knowledge of Abaddon in the first place. It was not childish spite, as the margin notes claim, but fear that knowledge of Abaddon in the mortal realm would allow him to act upon Tyria... as, indeed, he did in *Guild Wars: Nightfall* and the events leading up to it. After Abaddon's defeat and replacement by Kormir, the gods may have felt that the concealment was no longer needed and allowed the veils to dissipate.

KORA'S INTERPRETATION

How does the old phrase go? Arah wasn't built in a day. In truth, it was built slowly, building by building. The glorious city dug itself deep into the ground and rose high into the sky. The humans who called the city their home decorated it lavishly to honor the gods. In turn, the gods were pleased by the devotion of these humans and looked upon Tyria and decided that this city, decorated in precious metals and jewels, would be a suitable home for their divinity.

As the gods settled into the now holy city, they brought with them sacred and powerful items.

Abaddon - not yet fallen - understood that these magical items needed to be stored safely away from the reach of thieves. It was this god of secrets that took upon himself the task of building a set of containers for the holy relics. He gifted a reliquary to each god and goddess, including himself. Perhaps already believing himself to be better than the other gods, he designed his personal reliquary as the centerpiece.

The final line of this parable comes with a sense of irony, as it is Abaddon and his worshippers that will become the thieves and defilers that threaten the gods and their secrets. In truth, the whole parable is filled with irony. The Orrians built a city for the gods to call home. The gods arrived and brought powerful items and great magical knowledge with them... but eventually, they left Arah and left these items behind. Arah wasn't built in a day, but because of the items left behind by the gods... it sank in one.

If there is a lesson to be learned here, it's in knowing one's own limits and not wanting for more than what one needs.





LEGACY
INHERITANCE

“I still think we should destroy it,” a voice came from within the cave. Zach carried a bundle of firewood in his arms as he made his way up to the cave’s entrance. Mosquitos buzzed near his ear, though he could do little to protect himself with his hands full. The humidity of the day had lingered well into the night. The sooner he could leave the climate of Maguuma, the better; he hated being sweaty.

“That’s because you have cabbage for brains,” another voice came from the entrance. Zach rolled his eyes as he entered the dank cave.

“You two at it again?” he said as he made his way to the small fire. Ravi and Lorian were near the fireplace.

Ravi’s golem was on its back; the little asura had made himself comfortable on its chest. Mechanical parts were strewn about. Ravi had one hand in a hole he had made in his creation’s chest; the other hand held a small device that changed colour at regular intervals. Every few seconds Ravi would look at the small device, mutter under his breath, then fiddle in the hole again until the device changed colours. Zach knew better than to ask what he was up to; he was too hot and tired for another lecture.

Lorian was sitting near what little of the fire remained, carving a stick with a sharpened stone. At his feet lay a few different gemstones he had dug up in the cave. Zach had never been much of an artificer, but the process of crafting magic weapons fascinated him - not that he was any good with magic. Zach much preferred a good bow or dagger over a staff or sceptre.

“The overgrown petunia still believes we should burn it. Tell him he’s an idiot, Zach.” Ravi barely looked up as he worked. Lorian was trying to fit a gemstone into the tip of his makeshift sceptre. Neither of them put much effort into arguing their points anymore; it was almost part of their routine by now.

The argument over his father’s book had gone on since the day of the funeral. The two attackers had missed their mark when they tried to kill him, and had it not been for Lorian’s portal, they might not have made it out alive. They took the nearest waypoint to Rata Sum; that was where they took the time to decipher the notes his father had made. When word spread about their discovery, they found themselves hounded by Inquest. Their next stop was the Grove, but the Nightmare Court had gotten wind of them as well. Everywhere they went, they were followed by someone who wanted his father’s book.

“Lorian, I understand your reasons for wanting it destroyed, but I can’t just do that. This book



BY
VIAN
DE BOD

is the culmination of my father's research. It's his life's work. His legacy." Zach had thought long and hard about what needed to be done with the book. He could not give it to anyone. Nor could he destroy it. He had considered giving it to the Pact, but he had remembered what his father once told him.

"Absolute power is for the Gods only. Their divine souls are incorruptible. Put absolute power in the hands of even the most religious man and he will be corrupted by it."

His father would not want to give it to anyone. Perhaps that is why he sent it to Zach just a few months before his passing. Encoding it and sending it away was his way of preventing his own corruption. Zach dropped the pile of wood next to the fire and took a seat. They could do without the heat, but they needed the light.

"But Zach, the power to freely manipulate ley-energy should never fall in anyone's hands. It should be destroyed." Lorian was looking at him now. The young sylvari had grown on him in the last few months, but he still felt slightly nervous when he thought back on what damage Mordremoth had done to the world.

"It should be utilised, not destroyed. Just imagine all the great things we could do! Travelling without waypoints to anywhere in the world. Being able to completely disable harmful magic in large areas. Think of the destruction we could have prevented in Lake Doric when the attack happened!" Ravi's attention was no longer on his golem, but he kept his hand in its chest.

"Ravi, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I've told you already that I won't utilise this. What would stop me from using that power for my own purposes? I'm no saint. I was a thief before I joined the Priory. Had it not been for my father and the Priory, I might have continued down that dark path. Without either, who says I won't return to it? Especially with that kind of power," a shiver went down Zach's spine when the thought came to him. He had left that life behind, though now he felt the itch more than ever before. His father called it kleptomania, though he would have preferred a softer term.

"Whatever you decide Zach. It's your inheritance after all." Ravi sighed and continued with the repairs on his golem.

"I've actually given it some thought. I want to take the journal to my father's research lab. He had an asuran partner, though I haven't heard from him since before the funeral. He might be able to help us keep it safe." Zach added some wood to the fire and stirred the coals with a stick. "Good idea. Most asuran labs have lockboxes for each member of the krewe to keep their

valuables. If your father had an asuran partner I'm sure he had his own lockbox. They work with genetic memory, so only your father or people who share his blood could open it - it's a pretty interesting mechanism, really. It was founded on the principles of..." Ravi rambled on while he worked. Zach pretended to listen, but barely looked up from the fire.

Regardless of the lockbox, he wanted to speak to his father's partner. He wanted to know how his last months had been. He wanted to know more about his father's motivations for his research. Most importantly, he wanted someone to talk to who knew his father. Someone who could make him feel less alone.
"Zach, are you ignoring me again?" Ravi's voice came from beside him. The little asura had left his golem and walked over to Zach.

"No."

"What did I ask you?"

"If I was ignoring you."

"Funny, Flynn. Before that," his voice was tinged with annoyance.

"Something about lockboxes?" Zach gave his best guess. Ravi sighed.

"I asked if you knew where this lab is." Ravi crossed his arms as if waiting for an answer. Zach thought for a moment before responding.

"Where all this ley-energy madness began." Ravi looked momentarily confused, but then a wave of understanding spread across his face. Lorian raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"Oh dear," Ravi said.

* * *

The old city of Lion's Arch had been destroyed and rebuilt twice in the last few centuries, though looking at it, you would never have guessed. Zach had only been there once before. When he last saw the town, it was celebrating some kind of anti-dragon festival. Back then it was a stronghold crawling with pirates and outlaws; now it was a stronghold crawling with pirates and outlaws that had gotten a recent remodelling.

The buildings had once been made out of old ships and boats. The bridges were made of planks from forgotten galleys and the keeps from rough stone quarried from the local mountains. It had a real charm back then. Sure it was uglier than a basilisk's rear end, but it had a charm nonetheless.

It was much different now. Large buildings were beautifully crafted from white limestone in the shapes of creatures of the deep: the local bank was an octopus with an aquarium in its head; the Black Lion Market was now housed in a spiralled





shell. Off in the distance Zach could see the harbour in the shape of some kind of crustacean. The city of Lion's Arch was a real fortress now, and the multiple patrols of Lion Guard added to the effect. Zach had heard of an organisation called the Consortium rebuilding Lion's Arch after the war against Scarlet, though he never thought it would be this different.

The waypoint they had used was near the bank. Ravi kept his face down and Zach wore a hood.

"Why are you two hiding your faces?" Lorian asked as the three of them walked through the town, though Ravi sat and let his golem do most of the work.

"It's a long story," Zach said, keeping his voice down as he spoke. He looked about nervously as they made their way to the harbour.

"Zach didn't exactly leave the city on the best of terms." Ravi kept his eyes firmly on the ground.

"Well if you're trying to avoid drawing detection, you aren't doing it very well. Take it from a master. If you want to go unnoticed, you must give the illusion of innocence. Deception is about redirection. Walk like you're allowed to be here." Lorian spoke as he casually put his hands in his pockets and kicked a stone off in the distance. Ravi and Zach looked at each other and shrugged. Zach removed his hood and Ravi sat up straight; his eyes fixed ahead of him. It was actually working. They had just reached the harbour without attracting any unwanted attention.

I really should give Lorian more credit. He may be young, but in many ways, he is wise. Zach's thoughts on Lorian were suddenly interrupted by a gruff voice from their left.

"Well, well. If it isn't old Zachariah Flynn. Never thought I'd see you again," a large man in golden armour approached them.

Lorian, Ravi, and Zach were all frozen in fear of the hulking Lion Guard. He was nearly as large as a norn. Thick, black hair fell to his neck and fierce grey eyes peered from behind an ornate helm in the shape of a lion's head. A single red sash hung across his chest, marking him as a captain of the Guard. Zach groaned and took back all he thought of Lorian's 'wisdom'. He took a deep breath before looking up at the approaching man. The large man gave no smile, so Zach gave the biggest one he could muster.

"Marq! How long has it been? Gosh, the last time I saw you–"

"I was dangling from the balcony of the eastern windmill. By my ankle. Naked." Marq's face was a storm of barely-contained rage.

"Good times," Zach said with a failing smile. Ravi chuckled nervously.



WAR PROFITEERS

PART IV: FINALE

BY **KENT BENSON**

The evening streets of Lion's Arch were still filled with a slow bustle of activity, from which Captain Greer Bladewind could see outside his room's window at the inn. He'd since cleaned up the mess he'd made over the past week after Rilana had intruded on his drunken stupor that morning. A twitch of annoyance traveled across his face at the thought of her, quickly drowned in a wash of guilt. The charr had been staring at the same blank page of parchment for an hour now. A small pile of crumpled-up paper had formed on the desk, casting peculiar shadows in the lamp light.

Greer let out a tired growl, rubbing his groggy eyes with his free paw. "Damn woman was right, I can't do it," he mumbled as he looked over the scar from the wound he'd taken in Maguuma. Iyone had spent a portion of each day for a week performing her healing elemental magic without request. The captain would try to shoo her off, but she insisted. At the very least, it kept her well-practiced. Now, the scar was mostly gone, even when he pushed the fur around to check.

The captain's four ears pricked up as he heard the sound of a person running up the inn stairs. He scooted his seat away from his desk into a more prepared position. To the untrained eye, it would simply look like he was sitting, but any charr would know he was positioned to pounce. The sprinting footfalls continued up to his room's door before the it flew open with a burst of wind, sending some of Greer's loose papers into the air. Iyone stood in the threshold of the door, breathing heavily, with Rilana's bundled glider slung over the sylvari's shoulder.

Captain Evon Gnashblade sat at his desk, claws clicking against the fine wood as he waited impatiently for his employees to report back with - he had hoped - the sylvari in tow. His feline eyes scanned the woman sitting in the chair across from him, noticing that she leaned slightly to the left, the side his subordinate elbowed hard while en route to his office; she'd tried to escape more than once. In the quiet of his office, he poured himself a small glass of strong smelling whisky and twirled it slowly in the grip of his claws before taking a sip.

Another hour passed and a smile crept across the Pact engineer's lips. "Your cronies aren't back

yet, Gnashblade. Not that I'm surprised; my friend moves like lightning, literally."

"Don't underestimate my resources," he mused. "Whether your friend got away is irrelevant; she'll come back for you, and she'll have to make a deal for your release. You did threaten one of my employees after all."

"Please. The 'legitimate' businesses of Lion's Arch rarely shy away from a show of force when it suits their needs. I'm just a reminder that sometimes," her eyes flashed as she leaned in "the little people push back." After a moment of silence, Rilana let out a scoff. "Really though, your employee was just being an ass."

The charr scowled. "They were protecting the patrons at the inn."

"They threw that sylvari through a window and onto the street!" the human spat, arms raised in protest. "I don't know why I'm arguing this. You don't actually care that I threatened your employee; you're just using that to get your greedy hands on my glider prototype."

With a coy grin, the charr gestured with faux disbelief. "Miss Dejar, the thought hadn't even crossed my mind, but since you mention it … maybe you'd like to strike up a deal?"

Before Rilana could answer, the sound of quickly-paced but loud footsteps stopped at the office door. The knocks were equally as impatient.

"What is it?!" Evon barked. The same male norn that Rilana recognized from her confrontation earlier in the week shoved the heavy oaken door open with a single push.

"The Lionguard are here to see you, sir," he spoke.

Evon Gnashblade scratched at the peppered gray and black fur that lined his left brow. "Do I even need to ask…"

"It's Captain Kiel, sir," the norn replied, less enthusiastic.

"Fantastic," the charr grumbled. "Send her in and no one else."

After four or five minutes, the office door reopened. Another chair had been set next to Rilana for the third-party to sit, but Kiel ignored it, choosing to stand at its side, hands planted on the hips of her billowed aviator pants.

"What's going on, Gnashblade? Small-time extortion is a step down for you, isn't it? Are you going soft on me?" she mused, raising one hand to adjust a few stray strands of jaw-length ginger-colored hair out of her face. Captain Kiel looked more amused than angry, Rilana observed, which made sense from what little she knew of her. Kiel had bested Gnashblade for a spot on the Lion's Arch Captain's Council by being the first to secure the support and trust of the Zephyrites, at least, before they were lost to Maguuma.

"I don't know what you're going on about, councilor. I'm looking for reparations for this soldier's

threat against my employee's life," the charr leaned back in his chair slightly, adjusting to a more casual posture, "so I thought that maybe the noble Pact soldier and I could come to an arrangement to make this whole misunderstanding go away. Does that not sound reasonable?"

"You didn't give me much of a choice," Rilana spat. She postured herself to continue, but caught a hard downward glare from Kiel. The engineer got the feeling that her normal diplomatic and ethical postulating wasn't going to put an end to this. That wasn't how things worked in Lion's Arch.

"Let's get down to brass tacks, Evon. You want to strike a deal with the Pact for the glider prototype and designs, the one you never got to pitch because the Pact cancelled, no?" Kiel explained, white puffy sleeves now crossed over her blue-striped vest. She looked down at Rilana next. "Obviously, you'll want a formal apology from the Captain for your unwarranted detainment as well as some form of compensation as a gesture of goodwill before you consider business negotiations again, right?"

Rilana twitched irritably, tightly gripping the worn wooden arms of her seat. "What?! I can just take my business somewhere else. I don't have to deal with this cutthroat."

Evon nearly choked on his whisky as he broke into laughter. "HAH! Where?! The Consortium? Those malcontents will bury you in so much business legalease that you'll sell control of the Pact over to them without even knowing it," he replied. "Face it, kid. I'm the only one who has the means of production and business repute to make the Pact any form of profit off of such a niche item in the shortest amount of time - time that they don't have."

The Pact soldier bit her lip. Evon was an asshole, but he was right; there was the cruel truth in the matter. The Black Lion Trading Company was her first choice when they'd first arrived, but the following events had soured those prospects for Rilana. Even so, the Pact couldn't afford to wait much longer.

"Well?" Captain Gnashblade growled impatiently.

A minute passed, but to Rilana, it seemed far longer. "Fine... I'll reconsider a contract with you after you apologize to me and my team. And as for my compensation..." she paused to think of something delicious, something humiliating. It didn't take long. "You will commission my father to do a painting of Captain Kiel, which she will keep as a reminder of how she continually bests you day-to-day."

The human captain let out a single, exhausted laugh. "I can't wait to tell Magnus about this," she said, looking to the disgruntled charr behind his desk. "Take it or leave it, Captain. Either way, I'm walking out of here with your guest in tow."

Captain Gnashblade stood, still propping himself up on the desktop, his head lowered and eyes closed briefly in contemplation. Finally, he looked up at Rilana. "Burn me. You're lucky Kiel is here," the charr said, sporting a slanted grin. "I'm not sure if I should be furious or impressed; you really know how to twist a knife, mouse."

The Pact engineer also stood, staring past Captain Kiel to her left. “My fathers prepared me to face a world of uncertainty, which meant learning to fight with more than just daggers and swords,” she paused, eyes meeting Gnashblade’s gaze. “Now, when and where will we meet?”

The charr captain brought himself more upright as he pensively toyed with the end of his banded white goatee. “I have a few favorite street vendors around the Grand Piazza at midday that sell some of the tastiest morsels you’ll find in the city. Bring your friends tomorrow, if you want; however, I want to inspect the glider and your designs too. I’m not investing in a product that doesn’t meet my standards,” he finished.

Rilana made a muffled but haughty “hmph” before agreeing to his conditions and left the office with Captain Kiel.

As the two exited, they paced down the dimly lit hallway, past a couple of private guestrooms, and into the main foyer of Gnashblade’s bar. Two familiar faces barreled down on the women. Iyone rushed in and embraced her squadmate with a tight squeeze; Captain Greer looked on, his face awash with relief.

Rilana noticed this from peering over the sylvari’s shoulder. “I’m a little disappointed, Bladewind. I half expected you and Iyone to tear the whole place down to get to me, though I take it Captain Kiel insisted she be the one to handle it.”

Ellen, observing the the reunion with an exhausted satisfaction, simply smiled. “Your friends asked for my help; this is what my help looks like. That, and your esteemed captain promised me a personal favor,” she glanced over to the rusty-furred charr, “to be decided at a later time, I figure.”

“Really?” Rilana raised a brow.

Captain Greer’s expression furrowed, briefly wounded by his friend’s doubt. “You’re damn right I did! I take care of my team, whatever the cost.”

“It won’t be anything too dishonorable, I promise,” Kiel said with a slight smirk as she started to walk off into the night of a breezy but warm Lion’s Arch, a single arm raised in farewell. “Have a good evening. Stop by my office for a drink next time you’re around, you three; my door’s open.”

The next day, the three met with Evon Gnashblade and two of his own associates under the elegant glass pavilion that shaded much of the Grand Piazza. A round of uneasy apologies were exchanged between parties before business began. After a few days and few more meetings, a contract was finally struck, one that would funnel some direly needed support to the Pact’s war against the Elder Dragons. For the jungle dragon, however, that aid would not reach the front in time. Mordremoth was slain before Captain Greer, Rilana, and Iyone were assigned to active duty again, though they would spend a month in Maguuma conducting search-and-rescue operations for Pact survivors before returning to Vigil Keep as the Order began to reorganize.

Word spread of the Pact Commander’s exit from the official ranks after Mordremoth’s death, but

the blow to morale was short-lived as news of Logan Thackeray's appointment as Pact Marshal spread quickly. Afterwards, the team was split; Captain Bladewind began to help teach the new wave of recruits looking to helm and maintain the Pact's next wave of airships, impatiently waiting for Captain Kiel to send for him. The charr wanted an adventure, an excuse to get the team back together for one more journey far away. Meanwhile, Iyone took an extended leave to return to The Grove in the aftermath of the destruction of her race's creator, seeking to help heal the hearts and minds of her people, and aid those traumatized find new purpose in the sylvaris' unbound future.

Rilana sat alone in her shared office in the Vigil Keep. She'd been serving as one of many instructors in the Pact's engineering division since the team had split. The sound of crisp paper tearing and unfolding filled the chamber for only a moment as Rilana recognised the penmanship on the sealed envelope front. It was a letter from Greer. She poured over it, a smile breaking across her lips every few lines or so.

He wrote about the recent arrival of refugees from the Crystal Desert and Elona, and the rumors surrounding the crisis in the region. Further down, he mentioned seeing a consistent line of new and odd gliders every few weeks, making sure to note that her designs were far more practical and intuitive.

She set the letter down with a short relaxed sigh, turning her gaze to a small cabinet next to her desk. Somewhere inside, locked away in a small chest, sat a sealed scroll capsule that held a copy of her official trade contract with its wax stamp and signatures, where, in the fine print, acknowledgement and credit for the original designs and prototype was given to Rilana Dejar, Pact Engineer.







JOIN GUILDMAG

GuildMag is one of the oldest *Guild Wars 2* fansites, and the only one to produce a digital magazine. We're always looking for new volunteers to join the team and create our unique content - read on below for the positions available.

WRITER

Writers are the backbone of GuildMag; they're the ones who come up with the interesting articles that fill each magazine - whether that's lore, fashion, fiction or opinion pieces. To become a writer, all you need is a good written level of English and a passion for *Guild Wars 2*.

COPYEDITOR

Copyeditors work with our writing team to ensure each article is free from errors and filled with awesome content. You'll need a high profciency with written English.

To apply to join the team, and view more positions, visit **www.guildmag.com/join**.

FOLLOW US

@GuildMag

/guildmag

/GuildMag

/GuildMag





© GuildMag 2017. All Guild Wars 2 assets © 2017 ArenaNet, LLC. All rights reserved. NCSOFT, the interlocking NC logo, ArenaNet, Guild Wars, Guild Wars Factions, Guild Wars Nightfall, Guild Wars: Eye of the North, Guild Wars 2, and all associated logos and designs are trademarks or registered trademarks of NCSOFT Corporation. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.