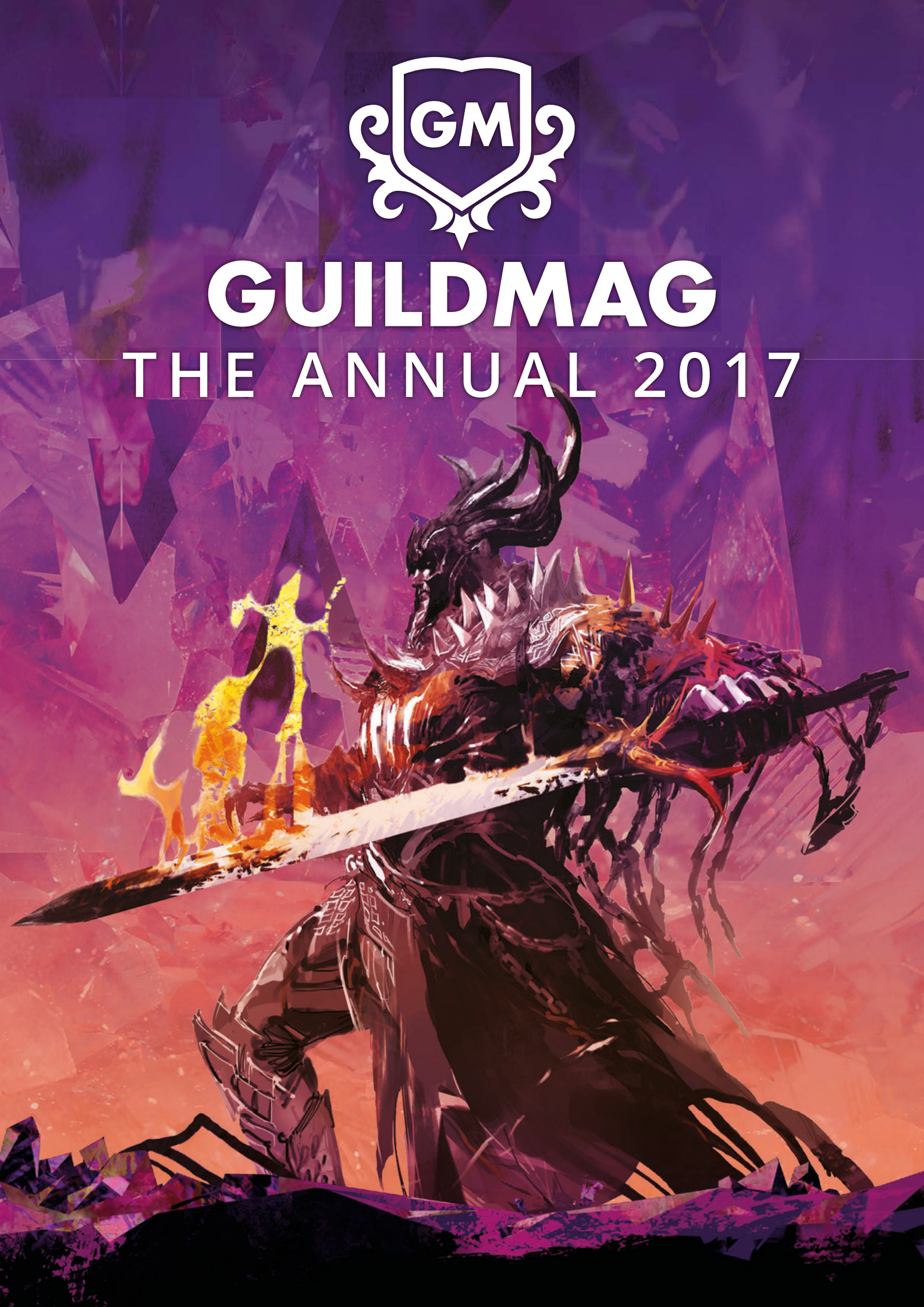
GUILDMAG

THE ANNUAL 2017



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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the 2017 edition of the GuildMag Annual! Proceeds from this year's magazine are supporting the work of WWF - a global conservation charity. From everyone at GuildMag, thank you for your support and we hope you enjoy what you'll find inside these pages!

After months of waiting, *Path of Fire* is now truly here! It's been a few months since the expansion's release, and in that time we've ventured to the exotic lands of Elona, battled a renegade god of war and witnessed the power of Kralkatorrik. We've also seen the commencement of Living World Season 4 with the debut episode "Daybreak", and the release of the latest raid the Hall of Chains. All in all then, the latter half of 2017 was a hugely busy time for *Guild Wars 2*, so what better way to celebrate and remember it than with the GuildMag Annual 2017?

In my letter for last year's Annual, I said that we hoped to make the next even better and raise even more for a charitable cause. It's therefore with great pleasure that I'm happy to announce we've done just that! The physical edition of this magazine helped us raise a total of $500 USD for WWF this time around, which is no mean feat! Over the last 7 years I've witnessed GuildMag grow from a fledgling fansite to what's now the longest-serving *Guild Wars 2* website still operating, with readers all around the world who help make what we do possible. So here's to each and every one of you. Whether this is your first experience with one of our magazines or your twenty-first, I sincerely hope you enjoy our content and continue to support us as we move into 2018 and beyond.

On that note, I'd like to extend my thanks to the content creators from across the community who have, in some shape or another, contributed to this magazine alongside our regular team of amazingly talented players. You'll find a list of our partners over the page, but I'd also like to give some honourable mentions to the following people not listed:

- Tauz – As our senior copyeditor and IRL friend, you've given up countless hours to GuildMag over the years. Thank you for all your hard work on this issue and all the others!
- Harper – The friendliest Romanian swordsman in *Guild Wars 2*. Thank you for the hundreds of screenshots you contributed!
- Ponomous, Calum & the rest of our raiders – There's too many of you to list, but thank you for sticking with GuildMag and the countless hours of fun!

So with all that said, I hope you enjoy this magazine. Happy reading!

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Come join our friendly team of players: www.guildmag.com/join

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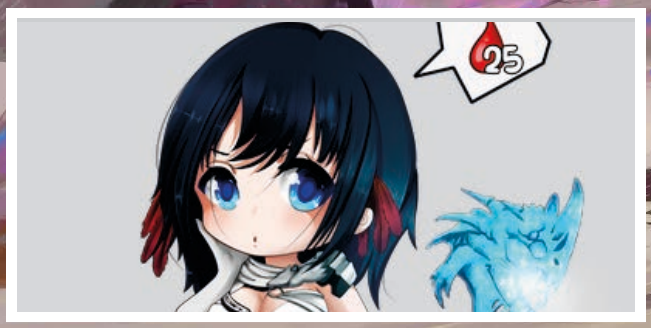
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@ChroniclesTyria
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@DragonSeasonCom
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All of the content creators listed here have helped contribute to this year's GuildMag Annual. We'd like to thank each and every one of them, and encourage you to check out their respective channels!



@GuildLores
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@mightyteapot
/mightyteapot



@MMOINKS
/mmoinks



@talkingskritt
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@TekkitsWorkshop
/tekkitsworkshop

THE LAND OF ELONA REVEALED

BY STARCONSPIRATOR

For hundreds of years, the land of Elona has been shrouded in mystery. The sands of the Crystal Desert, the sulfurous wastes of the Devastation and the lands of Vabbi last seen in the original game have once again been opened to the ranks of Tyrian explorers. For those who played the first game, returning to the Land of the Golden Sun has brought with it waves of nostalgia and giddiness, albeit with a (sometimes starkly) changed landscape under Joko's reign. While Elona has been sealed away, its citizens living and dying at the whim of the undead king, many of the iconic locations from *Prophecies* and *Nightfall* have undergone some transformations, whilst others have remained somewhat the same. In this special edition of GuildMag, we're going to reveal the extent of these changes... welcome back to the Elona of old!

AMNOON

Players of the first game found themselves in the Crystal Desert as they followed the storyline of *GuildWars: Prophecies*, landing at Amnoon Oasis and Augury Rock. Upon returning in *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire*, we also find ourselves in Amnoon, now a free city.

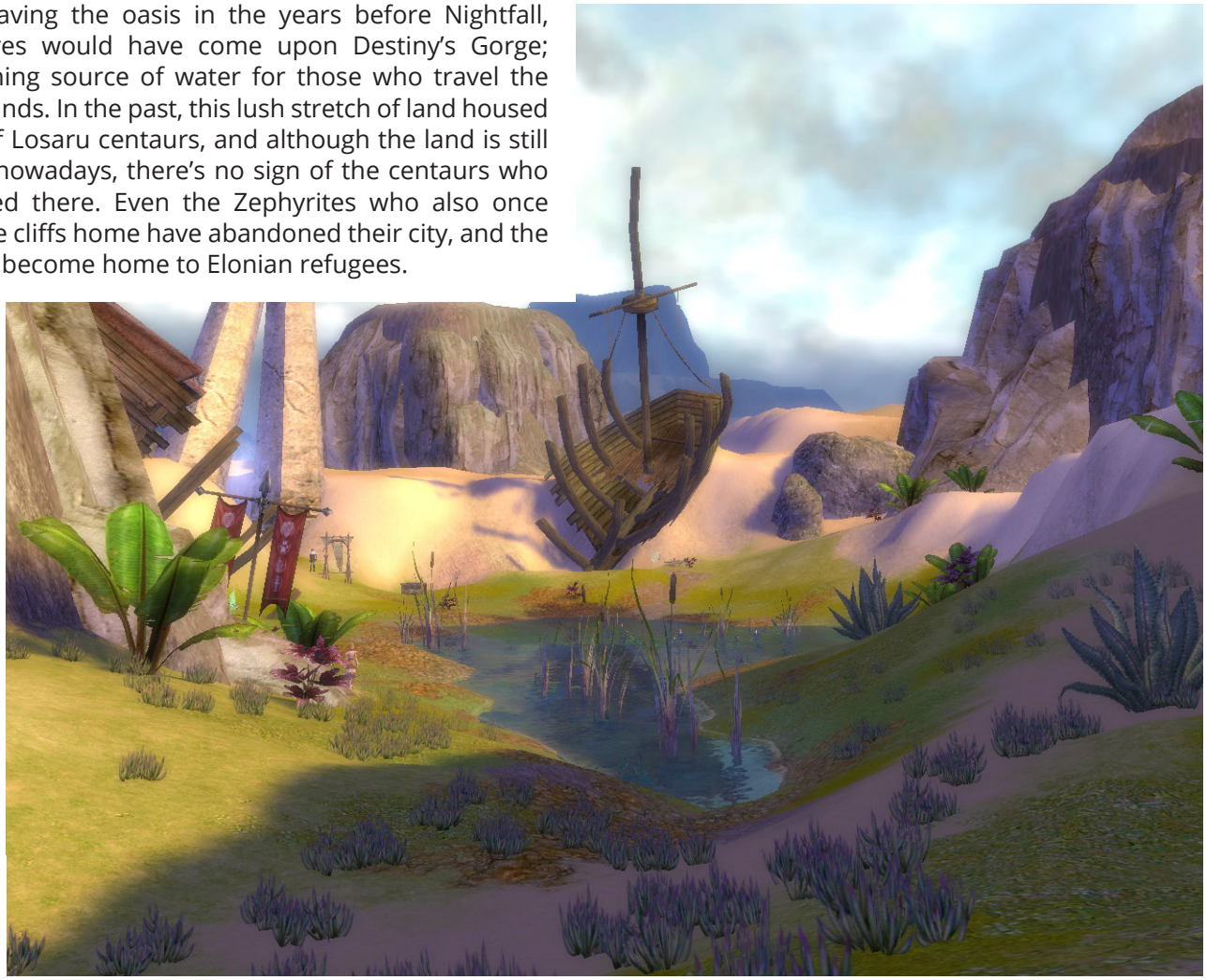


Years ago, the tiny port of Amnoon was the last chance people had to secure supplies before heading into the Crystal Desert. Today, Amnoon has grown into a large port city, arguably rivaling Lion's Arch in size and importance. Quite the difference a couple of centuries make!



DESTINY'S GORGE

When leaving the oasis in the years before Nightfall, adventures would have come upon Destiny's Gorge; a refreshing source of water for those who travel the crystal sands. In the past, this lush stretch of land housed a tribe of Losaru centaurs, and although the land is still verdant nowadays, there's no sign of the centaurs who once lived there. Even the Zephyrites who also once called the cliffs home have abandoned their city, and the area has become home to Elonian refugees.

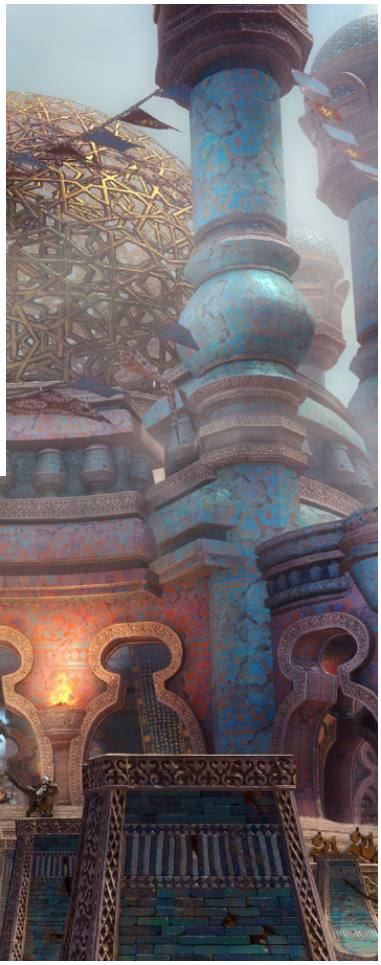




ELONA REACH

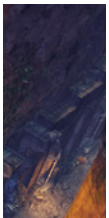
During *Prophecies*, players entered the Crystal Desert to Ascend. There, we met the ghosts of the Elonians who had once tried themselves. One of their lost cities, Elona Reach, can still be seen today; bleached bones once kept shipwrecks company in the ghost town, but today these ruins are gone, replaced by a temple dedicated to Kormir.





AUGURY ROCK

Completing the trials of Ascension brought the Chosen to Augury Rock, where inside the structure they faced a final trial before being deemed worthy to meet the dragon Glint. Current players of *Path of Fire* can find their way into Augury Rock once again with Follower Kaidenna, a sylvari studying the ancient Trials.







THE BONE PALACE

Palawa Joko's palace was already centuries old during the story of *Nightfall* when players first came across it. From the Bone Palace, Joko consolidated his power, rallying his undead army to fight against first Abbadon's forces and later the Elonians. The Bone Palace of today has certainly grown in magnificence...





MIRROR OF LYSS

The lake called the Mirror of Lyss was believed to be made by Lyssa herself, and played host to a floating cathedral dedicated to the goddess. The Sunspear heroes once defeated a powerful demon of Abaddon that was summoned here to desecrate this place, but not before the slaughter of the priestesses there - an act that resulted in the defection of General Morgahn of Kourna to the Sunspears.



MOUTH OF TORMENT

When Abbadon rose up against the other gods, they struck him down and imprisoned him here, creating the Realm of Torment. The surrounding land has been malignant ever since, twisted by the fallen god's presence. During the events of *Nightfall*, the warmarshal Varesh Ossa opened a gateway to the Realm of Torment in her attempt to free Abbadon, and for centuries the vortex has remained intact. Now Balthazar's minions, the Forged, pour from it.

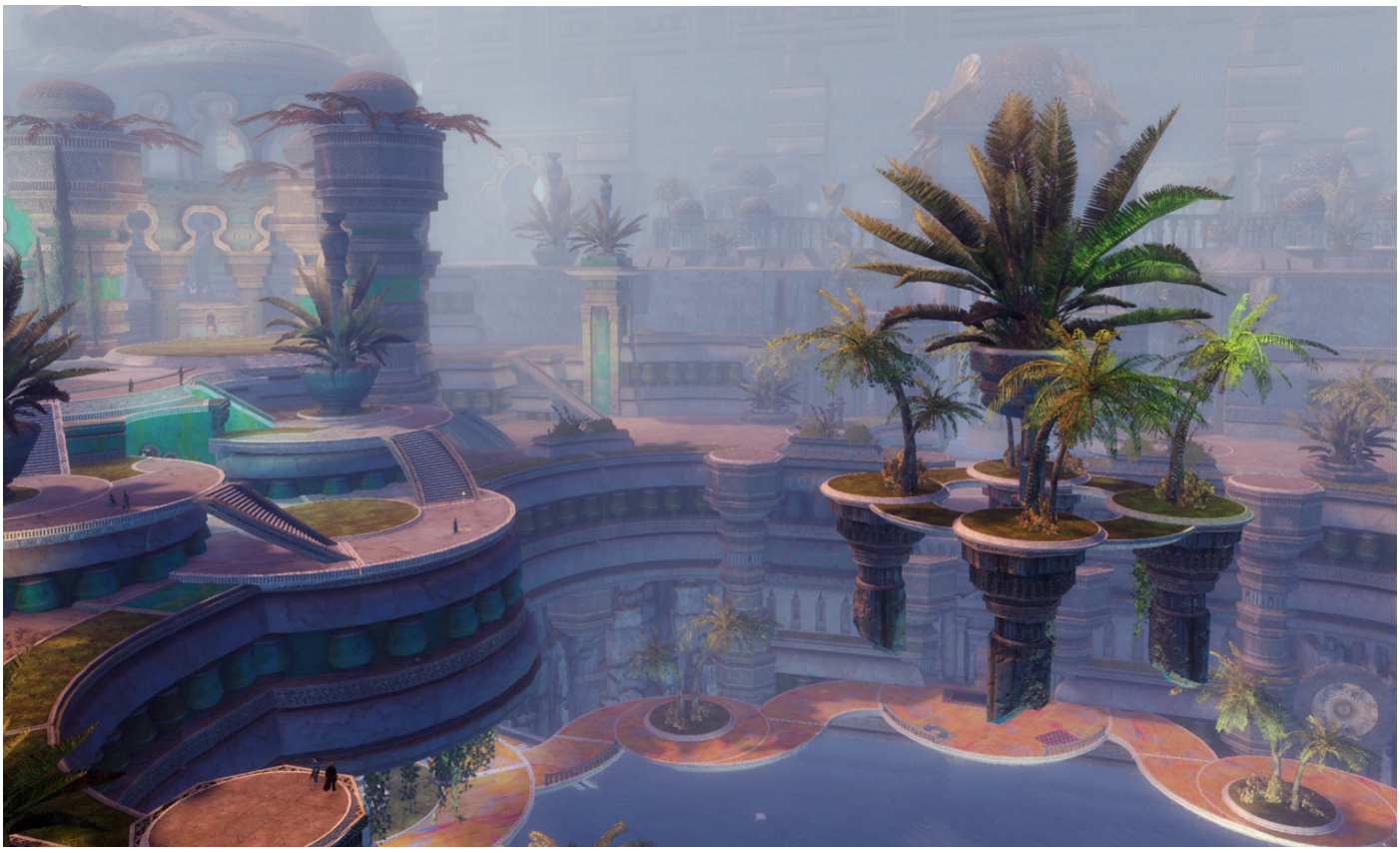




GARDEN OF SEBHORIN



The main party destination in Elona, the Garden of Seborhin was where the Sunspear heroes first met the princes of Vabbi during Nightfall, and later returned to cleanse the garden from Abaddon's influence. Having narrowly avoided Branding, the celebration continues despite the threat of Branded and Forged.





MIRAGE



LOOKING BACK ON THE PATH

BY AGE NIGHTROAD

When it comes to *Path of Fire*, the second *Guild Wars 2* expansion, there were quite a few expectations stemming from its predecessor *Heart of Thorns*, such as a stronger story, less of a mastery treadmill to do said story, and access to the map regardless of its meta event progress to name just a few. In this editorial for GuildMag, I want to look at each of the features introduced with *PoF* and examine how they felt at release, and how well the expansion is performing a few months down the road.

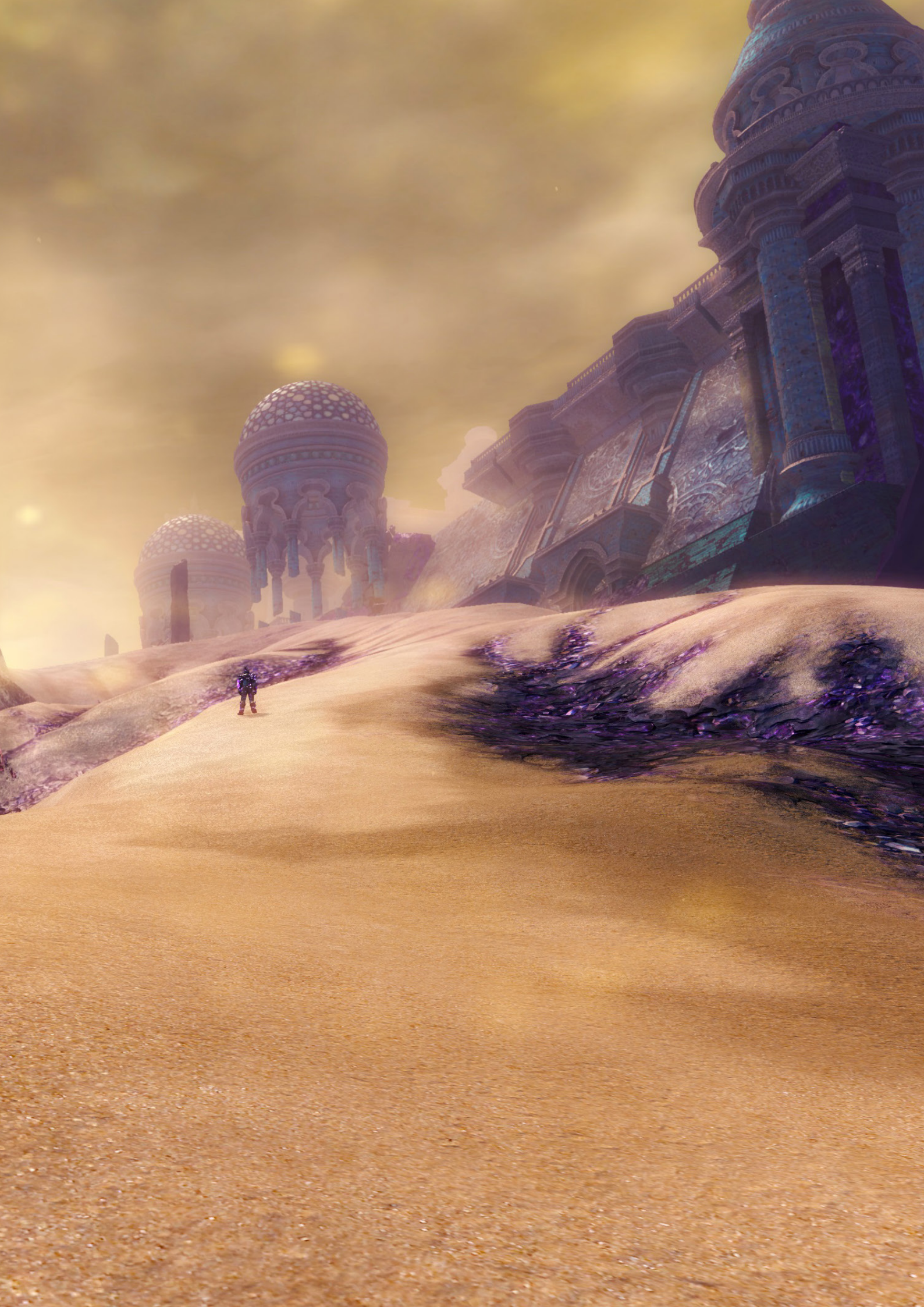
The main attraction of any expansion is the story, and *Guild Wars 2*'s story has been gradually getting better and better over time, carefully weaving the tale of our characters and their companions. In my opinion, *PoF*'s story is the best *Guild Wars 2* narrative told so far, which I believe is mainly due to the focus on character development, especially for our own character, which is something I've never really felt before in previous Living World seasons or the *HoT* story. In *PoF*, the story encounters themselves are more interesting with better mechanics to make the instances and fights more engaging, which is something I totally approve of. As we progress through the story we learn quite a few things, including answers to the older burning questions like why the gods left Tyria or what Rytlock did in the Mists. Speaking of Rytlock, the main NPC characters that join us in our adventures in the desert are himself, Canach and Kasmeer. Out of these three characters, I was most interested in Kasmeer because there was very little character development for her in Living World Season Three where here she had to deal with the huge task of facing down one of her gods. As a strong believer in the Six, Kasmeer has a lot of internal turmoil about what she should do and it was interesting to see the steps taken to display how she confronts this. In Act One she's still in disbelief that Balthazar gave up on Tyria, but as the story progresses her resolve grows after witnessing the power of the fallen god and his plan for all of Tyria.

> "*PoF*'s story is the best *Guild Wars 2* narrative told so far [...] mainly due to the focus on character development.

While I'm on the topic of characters from the story, one character that I found very compelling was Vlast, another offspring of Glint and Aurene's older sibling. Vlast sought to fulfill the duty that his mother gave him, but ultimately felt the weight of that responsibility very heavily and grew more frustrated with his situation as time went on, in part due to his disconnect from his caretakers and the races he was defending. It seems like he was fighting a losing battle as he constantly fended off hordes of Branded, and eventually Balthazar and the Forged, but his sense of duty outweighed his personal feelings. That struggle to endure and keep fighting was what made Vlast so compelling as a character.

As we transition through the story, we adventure through the beautiful maps that make up the Crystal Desert. Each of these large maps are unique in their own right, while retaining the desert theme and nostalgia from the original *Guild Wars* trilogy. A sense of exploration is brought back as you take different paths to unlock more of the map, or try to find interesting locations, which is made possible due to meta event progress not being map-wide like in *Heart of Thorns*, but instead focused into sections of the map. One of the issues in *Heart of Thorns* was that some of the hero points were not soloable - something rectified in *PoF* so you can unlock elite specializations at your leisure. You could say ArenaNet went back to their roots in terms of the maps, taking inspiration from core Tyrian maps that have meta events and hero points in a very similar fashion to





what can be seen in *Path of Fire*. The *PoF* meta events, with the possible exception of the casino coins in the Crystal Oasis, don't seem as lucrative reward-wise and probably need to be looked at down the road; yet the map introduced with Living World Season 4 in November seems to show that ArenaNet understands this point and can provide smaller meta events with good rewards.



While I'm on the subject of the maps and rewards, I should cover bounties as well. Bounties are a bit of a nostalgic feature from the original *Guild Wars*, replicating the feature of a bounty board filled with various bosses available to take down for a reward. What's pretty great about bounties in *PoF* is that you do not need to go pick up a bounty from the board to earn credit for a kill; instead, you can randomly join one in progress and receive full rewards. The fights themselves are good because they have engaging mechanics where you have to pay attention in order to do damage or even survive. For example, one mechanic is that there is a blue aura that requires players to be standing in it in order to do damage, with this aura fluctuating between being a ring for range damage and a circle for melee damage. Kills reward a specific currency that can be traded into an NPC that sells Funerary armor and weapons (which are fantastic by the way), but each armor piece or weapon is only purchasable after completing its related achievement. It seems where bounty rewards are concerned, ArenaNet wants this activity to be the reward system in the long-term.

To many people's amusement, mounts were introduced with *Path of Fire* through the mastery system established in the previous expansion. There are currently only five mounts a player can obtain, but the twist is that each has its own strengths and weaknesses for travelling across the terrain; for example the raptor is the fastest land mount, while the springer is the best vertical mount and the skimmer is the best for traversing across sulfur, quicksand and water. Mounts are a lot of fun to use, especially in core Tyria, but one small caveat is that the base mount skins only have one dye channel while the other mount skins, which can currently only be obtained in the gem store, have more dye options. Looking back at *HoT* and gliders, the only gliders not tied to the gem store are the legendary ones via PvP, WvW and fractals, which does raise the question if ArenaNet will introduce an interesting reward system to get any in-game obtainable mount skins like the legendary gliders.



I've briefly touched on elite specializations being easier to get in *PoF* due to the hero points being soloable, but it's worth comparing them to the ones we got in *HoT*. The *Heart of Thorns* elite specs were straight up power boosts in one respect or another, but it seems ArenaNet wanted those in *PoF* to have more of a niche roll. For example, the warrior's new elite specialization, the spellbreaker, is best played in PvP. Not to say that some *PoF* elite specs can't be played in multiple game modes, but for the most part there's a clear place where they excel. As time has gone on after release, it's become apparent that some elite specs have a few problems finding any means of use in other parts of the game. In PvP, the *HoT* elite specialization herald is the more viable option for revenant players over its *PoF* counterpart renegade, which has seen very little to no use in the mode - contrastingly, condition renegade builds are currently popular amongst many raiders. It's

important to note that *HoT* had an issue like this with a few of the elite specs on its release as well, and balance patches seemed to make things better in the end, allowing each *HoT* elite spec to be viable in each mode to some extent. I expect this trend to follow suit with *Path of Fire*, although players might have to wait a considerable amount of time for that to happen which is not ideal. This isn't to say all elite specs should be great in every mode, but they should be viable to a decent extent because not every player will have every expansion and therefore will not have access to every elite spec for their profession. Going back to my renegade example, if a player wanted to play revenant in PvP but only had *PoF*, said player would have a really hard time.

There were quite a few features added with *Path of Fire* but one new item that could be a bit overlooked is the new guild hall Windswept Haven, which is one of the most detailed guild halls out of the current three available. Sadly, outside of the eye candy value and some new scribing recipes, not much has changed in terms of guilds or guild halls.

How about the other parts of the game that *PoF* did not impact beyond elite specializations, such as WvW, PvP, raids and fractals which are on their own release schedule? It was painfully apparent with *Heart of Thorns* that a majority of WvW players did not like the Desert Borderlands and much prefered the layout of the Alpine Borderlands; in the same vein, a majority of PvP players did not like Stronghold and prefered the style of Conquest. ArenaNet took the safer approach by not having expansion content for those modes, and instead probed the community for PvP and WvW features they would like to see and iterated on that feedback accordingly. The PvP and WvW devs had some new forum threads go up in early December asking players for some feedback or answering frequently asked questions, so it's very likely that we'll something significant about WvW or PvP in the early months of 2018. When it comes to raids and fractals, the fifth raid wing Hall of Chains and the new fractal Twilight Oasis were released at the end of November 2017 and it seems those modes will be on a fairly consistent release schedule, which might be thrown off at times due to another expansion. If you haven't yet, make sure you read MMOINKS' impressions of the latest raid on page 40.

Perhaps the biggest weakness of *Path of Fire* is in its ability to hold players in the maps for the long term, because currently it does not feel like there is much to do even if that might not be the case. If *Heart of Thorns* has shown anything in terms of sticking potential, it's generally rewards via the meta events. Granted, there was a rework to improve these rewards in *HoT*, but rewards are what make players come back, whether that be meta events or farming currency for a legendary. In the November patch, ArenaNet did add an alternate way to make second generation legendaries via the Gift of Desert Mastery, which requires players to go back to the *PoF* maps.

> " Where bounty rewards are concerned, ArenaNet wants this activity to be the reward system in the long-term.

Outside of the issues I've outlined in this article, *Path of Fire* is a fairly good expansion, providing players with a much stronger storyline, a sense of exploration in the Crystal Desert maps, challenging bounties and a twist to mounts that make them enjoyable to use beyond a means of simple transportation.









GUILD WARS 2

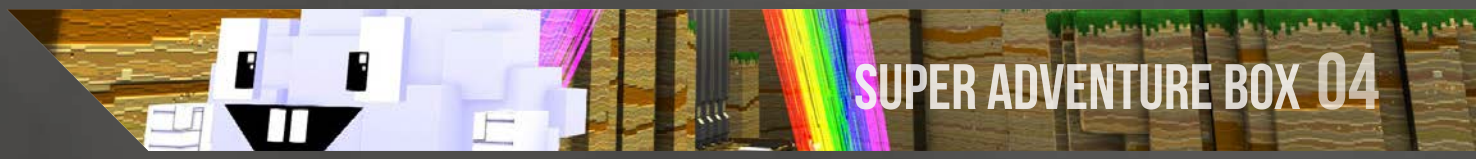
RELEASE TIMELINE

BY VIAN DE BOD



THE LOST SHORES 02

The Lost Shores release brought us Southsun Cove and the first big attack on our beloved city of Lion's Arch.



SUPER ADVENTURE BOX 04

Super Adventure Box appeared right before Flame and Frost concluded; the start of a beautiful arcade adventure for all Tyrians.



DRAGON BASH 06

Dragon Bash was an amazing festival celebrating resistance to the Elder Dragons. Of course, the celebration didn't end so well for a certain member of the Captain's Council.



BAZAAR OF THE FOUR WINDS 08

On the other end was the Bazaar of the Four Winds, introducing the Zephyrites and showing that not all sky-faring people are ruthless cutthroats.



QUEEN'S JUBILEE 10

The Queen of Kryta celebrated humanity's independence and strength through a series of fantastically challenging gauntlets!

Guild Wars 2 is over five years old! Over the last half decade we've been through more than 45 major releases; we're now at the second expansion and things are looking very good for our beloved franchise, and that's why I think it's time we took a step back and just admire how far we've come. To celebrate the journey from launch to *Path of Fire*, GuildMag has put together a timeline of all the game's major releases. For the sake of space, we've excluded Halloween and Wintersday since they come around every year and we're all pretty familiar with them anyway.

So without further ado, enjoy this *Guild Wars 2* release timeline!



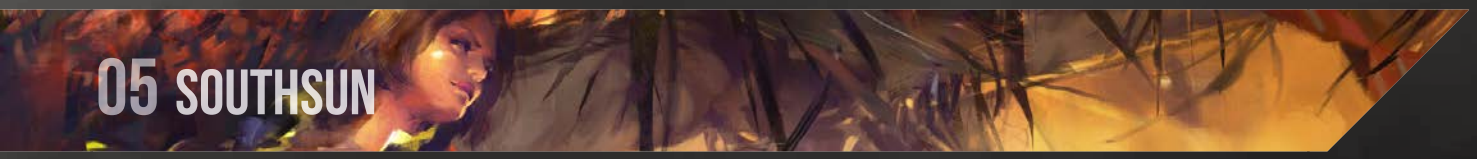
01 GAME LAUNCH

Launch is probably the most memorable experience for every *Guild Wars 2* veteran; where it all began.



03 FLAME AND FROST

Flame and Frost was split into four parts and heralded the first season of what we now know as the Living World.



05 SOUTHSUN

The two Southsun updates introduced us to both the Consortium and to the delightfully snarky Canach.



07 SKY PIRATES OF TYRIA

The Sky Pirates of Tyria was the introduction to a faction that turned the world upside down. These were the precursors to what we now call the Aetherblades.



09 CUTTHROAT POLITICS

Of course, that didn't stop our own ground-dwelling Tyrians from following that trend on the political battlefield. Finding the voting tokens all over the Zephyrite airships did make for quite an unusual voting system, though it was still a boat-load of fun!



SAB: BACK TO SCHOOL 12

Moto returned to teach all the young progeny the importance of retro platformers.



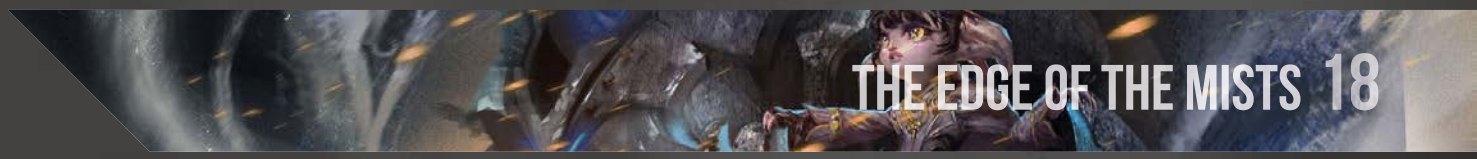
TWILIGHT ASSAULT 14

The first new dungeon path added to the game since launch brought us the Aetherpath in Twilight Arbor.



FRACTURED 16

We delved into the Mists to investigate new fractals and uncover the truth about Tyria's past and future.



THE EDGE OF THE MISTS 18

We found uncharted grounds in the Mists to further our advantage in the everlasting war! This the first new map added to WvW and is still frequented by the entire community.



APRIL 2014 FEATURE PACK 20

A bucketload of new features for all of us to enjoy! The most notable of these were the wardrobe and megaserver systems.



GATES OF MAGUUMA 22

Our epic journey to the west began as tragedy struck our sky-faring friends. The Master of Peace was missing and the Zephyrite fleet burned in Dry Top.



11 CLOCKWORK CHAOS

Unfortunately, our old friend Scarlet Briar had other plans for the Queen's Jubilee. Chaos ensued as the Queen's new machines were twisted and turned against those they were built to protect.



13 TEQUATL RISING

Tequatl's master is gone and he's none too happy about it. Players flocked to Sparkfly fen to battle the new Sunless Scourge, now stronger than ever.



15 TOWER OF NIGHTMARES

The Tower of Nightmares rose from the depths for two episodes of Living World, changing the face of Kessex Hills forever and introducing us to an alliance of toxic enemies.



17 THE ORIGINS OF MADNESS

We delved deeper into Scarlet's psyche to find out just what made her tick. In Origins, we discovered her base and read her secret journals to get an idea of how she became so twisted.



19 BATTLE FOR LION'S ARCH

This epic three-part chapter marked the death of old Lion's Arch. We watched as Scarlet destroyed our beloved city, then rose to defend its remains. In the culmination of this attack, Scarlet met her demise, and we came to learn of the Jungle Dragon's existence.



21 FESTIVAL OF THE FOUR WINDS

The Zephyrites return to the Labyrinthine Cliffs to share their wares and wisdom.



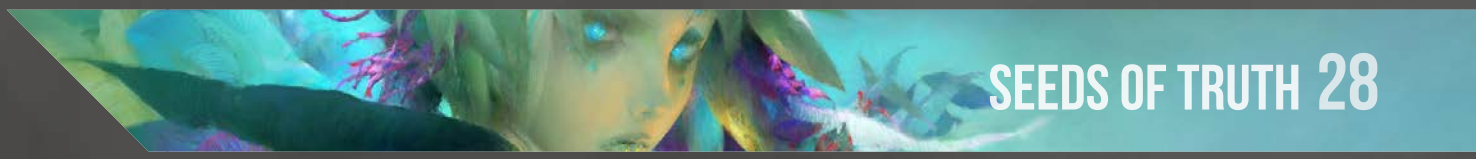
THE DRAGON'S REACH 24

Rytlock dove into the Mists and our heroes tried to forge alliances between the nations of Tyria.



ECHOES OF THE PAST 26

Our heroes journeyed to a hidden library and the lair of an old prophet...



SEEDS OF TRUTH 28

The truth was revealed and the past made clear. What were the origins of the sylvari? And what was the Pale Tree hiding from us?



FREE TO PLAY 30

Guild Wars 2 opened its doors to a whole new world of players!



SPIRIT VALE 32

Raids came to the *Guild Wars 2* scene with a bang, starting with the first wing of Forsaken Thicket!



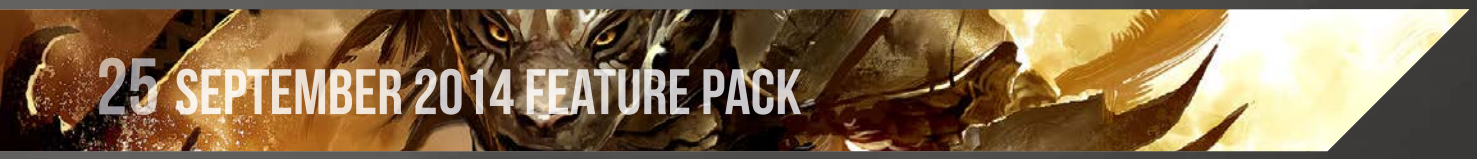
SALVATION PASS 34

The second wing of Forsaken Thicket revealed the order behind the Spirit Vale bandits: the White Mantle.



23 ENTANGLEMENT

Mordremoth's corruption spread across Tyria in a wave of death and destruction, leaving massive vines and tragedy in its wake.



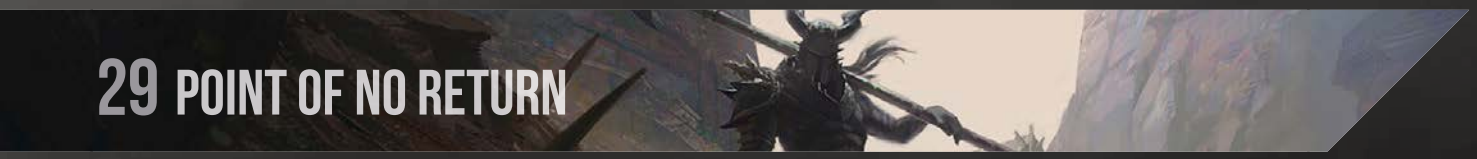
25 SEPTEMBER 2014 FEATURE PACK

An even bigger bucketload of features! This time with an updated Trading Post and a better experience for new players.



27 TANGLED PATHS

We chased after the Master of Peace in order to retrieve the mysterious Dragon Eg



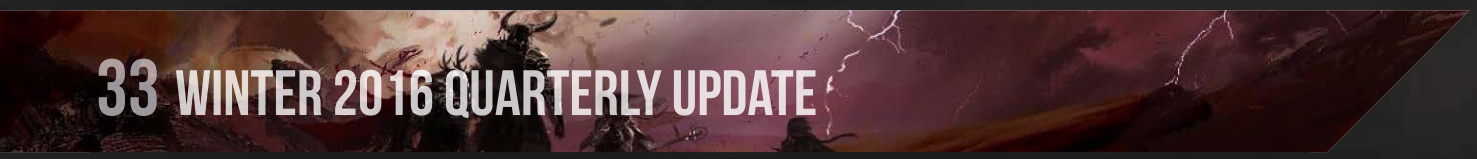
29 POINT OF NO RETURN

We were on the Dragon's doorstep; there was no more turning back...



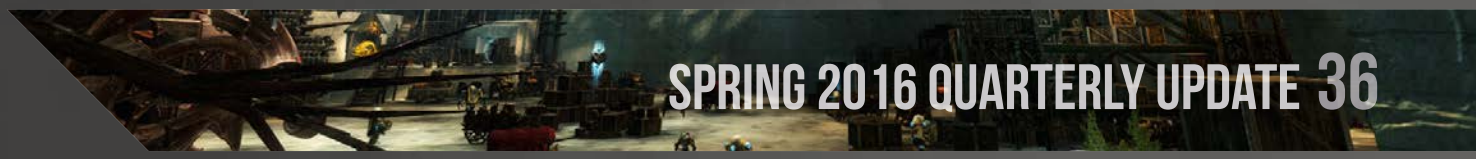
31 HEART OF THORNS

We took the fight to the Jungle Dragon in the largest feature and story update the game had ever seen!



33 WINTER 2016 QUARTERLY UPDATE

It's like a feature pack, but seasonal! This time, we took to the skies in central Tyria and fought an even stronger Shatterer.



SPRING 2016 QUARTERLY UPDATE 36

The birth of spring brought the birth of new features! The Heart of Maguuma was updated and *HoT* owners all received a free level 80 boost!



STRONGHOLD OF THE FAITHFUL 38

In the culmination of the Forsaken Thicket storyline, raiders assaulted the White Mantle's enclave and raced to stop Xera's nefarious plan...



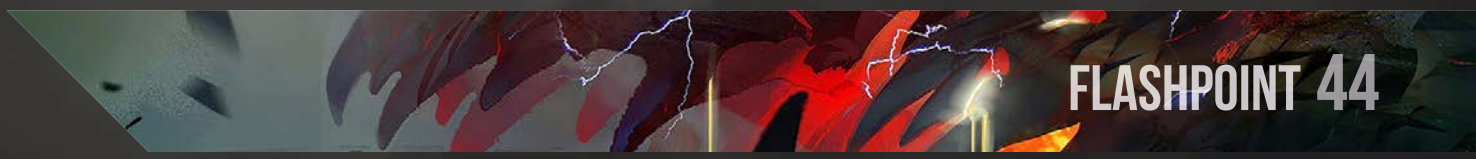
RISING FLAMES 40

We journeyed south to the hellish Fire Island chain in order to learn more about the nature of Elder Dragons.



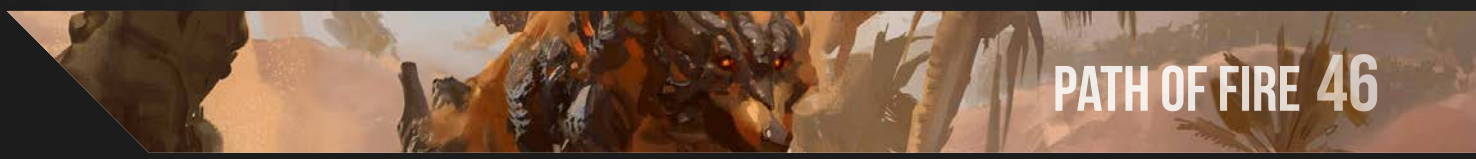
THE HEAD OF THE SNAKE 42

We cut off the head of the snake and crushed the White Mantle's attack on Divinity's Reach! The standalone raid Bastion of the Penitent was also released, where an old foe awaited...



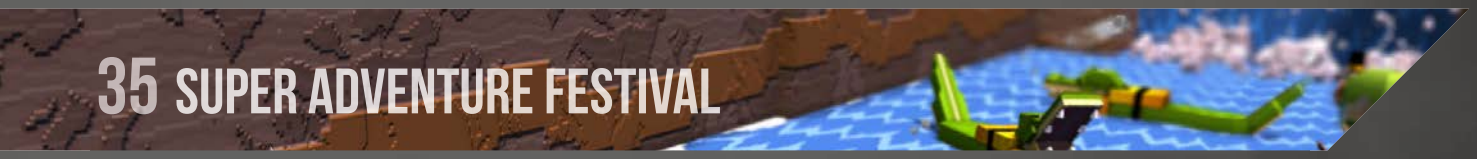
FLASHPOINT 44

We revealed a god, met the ancient druids and glimpsed another Elder Dragon all in one amazing chapter!



PATH OF FIRE 46

Both Balthazar and Kralkatorrik's call drew us to the land of sand and adventure! Elona was calling...



35 SUPER ADVENTURE FESTIVAL

Moto returned with what could only be described as the most loved festival in Tyria.



37 PVP LEAGUES

The competitive PvP scene got its day in the sun with the advent of Leagues.



39 OUT OF THE SHADOWS

The world stood in shock as a dead race, the mursaat, came back to life before our eyes.



41 A CRACK IN THE ICE

As a nice change after all that heat, Braham lured us north to an especially icy part of the Shiverpeaks.



43 SUPER ADVENTURE FESTIVAL

Moto was back with his box of platformer goodness!



45 ONE PATH ENDS

We returned to Orr to chase down Balthazar, the human god of war.





RENEGADE

THE HISTORY OF THE SUNSPEARS

Being a transcript of a lecture by Scholar Eleanor Draxynnus in the Season of the Scion in the year 1330 AE.

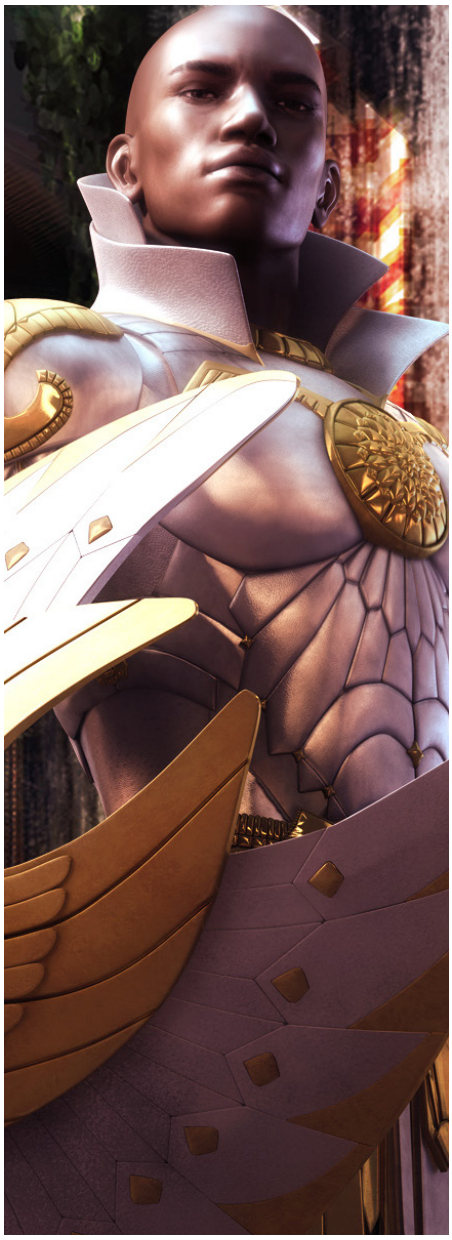
BY **DRAXYNNIC**

Despite the tragedies of recent events, there have also been opportunities; the opening up of the lands of Elona, and hence the opportunity to study them, that has not been available since the conquest of the region by Palawa Joko centuries ago. With this opportunity, however, comes a dilemma: should the organisations of northern Tyria, including our own Priory, outwardly cooperate with the lich king, despite all of the risks that such cooperation would entail? Or should we throw our support behind the factions that oppose him, in hopes of bringing him down and earning the ability to visit and study the region without his restrictions and censorship of the truth?

In making such a decision, it behooves us to familiarise ourselves as much as possible with the histories and activities of the organisations and individuals in question. While Palawa Joko's true origins remain a mystery - probably largely due to his own efforts at obfuscation - I believe that we do have the pieces to put together to understand one of the organisations that stands against him: the remnants of the Order of the Sunspears.

THE SUNSPEAR GUARD

The organisation known as the Sunspears was formed by Queen Nadijeh of the Primeval Dynasty as the Sunspear Guard, acting as the royal protectors of the Primeval Dynasty. Despite their connections with the Primeval Kings and Queens, most of the Sunspear Guard were not interred in the Tomb of the Primeval Kings, but instead were buried in a series of crypts south of Fahrunar, the ancient Istanian capital, in the region that would later be known as Lahtenda Bogs. Even the most ancient of the Sunspears, however, have shown a reluctance to pass easily into the Underworld - some of their spirits remain and could be invoked by their living successors as late as 1078 AE, while others manifest in the Tomb of Primeval Kings as ghostly guardians of the crypts of their monarchs. When the Primeval Dynasty was brought to an end by the Scarab Plague, as the living Sunspears evacuated and sealed off affected settlements, yet more ghostly Sunspears appeared to take up an eternal vigil, preventing the living from gaining access to the city and thus protecting the dangerous artifacts of Abaddon beneath the city.



With the fall of unified governance

of Elona, the survivors of the Sunspear Guard were left without a mandate. Under the leadership of Sogolon the Protector, they reformed into the Order of the Sunspears, an independent order that sought to protect Elona as a whole from threats both internal and external, while remaining above the politics of the various nation-states that arose in the vacuum left by the fallen dynasties. To this end, with the resettlement of eastern Istan, the Sunspears established a new headquarters in the Plains of Jarin near the growing port-city of Kamadan. It was from here that the Order took on new missions, fighting alongside Turai Ossa against Palawa Joko's first invasion, and protecting the people of Elona against threats such as harpies, corsairs, skale, and the highly aggressive Elonian hylek known as heket.

Their greatest test, however, would come with the onset of Nightfall in 1075 AE.

AGAINST THE MAD GOD

What began as a fight against an upsurge of corsair activity lead to the discovery of a conspiracy by Warmarshal Varesh Ossa of Kourna to destabilise Istan, granting her the opportunity to raid Fahrunar for artifacts of the fallen god Abaddon in an effort to return him to Tyria. In response, Spearmarshal Kormir rallied the Sunspears, along with the navy of Istan and veterans of the fighting in Cantha and Kryta, in order to launch an invasion of Kourna aimed at ending Varesh Ossa's schemes. At first, the Sunspear assault made good progress, reaching the Plaza of the Five Gods at the heart of the island fortress of Gandara. But they were too slow: as they arrived, Varesh completed a ritual to summon demons that tore the heart out of the Sunspear army. The survivors scattered into the wilderness of Kourna, while Kormir herself was captured and blinded by the summoned creatures.

Led by the Sunspear strategist Dunkoro and a Sunspear officer whose name has been lost to history, the surviving Sunspears rallied, forming an insurgency from a hidden sanctuary near the village of Ronjok. From here, the Sunspears were able to rescue many of the prisoners that had been captured by the Kournans, including Kormir herself - although her contact with Abaddon's demons would soon cause her to be pulled into the Realm of Torment. When Varesh Ossa moved into Vabbi and then the Desolation, the Sunspears followed, doing what they could to protect Vabbi from Varesh's Margonite followers and finally cornering her at the Mouth of Torment. Despite the warmarshal's death, the battle triggered the opening of the Mouth of Torment, granting the band of Sunspears responsible the opportunity to push forward into the Realm of Torment where they would find Kormir once again. With the aid of Sunspear ghosts rallied by Kormir within the Realm, and the Forgotten custodians that survived within that plane, a small band of Sunspears and their allies were able to push deep into Torment and slay Abaddon, paving the way for Kormir's ascension in his place.

Yet with this victory came the seeds of their own destruction.

THE FALL (AND RISE?) OF THE SUNSPEARS

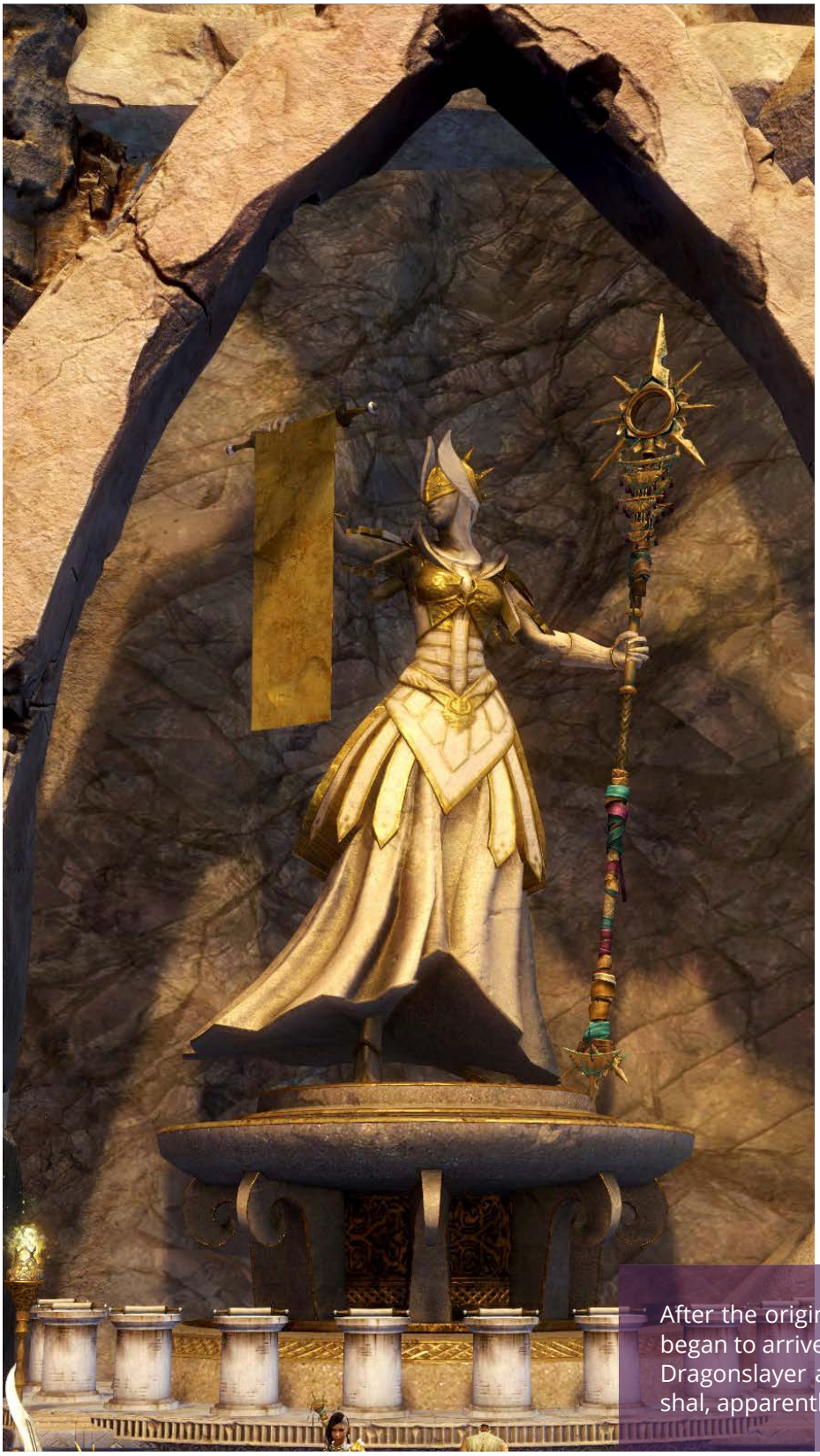
In order to pursue Varesh Ossa across the otherwise impassible sulphurous wastes of the Desolation, the Sunspears released Joko from his prison in exchange for a means of passage and the assistance of his Awakened armies against Varesh's forces. As part of the arrangement, the Sunspears and the Order of Whispers demanded that Joko reveal the route of his surprise attack against Vabbi two centuries before, which he readily did. The next time his bid for conquest would come, it would be by another means...



Instead of a direct assault, Joko diverted the flow of the Elon River, leaving the people of Kourna drought-stricken. Without the military strength of Kourna, the people of Elona were helpless to resist his demands, amongst which were the destruction of the Order of the Sunspears - Joko made it illegal for anyone to own a spear, and demanded that the Sunspears be turned over to him. Some such Sunspears were converted to his cause, forming the Mordant Crescent. Others formed an insurgency, opposing his forces from hidden places in the desert or speaking out against him and his historical "revisions".



Of special note is the last Spearmarshal of the Order, Princess Tahlkora. The daughter of Prince Mehtu of Vabbi, keeper of the libraries at Chokhin (since burned by Palawa Joko), Tahlkora was among the band who freed Joko and defeated Abaddon. Because of this, at least at first, Joko was afraid to simply kill Spearmarshal Tahlkora lest she become a martyr. Instead, Joko resorted to maiming her as she spoke out against him, taking her tongue so she could not speak, and taking her eyes so she could not write. Even deaf and mute, however, Tahlkora was too potent a symbol for Joko to allow to remain. In the end, he concluded that she was just as dangerous as a living symbol as a potential martyr and decided to kill her, hoping that she could be Awakened and become a tool to legitimise his rule rather than a symbol to oppose it. Miraculously, even this failed as somehow Tahlkora retained her own will after her death and reanimation. In response, Joko took back her animating force and left her to lie impotently in the mountains near Vehtendi.



In the centuries since, the Order of the Sunspears have continued to dwindle. Some few remain, but explorers in the desert are probably more likely to encounter the Mordant Crescent or the ghost of a dead Sunspear than a living Sunspear that holds true to the ideals of the Order. Rumour has it, though, that this may be changing - that the Sunspears have taken advantage of Joko's recent absence and established a new sanctuary east of the Brand, having somehow tamed griffons as mounts to fly them across the Brand to strike at Joko's empire with impunity. If this is true, then Joko's rule might find itself increasingly imperilled by a rebellion that he is unable to put down at its source. After all, Varesh's defeat has shown what even a small number of Sunspears can do against greater numbers as long as their base is secure, and in time the Branding of eastern Vabbi may prove to be a blessing in disguise, an opportunity for those seeking the liberation of Elona.

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

After the original delivery of this lecture, reports began to arrive of a revolution in Istan, led by the Dragonslayer and a newly appointed Spearmarshal, apparently the first since Joko's conquest.

THRIFTY PATH OF FIRE THREADS

BY XEROE

Hail, heroes and adventurers! Are you ready for a satisfyingly sandy and masterfully mummified Thrifty Threads? I know I am! This edition isn't about a conceptual idea for an outfit; instead, I wanted to go over all the brand new armour sets available with the release of the *Path of Fire* expansion. The new armour sets are truly magnificent; I'm just blown away at the level of artistry put into each piece, and each set of armour is so varied as well. You can venture the treacherous dunes in your Elonian or Spearmarshal apparel, or as mummified royalty ready to take back the land, adorned in Funerary armour! On the other hand, why not combat the Forged in proper Warbeast armour? Or hunt down the Crystal Desert's most fearsome foes in bounty hunter attire? *Path of Fire* gives you many opportunities to mix and match a million times over!



Embarking on an adventure to such a place as the Elonian Desert requires the right get-up, so who better to have as a fashion consultant than the Elonians? They have conquered the desert for hundreds of years, and in doing so have made the perfect outfits to wear for any of your adventuring needs! They've created the perfect blend of loose fabric and adornments while keeping you protected against whatever lurks beyond the dunes. But it doesn't stop there; the Order of the Sunspears have upgraded to an even fancier, flashier statement piece! If you're looking to complete your fashion-forward desert look, then look no further: the Elonian and Spearmarshal outfits provide the perfect solution.



Out of all the new armour sets, Elonian is the easiest to obtain. Just finish the *Path of Fire* story and along the way you'll earn all 3 armour types with ease! The Spearmarshal armour isn't hard to get either; you can choose a piece after the final *PoF* mission. Outside of the story, you can learn how to craft it from various heart vendors around the Elonian Desert. Thankfully they aren't too pricey to craft either if you need to buy the materials; **the list of vendors and their locations are to the right.**

Similar to the Elonian and Spearmarshal sets, the Funerary set combines different elements to make it an artistic yet powerful looking armour. Mummy wrappings, and armour that looks very pointy, decorative and regal, makes you turn into a high king or queen ready to take the land back from Joko and Balthazar! Delving into forbidden ruins and unlocking the dead royalty's secrets comes with a dangerous downside, but unlocking those secrets brings with it the Funerary armour. These sets were worn by the ancient Primeval kings and queens of Elona - a perfect disguise for any who wish to traverse the Crypt of the Royal Kings at their leisure. For all the necromancers out there, these sets provide ample opportunity to enhance your deathly (or death-defying) look! Personally I know I've always wanted to be a high fashion mummy.

The Funerary armour sets require you to complete collection achievements per armour piece, which are **shown on the right.** After you have finished a collection, when travelling to the Tomb of Primeval Kings you'll notice a vendor which will let you purchase the piece(s) you have unlocked.

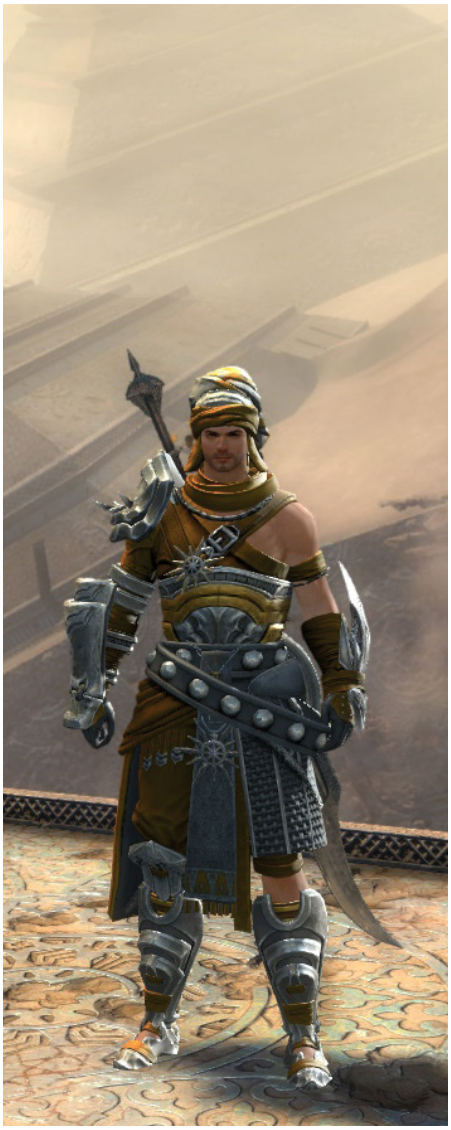
ELONIAN ARMOUR VENDORS

Adisa: Ustulate Barrens
Assistant Foreman Kofi: Arid Gladefields
Ebele: Elon Riverlands
Follower Dawnwynn: Augury Rock
Follower Xunn: Skyward Reach
Groffmok: Auburn Hills
Mehmet: Free City of Amnoon
Skimmer Trainer Ardra: Skimmer Ranch
Stablemaster Unja: Stampede Uplands
Tendaji: Diviner's Reach
Veteran Choya Chief: Brightwater Inlet



FUNERY ARMOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Head: Washing the Brow
Shoulders: Recitation of the Litany of Deeds
Chest: Glorify the Golden Heart
Gloves: Exaltation of the Guardians
Legs: The Collection of Tribute
Boots: Walk the Land







The bounty system introduced in *Path of Fire* is a great addition to the game, and what better way to celebrate bounty hunting than with its very own outfit! The nice thing about the Bounty Hunter's armour sets is their ability to mix and match with other armour pieces. For example, armour like the Primeval heavy set or the Tribal light armour set work very well with a combination of Bounty Hunter's armour. That's not to say the Bounty Hunter's sets aren't great on their own, but having a better opportunity to use them in more looks is definitely a huge benefit.

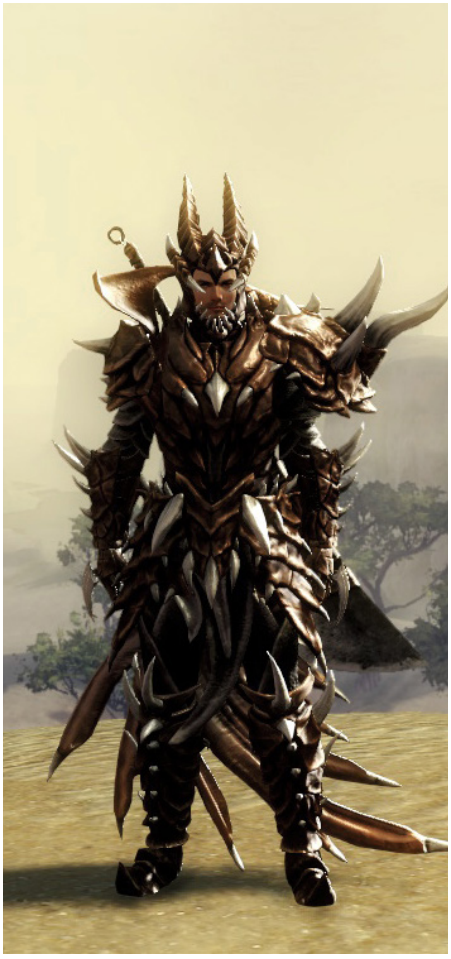
There are three main ways to acquire pieces from the Bounty Hunter's set. The recipe for the gloves, legs and shoulders are sold by Priory Historian Elisa, who can be found in a certain Crystal Desert region, changing zones on a weekly basis. Ley-Infused Sand can help you check if she's in your zone, or alternatively check the official wiki. She also changes her deals daily and/or weekly. Meanwhile, the recipe for the chest is rewarded uncommonly on legendary bounty missions. Finally to finish any pieces you wanted that weren't listed, there is a Crystal Desert PvP and WvW reward track for you to work towards!



The final armour set is none other than the maniacally metal Warbeast variety. Armour of this quality seemingly makes you fit right into Balthazar's Forged army ready to take the Crystal Desert by storm; it has a very pointed, yet smooth and sleek, design. Something I found similar was the parts of the Zodiac armour sets that blended well with the Warbeast armour - so there's room for experimentation! Not only does the armour have a semi-gloss metal finish, but certain pieces like the heavy shoulders have luminous orbs being held by twisted points all around. Other sets have that same orb material but in-lined in parts of the gloves or boots, etc. This armour gives off a very futuristic vibe, especially the light armour, but at the same time it fits right in with the rest of the game's aesthetic whilst being different enough to make a name for itself. Having a name like Warbeast is sure to turn heads when you show off these outfits.



Obtaining this armour set can be more elusive than you think. All in all, you get the pieces through crafting; to get the recipes you have to defeat champion Forged to obtain Battered Forged Components, so really it's your luck in RNG and prowess on the Forged-filled dunes that will see you with your own masterfully crafted Warbeast armour. Good luck!





THE DURMAND PRIORY

From the office of
Kora Sangbrell
Department of Lore

Steward Gixx
Durmand Priory Headquarters
Lornar's Pass
Shiverpeak Mountains

19 Colossus 1330 AE

RE: Durmand Priory Report: Rumors of an ancient spearmarshal presence in the Domain of Vabbi

Steward Gixx,

If I ever make it back to Priory Headquarters, I'm quitting. I mean it this time. Do you know how hot it is in Elona? I feel like I'm dying. The air is so dry and yet I sweat all day. I sweat through my clothes faster than this thrice-cursed heat can dry them, leaving me overheated, damp, and sticky for as long as the sun is in the sky. This is worse than that time you sent me to search for Quaggan relics off the coast of Orr! It's already the season of the Colossus; I should be sitting in the Priory Library, sipping tea, enjoying the snowfall… but no. You had to agree with me when I suggested an investigation into the rumors surrounding an ancient Elonian spearmarshal. You know I hate the heat. Now I understand why you left the room laughing after agreeing to fund my expedition.

Right. On to business. I found her. It wasn't easy; I had to travel much farther southeast than original research suggested. Far past the poisonous sands of the Desolation, to the very edges of the Domain of Vabbi, but I did find her. Or should I say, I found what's left of her.

Tahlkora, daughter of Prince Mehtu the Wise, Guardian of the Great Library of Chokhin, and last Spearmarshal of the Order of the Sunspears.

In Amnoon, she's spoken of with great regard. She's a folk hero, and her adventures are told in tales around the fire. She became what Palawa Joko never wanted to turn her into - a martyr in the fight against his rule.

She was born sometime around either the end of 1057 AE or beginning of 1058 AE. I've not been able to pinpoint an exact date as of yet* due to the realities that after the second rise of Palawa Joko many records were either lost, intentionally destroyed, or worse - they were altered to reflect Joko's propagandized version of history. She was born into nobility, becoming a priestess of Lyssa at a young age. Despite her sheltered upbringing - or perhaps because of it - she ran away from home shortly after turning 18. I keep hearing about her desire to travel the world and live a grand life "like the great adventurers the storytellers spin tales about." She succeeded, for better or worse.

She teamed up with a band of heroes and fought against the corrupt warmarshal Varesh Ossa, before continuing the fight against the fallen god Abaddon to prevent Nightfall. During this time, she fell in love with another member of the traveling party: the warrior Koss Dejarin (see 'Koss on Koss' located in the Special Collections section of the Durmand Priory Library). Upon realizing that Koss and another party member, Melonni, were in love with each other, she stepped aside. She never fell in love again. Maybe she just didn't live long enough to have the chance.

It should be noted that it was also this group who released Palawa Joko from his prison. They needed his aid to cross the Desolation and stop the Warmarshal from unleashing Nightfall; I believe this is what they call irony.

Following the battle against Abaddon and the ascension of Kormir, Tahlkora rose to prominence across Elona. She spoke, and the people listened. This was not to be allowed under Joko's new rule. She was captured, but rather than kill her, Joko cut her tongue out to make her an example of what would happen to those who spoke out against him. It seems he believed that following this torture, she would be unable rally the people to her cause. How could the people of Elona listen to a mute, right?

Without a voice, Tahlkora turned to writing. One local villager told me that Tahlkora wrote countless pamphlets and notices, spreading her words far and wide. I've yet to find any surviving copies or duplicates so I can't speak to the specifics, but it's safe to say, the people continued to fight against Palawa Joko's unjust rule under her guidance. In retaliation, Joko again captured her, and this time he took her sight, saying it would "bring her closer to her beloved Kormir." Again his attempt to silence her failed. By this point, Spearmarshal Tahlkora had many loyal followers, and they continued to spread her message. Palawa Joko himself had turned her into a symbol of resistance that threatened his dominion over Elona and its people.

So for one last time, Joko captured Tahlkora. And this time, he killed her. He intended to turn her into one of his Awakened thralls and parade her before the people of Elona, breaking their spirits and ending all talk of resistance. Once again he failed.

Gixx, before you get all uppity about supposition and hearsay, let me name my source: Spearmarshal Tahlkora herself. I found her high above the desert sands on the Yahnur Plateau. The Order of the Sunspears may be more broken than not, but the last Spearmarshal is still guiding the remaining members and working to rebuild the order. Her remains are stiff and mummified by the relentless sun and dry desert air, but despite being dead and unable to vocalize, she speaks quite eloquently.

She shared the story with me of how she died. Apparently, it was somewhat of a shock to both her and Joko that, Awakened as she was, she retained her free will. Unable to control her in life or death, Joko removed "all but the smallest spark of Awakening" and then had her body deposited upon a high clifftop to languish, alone, for the rest of time.

And she was alone - for a very long time. But then, she explained to me, the griffins arrived. One at first, but then it returned with a mate and they built a nest. In time, the eggs hatched; within a few years, the clifftop was a year-round roost.

The Spearmarshal says the griffins have become her eyes and ears in the world beyond. At first, I thought she was speaking metaphorically, but I've come to realize that she meant this literally. It is my firm belief (and hers too) that Spearmarshal Tahlkora was blessed by the Goddess Kormir. In the Spearmarshal's own words, "when Joko attempted to awaken me, I believe Kormir intervened. She safeguarded my will, and I suspect she gave me this ability to speak without words." I believe it was also Kormir who sent the griffins to watch over and keep Tahlkora company.

The Spearmarshal has asked for my help in locating several Sunspear artifacts - and a few other minor tasks of which I won't bore you with the details. As an archon of the Durmand Priory, it is my solemn duty to seek out and secure dangerous knowledge. I believe that should these Sunspear artifacts fall into the wrong hands it could potentially be very dangerous not only to the people of Elona but to those in Tyria as well. As such, I will need an additional 250 gold to fund this secondary expedition to secure these relics.

K.S

Kora Sangbrell
Archon, Durmand Priory

** I did try asking the Spearmarshal for her exact birthday, but she seemed to find amusement in keeping it secret. She did say that I am welcome to return when I believe I've discovered it and promised to confirm or deny the accuracy. I think she just wants me to return to talk more with her.*







FIREBRAND

INKS: RAIDING IN 2017

BY MMOINKS

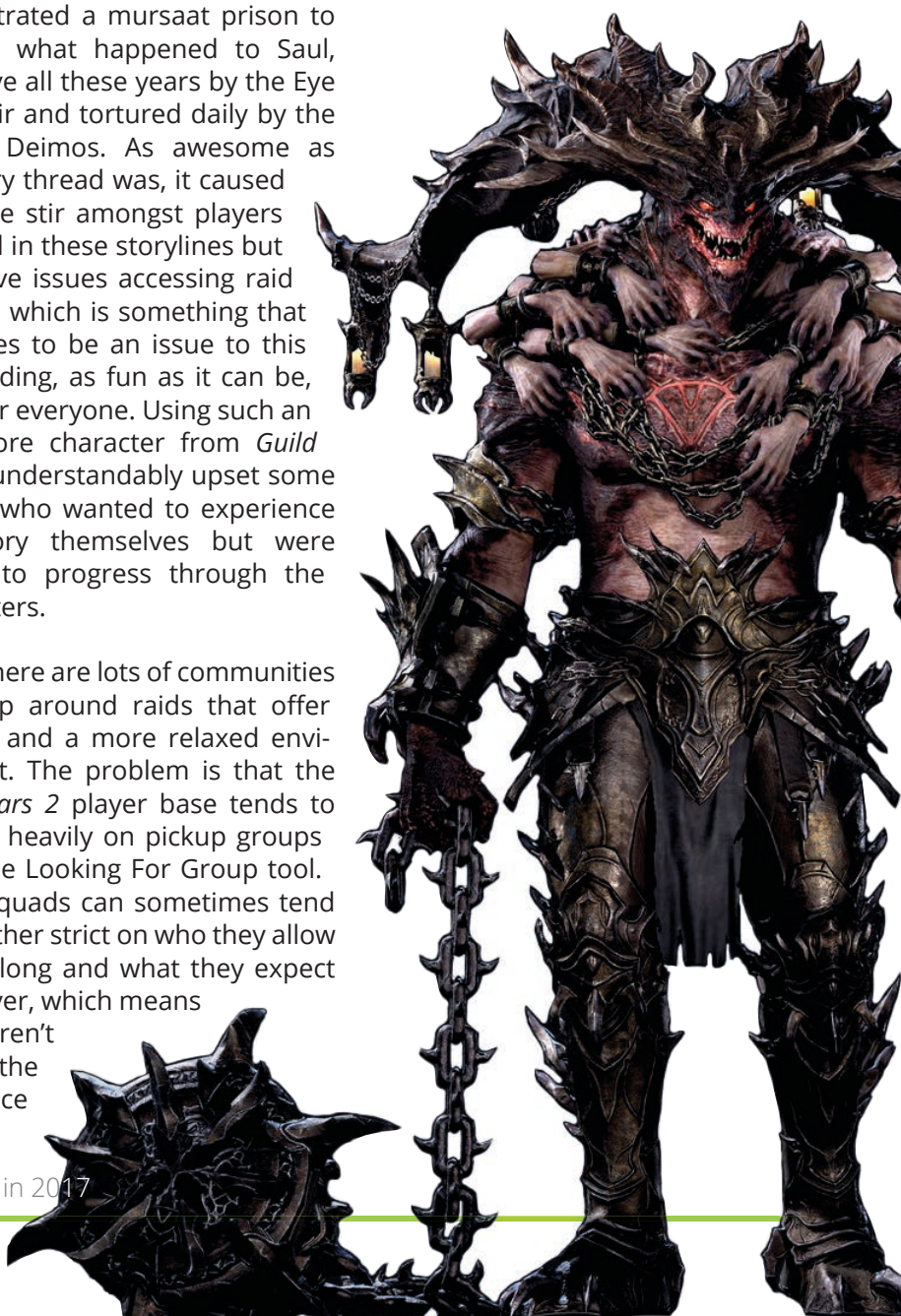
MMOINKS returns to share his thoughts on the *Guild Wars 2* raiding scene.

Has it been a year already? It seems like only yesterday I was writing my raiding retrospective for the GuildMag Annual 2016. Time certainly does fly and *Guild Wars 2* is as strong today, if not more so narratively, as it's ever been. As far as raiding goes, however, we've only seen 2 new wings released since the last GuildMag Annual. That may sound like a slow release cadence to some, but bear with me as I discuss what we've got and where we are heading in this latest attempt to explore the *Guild Wars 2* raiding scene.

On February 8th 2017, Bastion of the Penitent was released alongside Episode 4 of the Living World: The Head of the Snake. At this point, raiders had been waiting since June 14th of 2016 - nearly 8 months - for a new raid, so when Bastion of the Penitent came along, that portion of the community were chomping at the bit to get in there and smash against the new bosses. ArenaNet delivered 4 bosses in total, which is more than any other wing to date. Unlike previous raids, however, Bastion was also a standalone wing, which meant that the story being told there started and finished all within those bosses - though that's not to say the story was any less epic.

The first 3 raid wings and the entirety of the first raid itself dealt with the White Mantle and what was happening to their order and the power of the bloodstone. Bastion's theme was connected but did not follow that story further; instead we re-visited an old *Guild Wars* mystery: the disappearance of the founder of the White Mantle, Saul D'Alessio. We infiltrated a mursaat prison to uncover what happened to Saul, kept alive all these years by the Eye of Janthir and tortured daily by the demon Deimos. As awesome as this story thread was, it caused quite the stir amongst players invested in these storylines but who have issues accessing raid content, which is something that continues to be an issue to this day. Raiding, as fun as it can be, is not for everyone. Using such an iconic lore character from *Guild Wars 1* understandably upset some players who wanted to experience this story themselves but were unable to progress through the encounters.

Today there are lots of communities rising up around raids that offer training and a more relaxed environment. The problem is that the *Guild Wars 2* player base tends to still rely heavily on pickup groups using the Looking For Group tool. These squads can sometimes tend to be rather strict on who they allow to tag along and what they expect of a player, which means they aren't always the best place to learn a new raid or experience the story. My advice has been - and continues to be - to seek out training guilds or join a guild that has a static group that best fits your schedule and attitude toward the game and this game mode.





A few examples of this include GuildMag, who has a static for raiding newbies, The Raiders Inn for NA and the Crossroads Inn for EU. There is room for everyone but you've got to put in the "wrench time" as they like to say. This doesn't mean that player involvement can't or shouldn't be improved (I think that it should), but we've yet to see such improvements. Just as an example, World of Warcraft has a raid LFG tool that also lowers the difficulty and reduces the loot obtained. Another option is to look deeper into difficulty scaling or reduced party size for raids. Realizing either of these options inevitably requires more development time, which is something we already struggle with, but I do think it should get a deeper look.

Bastion of the Penitent and its 4 raid bosses on normal mode suffers, in my opinion, from being fairly easy. Cairn, the first boss, might be considered a challenge to some when initially encountering him; he has a few mechanics which makes the boss feel a little hectic at first, such as the Displacement teleports and Shared Agony player AoEs. Players seem to adjust fairly quickly though and once you do he tends to be a breeze. In fact, a few extraordinary individuals are actually able to solo this boss, which is not something that is very common when it comes to raids in *Guild Wars 2*.

Beyond Cairn, the second boss, the Mursaat Overseer, is a statue and can be seen as a mini chess game of sorts. It's not so much a puzzle but a series of mechanics, including keeping yourself out of the insta-death floor spikes, moving the statue a little and dealing with the adds as they come up. This is probably the easiest fight in this raid. The third boss, Samarog, had some bugs early on but the objective here, for the most part, is to have your tank pull him around while the rest of the group chases after him avoiding his knockbacks. He does have a fun mechanic where two players will be randomly selected and have to stack on top of each other outside the rest of the raid or massive damage will ensue. A fun fight for sure, but nothing too out of the ordinary for *Guild Wars 2* players. Deimos is the real challenge in this wing and until Hall of Chains came along he was the big baddie to beat.

Deimos has 36 million hit points, has a Demonic Aura which damages anyone in range every 3 seconds and has a number of heavy hitting attacks you don't want to get hit by. You'll want to have 1 person to kite or draw away the Soul Feast ability; these are grasping hands that you do not want Deimos to walk across. He has 5 phases and the party is often split into two to deal with Saul or Deimos in the demonic realm. At 60% black oil will start to show up; if a player steps in it the oil will spread over the platform, dealing a lot of damage and often times causing a party wipe. Obviously these fights are all a little more detailed than I let on here, but the real challenge is in the last two bosses. That is, until we take a look at challenge motes.

With the release of Bastion of the Penitent, ArenaNet started to add more challenge motes to up the ante in difficulty, in addition to a reward rework. What rewards you might ask? A normal CM reward will give you an item called Box of Raider's Supplies, where inside you'll find 2 random pieces of loot from any of the Tier 7 ascended crafting materials, or a Chest of Insignias or a Chest of Inscriptions. All of these can be sold for a nice profit on the trading post, or you can keep them for yourself and work on ascended armor or weapons. Raid boss CMs will give you a Top Tier box related to the particular boss, which are even more fruitful than the Raider's Supplies. These chests include: 1 chest where you get to choose a reward from the boss's loot table; 3 random Tier 7 ascended crafting materials; 1 Chest of Insignias; 1 Chest of Inscriptions; 1 Box of Raider's Utility (which gives the player the choice of 20 to 40 of commonly used utilities); and 1 Box of Raider's Sustenance (which gives a choice of 20 to 40 of commonly used foods for raiding). Once again you can keep these which will help you progress in current or future raids, or you can sell these on the trading post and make quite a profit. However, the problem with these is that they aren't repeatable and sometimes finding a group willing to do these CMs can be a challenge.

In Bastion, the actual difficulty of the challenge motes is another point against them. If they managed to add a deeper level of challenge on all bosses I would have said that Bastion of the Penitent would have been a favorite wing. Unfortunately this isn't the case as the first two bosses, even on challenge motes, aren't that challenging. The heat does turn up on Samarog and Deimos, but the raid was plagued by bugs early on. Many (but not all) have been fixed since, but certainly at the time it affected players' perception of the bosses and their difficulty. While the wing's layout was exactly what I was looking for, being all bosses and no events, the overall difficulty was lacking and the addition of more CMs was a great start, but I think they really need to be repeatable to encourage more groups to keep doing them.



Nine months after Bastion, on November 28th 2017, Hall of Chains was released. Where is the Hall of Chains? Well it's in the Underworld! That's right, if you played *Guild Wars 1* then you are likely familiar with this end-game area; how difficult it was and how it still holds a place in many players' minds to this day. At the time of writing, the raid is still very new. ArenaNet went back to the drawing board on this one, adding events back in (where they were previously missing from Bastion) and upping the difficulty overall. This wing has 2 bosses and 2 events, where 1 of the events is to defeat 3 mini bosses. While I am not the biggest fan of events based on previous wings, these latest ones so far aren't too bad and certainly early on provide an interesting challenge alongside rewards - which wasn't always the case with other events in previous raid wings. However, how am I going to feel in a few months when I've done these events over and over again? I've said before that I'd like to see some way to skip these events and that might have been viable in the previous wings. Sadly here, and probably going forward, ArenaNet is looking to reward us for doing these events even if I (and many others) find them to be quite the time sink and a little stale after a few months. I say sadly because of my lack of general enjoyment after a few months, but I am sure there are players who really do enjoy these easier events and those rewards.

When it comes to the bosses, the difference with Hall of Chains is that what we're presented with are actually difficult. There are many groups who have wiped over and over again on the Soulless Horror - the first boss - and for the first time in a long time, the raid wing wasn't cleared in the first 24 hours. Dhuum (that's right, the fallen god of death) is the last boss in the Hall and he is incredible! He's difficult, has interesting mechanics and is right now the most difficult boss in *Guild Wars 2*, sporting 32 million hit points and a 10 minute enrage timer. He challenges your group to split itself into several different roles: you need 2 power DPS classes to deal with Enforcers who take extra damage from power over conditions; at least three players on high mobility, non-squishy, classes to deal with a green circle mechanic; and you need one kiter to deal with Dhuum's Messengers. Most players will need a stun break of their own and a condition cleanse of some kind. There is a lot of personal responsibility that goes into this fight, making it all the more difficult.

Hall of Chains does have challenge motes just like Bastion did, but once again these are not repeatable and I really would like to stress how important I feel it is to make these repeatable for rewards. The longer the raid is out, the more difficult it becomes to find groups who want to do these challenge motes, thus alienating players who don't have a static to help them.

This brings me onto the state of raiding as a whole. Sadly raids in my opinion still suffer from two major things in 2017. The first: accessibility. It's been said before, but raiding was originally designed to be the most challenging content that *Guild Wars 2* can offer. It certainly is that on many levels, however why can't there be an easier mode? For a long time this was something that I was against, but as long as higher difficulty is maintained for those who want it, I don't see why there can't be variable levels of difficulty with variable levels of rewards. Current raiders want greater challenges; they want repeatable challenge motes, but there is a large untapped audience out there who either isn't interested or are intimidated by raids. The wings have some really great narrative and while there are other ways for players to get a hold of this narrative if they really want to see or know it, it would be great to get more and more players involved in this game mode. Give these players a stepping stone to get involved, and in turn hopefully grow their own comfortability and skill level to tackle greater challenges that are more rewarding. Hall of Chains is the most difficult raid to date and at the same time it's another *Guild Wars 1* narrative that a good deal of players are cut off from. I'd love in the future if more and more players could feel more comfortable getting involved in raids not only for the joy of raiding but for the narrative as well.

The second issue with raids as I see it currently is the release cadence. At one point a long while ago now we were told that it might have been possible to see 6 wings per year. Sadly we are nowhere near that. We aren't even at half of that right now. It's not uncommon for raiders to wait 8 or more months for a new wing, and personally that is just too slow. I'm not alone in thinking this either: as much as I love the challenge, I have seen some of the community shrink on this front as they get tired of waiting. There is, however, a silver lining: in a recent reddit AMA with ArenaNet, we were told that the pace of raid releases is going to pick up once again. I would also stress to myself - but also to other players - that the Underworld, or the Hall of Chains, is heavily related to *Path of Fire.* While not confirmed, I am sure that held up the release some as well.

Regardless of the two problems I outlined above, raids are overall in a decent place.They have brought back some of the difficulty players are looking for and this proves to me that ArenaNet is certainly capable of delivering that challenge to its players. On top of that, the narrative remains strong. If the raid development team is able to address the issues I've mentioned here, then we very well could be entering a golden age for *Guild Wars 2* raiding.



COMMUNITY

ART

BY
STARCONSPIRATOR



DESERT INSPIRATION

For many, *Guild Wars* is a source of inspiration. It is just one sign of a well-built world that so many of us can play with its themes, characters, and environs to create new visions and tales that we then share with our fellow gamers. We create unique characters and alter egos who inhabit a land full of myriad possible stories. While some of our fellow players write amazing fiction, others express their creativity through color and line, creating visual works of art. This issue, we take a look at some of the fanart that has been created with the latest expansion in mind.

The release of *Path of Fire* welcomed us into a vast new section of Tyria, and our community's talented artists found much to be inspired by in the lands of Elona. Many of the pieces we've chosen to feature this issue relate to the new mounts we are all bounding and skimming about upon, while a few others invite us to experience Elona and the Crystal Desert. Each of the featured artists has so much to offer and exploring their other work using the provided links will not disappoint!

“TO THE DESERT” BY KINIXUKI

kinixuki.deviantart.com



In the piece *To the Desert*, artist Kinixuki captures the overwhelming excitement many of us felt as we looked forward to the release. The sylvari in this piece are eager to explore new places and experience the world as it unfolds before them, although the darker figure seems to be pulled forward by his more enthusiastic companions.



"OASIS" BY ZOMBIDJ

zombidj.deviantart.com

My first experience with *Path of Fire* was standing in Divinity's Reach and watching a raptor mount appear out of thin air! My surprise at seeing the beast was only outdone by my eagerness to procure my own. Collecting all the mounts became my top goal, even more important than finishing the story or opening any new specializations. Happily, our community's artists have provided a large number of images featuring each of the mounts.

The first mount, the raptor, is well suited for traversing the world we find ourselves in, able to run and leap and fight. *Oasis* by ZombiDJ captures the feel of the raptor as a constant companion... one would argue more useful than a ranger's pet! The tranquility of this scene with the rock deer belies the danger we all know is waiting just over the horizon. However, with a raptor by your side you are never without a competent partner. As seen in *Ranger and Raptor* by SkavenZverov, even a vanilla ranger can benefit from the fighting prowess of the raptor.



"RANGER AND RAPTOR" BY SKAVENZVEROV

skavenzverov.deviantart.com



BY PIPANN

pipann.tumblr.com

Of course these mounts, no matter how functional, can become the subject of "cuteness overload." Springers, the giant kangaroo rats of Elona, certainly fit that bill. Although they are amazing modes of transportation, their bunny-like features guarantee we will be seeing more of them in a wide array of scenarios such as Pipann's light-hearted drawing of a mob of springers overwhelming a hapless adventurer.

A mount's usefulness is further illustrated by Knight-mj's *Over the Ocean*. Skimmers have shown themselves to be one of the best ways to explore the far-off shores and hidden bays of Tyria and this piece uses shape and color to give us a sense of rising adventure. Looking at the asura rider, we can feel the thrill of discovery as she sets out into the unknown with her trusty mount!

"OVER THE OCEAN" BY KNIGHT-MJ

knight-mj.deviantart.com

"MUMMY JACKAL" BY ELLBEH

ellbeh.deviantart.com

Because I am an incompetent jumper, but a stubborn gamer, it took me quite some time to procure the last of the easily collected mounts: the jackal. However, I found it to be the most appropriate for the setting, an idea that is encompassed in *Mummy Jackal* by EllBeh.





BY WESTON T. JONES

twitter.com/westontjones

Even the god-king of Elona, Palawa Joko, gets a mount in Weston T. Jones' piece. When I first saw this piece, I was reminded of the Scorpion King from The Mummy 2... maybe it's just me.



BY WESTON T. JONES

twitter.com/westontjones

In the end, our journey through Elona brought us to the final battle between Aurene and Balthazar. Aurene, already the subject of a number of artistic pieces across the community, found herself pitted against the god of fire and war. How could the adorable baby dragon stand before such an opponent? Weston captures the dragon's crystalline nature and plucky attitude in his piece *Aurene vs. Balthazar*, created prior to the release of *Path of Fire*. It perfectly melds several story elements from the expansion, including Kralkatorrik and the pyramids of the Crystal Desert, all of it seemingly surrounded by fire, which is exactly how I felt during the final battle.

There is still so much to explore and experience in the Land of the Golden Sun and it has been great fun visiting websites and blogs across our community. There were so many works of art to love and sadly space was limited so not every piece could be featured. We at GuildMag would like to thank the artists featured in this issue for their permission to use their work and can't wait to see what our community comes up with next!

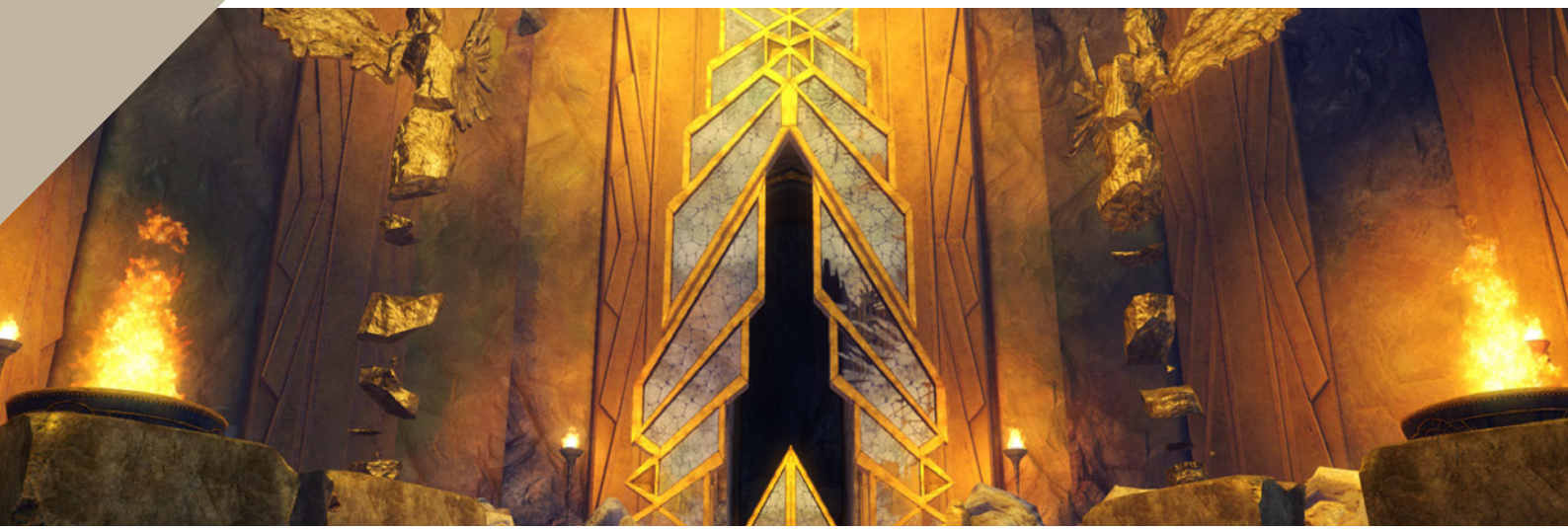
We are always looking for more work to feature, both written and drawn, so if you'd like to join in the fun, visit us at GuildMag.com/submit and share your own creation!





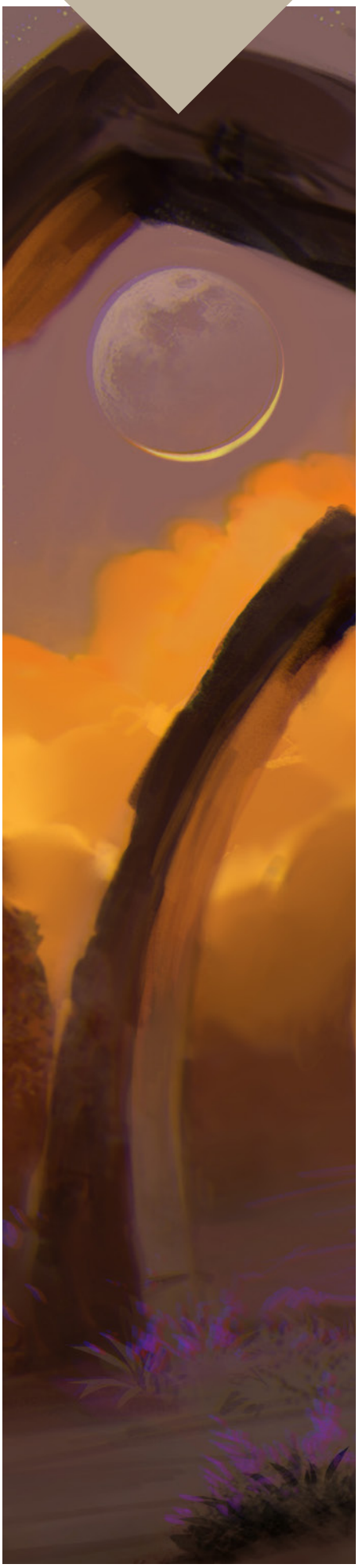


MATTERS OF ASCENSION



BY
NORTHERNER
(DRAGON SEASON)

Deities in religion are, by definition, mysterious to their followers; beings that their followers have placed their faith in, thus elevating them to a power greater than themselves, and one which often works in ways they cannot understand. As such, history holds countless stories of individuals or groups seeking to achieve a position where they could commune with their gods to gain stature, power or receive enlightenment on all the questions they were not privy to answers through their normal lives. Elaborating on this, the races of Tyria, predominantly the human nations, have similarly been drawn to the idea of communing with the Old Gods through the act known as *Ascension*. In Cantha, a similar ritual is known as Weh no Su, where the individual would become *"Closer to the Stars"*.



Canthan Ascension dates back to 1 AE when the eldest prince of Cantha, Chang Hai, refuted family traditions and trained in both the disciplines of warrior and monk, eventually achieving Ascension. After he became Emperor - the 11th in order and the first of a new line of Ascendant Emperors - it became tradition and law for all Canthan Emperors to become Weh No Su. Ascension in Tyria also had the same effect on those who Ascended; they would be able to train in a second profession.

The first records of seeking Ascension date back to the Margonite civilization, although evidence of this is only visible as remains of structures and less as written records. This once-proud, seafaring, nation of humans were special in their own way as they exclusively worshipped Abaddon - God of Water and Secrets - thus forsaking the five other human gods. As the Crystal Sea was transformed during the battle between Abaddon and the other Five Gods, and the Crystal Desert arose in its place, the remaining Margonites who had not been transformed into demon-like disciples of Abaddon dismantled their ships and constructed tall structures reaching into the heavens, perhaps mistakenly believing they would be able to commune with the remaining Gods - and as such achieve Ascension for the sake of redemption. However, historians have little written evidence of this, and all that remains are hollow structures of old ship masts and hulls scattered around Thirsty River and the Mesa in the Crystal Desert; a testament to their actions, and as such the origin and reason for the Margonites seeking Ascension is left a mystery.

" The first records of seeking Ascension date back to the Margonite civilization.

The second attempt made by humans to Ascend was spearheaded by the legendary Warmarshal Turai Ossa of the Kournan nation. Following his single-handed defeat of Palawa Joko at the Grand Cataract of Jahai, Turai was hailed and crowned King of Elona, uniting its people and succeeding where all the previous Pretender Kings before him had failed. However, for all the peace and prosperity it brought Elona and its people, Turai Ossa would soon yearn for greater tasks, secretly staying awake at night to muse over old prophecies, troubled by pondering his own purpose in life and whether the gods had greater tasks in store for him. Especially captivated by the Flameseeker Prophecies, Turai concluded answers to his questions lay to the north in the Crystal Desert where he would seek Ascension. Turai consequently stepped down from his position of authority, and began the Great Pilgrimage to the Crystal Desert, taking him and a loyal group of Elonian supporters through the Desolation. Some perished crossing the sulphurous wastes, however many prevailed. Those that did went on and established an outpost named Lannur on their way to the Crystal Desert. Once they reached the final destination they founded the Crystal Desert Elonian colony, allegedly named Elonia according to some. Despite sharing a common goal, the Elonian pilgrims had many internal conflicts and eventually branched out to smaller settlements in Elona Reach, Vulture Drifts and Arid Sea.

In Elona Reach, the settlers began constructing a Temple of Ascension with a central throne, the Throne of Pellentia, at its midst; one on which those seeking Ascension would stand to attract the gaze of the Gods to be deemed worthy. An ancient artifact, the Vision Crystal, was needed to focus the attention of the gods during the final Trial of Ascension, but due to mistrust among the Elonian settlers the artifact was divided into three Crystal Shards and kept in separate camps. During their time in the Crystal Desert, the Elonian settlers waged war on the Forgotten, an elder race of

serpent-like humanoids, mistaking them for mindless beasts and gravely underestimating their strength. The Forgotten razed the Temple of Ascension, and Turai fell in battle with many of his people; but their souls lingered in the desert. Turai Ossa himself was trapped, having mistaken his role in the Flameseeker Prophecies as the hero who would Ascend and only in after-life realising his role was to be the Ghostly Hero that would guide the Chosen some day in the Trials of Ascension. Only a mortal could achieve Ascension, thus opening the path to the Hall of Heroes, and as such this too was the only way Turai Ossa and his followers could finally pass on to rest in afterlife. *(Ed. there is discrepancy in lore here, because in Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire we still find a ghostly Turai Ossa at the Throne of Pellentia in Elon Riverlands, even though he eventually passed on to afterlife - as confirmed by the "Dunes of Despair" chapter in the Flameseeker Prophecies storybook of the original Guild Wars; "Together we ensured his passage to the Hall of Heroes.").*



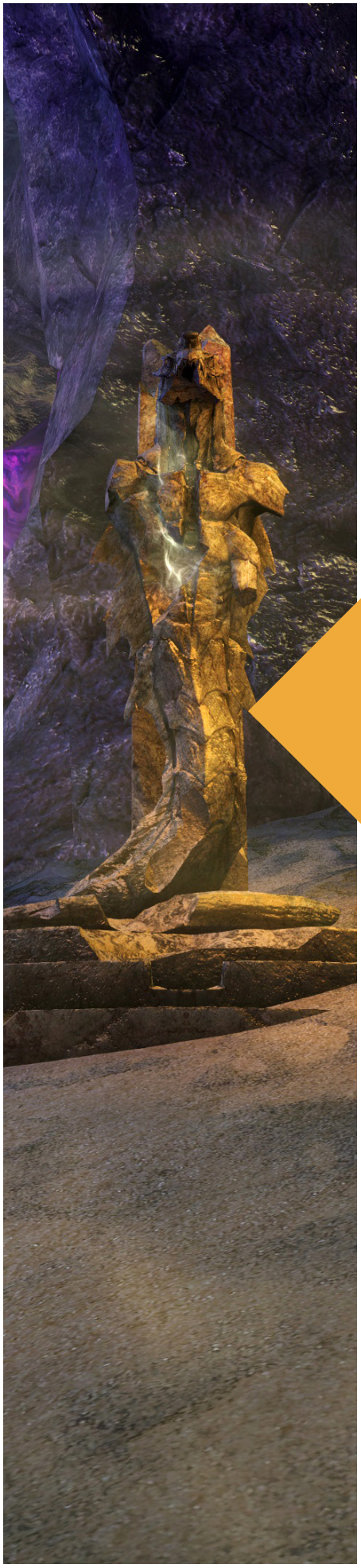
this group were the young heroes Mhenlo, Cynn, Aidan and Devona and an unnamed, mortal hero. The Forgotten tested the heroes in the three Trials of Ascension where they were aided by the aforementioned Ghostly Hero of Turai Ossa. The first ritual saw them reclaim the Throne of Pellentia at the Dunes of Despair. Next, they had to prove their worth at Thirsty River by defeating waves of Forgotten and their Enchanted armies in order to claim the Rune Circle and be cleansed of their earthly imperfections. Lastly, the final ritual at Elona Reach saw the heroes reclaim the three Crystal Shards in order to re-assemble the Vision Crystal.

Having completed the Trials of Ascension, the unnamed hero gained admittance to the hidden Halls of Ascension, and the final test: defeating the mirror image of himself - known as the Doppelganger - in battle. With the Doppelganger's defeat, according to the Flameseeker Prophecies, Turai Ossa and his ghostly followers gained passage to the Hall of Heroes.

> During their time in the Crystal Desert, the Elonian settlers waged war on the Forgotten, an elder race of serpent-like humanoids.

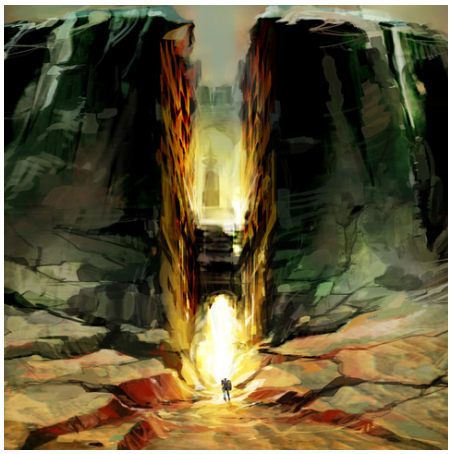
Other humans have also entered the Crystal Desert seeking Ascension: both a group of pilgrims known as the Seekers, as well as a group of Ascalonian pilgrims. However, they all met their demise and we encounter few remains that shed light on their fate except for some ghosts of their spiritual leaders. To date, only one group have succeeded in achieving Ascension: the Chosen of Tyria - the heroes who defeated the Lich Lord and the Titans, and the Unseen (mursaat). Among

In present day Tyria, the hero of Lion's Arch and former Commander of the Pact arrives in the Crystal Desert and Northern Elona to discover a group known as the Followers of Ascension, led by a woman named Kaidenna, a former member of the Durmand Priory turned adventurer. She formed a community of like-minded adventurers of all races who either came from Tyria to the Crystal Desert after contact was re-established, or others who escaped the clutches of Palawa





Joko's tyranny from the south. With a variety of troubled pasts, they are united in their search for Ascension, seeking clues in the area around Augury Rock in the Elon Riverlands. Allegedly the legendary Forgotten priest, Josso Essher, who once tested Chosen in their trials of Ascension, has been seen in the area and the Followers hope to find him to shed light on the matter. As you explore the First Camp settlement, the elders there share some interesting details about the past. Once the three Trials of Ascension had been passed, the Chosen candidate actually acquired the blessing of divine fire. Upon returning to Augury Rock, the Chosen was then able to witness the Mesa split open and reveal the Ascension Chamber within where the Doppelganger awaited for the final trial. We also learn more about crystal shards held in the three camps in Elona Reach: due to its three leaders being brothers who gave in to their bickering, sibling rivalry meant they could not agree to combine the shards in the Vision Crystal. Only in their ghostly afterlife were they able to reconcile and aid the Chosen of Tyria when they arrived in the desert, as foretold by the Flameseeker Prophecies.



The meta event of the Followers of Ascension in Elon Riverlands leads to an inactive teleporter on a cliff outside Augury Rock. It is Kaidenna's belief that the portal will be activated if she can harness enough magic from killing Branded Forgotten in the nearby area, and as such takes a group of Followers with her to defeat a Branded Forgotten Priest. Upon success, the group hurries to the teleporter, which subsequently activates and the group gains entry to the Hall of Ascension. Within they meet Josso Essher, who has taken the secrets of the Forgotten with him to a silent grave when he was Branded by Kralkatorrik. His magic has cast a Branded seal around the Ascension Chamber, and it will only be broken by defeating him. An Elonian ghost by the name of Jorn Kudebeh resides on a cliff outside Augury Rock, and he explains the Branded Forgotten are drawn to Augury Rock, unlike the other Branded who seek the Dragonbrand.

> " Once the three Trials of Ascension had been passed, the Chosen candidate actually acquired the blessing of divine fire.

Previously, the last remaining Forgotten lingered around Augury Rock nurturing Glint's first offspring, Vlast, but as the dragon could no longer remain in their care, the Forgotten left and built a sacred city, Kesho, further south in the desert. Kesho was the precursor of Tarir, where they - in recognition of being a dying race - created the Exalted who would uphold and protect Glint's legacy. The Exalted were actually the result of a group of human followers, the Zephyrites, who underwent a spiritual bonding with the former Enchanted armors of the Forgotten. Kaidenna and the Followers, however, are seeking Ascension to search for clues left for the Chosen to find and use; could there be more legacies left by Glint than the Flameseeker Prophecies to instruct how to defeat the Elder Dragons? However, their search and hopes of achieving Ascension are cut short in the catacombs below. There they find the ghost of the Great Ritual Priest Zahmut lingering - alongside the three generals of Turai Ossa. Zahmut warns that Ascension has not been possible since the Gods left Tyria. However, the Gods had allegedly left Tyria last time Ascension was achieved 250 years ago, presumably then retreating to the Mists when the Exodus of the Gods took place in 0 BE. Up until *Nightfall* they would only make their presence felt through avatars and blessings, and hence Ascension was possible. After *Nightfall* we were led to believe the Gods no longer paid attention, that is, with the exception of Kormir

and Balthazar. Having encountered Kormir in her Sanctum, we now know Dwayna, Melandru, Grenth and indeed Kormir herself have departed, while Balthazar has been stripped of his divinity. Thus we are left with subtle hints alluding to maybe not everything being as it seems in the pantheon of Tyria concerning Lyssa's whereabouts, as evidenced by Balthazar leaving her out as he curses the remaining Gods with his dying breath. Could there even be a possibility that a new individual has become the sixth god in place of the deposed Balthazar? Kormir herself refers to the Six Gods, and so we have reason to assume there must be another who has replaced Balthazar, otherwise one might argue she would have said the gods were now back to being only Five Gods again as they were between Exodus and *Nightfall*. So what does the future hold? Will the current heroes of Tyria be able to seek Ascension again and how will it matter in the upcoming struggles, and will even non-human races be able to Ascend? Will the legacy of Glint reveal how the threat of the Elder Dragons can be contained, beyond protection of her offspring, which according to the Forgotten was only one part of the legacy? These are some open questions that we may hope to see answers to in stories that have yet to be told.





SOULBEAST







SPELLBREAKER



FINDING HOPE

BY **STARCONSPIRATOR**

I woke alone in the cool morning air. The cloth hut was empty, the bead curtains tinkling in a stray breeze. I dressed quickly, hurrying to start my chores. Father was undoubtedly already about his business; silly of him not to wake me. Here in the cool mountains of the Stampede Highlands it was less important to finish strenuous labor while the sun was still low - not like down in the lowlands where the mid-morning sun baked the sand and wilted plants and animals alike - but chores always start early on a ranch. When an animal depends on you for food and safety, their well-being comes before yours, especially an animal as important as our springers.

Years ago, my father set up shop here in the uplands to try and escape a painful past, hoping the springers would give him direction and a new purpose in life. In a way, they did just that! His ranch attracted local merchants and couriers who used his mounts to scale the cliffs. Business grew, and with it, the sleepy village in the cliffs. My father's springers grew in renown, reinvigorating the village. In fact, his ranch became synonymous with the village, Highjump Ranch. One of the villagers who found her way to Highjump Ranch ended up marrying my father... my mother! With a new family and an important job at the center of a community, my father had indeed found new hope. Of course, the eventual loss of my mother when I was young devastated him, but he continued working on the ranch and found purpose in raising me.

That was years ago. Now he was nowhere to be seen outside our hut. Skippy was missing as well. I thought for a moment, trying to remember if my father had told me he was going somewhere today. I couldn't remember anything, though it wasn't unusual for him to take his springer out in the early morning. With a sigh and a shrug, I grabbed the water pail, filled it at the well and started filling the troughs around the stable. Springers stirred, snuffling and squeaking. They knew by now that water came first, followed by grain and vegetables. Soon the larger ones would be forcing their way to the troughs, pushing the smaller springers out of the way so they could get the best carrots.

I finished distributing the water and started dishing up the grain. Excited squeaks and clicks accompanied the first of the scoops. I purposely saved Corsair for last. My favorite springer stood ears above all the others, waiting patiently by the food trough, knowing that even though his grain was last, he would be the first to get a carrot.

"Good morning, you old scalawag," I said, pouring the grain into the trough in front of him. As he bent his large bunny head to eat, I rubbed his tawny ears, the velvet fur warming my fingers in the cool morning. "Here," I said to him, pulling the first carrot from my pocket, tapping it on the trough to get his attention. Corsair munched on a mouthful of grain for another moment before grabbing the carrot from my hand. The doe next to him sniffed noisily at him, intent on his treat. "Hush," I told her, patting her gray nose. "You get one too. Wait here." I turned to collect more carrots from the small barrow near the door. Skippy stood there, saddled.

"Hey there, Skippy," I said and the springer hopped hesitantly into the barn. "Where's dad?" I asked. He took another slow hop toward me, his leg hitching oddly in the middle of the movement. My heart leapt to my throat. Realizing Skippy was hurt, I rushed to his side. Sharp gashes marred his beige fur, the blood fresh. "Oh no!" I exclaimed, staring at the wound, "What happened to you? Da?!" I looked to the hut, expecting him to come out with the first aid kit but several minutes passed and he never showed.

I helped Skippy to his stall and wrapped his reins around a post before hurrying across to the hut. "Da?" I called as I entered. He wasn't there. I frowned, doing a double-take and calling again, "Da?!" A strange prickle crawled along my skin. My father was gone and Skippy was injured. I grabbed the first aid kit and hurried out to the yard. I stared at the barn for a moment before turning around and staring out at the woods and surrounding cliffs. The sun was just rising, bringing the meadows to life as flowers opened and insects stirred. Somewhere to the west, other villagers were also waking up and starting their days. "Help," I thought, running for the nearest villager, Dian.

"Dian! My father's missing! Skippy came home alone and wounded!" I shouted as the llama herder straightened from the tac he was sorting.

"What's that you say, girl?" he asked.

"My da! He's missing!" I forced myself to take a deep breath and restate what had happened. As I finished, Dian started running toward the ranch. I followed him to the stable where he inspected Skippy's wound.

"Skelk," he spat. "Nasty vermin." He straightened up and stood a moment in thought. "Those beasts are everywhere along the cliffs. Skippy's in no shape for leading us back to your father but don't worry. I'll wake the villagers and we'll find him."

"I want to help," I said.

"Help by staying safe here with Skippy, Unja. Help by loaning us your springers."

"But-"

"But the cliffs are dangerous," Dian finished. "I'll take Corsair and we'll go. Saddle your six best springers while I gather the men."

"I-"

"Please, Unja. You are all your family has left right now. I need you to stay here where it's safe while we go out searching for your father. I'm sure he's fine and we'll find him soon enough. Please, saddle the springers."

My heart screamed to go with him but my brain knew he spoke truth. Swallowing my fear and anger, I nodded in consent and hurried to saddle the best springers we had.

Along with a handful of villagers a few minutes later, Dian took Corsair. The springers carried them north, the direction my father always went when he left the ranch. I waited impatiently. Hours passed. I tried to busy myself with my chores. Around mid-morning, I made breakfast and ate alone for the first time ever. I kept waiting but the more time passed, the harder it was to not worry. "They should have found him by now," I thought repeatedly.

Morning gave way to the afternoon and the sun climbed higher. Animals dozed or munched lazily at the grass. I sat outside the hut plaiting a handful of colorful strands, watching the northern passes and worrying. When Dian finally reappeared riding Corsair, I practically leapt to my feet and ran for them. My father wasn't with them, but I hoped they had news. Dian's face was grim. Tears welled up in the corners of my eyes but I let him speak.

"We aren't giving up, Unja. We'll find him," he said. I took a deep shaky breath as he climbed off the springer and handed me the reins. "Take good care of him, Unja."

"I always do, I whispered," taking Corsair and returning him to his stable. Skippy was lying down in his clean straw, his wound now bandaged. "What did you see?" I asked him. "Where were you and where is father?" He couldn't answer, of course.

For three days, the men went out combing the cliffs and high meadows around the village, searching for my father or any clue to his whereabouts. Each day they returned without him. I cared for the springers and prayed to Melandru. I knew the gods were gone, of course, but when everything else seems futile, prayer might help. It definitely wouldn't hurt, I decided. After three long, lonely nights, me and Dian stood in the stable, watching Skippy munch on a carrot. "Do you want us to go out again

today?" he asked. "We will."

"But you don't think you'll find him," I said.

"We haven't found anything yet. He could have been anywhere when the skelk attacked Skippy and if he hasn't made it home by now then he wasn't able to travel." Dian paused a moment. "You need to decide what you want to do if he doesn't come back, Unja," he said.

I blinked in surprise at him. "What do you mean?"

"Will you stay here?"

"Why wouldn't I? This is my home," I said matter-of-factly.

Dian nodded and sighed, "Yes, that's what I thought you'd say." He smiled wanly.

"You don't think my father will return," I said, pushing the words out around a growing lump in my throat.

"No, I don't. I'm sorry, Unja but I think he is gone."

I looked away from him and moved to pat Corsair. The springer snuffled for carrots and chirped with affection. He didn't speak again, just left. I stood petting Corsair, crying, for a long time.

The next morning, no one came to borrow the springers. I woke up early and started my chores, watering the springers, feeding them, passing out carrots as usual, then checking on Skippy's wound. I checked the carrot and grain supply, stopping short when I found myself thinking I needed to tell father we had to have more brought in. Choking back tears, I collected the pouch near the front door where father kept our coins and went round to see Dian.

He seemed hesitant but nodded in greeting. "I need to place an order for some grain and carrots," I said.

He looked surprised for a split second before nodding. "I can bring your usual order next week," he said. Coins exchanged hands and I returned to the ranch.

Lazy hours passed and then, as I was brushing one of the younger does, a stranger called out, "Hello! I heard there was a springer ranch around here where I could rent a mount."

"Well..." I hesitated, "Yes, you've found it."



COMMUNITY FASHION
PATH OF FIRE EDITION

Welcome adventurers! In honour of the release of *Path of Fire* and our next saga throughout Tyria, we've collected a number of desert-venturing looks from our readers across the *Guild Wars 2* community. Over the next few pages you'll see how other Tyrians have styled themselves to fight off whatever Elona throws at them, with the looks you need to properly survive the heat of the desert (or the Forged!).

CHARACTER: LEAFEOWN



"

I had a difficult time trying to find a non-cliché look for medium armor with the large amount of trench coat styles that are out there. In the end I came up with what you see, using a woodsy color scheme to match my Wayfayer Henge back piece; I think this suits my druid well!



CHARACTER: RA SARAI



"

For this costume I wanted a pretty faithful interpretation of the iconic paragon armor from *Nightfall*. It took a bit of finesse to find the right elements, but I think each piece pulls the look together into something cohesive and instantly recognizable.





CHARACTER: NEBRYOSE



"

I play a mesmer, and I feel like as one, my character needed to look extravagant! So to achieve this, the Elonian chest and leg pieces were a perfect choice; they are very pretty, and the gold choker and belt works perfectly with my shoulder and gauntlets.



CHARACTER: RIYUJÎN



"

I've looked for a good outfit for my warrior for a long time. After the release of *Path of Fire*, I searched the wardrobe for new skins but couldn't quite find the right piece until one of my raid friends suggested the sylvari cultural armour. So I created a sylvari character that's living in Elona, proving you don't need *PoF* skins to look good in the desert! He's now absolutley my favorite character!







WEAVER



GUILD SPOTLIGHT

OUR SANCTUARY

BY VALIANT



If you've spent any amount of time on the North American servers, you may well have come across the [LGBT] guild tag during your adventures. In this special GuildMag magazine, we're excited to feature *Our Sanctuary* - an inclusive *Guild Wars 2* guild with an LGBTQIA+ focus. As a guild that's existed since the game's launch, [LGBT] aims to foster a community of players that respect one another and welcome those from diverse backgrounds, creating an online space to alleviate the pressures of the real world. To this end, their guild guidelines state that "[members] should all try to have an open mind and accept the various quirks of others", and though the guild is not exclusively for those who fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, their members "span different age groups, gender identities, religions, and sexual preferences." Anyone wishing to join *Our Sanctuary* should therefore embrace these differences and the individuality of each of the guild's 455+ members, but if you're able to do that then this might just be the home you've been looking for.

We were given the opportunity to speak to three of the guild's leadership team: Alexander Primeaux, Kristen Volkind and Sotha Sidhe. These three players make up *Our Sanctuary's* Head Council, whose collective responsibilities include ensuring the guild maintains an active presence of officers; recognising individuals that actively contribute to the community; and balancing the delegation of duties. This approach has resulted in a guild with stable and collaborative leadership, supportive officers and a sustained community of active, like-minded, players who all share a common goal of creating their own personal haven. The current Head Council is not the first of its kind, however; all three leaders have held their rank for roughly two years, having all previously joined the guild at various points in 2014 and since risen



Our Sanctuary [LGBT]

Leaders: Alexander Primeaux; Kristen Volkind; Sotha Sidhe
Servers: Tarnished Coast (NA) & Northern Shiverpeaks (NA)
Size: 445+ members
Preferred game mode: PvX
In-game contacts: alex.4036; Kristen.6475; JamesTrahan.2076
Website: www.lgbt.enjin.com
Quirk: We're a diverse community with nothing but love and support for everyone - our guild is what you make of it! Our members have made lifelong friends here, and we've seen others find true love through our community; but don't be fooled, we're all about *Guild Wars 2*!

through the hierarchy. The actual roots of [LGBT] lie somewhere closer to the beginning of *Guild Wars 2* - and maybe even before then, stretching as far back as the original trilogy of games. Since joining, Alexander (now the longest-serving leadership team member) describes his motivation for moving into a leadership position as an opportunity to improve how the guild was originally managed - and to this end, he and the rest of the team have greatly succeeded. Describing himself as the "team builder", Kristen also adds that "the guild is really just a fun group where you can be yourself with the knowledge that the leadership will not tolerate discrimination",



affirming their commitment to upholding the principles upon which the guild was originally founded.

It's not just about supporting the LGBTQIA+ community; members of *Our Sanctuary* are first and foremost *Guild Wars 2* players, so naturally the guild engages in a huge array of activities covering all aspects of the game. In addition to the usual fare of weekly guild missions, competitive group PvP and WvW sessions, and general player assistance, [LGBT] also boasts a successful raid static (with more to follow) and nightly meta trains open to all members. What makes the guild truly unique, however, is its special events; murder mysteries, fashion shows in Divinity's Reach and guild hall obstacle courses for *Path of Fire* mounts have all previously featured in the activity line-up. As Sotha explains, "I find that the things springing from the imaginations of our members tend to be the standouts" - and with prizes such as precursors, top-tier dyes and seasonal items often up for grabs, who can argue with that?

> " What makes the guild truly unique [...] is its special events; murder mysteries, fashion shows in Divinity's Reach and guild hall obstacle courses for *Path of Fire* mounts have all previously featured.

But if you think that *Our Sanctuary* is just for casual players, you'd be very much mistaken. "This isn't to say we don't have competitive members or members who are astonishingly talented at this game, but the philosophy is more that we'd like to finish something more casually with people who enrich the experience" continues Sotha. Whilst the focus is more toward members' enjoyment, the community is also home to accomplished players who take on the role of a trainer for fractals and raid bosses, meaning the guild truly does cater to all types of players - even, as Sotha puts it, "if all you want is to gather in our guild hall and chat in the guild channel."

So why should you want to join *Our Sanctuary*? We put the question to each of the leaders, and in their own words, here's what they had to say:

"The guild atmosphere is supportive, uplifting and sometimes humorous. The dedicated and active leadership team, coordinators and lovely members that call our guild home are what makes the place one of a kind." - Alexander Primeaux

"Members can join up with like-minded individuals that share struggles both in-game and in their real lives. People will see our tag, have a good experience with our members and want to join up with us." - Kristen Volkind

"I like to think we're different from other guilds in that our focus is on the people that make up the guild. We're about having a positive experience while playing and enjoying the company." - Sotha Sidhe

It's extremely clear that the happiness of their members are the core focus for the Head Council and guild officers; though diverse in nature and hailing from across the globe, the ultimate aim is to make each and every person feel welcomed and immediately at ease. Extending beyond the game, the guild's Discord server provides a space to help facilitate this: if you're in need of a friendly ear to listen to your issues or concerns, you'll find a wealth of support amongst the many channels and the members who frequent them.

If this all sounds like the kind of *Guild Wars 2* guild for you, there's a quick application process you'll need to go through. Here's what you need to do:

1. Navigate to www.lgbt.enjin.com & register an account on the guild's website, filling in the brief application form. Make sure you use a valid email address!
2. Once the form is sent, wait for your application to be reviewed by a member of the leadership team.
3. Upon approval, contact a member of the team in-game (we've included some contacts on the first page of this article) to receive your invite to the guild.

It should be noted that as a large guild, *Our Sanctuary* currently runs close to maximum capacity - so if you'd like to join, you'll need to be quick as applications may close in the future!

We'd like to thank Alexander, Kristen and Sotha for taking the time to answer our questions, as well as all the members of *Our Sanctuary* who feature in the screenshots throughout this spotlight.



REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

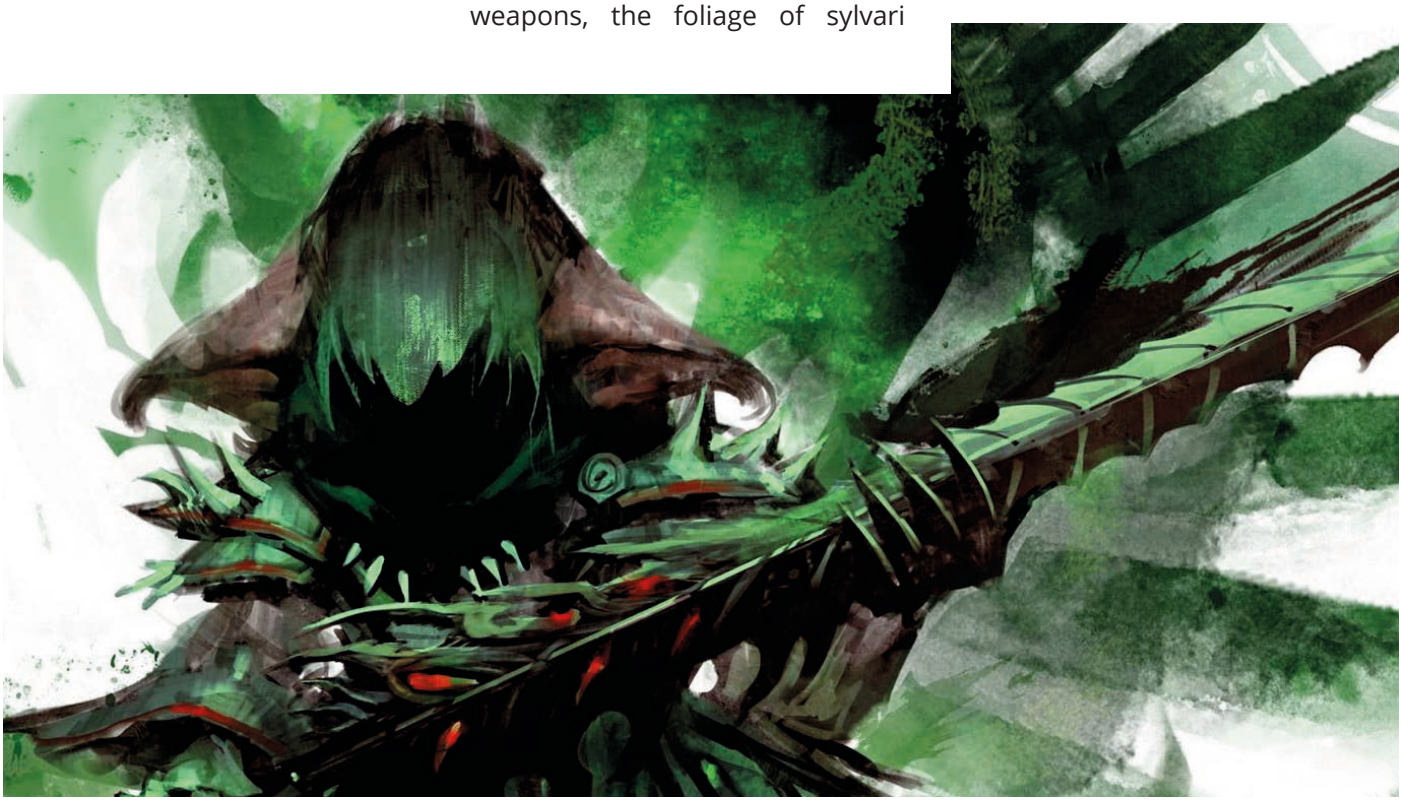
BY **DRAXYNNIC**



Where did the reaper come from? Its connections to Elona may provide the answer...

In previous issues, I have been running a series of articles speculating on the possible origins of the *Heart of Thorns* specialisations, starting with the berserker in *Issue 19* and the tempest in I*ssue 20*. While *Path of Fire* has provided us with in-game lore on the new specialisations (albeit on a fairly bare-bones level), most of the *Heart of Thorns* specialisations' lore remains, to my knowledge, a mystery. Due to the possible connections with Elona, in the wake of *Path of Fire*'s release we will be looking at the first necromancer elite specialisation: the reaper.

As with other professions, we can start with looking at the reaper's equipment for hints. However, this does not appear to provide anything useful, since this equipment does not appear to have clear references to any culture. The reaper's hood is simply one that leaves the face hidden - one could argue that the shape of the hood (particularly the lack of allowance for ears and horns) rules out races with more exotic head shapes like asura and charr, but apart from that, it does not appear to match the style of any specific race. The basic reaper's greatsword is long and slender, lacking the flashy magic of asura weapons, the foliage of sylvari



weapons, or the chunkiness of most norn and charr greatswords; this renders it most similar to Krytan and Ascalonian designs, but this is a tenuous connection at best. The Ascended greatsword Dark Harvest adds more bulk and a Gothic style to the weapon, but the death-oriented aesthetic overpowers any cultural markers that may be present.

Having considered the reaper's equipment, then, let's look at how the specialisation behaves in combat.

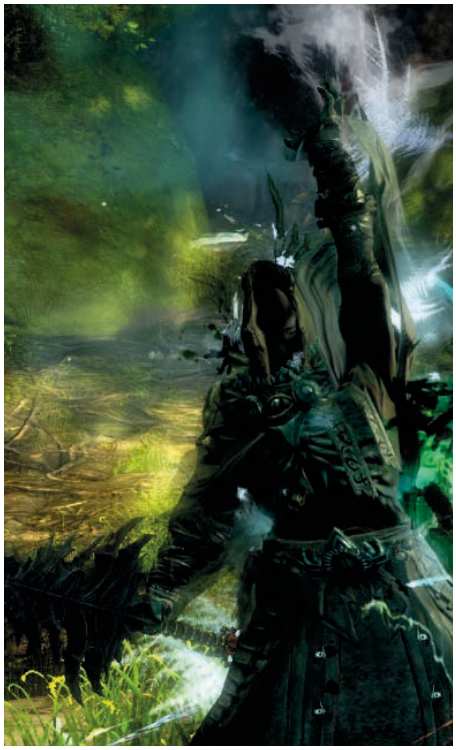
Back when the reaper was first announced and showcased, I immediately made a connection between it and the *Nightfall* dervish; specifically Grenth-focused dervish builds based on massive amounts of life-steal and cold damage. In addition to the simple fact of using a scythe when in Reaper's Shroud, this is supported by how they fight; the shroud attacks, the various reaper 'shout' skills, and the greatsword all have a strong focus on grouping enemies together to maximise the effects of spinning attacks and local-area-of-effect skills (the death-oriented "loyalist dervishes" recently appearing in the Daybreak content also seem to fight in a similar manner). Because of this, I'm inclined to think that the tradition that ultimately lead to the reaper may have started through followers of Grenth attempting to combine the arts of the Grenth dervish with the classic necromancer in order to become the ultimate avatar of Grenth's power. Switching to a greatsword instead of a scythe may be a matter of practicality; scythes are generally not as effective in combat as greatswords unless you're fighting crops.

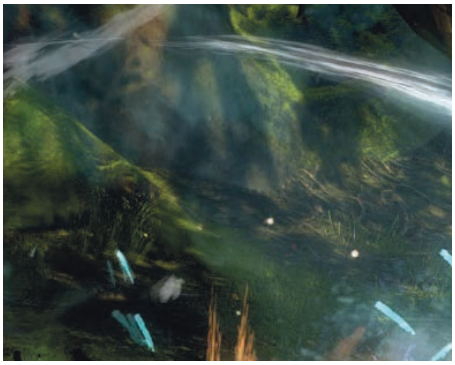
However, this immediately raises the question: If this specialisation is linked to the Grenth dervish, a fighting style which is clearly empowered by one of the human gods in the lore, how did it become something that can be accessed by any race?

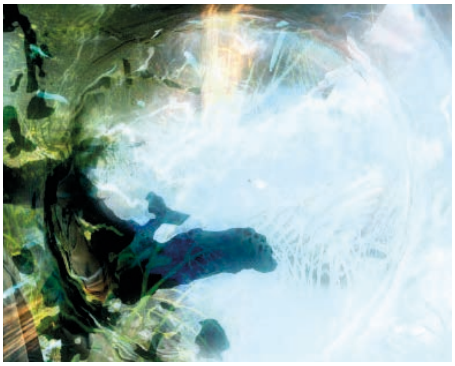
This is where things get interesting. While Grenth is clearly a god of death, he is not actually associated with the classic 'reaper' aesthetic. The animalistic, and often horned, skull which is featured in representations of Grenth is not part of the reaper aesthetic, and he is generally not depicted with a scythe (in fact, when shown with a weapon at all it is usually a necromancer's staff). The only connection with the Grenth dervish comes through the scythe being a weapon favoured by dervishes. Similarly, Grenth's seven servants, while they bear the title of Reaper, do not bear scythes.

There is, however, an older figure that does: Grenth's predecessor, Dhuum.

While it may seem to be a colossal error of judgement for a follower to tap into the power of Dhuum, this may not be a direct connection.











A number of sources have indicated that most races, even if they don't worship the human gods, have stories and cultural memories of their activities - the charr, for instance, still credited Melandru with creating the world while nevertheless seeking to destroy the gods and their chosen. Being a relatively recent addition to the pantheon, it is possible that it is not Grenth that has shaped the image of Death in the minds of the nonhuman races, but the Emperor of Oblivion himself. This cultural memory of Death in the form of the reaper may then have been reflected in the Mists, gaining its own form similar to the legends used by revenants, but intimately associated with death magic and necromancy. The original reapers may then have found themselves tapping into this power.



Since a skill that invokes Grenth's power already existed, this raises the question of why they didn't simply invoke that... however, there may be a simple answer to that question. While human player characters have access to these skills, they appear to be uncommon among the population as a whole. The lore indicates that the gods answering a prayer is almost unheard of in the present day, and unlike other races that are commonly seen using things associated with their racial skills (norn taking animal forms, sylvari planting seed mortars, asura fighting in or alongside golems, etc), we rarely see a human NPC that appears to be using a racial skill. It's possible that only the greatest of human heroes and villains are able to access these skills, and the early reapers did not qualify. Instead, they found a means of accessing an alternative form of deathly power... one which, as it spread across the necromancer community, proved to be usable by necromancers of all races.

There is one final aspect to consider, however: the character who might have been the first reaper that we have seen: Marjory Delaqua. While we have yet to see Marjory employ any of the telltale skills of the reaper, she was the first necromancer we saw to use a greatsword as an actual necromancer weapon (Trahearne's use of Caladbolg is simply invoking Caladbolg's powers directly), and her new outfit has a distinct reaper-y aesthetic, including a hood and features reminiscent of the spikes and prongs of Dark Harvest. So if she became a reaper, how did that happen? Her initial teacher in using a greatsword, after all, was Rox - a ranger who is unlikely to know anything about reaper combat forms. It's possible, however, that after receiving basic lessons from Rox, Marjory took up more advanced courses at the Durmand Priory.



The Marjory connection also brings up another possibility which may have some bearing on the possible lore of the reaper: the greatsword she bears is not just any greatsword, but a family heirloom that carries the soul of her dead sister, Belinda. This may, of course, simply be coincidence, but it may have deeper significance. Bearing a relic containing the soul of a ghost might actually be an important part of being a reaper - the deceased person's spirit provides the reaper with a link to the afterlife that allows them to channel powers of death that would not be available without that connection. Certainly, the gothic appearance of Dark Harvest, and to a lesser extent the simpler shape of the basic reaper's greatsword, do make them appear to be suitable repositories for a bound soul.

The collection items for the Dark Harvest collection may provide some additional evidence towards this. At first glance, these do appear to be generic necromantic or otherwise death-related items, with the exception of the smokescale claw, which seems more generally shadow-related. However, there does

appear to be a weighting towards objects associated with the binding of souls - Draithor's soul-sucking drill, Oola's research culminating in binding her spirit to a golem after death, and caring for the masks of fallen Exalted that still carry the souls of their former wearers.

As a result, it's possible that part of the power of a reaper is drawn from having the assistance - willing or otherwise - of the bound soul of one who has already died. This would fit thematically with the specialisation being connected, however distantly, to Dhuum, who gathered power from every death in the Underworld. Having possession of a soul of one who has died, and yet remains bound to Tyria, could then form a kind of "bridge" between a would-be reaper and the incarnation of death from whom they draw their power.

This, then, could present a possible origin story for the reaper. In order to find some means to access the powers once wielded by Grenth dervishes to enhance their own melee capabilities, some necromancers might well have attempted to make use of bound souls - possibly even the bound souls of former dervishes - in order to access that power. Instead of drawing on the same power employed by those Grenth dervishes, however, the power that these bound souls allowed them to access was not that of Grenth, but some vestige of the power of his predecessor: the original (as far as we know) reaper, Dhuum.








SCOURGE



LEGACY INTO THE DEPTHS

BY VIAN DE BOD

For all of Lion's Arch's new splendour, the dungeons were just as dark, dank, and dreadful as Zachariah remembered. Drops of water dripped from the ceiling in slow, rhythmic taps, each one echoing through the long corridor of cells, making the place feel cavernous. Ravi and Lorian had been thrown in with Zach, which was a small comfort. Two Lionguard soldiers stood at the entrance to their cell, a charr and a norn who never even turned to face them.

Ravi sat in the corner, scribbling with his finger in the dust and muttering to himself while Lorian was lounging on the single bed they had been told to share. Zach sat and watched the guards patiently. Of the three of them, Lorian seemed the most at ease with their current predicament. Though their weapons had been taken, Lorian still managed to conjure up a pink butterfly or two and fly them around the cell for his amusement. Ravi had all but given up talking after his golem had been seized, whilst Zach had taken to observing his guards, watching for any hint of weakness. They had relieved him of his weapons, but a good thief never went unarmed and Zach was no poor thief. He ran his finger over the outline of a concealed dagger in his boot; one they had luckily overlooked.

"Do you suppose we will be brought to trial before the Captain's Council?" Lorian asked in a slightly amused voice. A pink butterfly fluttered near Zach's ear, but he waved it off.

"I doubt it, Lorian. Marq is pretty angry and has enough authority to bypass a few procedures. Likely it's the gallows for us." He tried to keep his voice light. Zach traced the outline of the dagger again. If it came to it, he would not let them take him without a fight. Ravi just continued to mutter as he erased his new drawing in the dust and started again.

"That hardly sounds pleasant. What exactly did you do to escape last time? I understand you were arrested for stealing a valuable heirloom from a member of the Lionguard, but even if they threw you in the most guarded cell for it, you still managed to escape." Lorian sounded bored, as if he were discussing the day's weather rather than how to escape prison with two Lionguard nearby.

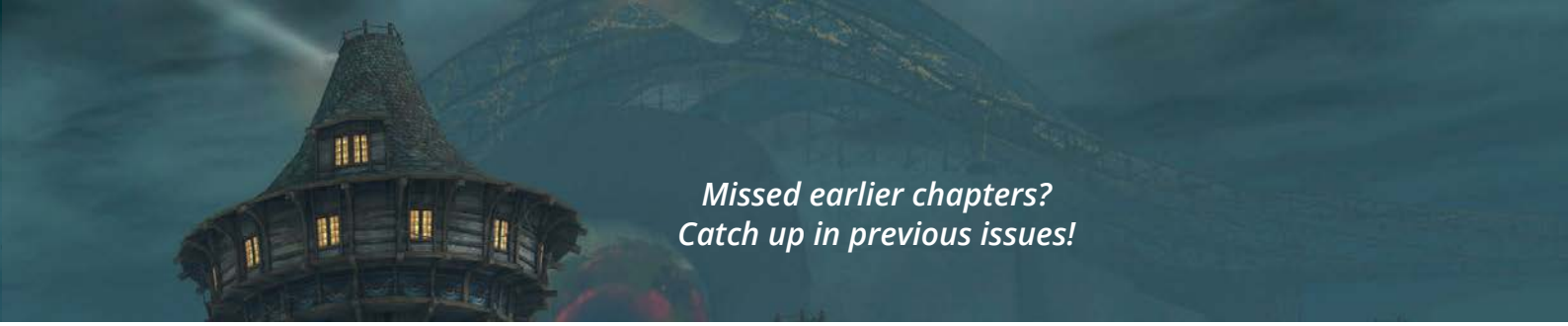
"Ravi broke me out, but he was on the outside back then. I doubt we could count on that right now," Zach said with a sigh.

"I guess not, but I'm sure we will be fine."

Zach turned to the lounging sylvari. He raised an eyebrow, but all Lorian gave in response was a knowing smile. Did the sylvari think Zach could teleport them out? Zach wasn't the mesmer in their group. *I can't work miracles, Lorian.*

"Flynn, today must be your lucky day." The thick, gruff voice of Marq came from the corridor beyond their cell. When the big man appeared, he was accompanied by an old asura in lab gear with a short, brown topknot on his head.

"Luck would be the last word I'd use to describe it, but I've been wrong before. Why?" Zach stood up and faced the odd pair.



Missed earlier chapters?
Catch up in previous issues!

"This here's Draxx. He's paid your bail." Marq looked ready to kill, but kept his voice steady.

"I've also notified the Captain's Council of your arrest before this oaf here could do anything less than legal," announced Draxx, glancing at Marq who also met his gaze. "Don't give me that look! Captain Kiel will pardon these three and throw *you* in their cell on a word from me. I've tamed dragonspawn scarier than you, so don't tempt me." Draxx yelled at Marq as if he were a child. Zach could only stare with a dropped jaw.

"You're free to go," Marq said through gritted teeth as he unlocked the cell door. Lorian stood up, and even Ravi jumped to escape the confines of the cell so fast it seemed he was afraid Marq might change his mind. Zach walked out last.

"Come with me, you three." Draxx spoke with an authoritative tone and started walking at a relaxed pace down the corridor, towards a staircase at the end that led up and out. The three of them hurried without a hint of hesitation.

Draxx had made sure that all their possessions were returned to them when they reached the large entrance hall to the Lionguard barracks. Ravi looked ready to cry when his golem was returned to him, while Lorian merely carried his things in a bundle; almost as if he barely cared about them at all. Zach briefly wondered about Lorian's lack of enthusiasm at being freed, but shrugged it off when he got his own stuff back. He happily put all his weapons, both visible and hidden, back in their rightful place and made sure his father's journal was still in his backpack; even his pouch of lockpicks had survived the rough treatment from the Lionguard. Draxx led them out and into the city.

It was clearly after midnight; the moon was high in the sky and the streets empty. A few Lionguard soldiers patrolled, but none paid them any mind. Draxx slowly led them to the harbour while Ravi sat on his golem, happier than Zach had seen him in a while. Lorian remained still and merely followed like some kind of mindless drone. Zach had tried to ask who Draxx was and why he had helped them, but the only replies he got were that Draxx was a friend and that all would be answered soon. By the time they reached the harbour, Zach was tired of asking. They stood below the strange, lobster-shaped building's head at the edge of the water. Was there a boat that they were supposed to wait for? Zach remained quiet.

Draxx moved his arms in a circular motion. At first it seemed like he had started to do some strange dance, but then water from the harbor began to ripple and lift in thin strands. Five, finger-thin ropes of water rose from the water's surface and snaked their way through the air toward them. When it finally reached them, the strands split and wove what looked like a net around them in a sphere. Through the holes in the net, Zach felt and heard the rushing of wind. The air seemed to almost solidify in the net's holes and around the sphere; almost like they were in some intricate bubble.

"I've never seen an elementalist weave two different elements at the same time," exclaimed Ravi, sounding astonished.

"Oh it's nothing really; I learned it from an Elonian colleague of mine. Ever since the Crystal Desert



was turned upside down by that renegade god, all manner of strange things have been flooding in along with the refugees. I've even heard there are rangers who can merge their souls with their pets."

Without warning, Draxx lifted the bubble into the air with all of them in it. It barely made a splash as it entered the water. Soon, the four of them were sinking down to the ocean's murky depths, protected by the strange bubble. As they descended, Ravi's golem began to emit a sharp light from the crystal at its centre, illuminating the space around them. Schools of fish darted out of the party's way as they moved past jagged coral and dark kelp, the ocean floor creeping further and further down. It felt as if they had been descending forever when the bubble came to a halt. With a sudden jerk, it began to move forward instead of down.

"Where are we headed?" Zach asked.

"To my lab," Draxx spoke, his focus kept on the way ahead.

Within minutes, Zach saw their destination. In the deepest pit under the waters of Lion's Arch lay the broken remnants of a gigantic drill. Zach had only seen depictions of it in the Durmand Priory, having chosen to avoid coming to Lion's Arch since his escape from prison years ago. Had he been here when this drill was used, he might not have made it out alive. Scarlet was never known to be merciful.

"Breachmaker," Ravi murmured as they approached it.

"Indeed. My krewe specialises in the study and practical application of ley-energy. Where better than the place where it all started?"

Zach could not help but stare as they neared the Breachmaker's remains. It really was an immense structure - to think that one sylvari created so much destruction. As they passed the drill, Zach noticed something appear near the ocean floor, right next to where Scarlet's creation broke into the ground. There was nothing there at first, but as they drew closer Zach saw the shape of a building come into view as if revealed by illusionary magic; one moment there was nothing, the next it stood there in plain view. By the time they were next to it, it was clearly an asuran lab. It was a large, octagonal building with barely any walls at the edge. Instead, rippling force-fields kept the air inside the confines of the large structure.

"We keep it cloaked from the view of anyone but those we allow to enter," Draxx explained as Zach's eyebrows rose.

A large gap in one wall led to the main hall of the lab. Draxx's bubble passed through the force-field without a problem. That morning they were thrown in a cell to rot; now they stood in an invisible, underwater, asuran lab. *Why can't I just have an easy life?*

Just as Zach was about to speak, his eyes widened at the site in front of him. A sylvari in pink and red foliage and robes walked to the group from a doorway that led deeper into the lab. In his hands he twirled a seemingly self-made sceptre. He smiled at the group as he drew near.

"Lorian!?" Zach blurted. Before he could ask another question, the Lorian in their party handed over



the bundle of belongings to the newcomer. As soon as it was handed over, the old Lorian burst into a shower of quickly-vanishing pink butterflies. The sylvari smiled and started pocketing his belongings.

“It was a clone!?” Ravi burst out. Clearly he was more infuriated at being deceived than Zach was.

“An illusion. I slipped away just before that big Lionguard arrested you. A bit of asking around, and I found Draxx here. He went to speak to Captain Kiel and pay your bail the moment I told him what had happened.”

Zach looked at Lorian, then at Draxx. *Why would an asuran scientist care about him so much?*

“Are you by any chance the partner of Darion?” Zach asked Draxx.

“Ex-partner, yes. A good mind for a human and an excellent necromancer. He and I touched on the fringes of ley-energy. I hear you have his journal? I was never able to decipher the thing, and he always kept his findings to himself,” said Draxx, smiling.

“We haven’t been able to decipher much either. We know what it’s about, but the details on how to do it are quite difficult to puzzle out. He kept his code close to his heart and I doubt anyone knows how to properly decypher it.” Zach smiled and tried to fight back tears.

“Well there is one.”

“What?”

“His code is a strange mix of ancient Orrian and a very specific dialect of old Elonian. I tracked down someone who could translate it months ago, but without the journal itself it seemed pointless.”

Zach was taken aback. His mind began to race with the possibility of finally uncovering his father’s legacy. He had to know what the book said, not just because of what it contained but because of who had written it. It was his father’s last work. He *had* to know.

“Who is it? I’ll take the journal to be translated. Just tell me who!” Zach was surprised by the eagerness in his own voice. Draxx looked him up and down.

“It will be a long journey… and it will take you to the most dangerous place on Tyria at the moment.”

“Just tell me!”

“His name is Derek. A member of the Order of Whispers actually.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s recently been reassigned to a new location. Tell me, what do you know of the Crystal Desert?”



DEADEYE






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