GUILDMAG
THE ANNUAL
2018



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ARENANET

We've packed this magazine with amazing art from talented community artists, as well as *Guild Wars 2* concept art. Look out for this logo for official art produced by ArenaNet.



EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the GuildMag Annual 2018! This is the largest project we've ever taken on, all to support this year's charity: World Child Cancer. On behalf of everyone involved in this magazine, thank you for your support and we hope you enjoy everything this Annual has to offer!

Where do I even begin this time around? It seems that every year our Annuals grow in size and improve in quality, and this year is no exception! We've partnered with more community members, produced more content and raised more money for charity than any previous magazine, and as always I couldn't be more proud of the final outcome.

I'd like to start by talking about the amazing work undertaken by the World Child Cancer charity. You may be forgiven for thinking that everyone in the world has access to solid healthcare, but this simply is not the case. Survival rates for children with cancer in developing countries are far below those in developed nations, and it is here where World Child Cancer chooses to work. They bring together healthcare professionals from both sides to ensure that children in developing countries have the best possible chance of beating cancer, in addition to offering support to the families. Many of us have been affected by cancer, including our very own Fearan whose child has a rare form of the disease. This is why we're donating this year's Annual proceeds to World Child Cancer - so on behalf of the charity and everyone at GuildMag, thank you for your donation that came as part of pre-ordering this magazine.

On a lighter note, the theme of this year's magazine is *Tyria in Flux*. For quite some time we've been experiencing the effects of excess magic in the world of Tyria and how it has warped the game world. The GuildMag Annual 2018 is an attempt to capture this in magazine format. We have a range of articles exploring the nature of magic and the changing nature of *Guild Wars 2* as an MMORPG, including contributions by Kora, MightyTeapot and Jalinar (Chronicles of Tyria). We've also commissioned a set of posters from littleMURE which depict a timeline of events that have shaped the world of Tyria. And as if that wasn't enough, you'll find more custom artwork hidden throughout the remaining pages - have fun exploring!

So, all that remains to be said is that I hope you enjoy the latest GuildMag Annual! Please remember to visit the channels of our partners listed on the following pages, and if this is your first GuildMag magazine, you can view all of our previous editions for free at www.guildmag.com.

Happy reading!

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Thank you to everyone involved in this year's GuildMag Annual! Without the support of everyone listed on these pages, this magazine wouldn't exist and we wouldn't have been able to raise over $3,500 for our chosen charity World Child Cancer.

Please visit our partner's respective channels to view their awesome content!


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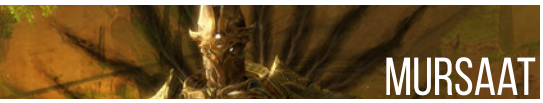
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BY **PHOENIX**

MINOR RACES MAJOR MAGIC

Odds are you know something about the magitech of the asura, the Dream's shared consciousness of the sylvari, and the shapeshifting abilities of the norn granted to them by the Spirits of the Wild. But many of the unplayable races and groups around Tyria have unique forms and uses of magic too. The most obvious examples are the five ancient races - the dwarves, Forgotten, jotun, mursaat, and the Seers - but there are several other notable ones. This article isn't exhaustive; I'm instead focusing on the most magical and prominent among them and have chosen the five we have the most information about.



Anyone who played *Guild Wars Prophecies* will know all about the mursaat, a race of floating spellcasters who wore golden armor and had long black feathers radiating from their backs. The downfall of the mursaat was foretold by Glint in the Flameseeker Prophecies. Afraid of their eventual doom, they manipulated a group of Krytans that came to be known as the White Mantle into doing their bidding.

The mursaat excelled in magic; they were all members of one of the original spellcasting professions: elementalist, mesmer, monk, and necromancer. Lucent the Spectral, one of the last living mursaat, was an assassin in addition to being a mesmer. Nevertheless, the only assassin skill he used was a signet, not a martial or melee skill.

All of the mursaat elementalists used air magic. This small detail turned out to be an important tell in Rising Flames, the second episode of Living World Season 3. In it, Lazarus the Dire, the last living mursaat, shows up and offers to help save Aurene from the enhanced destroyers. However, this fake Lazarus, who turns out to be Balthazar, uses only fire magic, while the real Lazarus from *Guild Wars* was a dual-classed

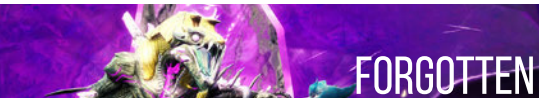


elementalist and necromancer who used only air magic like the rest of his kin. Accordingly, when Lazarus is truly resurrected in the Living World episode One Path Ends, he calls forth lightning storms and summons necrotic orbs, as would be expected in converting his abilities from the original games to *Guild Wars 2*.

The mursaat also had two interesting and unique abilities common to all members of the race. The first was the ability to shift into a different plane of existence, thereby rendering themselves invisible to those who did not have the Gift of True Sight. For this reason, they came to be known as the Unseen Ones. The Gift of True Sight was acquired by Ascending - communing with the Human Gods and being blessed with Divine Fire - or, in Canthan tradition, becoming Weh no Su ("closer to the stars") by fulfilling the trials of the Celestials and Oracle of the Mists. The Tests of Ascension were taken by Central Tyrians and Elonians and proctored by the Forgotten.

The second unique ability was Spectral Agony, a magic that inflicted excruciating pain, health loss, and eventually death upon its victims. The Seers created a safeguard against this deadly ability; they used the spectral essence of a phantom eidolon to infuse armor with special properties that would protect the wearer.

The mursaat were also skilled crafters, able to create an army of jade constructs to combat the Elder Dragons during their last awakening. They were not able to transfer their Spectral Agony to these constructs so they could use it at will, but they enchanted them so that whenever they attacked, Spectral Agony would be applied to their enemies.



The Forgotten were a race of serpents that slithered upright. They had gray or bronze scales and four arms. As previously mentioned, they oversaw pilgrims who wished to Ascend, but their contributions to Tyria are much larger than that.

Like the mursaat, the Forgotten were all spellcasters, but their elementalists favored earth magic. They also decided to assault the Elder Dragons head on by building enchanted armors that could wield physical weapons like hammers, bows, and swords. When they failed to rout Zhaitan, the mursaat planar shifted to protect themselves and their magic, but the Forgotten agreed to seal their magic with that of the other races and work toward a different solution.

To that end they discovered Glaust, a champion of Kralkatorrik, and attempted to purify her. It is unknown how exactly they subdued her, but within Arah they managed to perform a ritual that cleansed her of Elder Dragon corruption, though she retained her magical abilities and crystalline form. Afterwards, the cleansed dragon champion took on the name Glint.

The spell used to cleanse her does not require magic specific to the Forgotten. As a sylvari, Warden Illyra managed to recreate the ritual thousands of years later with a Risen chicken in the now-ruined city of Arah. It was also discovered that Forgotten artifacts were immune to dragon corruption, so we know the Forgotten used their knowledge not just to reverse the corruption, but to protect other objects from it as well.

About 200 years ago, some of the Forgotten joined with a group of humans, comprised mostly of Canthans and Elonians, dedicated

to preserving Glint's legacy. They performed a ritual on the humans who volunteered, transferring their souls into the enchanted armor they had made so long ago. They used their preventative magic on the armors, ensuring they would never be corrupted by the Dragons. This group of humans came to be known as the Exalted.

Unfortunately, the Forgotten's restorative magic either did not work at all, or was not potent enough when it was attempted to cleanse an Elder Dragon. Kralkatorrik's hunger was too great to be cowed, and it swept through Elona, exterminating half of the Forgotten in one fell swoop. Presumably this is because the Dragons are primal forces of nature, intended only to keep the balance of magic in check. Interestingly enough, the Forgotten either could not - or never tried to - use the preventative magic on themselves because there are Branded Forgotten in the desert, including the former monk, Josso Essher. While the restoration ritual works on living creatures, the protective spell may only work on inanimate objects.









The Zephyrites are not actually a race, but a neutral, nomadic sect of humans who were originally servants of Glint. After Glint's death, they traveled to her domain to collect crystals from the site of her demise to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. Some of the Zephyrites are also the aforementioned humans who volunteered to become Exalted.

They discovered the three Aspects of air magic: Lightning, Sun, and Wind, and developed a way to grow additional glowing crystals that contain the magical essence of each. Using these crystals, the Zephyrites' physical abilities are enhanced. Wind crystals allow them to ignore gravity and ride the wind, leaping much higher than normally possible. Lightning crystals enable them to dart from one spot to another, much like lightning strikes the ground. Finally, sun crystals let them briefly travel at the speed of light. Scholars who have studied the Aspects in-depth and can wield them with proficiency are known as Aspect Masters.

They guard these crystals and Glint's legacy closely, affording strangers a chance to use them only when they host their Bazaar of the Four Winds, an annual trading event and market in the Labyrinthine Cliffs. Damaged crystals, like those spread around after the Zephyrites' crash in Dry Top, lose their power rapidly. Presumably this is meant as a deterrent against stealing.



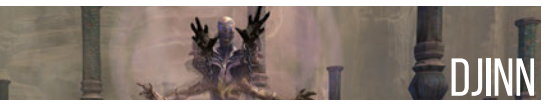
A Crack in the Ice, the third episode of Living World Season 3, took us into the northern Shiverpeaks. It was there that we learned more about the origins of the kodan, a race of humanoid polar bears, and their magic, which is closely tied to their religion.



The god of the kodan is Koda, also known as the Ancient One. Bear was the first creature to speak against chaos and instability and this pleased Koda, for the bears who were ready to guide the spirits of the world he transformed into kodan. According to the Flamebearers in Bitterfrost Frontier, Koda taught the kodan to guide all manner of spirits, from water and stone to plants and animals. Naturally, the tribe of Flamebearers accepted the spirit of fire. Supposedly their sanctuary contains the last living flame begotten by the original fire spirit.

It is unknown how much of the Flamebearers' story is true, but the fires tended in their braziers do have special properties; they can make living creatures resistant to the deadly frostbite caused by being so near to the ice dragon, Jormag. It may be that kodan who have dedicated themselves to other nature spirits have unique magical abilities too, but we have yet to see any other tribes, save those fleeing Jormag in their floating sanctuaries.

The spiritual leader of a group of kodan is called the Voice. They speak to Koda and interpret his will as well as perform other record-keeping duties and rituals. Occasionally a frenzy consumes them known as the Rage of Koda which may be caused by them casting their minds to the Mists for so long to seek guidance from their god. When the Voice is released from this religious fervor they seem to have no memory of what transpired shortly before or during their episode.



Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire brought back Elona and the djinn. The djinn are spirits with elemental magic that often protect items, places, or causes. Generally, they all float and have four arms and a torso with no discernable legs, but their appearance varies based on their element and they can take on different forms. They might also have wrappings or face or head coverings of some kind and emit an elemental aura.



Unlike elementals, djinn have agency and intelligence, enabling them to communicate with different species and races. They are masters of their respective element, each able to throw projectiles of fire, rock, ice, or lightning, summon storms, and embody the fluidity of their element temporarily, allowing them to pass through enemies.

The djinn are also able to modify the tormented remnants of Abaddon's magic that infected Elona after Nightfall. They forge runes, imbue these with their own essence, and then arrange the runes in the shape of jackals to contain the corrupted sand. The jackals are then tamed so they don't act on the will of the fallen god. Since the jackals are comprised of nothing but sand and magical energy, they are able to travel through sand portals, using the Mists as a gateway to get to another potentially far-off location instantly.

The djinn have other special abilities too. It is said they can grant wishes and bestow powers on others who win their favor or manage to subjugate them. All of them, no matter their element, can construct shields of white light that protect an area and all the creatures within it from the lightning of the Brand.

The djinn cannot be Branded and can theoretically imbue others with a minor form of their resistance. This might extend to other forms of dragon corruption, but no other Elder Dragon has gotten close to the djinn to know for sure. Oddly enough, a fire djinn named Vemyen

was recently Branded. This may have been caused by Kralkatorrik's new control over the domains of death, shadow, mind, and plants, courtesy of the deaths of Zhaitan and Mordremoth.



OTHER RACES

Like I said before, this is just a small smattering of the unplayable races and groups around Tyria that use magic in unique ways. Some races, such as the largos and tengu, likely have their own forms of magic or spirituality that remain a mystery due to their rare or secluded natures. The Seers died out before we could learn anything particular about them, but we know they were great spellcasters in life. The jotun, though still living, have forsaken magic, so we know little about their ancient powers except that they were tied to astronomy and the cosmos, and they consider the harnessing of the elements "primitive." Whether that's intended to mean it's crude and unsophisticated or simply archaic is up for interpretation. Who knows if the Canthans, if and when we're finally able to access their continent again, have some completely different sorcery in store for us. The spells we use as players and the raw magic we're used to seeing in the Elder Dragons are but a few of the many techniques developed over time in Tyria.





BY PERN

artstation.com/pern

THE SEARING CRYSTAL

With the titans' power, the charr brought forth the Searing, a devastating rain of huge burning crystals that shattered the land and destroyed the human cities of Ascalon. The Searing Crystal in Pockmark Flats is one of a handful remaining from that centuries-old event. The nearby grawl continue to worship it as a relic of their god and the Priory studies the magic that pours from it to this day.

BOUNTIES: A VISUAL GUIDE TO UNSTABLE MAGIC ABILITIES

BY AMALA & MAIIRIN

Commander! Reports of creatures driven insane by ley energy are coming from all over. What are you going to do about it?

Bounties are an open world, group-orientated activity introduced in *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire*. The premise is that with the death of two Elder Dragons, high levels of magic have been released into the world. This ley energy is affecting the wildlife, making certain individuals of a species larger, stronger, and more dangerous. Bounties are contracts to take down specific targets affected by this magical influx, which can be obtained from bounty boards in *PoF* maps.

If you're going to take a contract from a board, you'll need to prepare for the different mechanics you'll face out in the field. The normal variety of targets are Champions and will give you two mechanics to deal with. Each bounty board will also have one Legendary bounty, which will have three mechanics. To see which mechanics you'll have to deal with, look for the blue buffs underneath the enemy's nameplate. Each mechanic will also have visual cues during the fight which are easier to notice in a combat situation, so to help you recognise these cues we've put together this guide.

EXPLOITER



While Exploiter is up, you will see a blue bubble around your target. Touching the bubble will grant you the effect Identified Weak Point. This lasts for 20 seconds and in that time you can damage your target. Without this buff you can't damage your target. Of course you can also simply stand inside the bubble and do melee damage, but if you are using ranged weapons you will need to reactivate the effect by touching the bubble again.

PHASE-SHIFTED



While this ability is active you will see two types of blue areas around your target: one in melee range and one outside of that range. You can only damage the target as long you are standing in the blue zone - outside of this zone your attacks will be blocked. The best thing to do here is make sure your character is wielding melee and ranged weapons. When the area lights up brighter, you can then step into the new blue area and continue attacking. On the edge of the blue area there are arrows pointing inwards to show you where you need to move to keep damaging your target.

PROPAGATOR



With Propagator, tendrils will spawn around the target and heal it. You can take them down in just a few hits, or entirely ignore them as they will decay over time. This mechanic depends heavily on how many allies you have to take a bounty down. With a larger group, the amount of hitpoints healed will be inferior to the group DPS. However, with a smaller group your DPS will be lower than the amount of hitpoints healed, in which case taking down the tendrils becomes a priority. They also count towards the Plant Slayer achievement.

RESTORER



Restorer is similar to Propagator, but instead of spawning tendrils this ability will spawn healing coalescences. You might have seen them before; they look like green air elementals. You can ignore them when you have a lot of allies because the coalescences will not be able to outheal the amount of damage you deal. But, as with Propagator, they pose a threat when you have only a handful of people.

SIGNALER



Personally, every time I see this bounty, "Mambo Nr. 5" plays in my head. It is kind of like follow the leader. Your target will have a red or a green light next to it. A red light means you have to stand still and attack, while a green light means you have to move while attacking. If you don't follow these rules, your attacks will miss.

LEY-ENERGY BUILDUP



This mechanic is broadcast by glowing leystone spheres that levitate off the ground. You want to run to these often and stand within their area-of-effect to get the Resistor effect. When you are outside of these AoEs, a debuff will stack on you called Ley-Energy Buildup. The more stacks of this you have, the more damage will be done to you per tick. Gaining the Resistor effect wipes out all stacks of Ley-Energy Buildup.

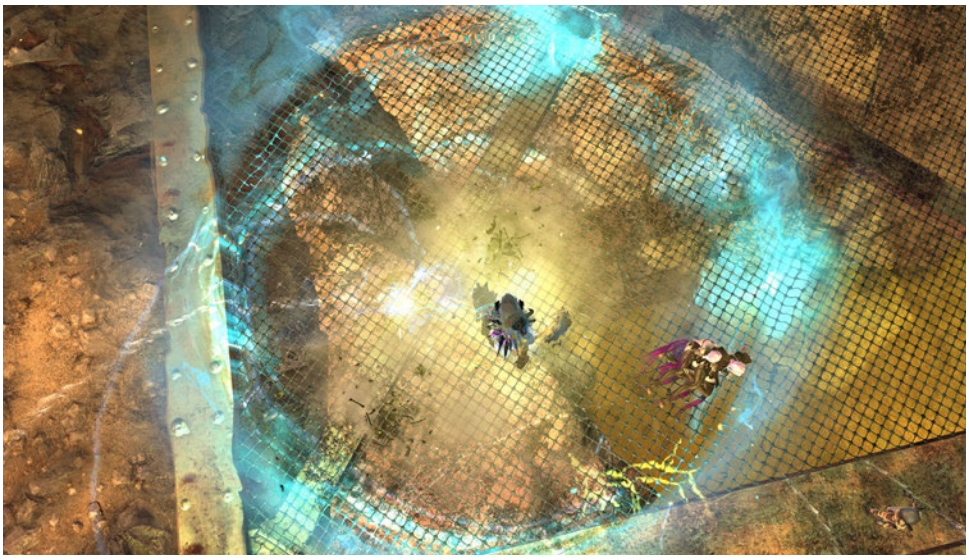
The safest method is to use ranged weapons and stay within the safe AoEs, but if you're using melee just remember to dart back in when you get to around five stacks of buildup. Note that if one of the leystone spheres spawns where you are, you won't get the Resistor buff until you leave the AoE and re-enter.

SNIPER



You'll notice the Sniper mechanic by the glowing orbs that follow random players. Stay away from these! Whether they will hurt you or not will depend on if you're Marked. Foreboding, isn't it? This is a debuff that can be seen on your UI, but you will also have a glowing gunsight icon on you. The aforementioned glowy orbs are actually also gunsights and if these touch you while Marked, you'll soon be hit with a powerful shot which will probably down you. This shot comes in the form of a blue fireball which can be dodged, though if you don't feel confident with this and feel doom breathing down your neck, heal up beforehand. Make sure you're standing close to other players so they can revive you quickly.

CAPTOR



Captor is similar to a move used by Balthazar's Herald in The Sacrifice story instance. Random players will be surrounded by an ethereal blue ring. You can't walk out of these, they will just knock you back into the centre, but you can dodge out of them. You can also shadowstep or blink out. They don't hurt, so you can just stay inside if the target is within your weapons' range.

FLASH FREEZE



This is denoted by pulses of icy rings coming from the target. Being hit by these blasts will chill you and cause a small interrupt. Deal with these as you would Tequatl's waves: jump over them.

PETRIFIER



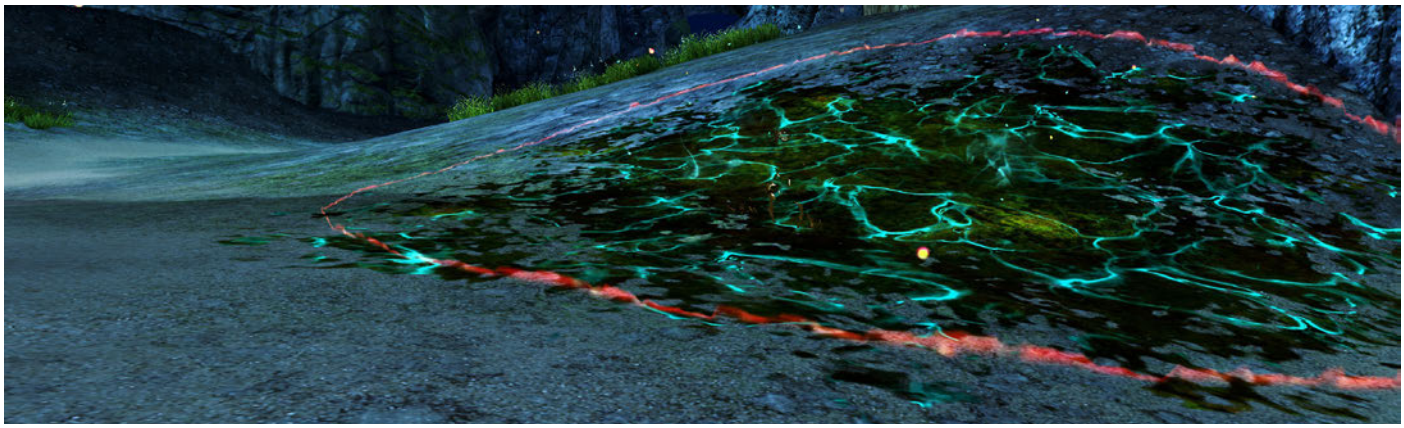
With this one you'll see an ominous depiction of an eye above your target. Like in the Shattered Observatory Fractal, when you see this turn your character away. If you are facing the target when the eye is present, your character will be temporarily petrified and therefore vulnerable to other dangers.

SURVIVOR



There is really not much you can do against this ability. The bounty will automatically block all attacks for a time. All you can do is wait for it to end.

POLLUTER



If you don't want to be poisoned and tormented, stay out of these dangerous fields. These fields spawn and expand around your target, but if you have a ranged weapon you can still attack.

SCORCHER



This ability is the same as Polluter, except now the fields are made out of fire instead of poison. Standing in fire is deadly!

SPINNING LASER



The central points of the spinning laser spawn first. These will look like blue, crackling nodes of magic and their appearance should give you enough time to get out of the vicinity before the lasers start spinning around them. If you don't get out, they hurt - a lot. Don't worry too much if you see your friend get hit and go down as the lasers do not hurt people in downed state; if you try to revive them, you'll just go down yourself.

FRIGHTENER



There will be several large, wispy circles with a skull - exactly the same one as you see when you get feared - floating above each circle. If you step into these fields, you will be feared. Be careful as these could send you off of a cliff.

HAMMERER



Three hammers will be rotating around the target. Being hit by one will knock you down. The hammers are a sizable distance away from the target so be careful if you're attacking from ranged.

This list of mechanics is long, but with practice they will all become intuitive and you'll be able to explain them to others with confidence. Helping others understand may be the best skill to take away from this guide as bounty targets cannot be taken down alone. If you're taking one on with only a handful of people instead of a zerg, the pressure for each person to perform is much higher, so share your new expertise!

Good luck with your hunts, Commander.



An explanatory document on the shift of the Pact's objectives regarding the Elder Dragons, penned by Scholar Eleanor Draxynnus in the Season of the Scion, 1331 AE.

THE FUNCTION OF DRAGONS

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

In his final words, Palawa Joko is reported to have claimed that the Elder Dragons are the "life force" of this world.

This is not the belief of the Priory. Magic is the true life force of Tyria. However, as recent events have shown, there is certainly such a thing as too much. Increased levels of ambient magic since the destruction of two Elder Dragons and the Maguuma bloodstone have resulted in the tearing of rifts in reality and the creation of destructive sentient coalescences. Simulations indicate that further overloading of energy would be more destructive still. In fact, too much could risk tearing apart the world in spontaneous cataclysms.

Instead of being the life force of the world themselves, the Elder Dragons act as magical regulators. When the levels of ambient magic rise, the Elder Dragons rise with them, consuming this power and containing it within themselves until they eventually go to sleep. Once they enter hibernation, the dragons unknowingly begin to slowly release energy back into the world, until the ambient magic rises to a level that causes them to awaken once again.

While this system has kept Tyria alive in the past, the problem is that the dragons are indiscriminate in their feeding. Rather than feeding in a manner that causes little harm to the other inhabitants of the world, the dragons actively seek out energy that is found within, or otherwise in use by, other living beings. In fact, they seem to specifically seek out the magic of sapient beings when given the opportunity. From the perspective of their ecological purpose as magical regulators, this is a highly inefficient system. It maximises the damage they cause, while mostly consuming power 'bound' within artifacts or living beings, rather than the ambient magic that threatens to overload Tyria's ley lines.

In addition, the dragons do not stop once this ambient dweomer has been reduced to safer levels. Instead, they continue to consume,

only entering hibernation when they sense nothing left to absorb. For Tyria's biosphere, this is just as dangerous as an overload; since living beings require magic, consuming it all would result in the death of those beings.

The solution in past awakenings was to hide some of this energy from the Elder Dragons, allowing Tyria to recover once they went into hibernation. The last time they were awake, this was accomplished by the combination of the original bloodstone, which absorbed much of Tyria's ambient magic before the dragons could, and through Glint hiding the elder races from the dragons. In principle, this suggests that the bloodstones could themselves be used as a regulatory system - as, in fact, the gods appear to have done before their Exodus. However, those with knowledge of the bloodstones to use them in this manner are believed not to be present on Tyria any longer.

> " Once they enter hibernation, the dragons unknowingly begin to slowly release energy back into the world.

To resolve this, Glint and the Forgotten formed a plan to replace the Elder Dragons with new beings which could regulate magic to safe levels. Instead of the destructiveness of the Elder Dragons, the idea was that the replacements would be beings that recognised the responsibility inherent in the role. Rather than engaging in cycles of unchecked consumption followed by hibernation, they would act for the good of Tyria and its inhabitants. Unfortunately, with the death of Vlast at the hands of the fallen god Balthazar, there is only one known candidate to assume this role: the second scion of Glint, Aurene.

The connection between the Elder Dragons and magic is, however, more complicated than simply being one of living storage devices. Similar



to how the Six Gods each represent different facets of existence, each of the Elder Dragons represented a different sphere of Tyria's dweomer, a concept encompassed by the diagrams of the All found in the Durmand Priory. It seems that while each of the Elder Dragons was alive, they were able to monopolise their own spheres so that other Elder Dragons were unable to use those powers directly or to empower into their minions. Despite this, an Elder Dragon is still able to make use of magic outside its own sphere if it corrupts a being which already had access to that energy, as seen by the use of the full spectrum of mortal disciplines by the Risen. After the death of Zhaitan and Mordremoth, other Elder Dragons proved fully capable of absorbing the power of their spheres.

The possible implications of this are far-reaching. If these spheres of magic were always part of Tyria's system, why was each dragon limited to its own speciality? Did the Elder Dragons have some means of jealously guarding the energy that fits within their own speciality so that the other Elder Dragons could not use it, even if mortals could? Or is it that magical power is something that can be transformed from one variety to another? In the latter case, the Elder Dragons might, consciously or unconsciously, shift all of the dweomer they absorb into their own sphere. If this is the case, then the current wider range of capabilities shown by the other Elder Dragons in the wake of the deaths of Zhaitan and Mordremoth might be temporary. Consumption of large amounts of the dead dragons' power allows the remainder to employ powers associated with their spheres while the magic remains untransformed. Over time, however, this energy may be absorbed into their own spheres.

Such a result might bring relief at first, as Kralkatorrik, Primordus and Jormag would gradually revert to their original capabilities, but might represent a greater danger to Tyria. Over time, the spheres associated with the dead dragons might disappear altogether, removing those branches of magic from the world.

It is also interesting to note that while a researcher might assume that the energy available to mortals would be divided among the same spheres, this does not appear to be the case. Of the various spellcasting professions of Tyria, only necromancers seem to fit nicely within a single sphere (that of Zhaitan). Meanwhile, the powers of mesmers and elementalists appear to be spread across multiple spheres. None of the spheres appear to grant powers similar to those of monks and guardians, or that allow access to the Mists (Kralkatorrik's current ability to do so appears to be derived from absorbing Balthazar's power).

We know that the divisions of mortal

magic derive from the splitting of the bloodstones, even if today these disciplines have become more a matter of tradition rather than being enforced by the rules of magic. However, it does appear to indicate that there are dweomers in the world of Tyria that do not follow the same rules by which the Elder Dragons appear to be bound. Even if these 'missing' forms of magic do fit within a sphere, other beings are able to access the complete spectrum. Elder Dragons, in contrast, appear to be unable to do so outside of special circumstances (such as a sphere being left without a corresponding Elder Dragon). Or it may simply be that the spheres controlled by the dragons do not encompass all magic, and that the magic of Tyria itself represents a seventh sphere, with some overlap with those of the Elder Dragons but nevertheless distinct.

Having discussed the overall function of the Elder Dragons in Tyria's ecosystem, it seems fitting to provide an overview of the observed spheres of each one.

PRIMORDUS

The first of the Elder Dragons to rise, Primordus' connection to fire is clear for all to see. Of the known Elder Dragons, Primordus' disdain for corrupted minions is notable. While it is capable of corrupting living beings, it appears to prefer simply to kill. Instead, it forms its minions out of rock and magma in twisted mockeries of creatures such as trolls, harpies, and crabs. Combined with Primordus' preference for dwelling underground, some have taken this to mean that the second part of the dragon's' sphere is earth magic, despite the apparent conflict this generates with Kralkatorrik's domain of crystal. Others consider that the second part of Primordus' magic is simply that of destruction.

JORMAG

The second dragon to rise was Primordus' apparent opposite, the ice dragon Jormag. In addition to the elemental opposition of fire versus ice, Jormag, while often still destructive and uncaring of mortals, seems to show the most tolerance towards them. Specifically, Jormag appears to be willing to accept and empower the Sons of Svanir without transforming them into icebrood, or taking away their free will, as long as they worship the dragon. Continued exposure to Jormag's corruption appears to inevitably lead to a Son of Svanir becoming an icebrood regardless, unless he dies or turns away from the Sons first. Nevertheless, Jormag's acceptance of followers that are not completely under its control is notable, and some suspect this might be a hint as to the second part of Jormag's sphere.

ZHAITAN

The third Elder Dragon to rise in recent history, and the first to die. Zhaitan was known as the dragon of undeath for good reason: while the second part of its sphere is known to encompass shadow, it was Zhaitan's use of death magic that resonated most clearly in the minds of those who fought him



"Confronting the Undead Dragon" - littleMURE
This piece captures the initial horror that surrounded the rotting corpse army of the Elder Dragon Zhatain. Trahearne valiantly faces off against the monstrous creature, their pitched battle playing out against the nondescript ruins of Orr.

and his minions. Furthermore, it is perhaps this aspect which is most dangerous when spread among the other dragons, allowing them to raise the dead when previously they might have been limited to corrupting victims while still alive.

THE DEEP SEA DRAGON

Due to the decay of the Scroll of the Five True Gods, much remains a mystery about the Deep Sea Dragon, including its name (we know that it starts with an S, and that it awoke sometime before 1270AE, but little else). Water is believed to be among its domains, but this may simply be a reflection of where it prefers to live, or even simply where it happened to be when it awoke, rather than truly being part of its domain. Confirmation of this assumption, and identification of other aspects of its sphere, will not be possible without the acquisition of new sources or a confrontation with the Deep Sea Dragon or one of its minions.

KRALKATORRIK

Possibly the most elemental of the Elder Dragons, the crystals left by the Branding creates a clear indication of at least part of Kralkatorrik's sphere. The other part can possibly be derived from observation: with the exception of Jormag's blizzards, Kralkatorrik is the dragon most associated with extreme weather, with its presence and that of its more powerful minions often heralded by tornadoes, Brandstorms, and even hurricanes. This suggests that the second aspect of Kralkatorrik's sphere is likely connected to air or the sky in some fashion.

> " Due to the decay of the Scroll of the Five True Gods, much remains a mysery about the Deep Sea Dragon, including its name.

MORDREMOTH

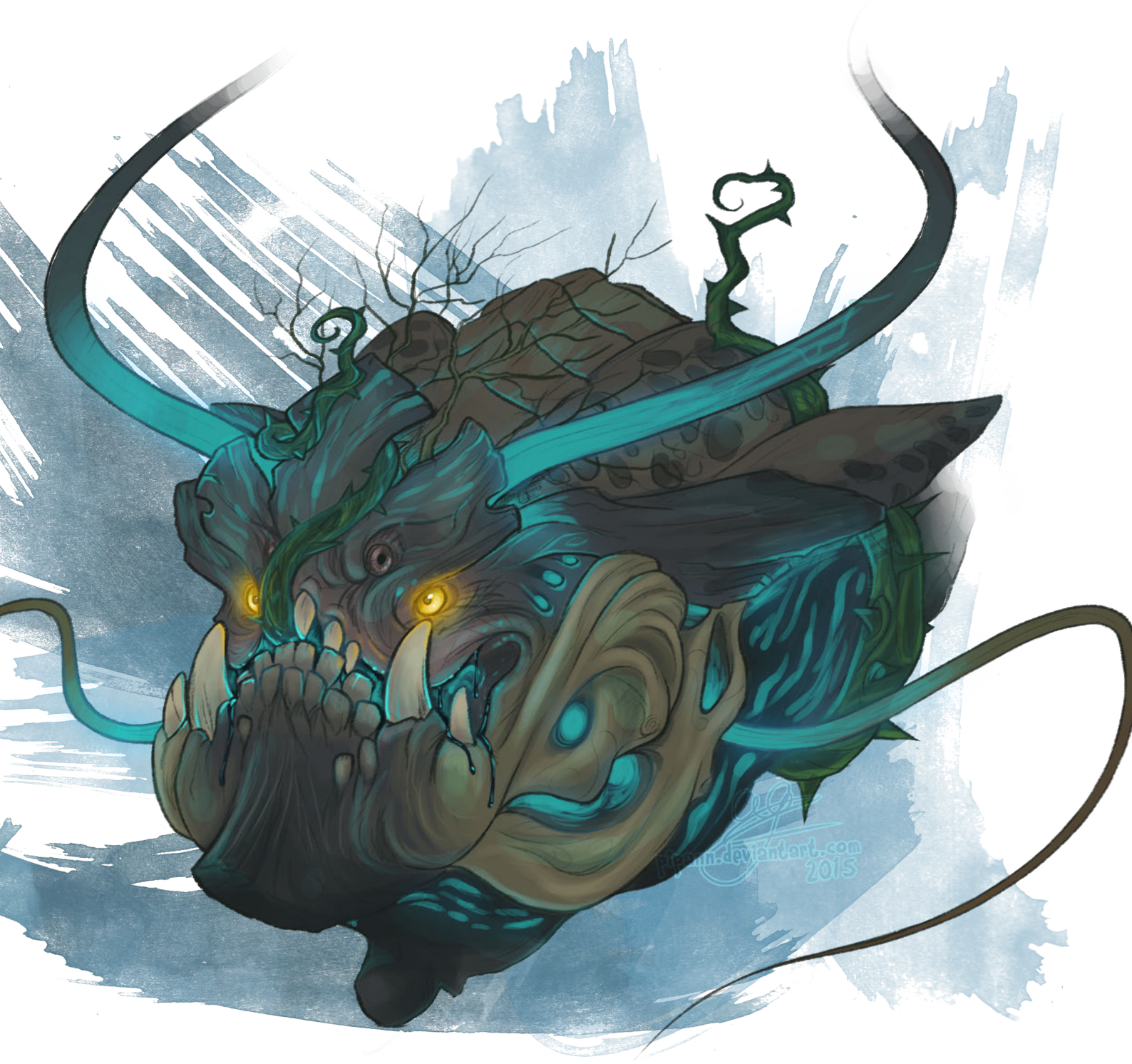
The last of the Elder Dragons to rise, Mordremoth leveraged both sides of its domain against the Pact to good effect before its demise. Its command over plants presented the most obvious threat, but its mental influence proved the more dangerous in the end, allowing it to manipulate sylvari through the Dream and distribute its sapience across the jungle rather than being confined to a single physical body. Only by entering its mind through the Dream and destroying it from within was Mordremoth able to be slain.



GLINT

While not technically an Elder Dragon, Glint provides an interesting case study of the distinction between powers that come from an Elder Dragon and those that do not. Like Kralkatorrik, Glint had command over crystals and over aspects of the sky, although Glint's aspects of wind, sun and lightning are gentler in nature than Kralkatorrik's. The aspect of sun, in particular, might not have originally come from her former master. Her telepathy and gift of prophecy definitely did not come from Kralkatorrik; instead, she is believed to have been corrupted by Kralkatorrik some time in the distant past specifically to grant the Elder Dragon a minion with capabilities he did not have access to directly. At present, not enough is known about the capabilities of Glint's scions to comment on just how much of their capabilities have been inherited from their mother, or whether they have developed their own unique magical skills.

With our newfound knowledge, it is clear that our understanding of the Elder Dragons creates a dilemma for the Pact and other defenders of civilisation. They represent a clear and direct threat to civilisation in their destructive behaviour, but their deaths risk bringing about a greater catastrophe. With luck, the ongoing efforts spearheaded by the Dragonslayer to find a solution to this problem will bear fruit. In the meantime, the Pact's efforts have switched from seeking to slay the Elder Dragons to a mission of containment.



“The Mouth of Mordremoth” - Pipann
deviantart.com/pipann
Pipann’s piece, representing the physical form of the dragon, is as adorable as the tubby Mind of Mordremoth we fight in the heart of Maguuma. Then again, perhaps ‘adorable’ isn’t quite the right word for an Elder Dragon...


ARENANET





BY VARRUS SHATTERBLADE

deviantart.com/tmattom

THE THRONE OF PELLENTIA

The ruins of the Throne of Pellentia still hold great power. Before they left this world, the gods would look down upon the throne and judge those who stood before them, their gaze imbuing the land with power. The throne itself was built by the legendary hero Turai Ossa after he led his people into the Crystal Desert. Although he stood before the gods and beseeched them to grant him Ascension, that honor would only be bestowed upon the heroes of the Flameseeker Prophecies.



THE HENGE OF DENRAVI

Centuries ago, druids gathered at the Henge of Denravi, performing their own rituals and imbuing the jungle with their magic. After the druids' disappearance, the Henge remained lost and abandoned until the Shining Blade found their way to its magical waters. Today, the Priory and Inquest struggle to lay claim to the area's secrets.

PARADIGM**SHIFT**

BY
AMALA & DRAXYNNIC

It's chaos out there. With the imbalance of magic wreaking havoc on the environment, aggravating the wildlife and empowering our enemies, we've had to adapt and evolve our roles. The quartermaster thought I was mad when I requisitioned heavy armour for the scholar classes and light armour for the soldier classes, but I told her unconventional stratagems will be the key to victory. They didn't make me a Tactician of the Vigil for nothing.

CRUSADING MAGISTER

These mages are already proficient with swords, axes and greatswords. Now they'll need to train those weapon stances in full armour if they're to build enough endurance for the frontlines.

MIDNIGHT YEW (MY)

TEA SHADE (TS)

TARNISH (T)

GREEN SHADE (GS)

MURKY GREY (MG)

PATINA (P)

ILLUMINATION (I)

SAGE (S)

Head: **Nightmare Court Regalia**
180 Deadly Blooms

This helmet's design was stolen from the upper echelons of the Nightmare Court hierarchy. I acquired the Deadly Blooms required to make the purchase by exploring the Twilight Arbor in Caledon Forest. Payment was made to the dungeon merchant near the Vigil Centerhouse in Lion's Arch.

Shoulders: **Chronomancer Epaulets**
Free

A member of my elite group of mesmers brought these shoulders to my attention. Every mesmer who masters the chronomancer specialisation earns a set.

Chest & Legs: **Luminous Regalia & Luminous Cuisses**
Free

It is vital to show veterans of any army that their experience and loyalty is valued. Starting from this year, those Commanders who've proven their loyalty to Tyria for six years will receive an Anniversary Armour Box. From this box, they may select a Luminous Armour set in their chosen armour class.

Gloves: **Triumphant Armguards**
Free

Those of my colleagues who endanger themselves in the Mist Wars, a never-ending battle which pits World vs. World, can sign up for one of many reward tracks. The last reward of the repeatable Triumphant Armor Reward Track gives the recipient their choice of the Triumphant armour piece.

Boots: **Glorious Footgear**
Free

Sometimes, one needs to get creative to motivate his troops. You could call it a training exercise, but I must admit, I've enjoyed the arena matches I've held for them. While they compete in these player vs. player matches, they also earn points towards different reward tracks. If they reach the end of the repeatable Glorious Armour Reward Track, they get their choice of the Glorious armour piece.

Dyes

Midnight Yew – 14s 67c

Tea Shade – 8s

Tarnish – 16s 28c

Green Shade – 44c

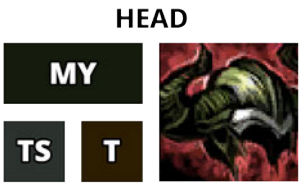
Murky Grey – 64g

Patina – 69c

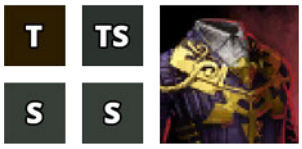
Illumination – 19s 81c

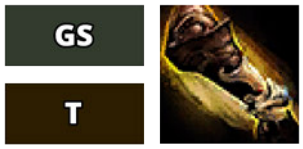
Sage – 39s 96c

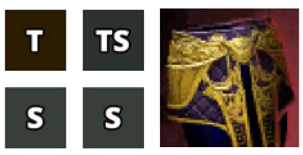


















ARCANE WARMASTER

Naturally, the asuran soldiers have taken well to the mandated studies. It made sense to invest in gear that would better synergise with their new skills.

ILLUMINATION (I)

LEMON TINT (LT)

BURGUNDY (B)

MIDNIGHT FIRE (MF)

Head: Sun Aspect Eye
500 gems

When the Bazaar of the Four Winds floated in last Summer, I caught word of elaborate aspect crystals being sold by the Black Lion Trading Company. This one, the Sun Aspect Eye, emanates visible waves of power.

Chest: Galvanic Coat
Free

I could always depend on asuran cultural armour to be of the highest standards in design. The Galvanic Coat could have been sourced from the tier 1 cultural armour merchant in Rata Sum for 80 silver, but there were also the skritt traders in the Borderlands and Eternal Battlegrounds to consider. These skritt offered the coat at the cheaper price of 40 silver and 20 Badges of Honour – the currency earned for participating in the Mist Wars.
Luckily, our coffers were saved when I learned that asuran warriors, guardians and revenants receive this coat for free during their level 20 personal story steps.

Legs: Funerary Tassets
Free

To satisfy the Primeval Steward at the Tomb of the Primeval Kings, I first had to complete 'The Collection of Tribute'. This achievement involved the thirsty work of harvesting materials across the desert from the Crystal Oasis to the Domain of Vabbi. On completion, I received the Royal Funerary Legging Box. If I hadn't selected the tassets at that time, I would have had to return to the Primeval Steward and purchase another box for 2 gold, 40 silver and 80 Elegy Mosaics.

Boots: Mursaat Brogans
Free

You could say the mursaat also wore an amalgamation of heavy and light armour. Getting these brogans meant returning to Siren's Landing, the place where the last mursaat perished, and then completing 36 achievements within the area. Each counted towards the 'One Path Ends Mastery' achievement.

Dyes

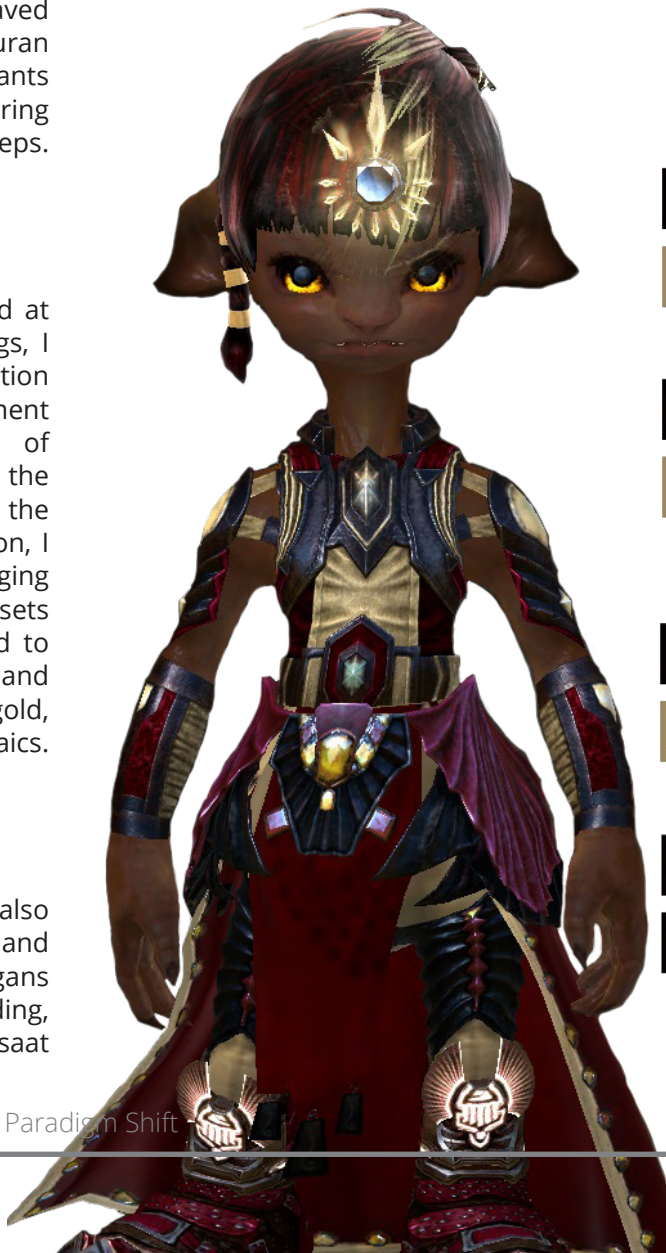
Illumination – 19s 81c

Lemon Tint – 39s 73c

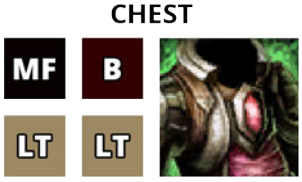
Burgundy – 33s 16c

Midnight Fire – 2g 80s 78c



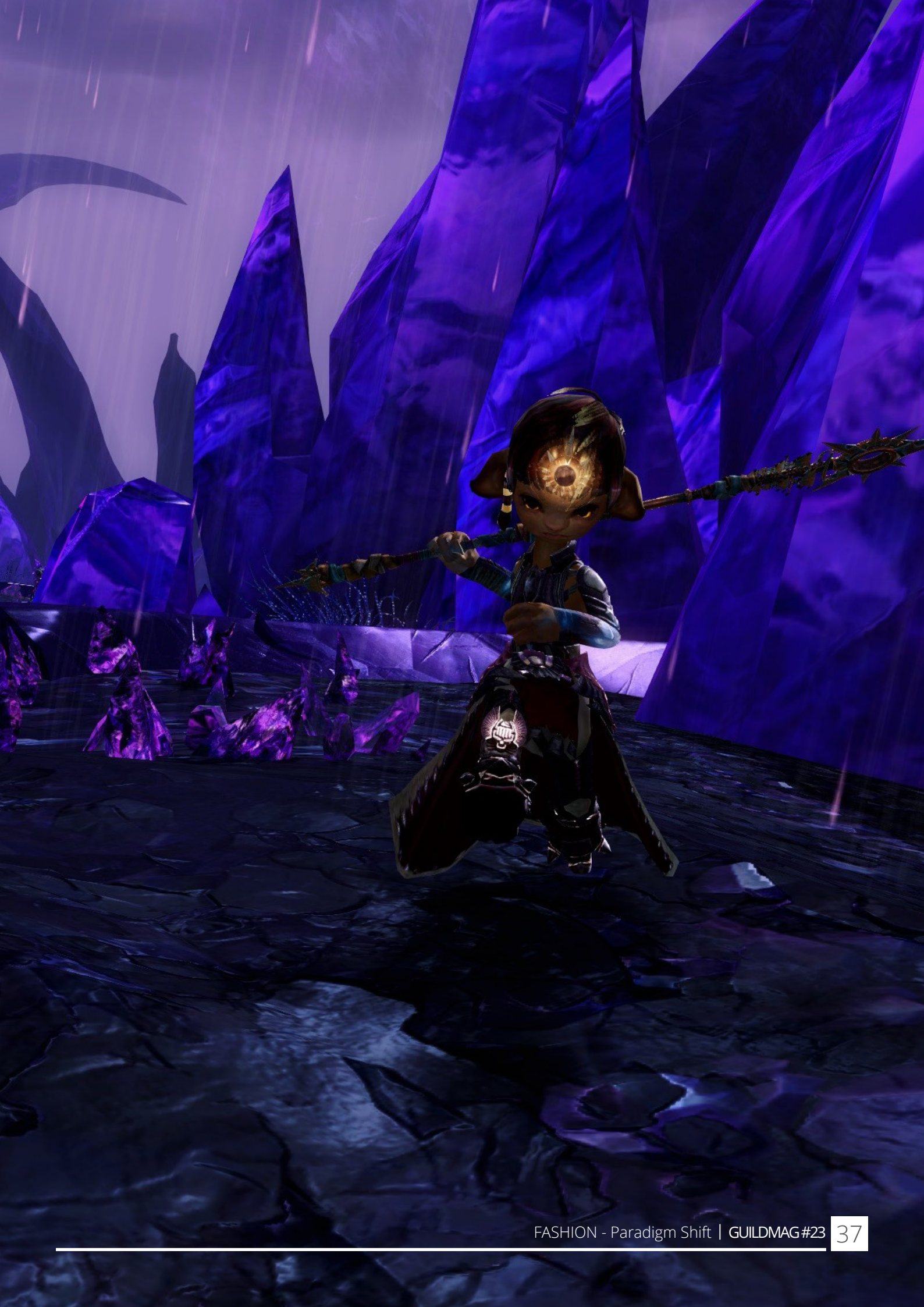








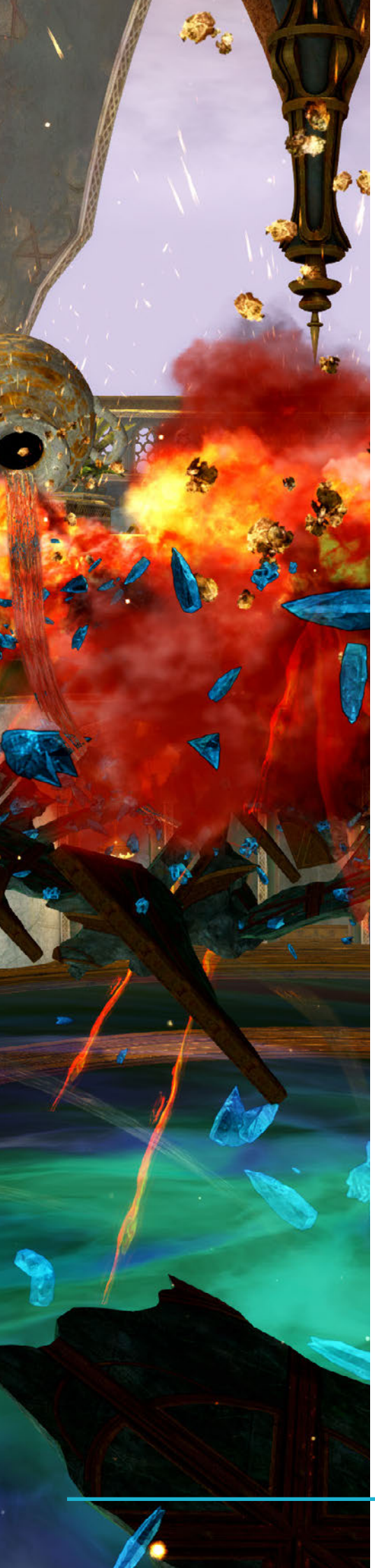






RAIDING MISCONCEPTIONS

BY **MIGHTYTEAPOT**



> Some of the most experienced raiders take hours to kill a new boss. This is because raids are like an elaborate puzzle; once you know how to solve and approach the puzzle, it essentially becomes trivial.

Raids in *Guild Wars 2* are an often misunderstood, and sometimes even feared, game mode. As a seasoned raider, I see the same misconceptions proliferating and preventing players from entering the scene or enjoying raids at all! Fortunately I have this article to clear up as many of these as I can.

Right at the top of the list is the notion that you have to be good at the game to raid. This idea typically stems from newer raiders not approaching the content with a solid game plan or knowledge about the encounter itself. If even the best players attempt to kill Qadim - the final boss in Mythwright Gambit - without knowing what to do, they are going to have an extremely bad time. Progression raiding is an excellent example of this. Some of the most experienced raiders take hours to kill a new boss for the first time. This is because raids are like an elaborate puzzle; once you know how to solve and approach the puzzle, it essentially becomes trivial.

There are two main aspects of understanding raids: Strategy and roles. Strategy is the method for dealing with the mechanics, and roles are the professions and builds used to execute the strategy. For example, you will generally want as many boons as you can lay your hands on, plenty of crowd control, and copious amounts of healing. It is possible to raid without these, but it is going to be a rocky road.
By understanding the encounters and making sure your team contains the utility to handle the unique challenges of each boss, you can change raids from an insurmountable obstacle to free loot every week!

The good news is that there are plenty of community resources to help solve this puzzle, from YouTube guides to friendly, non-toxic streamers and web resources such as the Snow Crows or Metabattle sites. By briefly perusing some of these sources, a new raider can approach a boss and be armed with the knowledge of how to execute each fight and know what is coming. Understanding these resources is also key; for example strategies found on the Snow Crows website are geared towards maximum efficiency and speedkilling, which may not be top priority for every group!

However, it is important to note that beating a boss doesn't require playing even close to perfectly as almost all the bosses in *Guild Wars 2* are very forgiving with regard to mechanics. The same is true for DPS. The sickest damage rotations are simply not required to down any of the bosses. Even in challenge mode, you can get away with slacking a bit on damage (or using green gear like The Inveterate [IvT] or less than five players like Quantify [qT] or Snow Crows [SC]). It is true that having high DPS is extremely favourable in raids, but it is simply not necessary; enrages are generous and will seldom be a threat.

Another misconception is that you must play only the professions with the biggest damage benchmarks. This causes problems for new raiders for multiple reasons. First of all, benchmarks are developed in an optimal environment. They assume the DPS player will get no raid mechanics, has perfect boons, and there is perfect execution from the entire team. This isn't going to happen in even the strongest of groups, let alone in groups facing



a boss for the first time. That is not to say, however, that benchmarks aren't useful; they demonstrate how to correctly execute a rotation and showcase the damage potential of various professions.

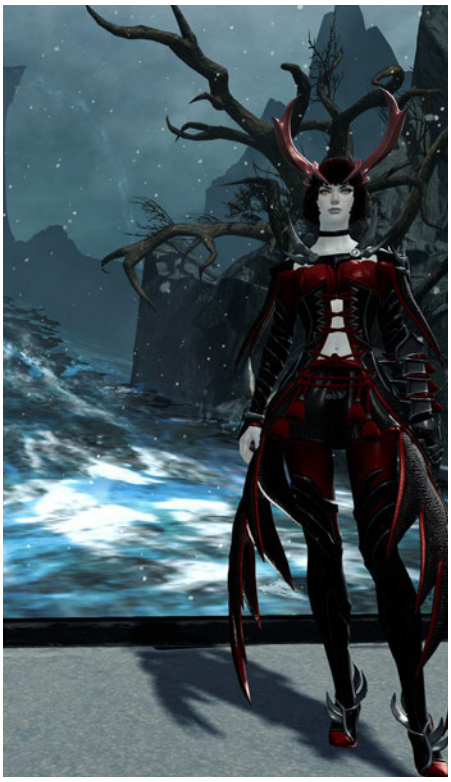
The problem of idolizing benchmark damage is compounded by the fact that not all professions are affected equally by conditions within the raid or group. For example, scourge DPS is barely influenced by mechanics and, although its benchmark is on the lower side, it will be able to consistently deal damage whereas a thief or elementalist may struggle in suboptimal situations (i.e. not being in melee range all the time or taking heavy damage).

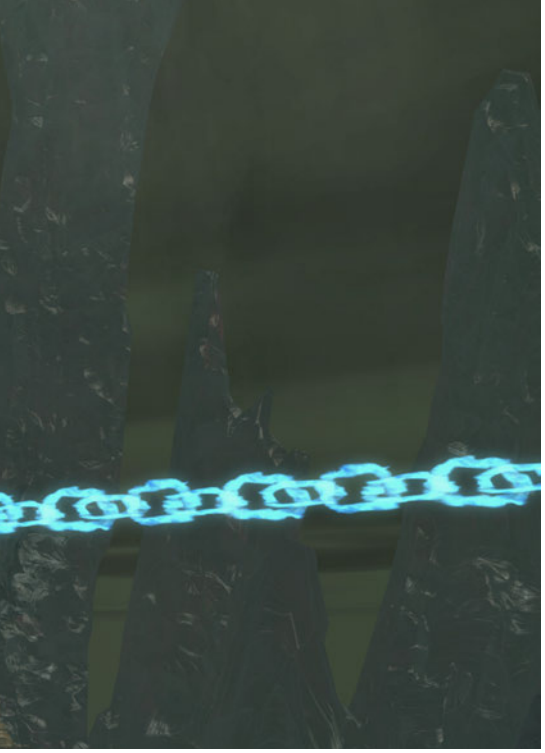
Not all DPS rotations are created equal and some are more difficult and more punishing than others. I would advise sticking to simpler rotations and sturdy professions like holosmith, soulbeast, scourge, warrior, and dragonhunter. There is also more to playing DPS than just damage, no matter what DPS mains try to tell you! The best raiders are always looking to make the raid as easy as possible by bringing all the utility their class can offer. Whether it's cleaving down adds, providing strong crowd control, using mobility to handle mechanics, or reviving, healing, cleansing, or applying barrier, all DPS professions have something to offer and it should be your goal to always use your profession to delete mechanics in whatever way you can.

> "Another misconception is that you must play only the professions with the biggest damage benchmarks.

The deadeye illustrates this point well. It has a very high benchmark, but it doesn't provide much cleave or group support and it requires specific positioning and being in melee constantly while being very squishy. Although a holosmith may theoretically do less DPS, it doesn't struggle with the same issues; it's much beefier, provides very strong cleave, AoE CC, AoE healing and cleanse, and it has decent ranged capabilities. In most raid groups, it is easily possible to be the top damage dealer on any profession you like, often thanks to things descending into a clown fiesta, but you should be more concerned with handling mechanics and keeping your team alive than your DPS.

In judging the merits of a profession, you must look at the whole picture rather than just the benchmark number. It is easy to dismiss a profession with a lower benchmark, e.g. necromancer, while ignoring the potentially game-breaking utility it brings - in this instance Epidemic. Epidemic is so strong that it can single-handedly delete multiple mechanics from fights, all while packaged with an extremely durable profession that offers solid team support and good damage. This makes scourge arguably the most broken DPS profession in the game, especially for newer raiders, as one or two scourges can greatly smooth out almost any encounter.





Just as some players misunderstand DPS viability, many misconceptions exist regarding general composition and supports. Now more than ever, the door has been opened for playing pretty much whatever you want. Druid, for example, is not the only good healer - in fact it pales in comparison to heal scourge, tempest, firebrand, renegade, or scrapper when it comes to raw support potential. Druid is more of a hybrid role, providing boons and buffs while also healing the team. Other options don't always fill the boon role as well, but they can excel in other areas; for example, nothing quite carries like a heal necro (go watch my guide)!

These hard support builds may not be useful for amazing speed kills, but it turns out that 99% of the community don't engage with raids in that way, so the supports are perhaps overpowered for their role rather than underpowered, as some believe.

Many of the misconceptions that I have been discussing are rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of balance. The most important thing about balance is that not every profession can or should cover all bases. One profession or specialization should not be able to do the best DPS while also obliterating adds and break-bars, nor should it possess the supreme buff powers of druid while having the godlike healing of a tempest. Professions being asymmetric - trading utility, offense, and defense - is the heart and soul of balance. If every profession performed the same functions, the game would be dull and flavourless.

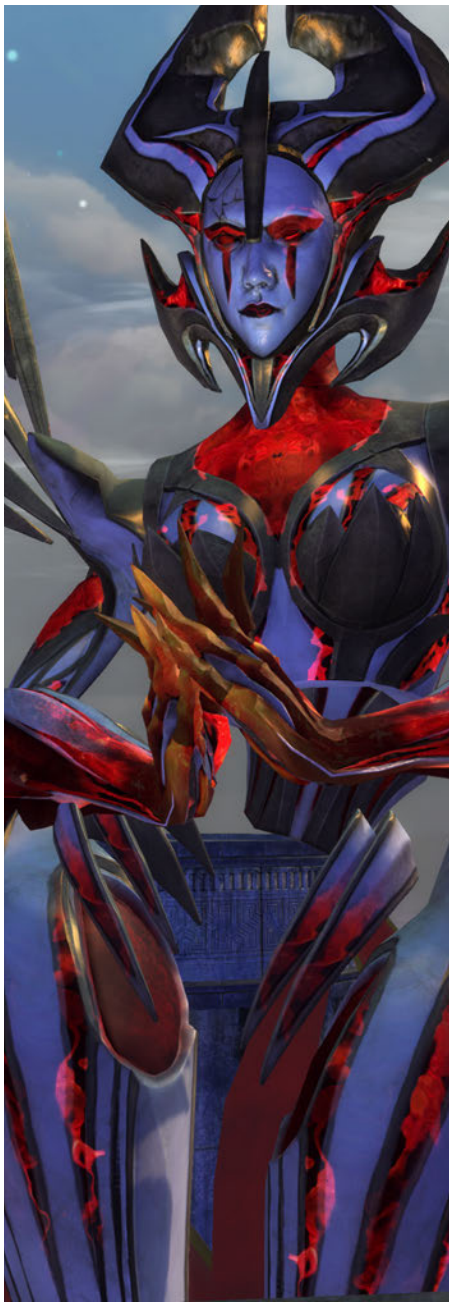
Another common misapprehension about raids is that you will need to devote hours of research and training in order to even think about participating, and after all that you will still get flamed by the toxic delusional raiding community. In truth, however, simply watching or reading a guide and spending about thirty minutes on the golem will set you well on your way to stacking up Legendary Insights!

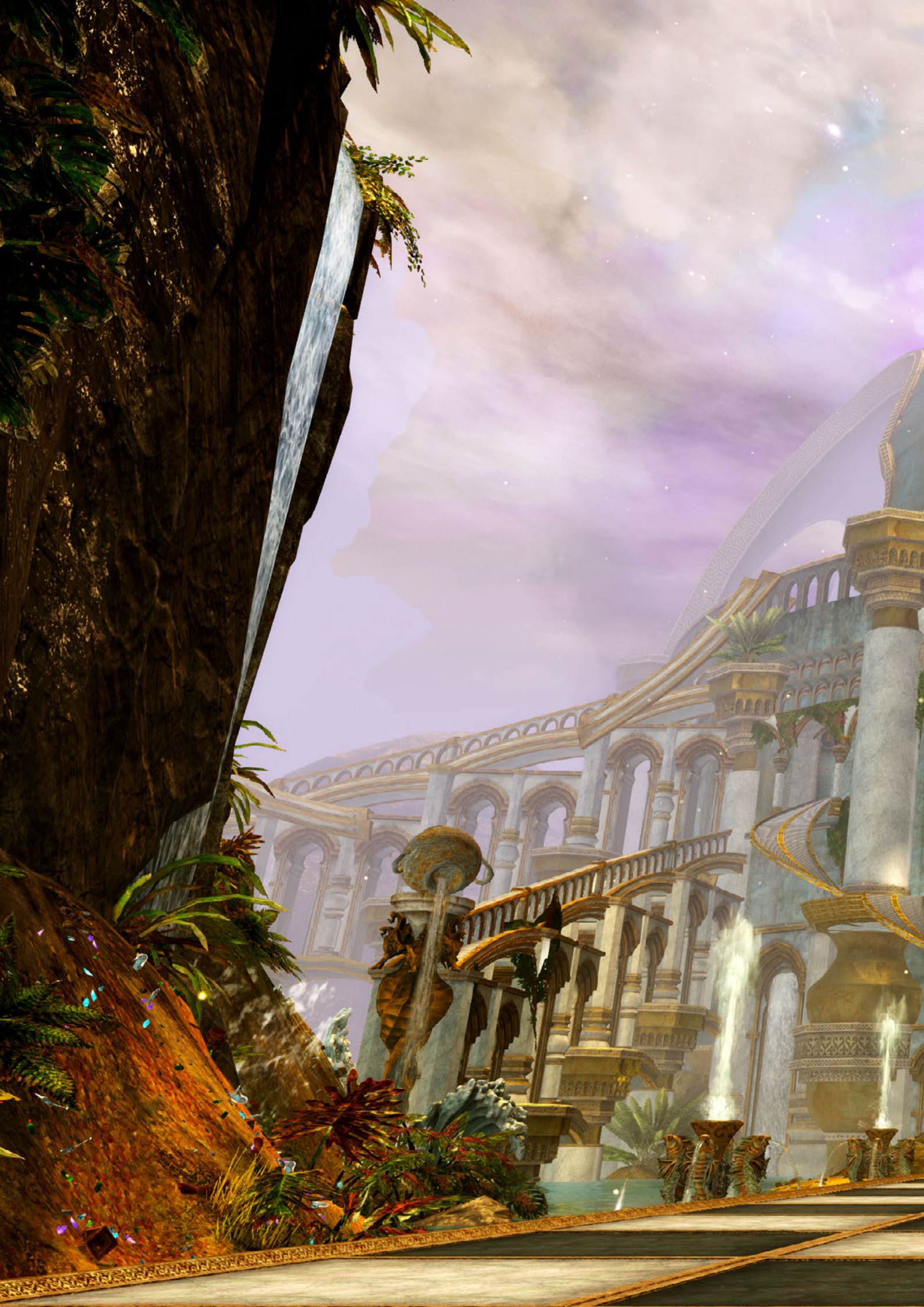
For the raider concerned with encountering toxicity, fear not; training guilds such as the Crossroads Inn (EU) or The Guild Wars 2 Raid Academy (NA) exist, providing a friendly and helpful environment for all those entering raids for the first time. Even PUG groups are not particularly toxic; as long as you meet the requirements and know vaguely what to do, you will probably be okay.

> "Now more than ever, the door has been opened for playing pretty much whatever you want.

Of course, in any game mode that requires teamwork and coordination, you will encounter a few unpleasant individuals, but they are very much in the minority and are best ignored. Furthermore, even if you lack kill proof or Insights, simply expressing that you know your role can often be enough for most groups to give you a chance. I personally have joined PUG groups on an anonymous alt with nothing but my wits and spamming memes and have been given a shot, even though I was playing on an extremely off-meta profession. I was even able to secure top DPS in many of those groups!

In conclusion, raids are content that can be accessible to everyone and many of the barriers that seem to exist stem from misinformation rather than huge problems with the game mode or community. Contrary to popular belief, you can hop into raids with any profession and minimal experience or time investment and come out with something to show for it. Balance is actually solid in ten-man content, with a wide variety of builds and playstyles to choose from, so pick up your favourite profession, gather your friends, and conquer the raids!









A FORGE OF ICE AND FIRE

BY PHOENIX

Fall into the Mystic Forge with lore from the new raid wing, Mythwright Gambit.

To whom it may concern: Glenna is neither my legal document assistant nor power of attorney, and therefore she is not authorized to sign any documents on my behalf, including but not limited to legally or life-binding contracts, waivers, and non-disclosure agreements. Therefore, it is within my rights to uncover details of the contents and operations of the Mystic Forge.

Now that I've addressed that potential spot of legal trouble, let's talk about the Mystic Forge. For years the secrets of the Forge have remained a mystery. Until recently, all we knew was that it was controlled and guarded by a water djinn named Zommoros. His friend and mouthpiece in Tyria, Miyani, was the only one who knew anything about the Forge. But this all changed recently when Zommoros extended an invitation to Scholar Glenna and a band of willing explorers to tour the Mystic Forge.

Unfortunately, our "tour" was derailed rather quickly when a fire djinn named Qadim popped out of a lamp and summoned a living construct of Elonian architecture. Zommoros refused to provide us with more information until we took care of this threat for him. Being the stalwart adventurers we are, we decided to destroy it, if only to learn more about the Mystic Forge and berate our host for the obviously

false pretenses we were lured in under.

During the fight, Qadim explained that Zommoros had gambled himself into debt. Zommoros made a bet to pay them off, staking the Mystic Forge. Qadim handpicked three of his own challengers, but Zommoros had to get creative to find people willing to take the risk. That's where we came in.

The second challenger was a gold-guzzling sand shark that ran rampant through the different divisions of the Forge (more on those later). Luckily, we'd all encountered many of these in the Crystal Desert before, so we knew just how to handle it. A few of our asura friends were nearly flattened by the flopping monstrosity, but we made it out relatively unscathed.

As we went along though, we discovered Qadim's true nature. Zommoros is a savant of shiny things - a hoarder of hand-me-downs, if you will - but Qadim has different tastes. Most of his possessions are living, breathing, sentient creatures he stores in his lamp. At best we might call it a zoo, at worst it's slavery. I distinctly remember Seraph Exemplar Talie's words to the centaur Vallog: "Slavery's illegal in Kryta. Even the animals know that. It looks like some animals need to be reminded." The same held true here.

Qadim's final challenge for us was a brother and sister pair of Largos twins: Nikare and Kenut. The aquatic assassins proved the most difficult challenge yet, but we were unable to glean if they willingly fought for Qadim. We know that largos value oaths and pay their debts, as we saw with Sayeh al' Rajihd and the late Pact Marshal Trahearne. The twins didn't remark upon Qadim except to say, "The djinn's thrown us some meat," and "finally given us something with teeth," so they didn't seem entirely unhappy. Yet it's hard to imagine any creature, especially ones with sophisticated reasoning and complex emotions like the largos, could have been happy stuffed in a lamp with a menagerie of exotic specimens. Maybe a largos with a challenger is a content largos.

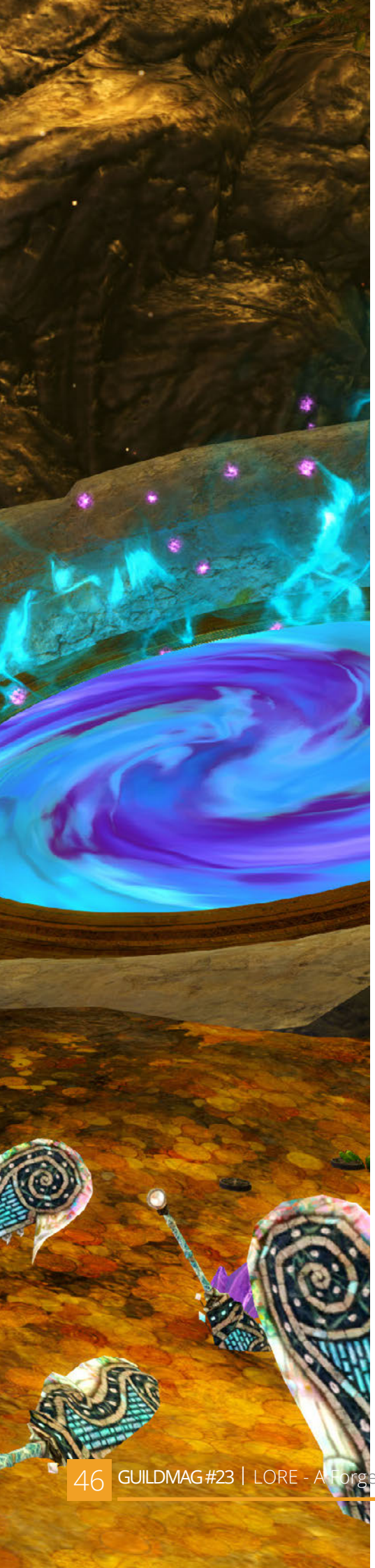
We were forced to dispatch the largos twins, emerging from their watery domain onto a grand causeway. Zommoros and Qadim argued, Qadim refusing to honor their deal even though we clearly conquered every challenge set in our way. In the process, he revealed the existence of the Mystic Cauldron, the powerful artifact Zommoros uses to create and imbue legendary relics. Qadim wishes to use it to forge new living things, making an army to annihilate the races of Tyria and take over as the ruler of all djinn.

Qadim blew apart a rock wall and rushed to claim the Cauldron. Zommoros, distraught that Qadim disregarded the djinn bylaws, asked us for our help, no tricks or games or "tours." Side note: who knew the djinn had their own set of bylaws? It seems they have a more complex social and legal system than previously imagined. Regardless, we had come this far already, and grown fond of the charismatic water djinn, so we took him up on the offer.

" Qadim's final challenge for us was a brother and sister pair of Largos twins: Nikare and Kenut.

We raced down the reliquary bridge, up the stairs, and into the Cauldron itself, defeating scores of fire imps and elementals released from Qadim's lamp as we went. The Cauldron is a sight to behold, a pool of swirling magical energy with vessels of enchanted water feeding it. It was there Qadim and Zommoros squared off, flinging fire balls and spheres of water that erupted in bursts of steam where they met. Naturally we were hesitant to put ourselves between them, that is until Qadim entrapped Zommoros in his lamp.





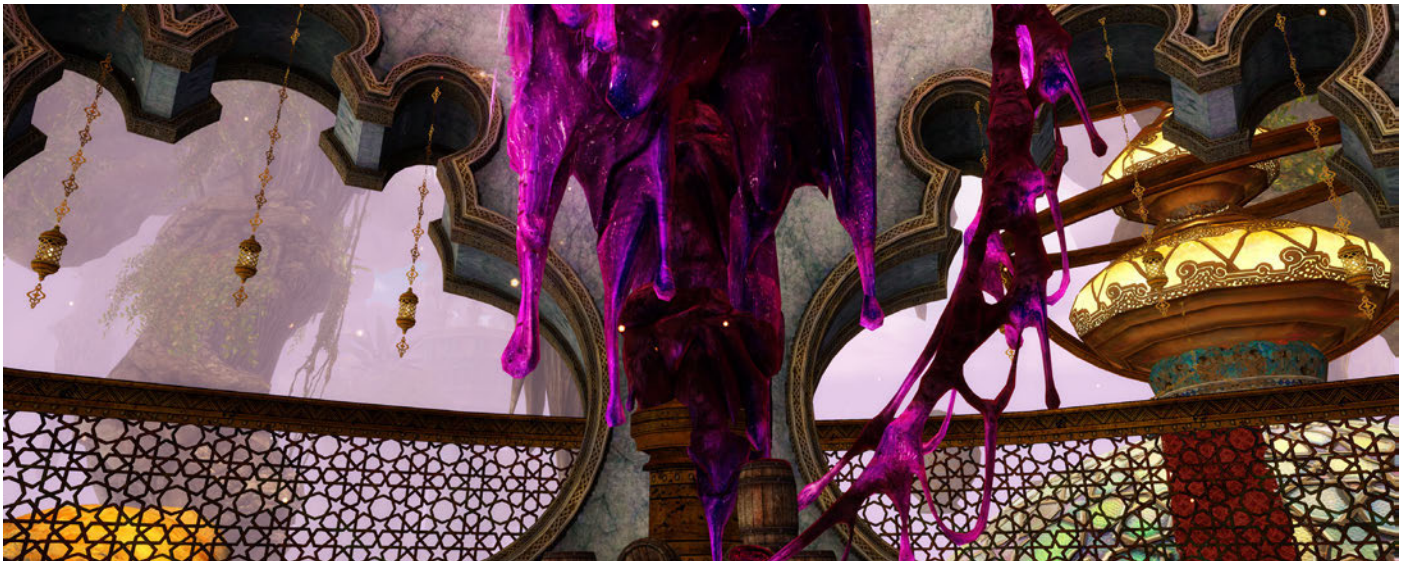
We had to confront the petulant fire djinn ourselves. In the end, his strength was also his downfall. Being a fire djinn, Qadim was naturally inclined to keeping all manner of fiery animals and elementals. But being a soulless subjugator who captured creatures for entertainment and enslavement, he also kept a bunch of other critters. For each deadly creature he released from its cramped prison, we too braved the lamp and unlocked cages to find other creatures to attack those. An iceborn hydra versus his ancient chimeric hydra, an ice elemental to combat the destroyer he unleashed, and finally Zommoros himself to settle his conflict with Qadim.

Zommoros dual-wielded the legendary greatswords Sunrise and Twilight (like a complete badass, I might add), and together we managed to knock Qadim from the platforms... rather unfortunately into the Cauldron below. Unable to snatch him out in time, Qadim emerged as a spectre of his former self, black as night and with glowing purple eyes. We've no idea where Qadim flew off to, but for now, the Cauldron is secure and the Mystic Forge still safely in the hands of Zommoros.

But now you know that the precious Cauldron has been defended, I'm sure you want to hear all about what's inside the Mystic Forge. In short? Everything. Gold and mystic coins litter the floors in great piles; the old lion statue, destroyed by Scarlet Briar in the razing of Lion's Arch (may it rest in peace) is buried among them. Pearl weapons protrude here and there; everyone knows they're a favorite currency of Tyrians itching to receive a precursor.

And who sorts and organizes it all? The skritt. Zommoros took advantage of their propensity to do any job or take any test as long as it involves shinies. The skritt also work in the miniature-pet menagerie.





There they prepare pets for their new homes, stabilizing cuddle ratios, adding a dash of holiday magic here, and a pinch of sugary sweetness there. They then reduce them down to size with a shrink ray and send them up to the Tyrians above.

Aside from the menagerie, we were lucky enough to see many of the other manufacturing and storage rooms. Zommoros is quite the wine connoisseur, keeping a floor-to-ceiling cellar full of Elonian wine. It would behoove you all to know: his favorite is Jackspruce Jacaranda, a grape blend with floral notes, while the wine he deems "common swill" is Djinnspit, both because of the name and the subpar quality. So next time you consider tossing a bottle of Elonian wine in the forge to bribe Zommoros with, do make sure you get the best vintage.

> "Zommoros dual-wielded the legendary greatswords Sunrise and Twilight and together we managed to knock Qadim from the platforms.

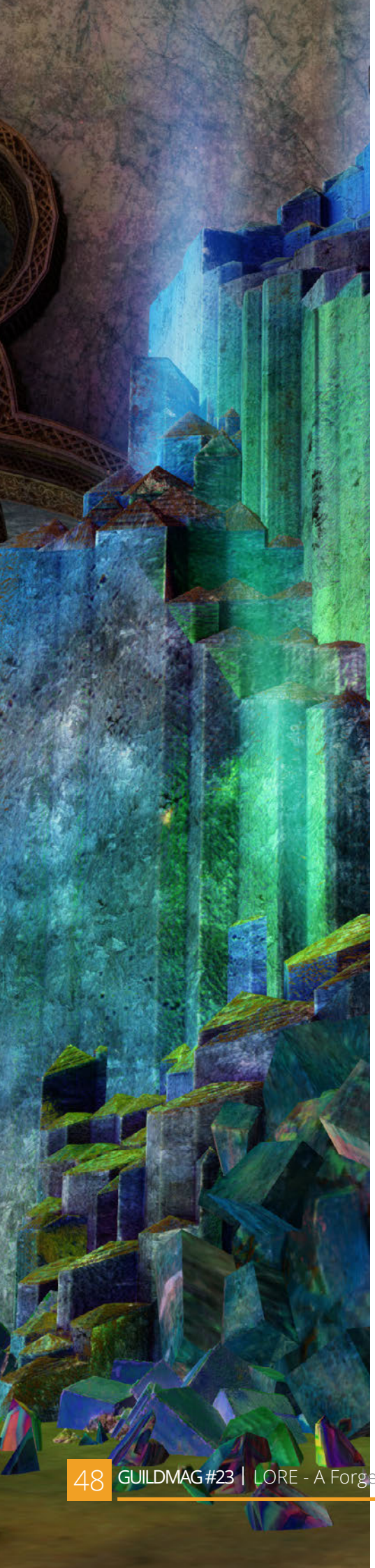
There are two containment rooms, one dripping with ectoplasm. Initial exposure caused our strength to swell, but as time progressed we felt cold, lethargic, and nauseous. Unsurprisingly, the latter feeling is similar to the experience of being run through by a ghost. Another room housed deposits of gemstones from ruby to emerald to opal. There were also barrels sizzling with magic here and there; Bezzalak the skritt informed us that these held all manner of lodestones corrupted by dragon energies. An additional storage room held bones and skulls, likely put there by necromancers wishing to get back a powerful item to help them better commune with the dead.

The final room we were shown? The mystic clover garden. It's a small open-air garden with a fountain in the center. Naturally, a few in our group, I will admit myself among them, were inclined to pick a clover or two... or seventy-seven. If the ectoplasm cast a chill in the room, Zommoros' sudden appearance in the garden, shards of solid ice hovering over each of his many hands, sent the cold into our very bones. Needless to say, our temptation was properly doused after that.

Honestly, I could go on about the Forge's interior, sprawling, glittering thing that it is. But I'd like to tell you all a little more about our enigmatic host, Zommoros. As you all know, Zommoros is a water djinn, and as I've explained, a gambler. If you ever wondered why he's so capricious about what he throws back out of the Forge, there are a few reasons.

First, it's a game for him. Being master of the Mystic Cauldron is like being the pit boss of his very own casino. Second, as there are so many people chucking things in the Forge daily, Zommoros controls very few of the transactions. In actuality, the skritt give and receive as they see fit and they don't always keep the best records. Finally, some things are controlled by the Cauldron, particularly our legendary relics. But Zommoros assured me he gets just as excited as we do when we finally find the right combination of items to be awarded the dazzling, magical weapons and armor. He's there whenever a legendary item is Tyria-bound.

Even though the Cauldron spits out the legendaries, Zommoros designs them within the confines of the Cauldron's power and his own magic and creativity. He was humble enough to show us a few scrapped ideas. Among them were a Duoblade, a legendary greatsword that splits into two greatswords. While prototyping that one, he remembered his target audience tends to only have two arms instead of four. I was intrigued by Featherweight, a set of three daggers that float around your person... that is, until he told us they were invisible and eager to take on any perceived threats, whether it was a wyvern or a friend with a



simple question.

Even though he used deceit to rope us into fighting his battle, I was pleasantly surprised by Zommoros in the end. He was protective of everything in the Forge, from his possessions to the live skritt. From interviewing a few, we found out he does, in fact, employ them, taking them in as refugees and letting them quit when they please. He even told them they were free to take knowledge of the Forge back to their scratches and invite others to work for him as well.

Being the nosy person I am, I might have read Zommoros' private journal while we were in there. He is both confused and horrified by Qadim's keeping of creatures. From his perspective, living things need nourishment and care and keeping them purely for entertainment is nonsensical. Zommoros' preference is to invent objects with historical relevance and emotional and monetary value. It seems to make him happy that Tyrians haul his handiwork around with them.

Something Zommoros said to Qadim made me think: "My creations travel the world, striking down evil, protecting the weak. What do YOU create aside from chaos?" All this time, we thought we could best bribe and please Zommoros by sending him so many sparkly things, but perhaps the best way to honor him is to use his legendary creations to create a better world we can cherish as much as we do those wonderful, mythical relics.

Oh! I'm sure it's not important, but Zommoros did write a journal entry about Isgarren, the wizard who resides in the floating tower over Garrenhoff. He said Isgarren had thrown things in the Forge seeking special compounds, likely for one spell or another. But there's no record of what the magic practitioner tossed in, nor what he received in kind. And no one's seen hide nor hair of Isgarren in a long while. Normally I wouldn't comment on such an insignificant sliver of information, but perhaps the Wizard's Tower is where we'll...

... Nah, couldn't be.




THE MURSAAT ABANDON THE ELDER RACES' ALLIANCE AGAINST THE ELDER DRAGONS, BOTH GROUPS BELIEVING THEY HAD BEEN BETRAYED...
...THE FORGOTTEN FREE GLINT...
...THE HUMAN GODS ARRIVE
...THE GODS DEPART
...LORD ODRAN BREACHES THE VEIL BETWEEN TYRIA AND THE MISTS
...UNDER THE INFL
...AGENTS OF ABADDON ACT ON TYRIA...
...THE FLAME LEGION MAKE CONTACT WITH THE TITANS...


...AND TAMPER WITH THE BLOODSTONE, RELEASING MAGICS...
...MAGICAL WARS BREAK THE BLOODSTONE INTO FOUR...
...THE GODS WAR WITH EACH OTHER. ABADDON IS IMPRISONED IN THE REALM OF TORMENT...
...TO THE MISTS...
THE CRYSTAL SEA IS BOILED AWAY...
...QUENCE OF ABADDON, SAIRO TAGACHI MURDERS THE CANTHAN EMPEROR...
...MUCH OF CANTHA IS PETRIFIED BY THE JADE WIND...
...THE MURSAAT RETURN AND ARE DECIMATED...


... WITH ABADDON SLAIN, KORMIR ABSORBS HIS ESSENCE AND BECOMES THE GODDESS OF KNOWLEDGE.
... BUT ENOUGH EXCESS MAGIC ESCAPES AND THE ELDER DRAGONS STIR...
...THE CHARR ARMY IS DESTROYED...
...INADVERTENTLY ALLOWING THE SUNSPEARS AND THEIR ALLIES TO PUSH FORWARDS AND SEAL ABADDON'S...
...VARESH OSSA OPENS PORTALS TO THE REALM OF TORMENT...


...THE DRAGON CHAMPIONS RISE...
...KING ADELBERN INVOKES THE FOEFIRE...
...THE ASURA FLEE THEIR UNDERGROUND HOMES...
...THE GREAT DESTROYERS RISE HERALDS THE DWARVES' DOOM...
ED...


...THE FIRST SYLVARI AWAKEN IN THE GROVE...
...THE DISPLACED WATER FLOODS LION'S ARCH...
..ZHAITAN RAISES THE CITY OF ORR FROM THE DEPTHS...
...THE RESIDUAL MAGIC FROM THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BLOODSTONE IS ABSORBED BY BALTHAZAR...
...THE BRAND EXTENDS INTO ELONA AND THE FABRIC OF REALITY STRAINS...


...DESTINY'S EDGE IS FORMED TO FIGHT AGAINST DRAGON MINIONS...
...IN RESPONSE TO THE RISING THREAT OF THE ELDER DRAGONS, THE VIGIL AND SENTINELS ARE FOUNDED...
...TWO DRAGONS ARE SLAIN WITH THE COMBINED FORCES OF THE PACT...
...HUMAN AND CHARR PEACE TALKS BEGIN...



"Drooburt"
Custom art by Ametat
(artstation.com/ametat)

BY STARCONSPIRATOR

THE MERCHANT PRINCE

None now know how long he waddled,
How far-flung his fate had become.
Drooburt, Merchant Prince
Driven out by Briar's Tower
To deserts harsh and dry

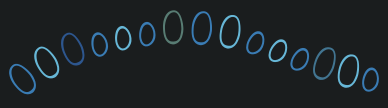
There to waste away lost, betrayed;
He begged for coin that none could give
Drooburt, Merchant Prince
For taverns owned by charr are cold
And miners have no gold



Then came the crashing vines!

Wild thorns, poison barbs, acid pools!
Elder Dragon minions all around!
Drooburt, Merchant Prince
Did fight and bite and havoc wreak!
As all brave quaggan do!

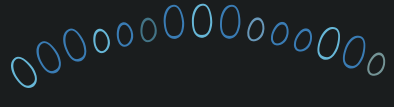
OH! The greenery! Stems, twigs, leaves!
Not a single plant was safe from
Drooburt, Merchant Prince.
With flippers, tail, and teeth he fought
And none more bravely stood!



Then one came up behind!

None now mourn, none saw his struggle
Body left behind, wrapped in vine!
Drooburt, Merchant Prince!
He disappeared into the Mists
Bereft of scant penny

Whilst time passed, he did wander there
Through ghostly mists both thick and fine,
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
Until he came upon another
A pumpkin head on fire!



Then Mad King Thorn did stand!
"What have we here?!" the Mad King cried,
"A wayward tuna washed ashore?"
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
sighed, "Foo! Quaggan's very good at
Poor decision-making!"

The Fire chortled, held out his hand.
"Join my Court!" the King commanded,
"Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
We'll find you fish and copper coin!
Rebuild your life anew!"



Then quaggan joined the King!

Now ghostly quaggan courtier
Attended Thorn in Lion's Arch.
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
Was sent to beg for candy corn
In hopes of renewed life!

But sweets and treats cannot rebuild
A quaggan life sadly squandered,
Drooburt, Merchant Prince!
Relentless begging at the door
Brought quaggan no succor!



Then Drooburt lost all hope!

Not candy corn nor snowflakes cold
Could bring quaggan life anew.
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
Did even try Continue Coins!
No single currency bought peace.

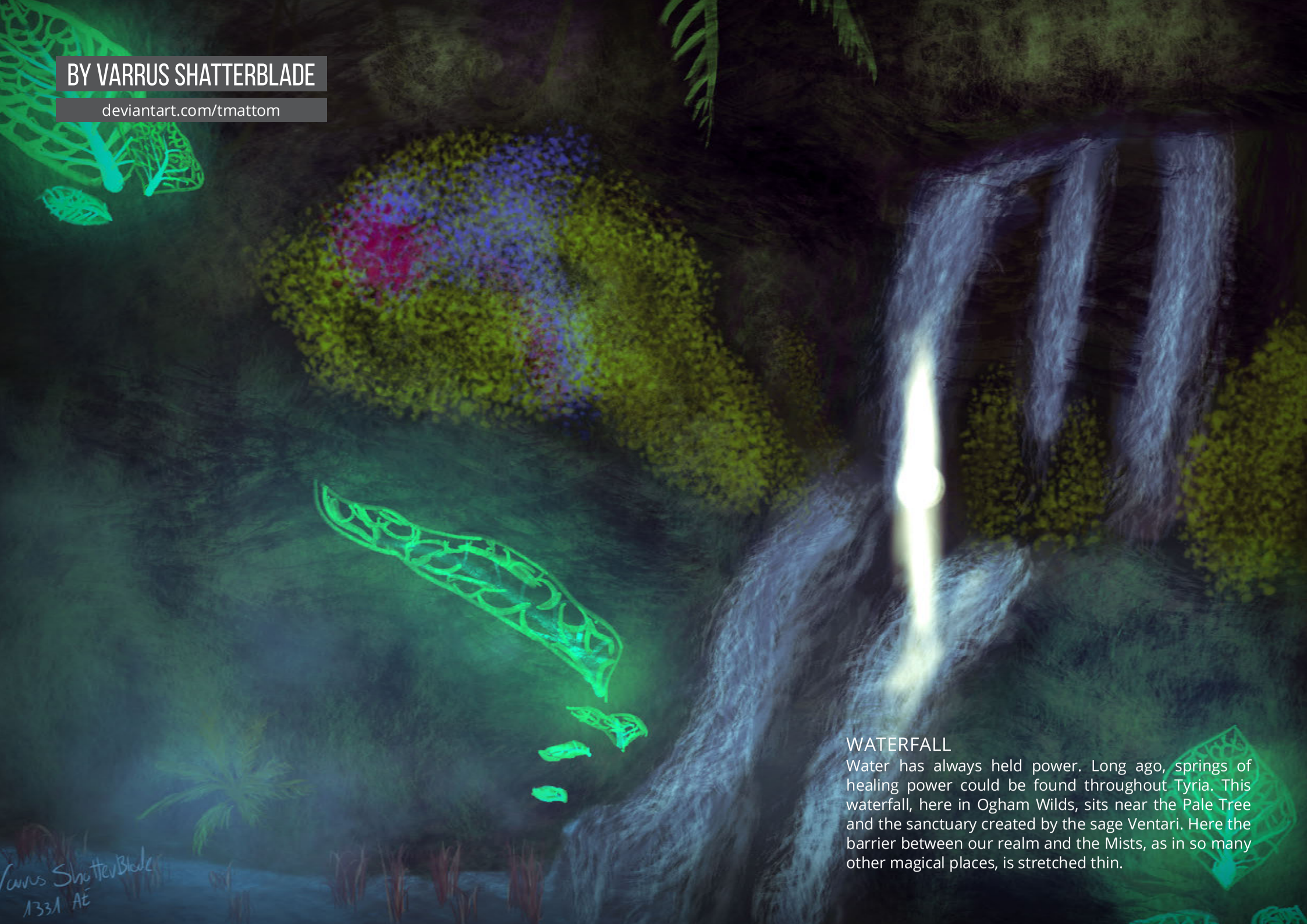
Disheartened, Drooburt wandered far.
Between the mortal realm and Mists
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
Soon found his way to Sanctum high
And met the elements!



Then merchants took him in!

Now merchant quaggan ghost is found
Plying his wares with Zephyrites!
Drooburt, Merchant Prince,
At last his life has turned around
His luck improved greatly!


BY VARRUS SHATTERBLADE
deviantart.com/tmattom
TEMPLE OF THE AGES
For centuries, people gathered here to worship the gods of Tyria. Even when the mursaat convinced Saul D'Alessio that they were gods, the Temple of the Ages remained unchanged, dedicated to the original pantheon. When the gods left, the Temple remained and stories spread that one day the gods would return.



WATERFALL

Water has always held power. Long ago, springs of healing power could be found throughout Tyria. This waterfall, here in Ogham Wilds, sits near the Pale Tree and the sanctuary created by the sage Ventari. Here the barrier between our realm and the Mists, as in so many other magical places, is stretched thin.



BY **STARCONSPIRATOR**

GUIDING STARS

S4 RECAP: EPISODE4



A STAR TO GUIDE US

The latest chapter of the Living World found us delving deeper into the Mists and pressing further into Elona's deserts. Along the way we met new allies, visited old friends, and discovered uncomfortable truths.

SHATTERED REALITY

A call from Taimi brings us back to Jahai where the leaders of the various Elonian factions are trying to negotiate peace in the power vacuum left by Joko's demise. Zaeim, leader of the Sunspears, requires the Commander's help in quelling the hatred and distrust that has flared up between the factions when Aurene crashed the summit and refused to leave. Concerned about our dragon, we hurry to Vehtendi. There, in the Vineyards, we meet Braham who escorts us through a secret passage into Jahai.

According to Braham, Aurene has been defending villages across Elona and she was probably simply concerned about everyone's safety at the summit when she collapsed in the middle of the proceedings. Her presence unnerves the Joko loyalists, who are led by Grand Vizier Utumishi. However, each faction brings its own worries, fears, and prejudices. The free Awakened, led by Ambassador Sianna, want to try and make the best of their unlife but their human countrymen are not always welcoming, while the loyalists are determined to await Joko's return. We also meet Redeemer Kossan, the representative of the Order of Shadows and one of Koss Dejarin's descendants, and Archon Iberu of the Mordant Crescent. We are able to convince Aurene to go on a walk with Taimi and let the summit continue. However, just as negotiations begin, a Mordant Crescent force descends upon the rotunda and attacks!

Iberu's coup is short-lived and his dreams of glory cut short by Koss Dejarin's arrival. With the show of force, the free Awakened and the remaining Mordant Crescent agree to join Zaeim and his Sunspears. However, Utumishi demands land of their own where they can wait for Joko. The negotiations are interrupted once again by the appearance of the Shatterer, Kralkatorrik's champion. With an even larger dragon to contend with, everyone flees Jahai, fighting past Branded Awakened controlled by the Elder Dragon.

This serves well for an introductory story step, setting up the tension between the rival factions and introducing the Shatterer to Elona. Utumishi's insistence that Joko will return and that Aurene is the enemy and the Commander not to be trusted is a welcome change in point of view that reminds us we may be the hero of our own story but we are not everyone's hero.

After making our way out of the Fortress of Jahai, we witness the Shatterer disappear into a strange rift! Confounded by her readings, Taimi escorts the survivors to safety and we begin our exploration of the new map, searching for information regarding the rifts we witnessed and others that have appeared across Jahai.

THE JAHAI BLUFFS

As has become part of each new story step, we are now free to explore the map, the Jahai Bluffs. Our goal is to collect data on the rifts



for Taimi and her partners Blish and Gorrik, which sends us into battle with the Branded creatures that pour out of the tears in reality. There are a total of four events that require our attention and they are flung across the map just far enough that we get a good taste of the environs by traveling to each disturbance. It isn't long before we realize that many of the disturbances in the Jahai Bluffs are echoes of the past; moments of time from the Mists that have been transposed onto modern reality. As a historian and long-time player of the first game, I found this to be an interesting touch and quite enjoyed the battles. However, one of the more interesting events has to do with a sudden appearance of otherworldly mushrooms. Like the activity associated with it, Run Around for No Reason, to me it seemed to serve little purpose. As part of the story steps, it does provide some characterization for Taimi and the Commander and it does allow us to hallucinate various figures from our past.



After completing the events we have enough samples that Blish and Taimi are able to deduce that Kralkatorrik has invaded the Mists, a place previously off-limits to Elder Dragons. His presence there is causing the rifts and threatens all of reality!



GOING TO GROUND

The final event in our exploration of Jahai starts with a call from Braham, who had been sent to check on a village that had just been Branded. He discovers a handful of survivors who escaped Branding by hiding underground. With this discovery, we realize that the best headquarters in our fight against Kralkatorrik will be underground - and Koss knows just the place. Once the center of activity in Kourna, the former central command post of the Sunspears will be perfect! However, the large underground chamber is currently overrun by spiders, including a giant spider Broodmother that must be driven out or destroyed. While creepy, they are not a difficult fight and we are soon able to claim the territory as our own, dubbing it Sun's Refuge. Like our home instances, the Sunspear Sanctuary belongs to us alone. There, we can rebuild the Refuge through a series of quests.

Once safe, the krewe discuss their findings. Kralkatorrik's presence in the Mists is destabilizing reality and threatening its destruction! Sadly, there is little explanation at this point in time as to how or why an Elder Dragon residing in the Mists represents such a threat. Blish and Taimi also determine that Kralkatorrik's rifts and Branded minions are attacking places where Aurene has been. As she is being hunted, it is decided that the young dragon will be safe if she remains in Sun's Refuge. This was one of my favorite story steps for a couple reasons. Returning to yet another *Guild Wars* area of significance and opening the series of quests that allows one to rebuild the Refuge provided another wonderful shot of nostalgia. I also enjoyed the final fight of the story step, joining forces with the spirits of Eir and Snaff - of all people! - to close a rift and save Aurene and the sanctuary. Given Snaff's original demise, their presence in this fight was very satisfying. Only when the battle is

finished do we receive the missing piece of information that explains the rifts: Kralkatorrik is devouring the energy within the Mists!

THERE AND BACK AGAIN

With everyone safe and Braham and Eir's reunion at an end, it's time to turn our attention to fighting the Elder Dragon - this time in the hope of saving all of reality. Snaff and Eir have brought a message to Aurene from Glint: Aurene must replace Kralkatorrik as an Elder Dragon and we cannot wait for her to grow. However, Aurene's vision shows her dying at every attempt. With no clear path forward, and fearing death, Aurene flees. In her wake, people begin to panic over the fact that Kralkatorrik is untraceable and nearly indestructible. Hurriedly, Blish assures everyone that he has a plan for tracking the Elder Dragon so that they will have warning of his arrival. Blish believes he can build a device that can be attached to Kralkatorrik and warn them of his approach. In order to lure the Elder Dragon close to Blish and allow the tracking device to be attached, the Commander must secure some tasty bait: Balthazar's sword.

Running out to collect the sword is a quick sidequest to Vabbi and back to the Bluffs. While searching for the sword, we come across a Priory team who were ambushed by a sniper who stole Balthazar's sword from them. We quickly hunt down the sniper, a priestess of Balthazar, who wishes to complete Balthazar's work and kill Kralkatorrik. We are able to subdue her and regain the sword. After recharging it with Sohothin's power, Balthazar's sword reacts on its own, seeking Balthazar, sensing the god through Aurene.

BRANDSTORM IN THE MISTS

We soon learn the rest of Blish's plan to help Aurene. First we need



to enter the Mists through a rift. With Glint protecting us, we should be able to lure Kralkatorrik to us with Balthazar's sword. We then convince the dragon to swallow both the sword and the tracker. Blish insists on doing this without Gorrik, saying that he won't be able to concentrate if he's worried about his brother. Begrudgingly, Gorrik acquiesces and we set out to find a rift.

Upon entering the Mists we find ourselves in the middle of a battle between Glint's forces and Kralkatorrik's Branded. We hurry to set up the sword as a trap for the Elder Dragon while Glint's forces provide cover. Despite waves of Branded attempting to steal the sword for their master, Blish is able to set the bait and attach the tracker. As Kralkatorrik draws near, the sword reacts to the dragon and erupts with Balthazar's magic, sending out an explosion that damages the tracker and its power supply. Blish valiantly tries to repair it but as Kralkatorrik draws near and Glint's army falls to the Branded we run out of time. Blish stays behind and orders us to escape, telling us to return for him afterward - since he's a machine, he'll be safe from the brandstorm. We give in to his wishes and, with Glint's help, escape across the wastelands of the Mists.

After we leave, Blish contacts us on the communicator and confesses. There is no way for him to restore the power to the tracker and he will have to use his golem body as the power source. This will only be possible if he takes his higher





functions offline. No matter how much we want to go back for the golem, we cannot, and the plucky little Inquest scientist sacrifices himself in order to save Tyria. Despite being telegraphed in the story, Blish's sacrifice is a noble deed and fits well with the change of heart he confessed to earlier in the Living World story. He was impressed with Taimi's desire to save people and help others and wanted to do the same. His sacrifice now allows him to do so and left me a bit teary-eyed.

Leaving the Mists is a race against time against Kralkatorrik's Brandstorm. Guided by Glint's spirit, we are able to ride our raptors to safety, leaping at last through a portal back to the real world.

MORE BAD NEWS

Taimi welcomes us back on the communicator, ecstatic that she's able to receive a signal from the tracker. Unable to tell her about Blish right away, we return to Sun's Refuge to break the news to her and Gorrik in person. Everyone is devastated by Blish's sacrifice and Gorrik wanders away mumbling, "But I saved him," which I felt was another shout-out to Edward and Alphonse Elric of *Fullmetal Alchemist*. Blish's last words included a call for everyone to stop keeping secrets from one another. When we mention this to Taimi, she reveals that her condition is no longer in remission and she doesn't have long to live. After losing Blish and with Gorrik wandering away, this final bit of bad news is enough to bring more tears to the eyes. I have to admit that even though I am not a fan of Taimi, the thought of losing her does bring a frown to my face and a tear to my eye. I've grown attached to her, even if I prefer Rox and Rytlock as companions.

With this final revelation, the stage is set for the next Living World story step. We need to find Aurene in order to help her face Kralkatorrik but we do not know where to begin.

As if on cue, Caithe reappears, stepping from the shadows and offering to help us find Aurene. The sylvari's appearance marks the end of this episode. In the next one, I'm hoping for more large-scale battles like those found in Jahai, more maps to explore, collections to complete, and perhaps a reprieve for Taimi.







THE DURMAND PRIORY

From the office of
Kora Sangbrell
Department of Lore

Steward Gixx
Durmand Priory Headquarters
Lornar's Pass
Shiverpeak Mountains

17 Colossus 1331 AE

RE: Tyria in Flux

Steward Gixx,

Apologies for the gap in my communications. Has it really been a year since my previous report on the Ancient Spearmarshal? Time does fly when you're fighting to prevent a psychotic lich from unleashing an ancient plague on the world!

As requested, the following report summarizes the massive world-changing events of the last five years.

Honestly, I'm not even sure where to start this report. So much has happened post-Zhaitan's fall, all leading up to the current state of the world. How could I possibly hope to summarize it all in a single letter? But I'll do my best.

If I had to pick the first sign of the changes that were to come, it would be the emergence of the Ancient Karka from the Unending Sea and its attack on Lion's Arch. We still have yet to discover what the Deep Sea Dragon is up to that drove the karka from the depths to resettle on Southsun Cove. But as things have stabilized in that section of Tyria, I can only assume that the Deep Sea Dragon has settled back down. For now, at least.

Soon after the events of Southsun Cove, various intelligence reports began circulating about a rogue sylvari named Scarlet Briar. We would not learn the dire significance of her actions until later… and after substantial losses.

Following completion of critical repairs on Lion's Arch in the wake of the karka attack, the city held the first (and last) annual Dragon Bash festival. During the celebration's effigy lighting, a member of the Ship's Council was assassinated by Mai Trin and her Aetherblade pirates. Before the Council had a chance to vote on a replacement, a notice arrived that the Zephyrites and their floating sanctuary - the Zephyr Sanctum - had docked in the Labyrinthine Cliffs for the Bazaar of the Four Winds.

Per your orders, I traveled to the bazaar to investigate the unique properties of the magical "Aspects" that were supposedly connected to that of the deceased dragon, Glint. Try as I might, I never quite managed to master the use of the various Aspects to enhance my movement. I kept crashing into walls at full speed or knocking my head into every slightly protruding ledge. I don't care what anyone else says, it's harder than it looks. But I digress.

Over the next many months, Scarlet Briar made various attacks on the people of Tyria that culminated in a devastating assault on Lion's Arch. The result was mass casualties and structural damage necessitating a complete rebuild of the entire city. While the threat of Scarlet herself was ended during the final battle, she succeeded in her ultimate goal. In drilling down into a ley line, the resulting surge of magic awakened Mordremoth.

It wasn't long before the first reports came in of the Jungle Dragon's deadly vines sprouting up all over Tyria. Then more terrible news - the Zephyr Sanctum had crashed in Dry Top desert. The Pact quickly sent out members to aid in search-and-rescue efforts. It was during this time that the Commander discovered the ship had been sabotaged by Aerin, another rogue sylvari.

We now know that both Aerin and Scarlet were acting as agents of Mordremoth. It would be some months yet before we learned the dark truth - that sylvari are minions of the Jungle Dragon and that it's only through the protection of the Pale Tree that sylvari are born with free will. It's unknown why some succumbed to the corruptive call of the Dragon, while others resisted and stayed pure. In the years since, I have come across reports suggesting the Soundless were particularly vulnerable given their predisposition to block the Pale Tree from their minds.

I must check my journals for the order of what happened next.

Let's see… Fort Salma was overrun by the Dragon's vines. There were few survivors.

Rytlock attempted to use his sword, Sohothin, in a ritual to end the curse in Ascalon. He failed, though subsequent reports have put the current number of ghosts at a much lower count. Both Rytlock and his sword vanished into the Mists - another event deeply connected to future world-changing events.

The World Summit followed soon after and the leaders of the various races came together as one to agree to fight the Jungle Dragon together. Too bad it ended when a champion of the Dragon attacked. The Commander and their team brought the beast down, but not before the Pale Tree herself was left in a critical (albeit, stable) condition.

We received our first top-secret report about Glint's last known egg just as the Pact fleet set sail to end Mordremoth's threat. No one could have anticipated the utter destruction that waited. If only the truth about the sylvari had been uncovered sooner, perhaps the outcome would have been different. Perhaps the Pact wouldn't have been literally decimated before they could even get one shot off.

As your evaluations of me at the time included the request that I "cease my inane gushing about Tarir and the Exalted" and to "get back to work," I will simply say that the golden city and its inhabitants are still a vast fountain of lore that Priory members are cataloging to this day.

Now, where was I? Oh, yes!

With the remains of the Pact scattered throughout the jungle, the Commander took charge. Rytlock reappeared, no longer a warrior, but the first revenant able to summon forth legendary figures of the past and gain their abilities for battle. Glint's egg was safely recovered and placed within the protected walls of Tarir.

The Commander and allies ventured forth to attack the very mind of Mordremoth, while the shattered remains of the Pact forces rallied to fight the physical manifestation of the Dragon. The assault on both fronts succeeded and the Dragon was killed… although - given what we've learned this past year - killing an Elder Dragon is less an "ending of a threat to the world and a cause for celebration" and more of an "oh dear, we've tipped the world closer to apocalyptic destruction." Who knew?

That brings us up to 1329 AE, which really was all over the place. I mean that literally. It seemed with every new event I was traveling back and forth across Tyria trying to stay current on the latest happenings.

It was exhausting.

Minister Caudecus caused a ruckus over the Bloodstone that coincided with the resurrection of Lazarus, the last mursaat. Lazarus then denounced Caudecus as a fraud who then denounced Lazarus as a fraud who, in fact, was a fraud. It turned out that Fake Lazarus was actually the god Balthazar in disguise because he'd been kicked out of the pantheon and needed to collect magical energy to regain his power. We've since learned that it was Rytlock who freed Balthazar from his imprisonment in the Mists in exchange for the god re-igniting Sohothin. To be fair, it's not as though Rytlock knew he was unleashing a vengeful god determined to wreak havoc on the world.

It was about this time that the dragon egg hatched and the baby Aurene bonded with the Commander.

That hot-head Braham shot an arrow at Jormag's tooth. The one the norn have on display in Hoelbrak, that is. The tooth cracked which the norn took as a sign and were all set to attack Jormag.

Balthazar tried to kill Primordus to steal the dragon's energy but the Commander used an asuran device that pitted Primordus' and Jormag's energies against each other. The result was that both dragons were put back into a "dormant state." No one has been able to answer how long these dormant states will last. It could be months, years, or hundreds of thousands of years. Even though that would mean two fewer threats for the world, I can't help but feel it would be rather anticlimactic if we should not see them again in our lifetimes.

Oh, and somewhere in all that, the real Lazarus was resurrected and then Livia - *the* Livia - reappeared and helped the Commander put down the last mursaat once and for all.

After that, I went to Elona. You have all my reports of my time there. Of Glint's first Scion, Vlast. Of Balthazar's plan to kill Kralkatorrik. Of Aurene and the Commander fighting together to kill a god and save an Elder Dragon. And so on and so on.

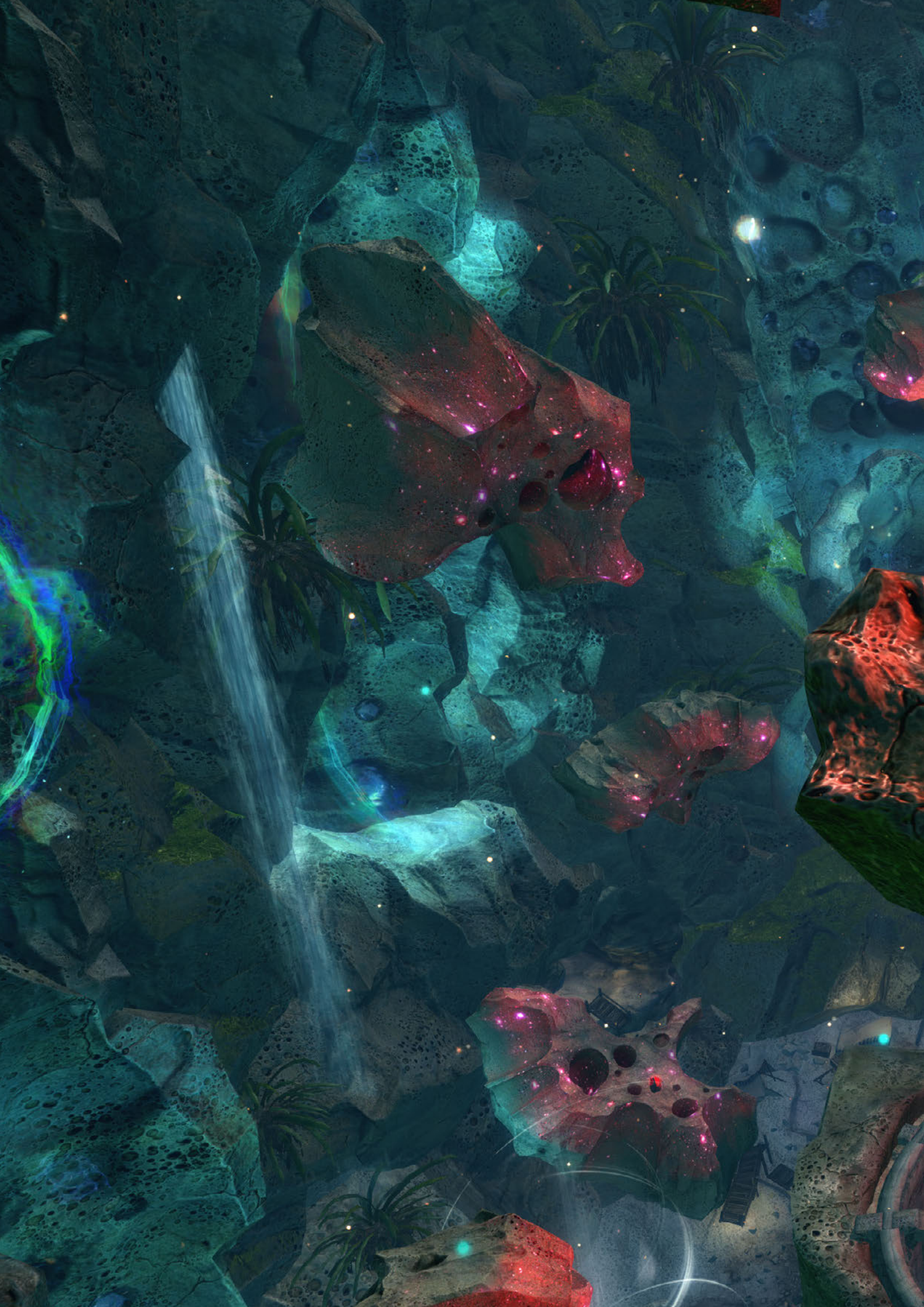
That catches us up to Palawa Joko's return, the narrowly-avoided outbreak of the Scarab Plague, and of the lich king's permanent death at the hands (or rather, teeth) of the juvenile Aurene. I do worry that there are yet unforeseen consequences of the second scion consuming that pile of rotten flesh and evil magic, but none have presented themselves as of yet.

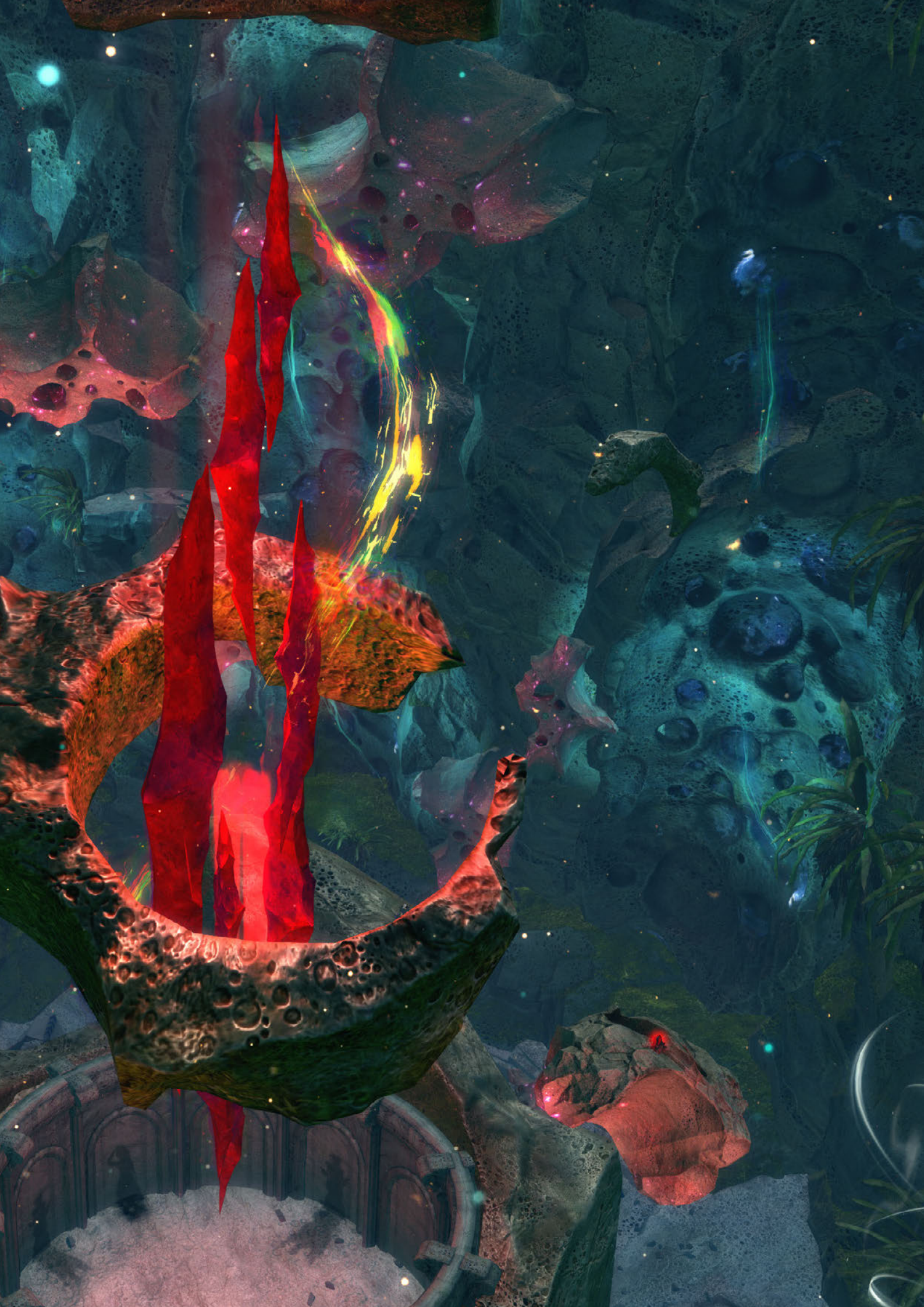
Other than a bit of fighting in the Mists, the Commander preparing Aurene to take her place as an Elder Dragon, and Dragon's Watch preparing to destroy Kralkatorrik, I have nothing else to report at this time. Which is good as it's time for me to take my pet roller beetle out for her daily spin.

Until my next report,



Kora Sangbrell
Archon, Durmand Priory





GUILD SPOTLIGHT

OWL LEGION

BY **MIKO**



Think the top tier WvW servers are full of hardcore guilds with hardcore 24/7 rep rules and no-holds-barred tactics? Then meet Owl Legion [Owls], a Kaineng loyalist guild that's been with the server since 2012 and is known for its friendliness and sense of fun.

Guild leaders Krimshaw and Nanesh began [Owls] as a personal guild shortly after *Guild Wars 2*'s launch, developing friendships with many of the core WvW players along the way. After several Kaineng guilds disbanded or transferred off the server, Krim and Nan decided to open the guild up to their friends and other guildless Kaineng players. "Over the years we've taken in Kaineng loyalists and that's been part of our guild's strength - the longevity of our friendships," Nan says. This extends beyond the guild and to the partnerships they've established with other guilds. "[Owls] is not a solo act," Nan tells us. "We believe in guild cooperation. We partner with our friends and encourage guild cross-over; this means you almost always have someone to run around with. Skritt Kings [SK] and The Devil's Rejects [HELL] are active guilds that [Owls] tag up for when we're not flying as a flock."

This dedication to the friends they've made on Kaineng has not gone unnoticed and continues to draw people to the guild. Guild members Elrenia, Rhall, Corvax, and Migellito all found themselves running into the Owls in WvW and had their curiosity piqued. "They were super friendly and accepting right away," Elrenia shares, while Rhall says he "was enticed by a promise of Kaineng shenanigans. For the most part I had only done some roaming, so playing with a larger group was a different and fun experience with [Owls]. After running with Owl Legion for the night, I joined the guild, and have met some amazing people over the past few years." Their dedication to Kaineng has also not gone unnoticed by server leaders. As [Owls] member and Kaineng's Discord server admin, Caephire, tells us, "they're a fun group to run with, not too serious, but not too casual, they hold special events in WvW (Theme Nights) and the accompanying music always cheers me up. They've served as my anchor



Owl Legion [Owls]

Leader: Nanesh and Krimshaw
Server: Kaineng (NA)
Size: 224+ members
Preferred game mode: WvW
In-game contacts: Sionnach.5391 , Dill Picks.5069 , Elrenia Hothien.4657
Website: www.owllegion.com
Quirk: We're a wacky bunch of Kaineng Loyalists; a flock of fun-loving Owls ready to swoop in to WvW and save the day (or die honorably.) Our watchwords are Have Fun With It - translation: "Hoot hoot!"

on the server. I believe in staying on Kaineng for a while since it's been my home server. With [Owls] here, it always feels great to have familiar people to hang out with."

So what makes [Owls] different from other guilds? Krim believes it begins in their being a no-hassle guild. Their only real requirement is to be good to one another along with other players. "Because of our laid-back atmosphere, I think it really allows for everyone to kick back and enjoy the game versus making it into a job. We all have jobs and gaming shouldn't be one of them." For guild officer Dill Picks it's their members. "Any questions you have, there are always players to help answer it. I enjoy how we are always laughing and having a good time in voice chats. We always try to invite and include any players running around with us so it is always a fresh experience." Migellito sees an interesting effect from this relaxed atmosphere: everybody really feels they have room to shine in their own way. "I think people tend to perform better when they're fulfilling their own potential rather than trying to stick to someone else's paradigm of how to play their character." The [Owls] are also not strangers to other game modes. Recently, Dill Picks has also organized some Owls into trying out raids, progressing through the wings quickly, their coordination and experience from WvW proving its worth here as well.

Nan and Krim also make it a point to reward their members with semi-monthly WvW theme events featuring giveaways, ensuring that everyone in squad gets something cool - usually a skin or top-tier dye. Themes have run the gamut from Caturday (all charr) to Macho Madness (wrestling characters!) to Purple Reign (mesmers and the music of Prince). As Corvax puts it, "Theme nights in WvW are always lots of fun. During these events, we often end up running ridiculously unconventional builds and comps, and I think we give the enemy some good laughs due to our shenanigans as well." [Owls] also team up with their partner guild [HELL] for WvW guild missions and [HELL]'s annual St. Patrick's Day gold and giveaway raffle. In addition, [Owls] host their own annual events like Mardi Gras, where they parade through all the



major cities the weekend before Fat Tuesday, throwing all the best stuff to parade watchers! As well, they participate in the Tyria Pride march, which is always a great time. Guild member Clea is proud of [Owls]' participation in the in-game Pride marches. "Few or many, [Owls] is always there, representing a belief in fun, acceptance and diversity."

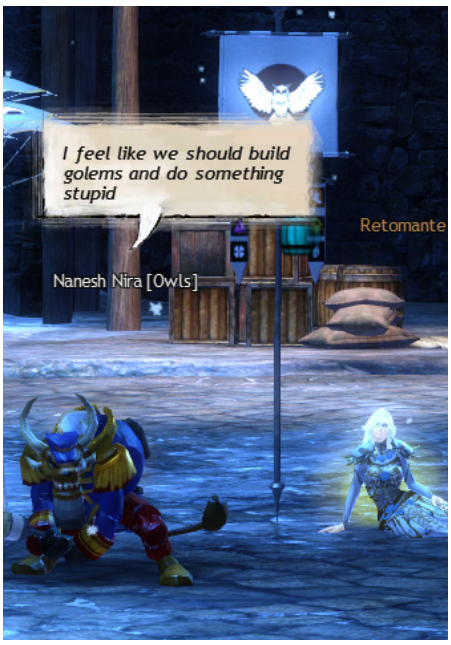
> "Because of our laid-back atmosphere, I think it really allows for everyone to kick back and enjoy the game versus making it into a job.

Together, [Owls] continue to stay true to their server pride as one of the remaining WvW guilds and also one of the Old Kaineng guilds. They've achieved a fully unlocked and max level guild hall, and boast friends across just about every NA server thanks, in Caephire's opinion, to Nan's ability to reach out to opposing teams after a good WvW skirmish. Nan credits their ability to stick together through thick and thin as one of their major achievements. They've also managed to make a name for themselves in WvW despite the fact, in Krim's opinion, that they consider themselves a casual WvW guild.

Still, you can always find [Owls] roaming around WvW maps even outside of their normal weekend runs. And because many Owls are cross-guild members, they can often run into each other in the Borderlands or Eternal Battlegrounds. Nevertheless, when the call to arms goes up on Discord or in guild chat, the Owls show up whether it be for dungeons, fractals, raids, WvW, or even in other games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. Because of their focus on weekend activities, guild officers take care of the guild during the week, forming up casual parties or squads for fun in PvE dungeons, fractals, raids, or in WvW.

For players who might think starting a guild is daunting, Nan and Krim encourage players to find out what your group likes to do and go and have fun with that. It also helps to have a friend or partner, someone you can trust and rely on, with whom to start the guild. "Don't be in a rush," Krim says. "[Owls] grew organically over time. We almost never recruit in the way big WvW guilds recruit. Most of our players have been picked up via direct player-to-player communication."

Nan shares that she regularly messages "tagless roamers in WvW to see if they are looking for friends to teach them the ropes - often new WvWers are shy because the atmosphere can be intimidating." Clea agrees and points out to "keep an eye on those who run with the squad, but aren't in it. Remember the name of the asura who always seems to be around to revive you. Talk to the charr on the wall raining fire down on the rams. These are the folks wanting to help, to collaborate. They are often looking



for a group to be part of, a home."

So if you're on Kaineng and [Owls] sound like the kind of people you'd like to know or be a part of, get in touch with one of the in-game contacts listed on the previous page. Nan stresses that their focus on fun and friendship amazes her - "[I] love my server mates and love my Owlets!" And this sense of true friendship extends throughout the guild. "Some people would say there is a difference between the friends I have in [Owls] and the friends who I've eaten dinner with. There isn't," Migellito says. "These people are my friends, and I'm proud to know them. I can't even count the number of times one or another has had my back in some way that has nothing to do with playing an MMO. I care about them, and I know they care about me too." Clea expands, "During our tenure as a linked server, we encountered a host of phenomenal guilds and individuals, many of whom we welcomed to our ranks. We eagerly look forward to the next member, and their poor puns and challenged tastes in beverages, anxious to invite them to our sundry and varied calamities and capers."

> "Some people would say there is a difference between the friends I have in [Owls] and the friends who I've eaten dinner with. There isn't.






ARENANET



MAGIC SYSTEMS IN TYRIA

BY **FEARAN** & **STARCONSPIRATOR**

The concept of magic is a frequent occurrence in books, movies and video games. Players well-versed in the fantasy genre will easily recognise the common tropes of magic that exist in *Guild Wars 2* the moment they start playing. From the playable races and professions, to the different personal stories, starter maps or end game content, there is no denying that magic plays a massive role in this game. We see two distinct magic systems at work in Tyria which creates an interesting mix of inherent properties and flowing energies that can be harnessed by living beings for a variety of purposes, including food. This dual system cleverly explains a number of in-game phenomena and provides the impetus for the overarching story of the Living World.

LEY ENERGY

The core magic of Tyria is ever present, moving through the world along ley lines that enable waypoints and various places of power. The waypoints and asura gates were first introduced in the *Eye of the North* expansion and it was only recently that we discovered they were powered by the energy flowing across the planet. Many modern games with expansive worlds must offer a fast-travel system, and while many of these are free, using asuran business acumen to charge a small fare for using their gates is an added characterization bonus. As far as fast-travel systems go, explaining fast-travel to far-off places by connecting the two points through a river of magic, this is quite clever. Now, if only we could figure out a way to get in on some of that profit.

The ley lines themselves are only visible in some specific places such



as the Ley Line Hub in Dry Top or some underground areas in the Heart of Maguuma, where the chak are found feeding on the ley energy. While in most places the ley lines are of a light blue color, in some other places such as Slothasor's Den in the Salvation Pass raid wing, the flowing rivers are of a bright yellow (with a hint of purple) color. Taking into consideration that the different types of magic, each with their own color, combined would create the light blue ley lines - similar to the way light behaves, with different wavelengths merging to create the color white - these yellow ley lines could be a sign of the system's imbalance.

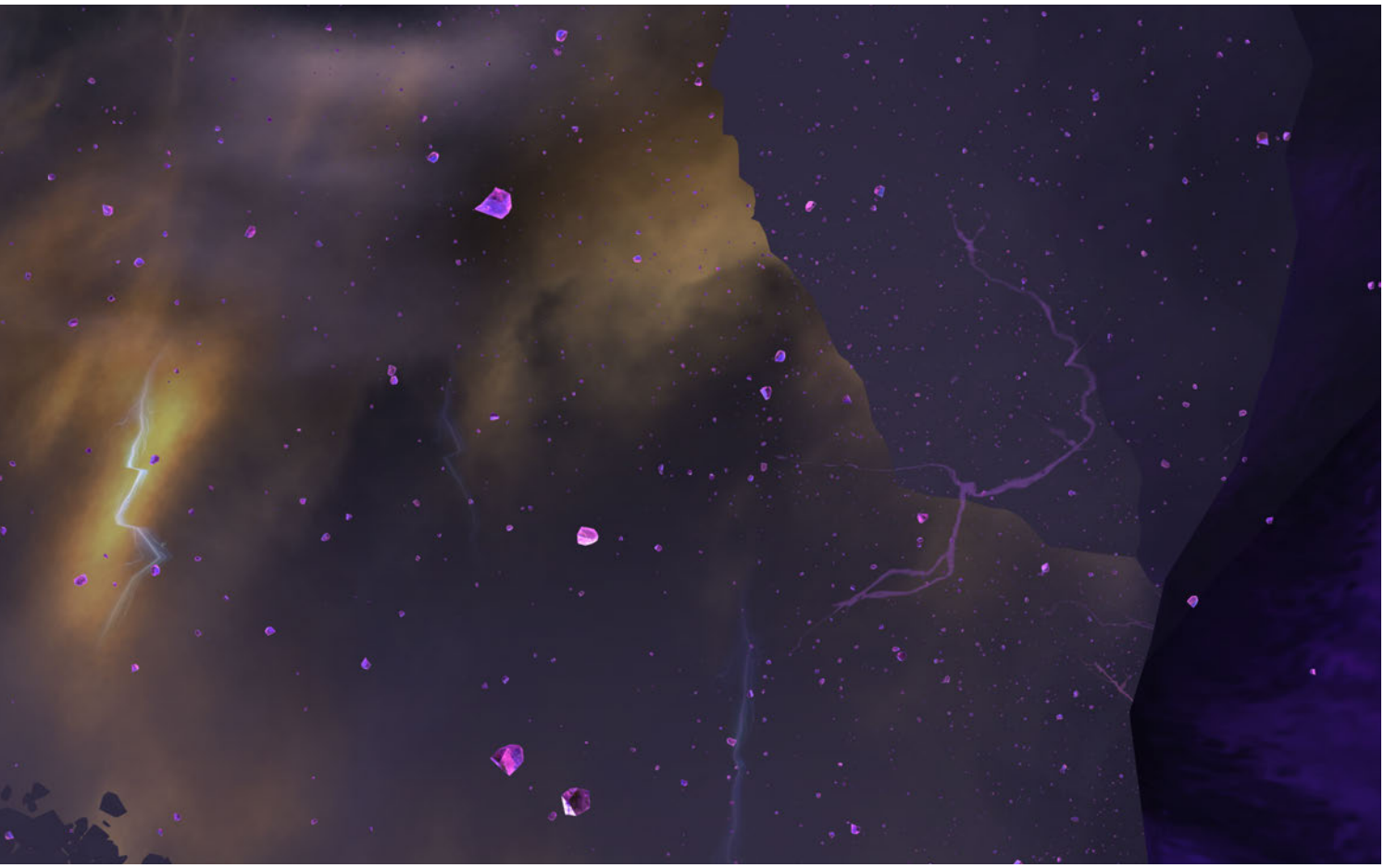
> "The core magic of Tyria is ever present, moving through the world along ley lines.

UNSTABLE SYSTEMS

Not surprisingly, the ley line system is not always reliable and it fluctuates. Basing the network of waypoints on an unstable power source means that sometimes a gate will be unavailable or the magic will spike, becoming volatile or unstable. Although some creatures, such as the chak, feed on ley energy, some of the greatest changes to this core magic system of late have related to the awakening Elder Dragons and their apocalyptic eating habits. Creating a world where monstrous beings rise up to destroy civilization by allowing them to feast on the lifeblood of the planet sets up an interesting conundrum for players. Making the Elder Dragons a cataclysmic force has allowed the storytellers at ArenaNet to explore a world in which trying to save it from being consumed by dragons has inadvertently led to its possible destruction as the energy that girds the planet becomes dangerously unstable.

THE MISTS

A lot of lore, originating back from the first *Guild Wars* series, was based on the existence of gods who once came to Tyria from the Mists, and later returned to it. Having established that an "afterlife" or other dimensional area exists, and adding in a network of gateways that instantaneously move you from one place to another, the next natural step was to add in gateways to the Mists. With the connection to the Mists, the developers at ArenaNet created a system that would explain how some other seemingly magical things could happen; things that don't fit into the Elder Dragon magic-balancing system. Even though having this two-layered system seems controversial and may seem contrived, it does turn out to work pretty well. This combined system, comprising of the magic of Tyria with its Elder Dragons and the old lore of *Guild Wars* with its gods and the Mists, is actually a new and realistic way to represent the physics of



magic in a game world.

THE GODS

So how does this work? The magic of the Mists could not simply remain within the Mists. Placing the gods - extremely powerful beings with their own access to magic - into the world made it clear that Mists' magic could be used elsewhere. Artifacts and certain events become explainable, without resorting to "it just happened" because of this extra touch. For example, the magic of some of the professions partially originates from the Mists; whilst the revenant is obvious, the guardian and the necromancer augment their capabilities by drawing on magic from another time and place as well. Many of the storytelling moments of *Guild Wars* and *Guild Wars 2* are driven by the actions of the gods. The founding of Arah, the gifting of magic by Abaddon, the shattering of the bloodstone and the three Guild Wars that followed, are all examples of this heavy-handedness. In this way, ArenaNet has two options for explaining a story: if the Elder Dragons didn't do it, then surely the gods did.

TRAVELING TO THE MISTS

Once players could travel to the Mists, various worlds opened up to our exploration. The Mist Wars and the PvP maps were some of our first experiences with this magical realm outside of the Elder Dragon system. Additionally, the Fractals also takes place in the Mists. Alongside Fractals, other PvP areas including the realms of the Mad King and World vs. World can all be explained by this mechanism, giving these areas we frequently visit a solid reason to be there, instead of offering some magical, out-of-nowhere appearance. Of course, our most recent Living World Story showed us what happens when the two systems cross! With an Elder Dragon now running rampant in the Mists, eating its energy, the very fabric of reality is tearing!

> "The magic of some of the professions partially originates from the Mists.



TWO SYSTEMS IN DANGER

These two sources of power, that of the ley lines and that of the Mists, form the foundations upon which all the magic used by ArenaNet is built. The balance between these two sources is a delicate system because the world of Tyria can't exist without it, but a level of magic that is too high on the other hand will be equally destructive. The process of evening the scales is not peaceful and can be found in the in-game lore. Killing two Elder Dragons has led to volatile and unstable magic flowing through the ley line system. Throughout the story of the Living World and the first two expansions, it becomes clear that Tyria has become unbalanced and hazardous. Orbs of free floating magic appear randomly; anomalies, sparks and coalescences trigger events at certain places. Even rifts to the Mists have developed and grown to the point where bubbles in reality are forming throughout the world.

To create a world where magic is always present, the developers have added places, items and stories that show its variety, complexity and believability. Through the story of *Guild Wars 2*, ArenaNet has created a system that depends on dragons to cycle power in and out of a system and have set a land of pure magic on a separate plane of existence to explain otherworldly adventures. Then they purposefully broke it. This results in a challenging storyline where the players (Tyrian creatures), and the forces threatening them (the gods and Elder Dragons) are disrupting the balance of the world itself to a level where it could be destroyed. By having the story go in this direction, the storytellers at ArenaNet are making sure they develop an interesting tale, where the risks of failure are ever-present but the euphoria of victory high.



Revealing the origins of the daredevil...

BY **DRAXYNNIC**

WITH LEAPS AND BOUNDS

Welcome to the fifth installment of our series where we try to uncover the possible backstories behind the various elite specialisations of *Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thorns*. In this issue, we set our sights on what is possibly the slipperiest of them: the daredevil!

Launching first into an analysis of the daredevil's equipment set, the Daredevil's Scarf is close to the stereotypical 'ninja head wrap' look. However, this actually clashes with the historical headwear of the Canthan assassins in *Guild Wars*, which were usually masks that only covered the lower face. This appearance was available to PCs of all professions in the Mask of the Mo Zing in *Guild Wars: Eye of the North*, but despite the Canthan-derived name of the item, a head wrap received from the mysterious Vael might not genuinely be Canthan in origin. Some Canthan NPCs, particularly among the Luxons, do wear such headgear, but this is probably not enough to tie this style to Cantha. Instead, similar head wrappings are present in other forms of adventuring armour, such as the Anonymity Mask available to starting thieves; this seems to indicate that in present-day Tyria, such items have become common among those interested in hiding their identity.

Moving on to the weapons, the Daredevil's Staff appears to be a simple, utilitarian, iron-bound staff without decoration. In *Guild Wars*, staves of this nature were generally found in Cantha, but in real-world history this sort of design was fairly common wherever staves were seriously used as a weapon. Considering this, its appearance probably cannot be taken as meaning anything more than that the staff is intended for combat rather than as a spellcasting focus.

The Ascended weapon, known simply as "Bo", is similar in design

- however, the entirety of each end is capped in bronze (or at least a thicker section of wood). More interesting is a design inscribed on the shaft: one formed from flowing lines reminiscent of those that decorated many Canthan armour pieces in *Guild Wars Factions* and the sleeves of the Canthan-themed Imperial outfit in *Guild Wars 2*. Another notable design element of Bo is the two tassels along its length - a feature which is, again, commonly associated with Canthan-themed weapons such as the Dragon's Jade set.









The collection required to acquire Bo provides few hints to the daredevil's origins, or at least nothing that seems to point in a single direction. The Grizzlemouth Fighting Techniques manual indicates an interest in charr martial arts, but this is probably to be expected in what is essentially a martial artist elite specialisation. The Silencing Down Feather is something that can be expected to be of interest to thieves in general for sneaking around, and therefore does not point to any particular origin. The Scalawag's Lucky Coin, on the other hand, may be a potential clue. While it may simply be a lucky charm for a profession with a habit of swashbuckling, it does point to a potential criminal connection; specifically, to the pirates from whom this coin is scavenged.

Finally, let's look at the skills available to the daredevil. The daredevil's utility skills involve a mix of throwing daggers on the one hand and unarmed combat based around kicks and punches on the other. This style is reminiscent of some of the skills from the Deadly Arts line for assassins in Factions, but where assassins seemed to be focused on precise strikes, the daredevil's unarmed skills seem to be more of a brawling style, focusing on power and speed over precision. Of particular interest is the Bandit's Defense skill - the naming of which suggests that even if the originators of the daredevil profession weren't bandits themselves, they were, at the very least, not too proud to learn from them.

This gives us two intertwined threads regarding the origin of the daredevil. The first is that there is, apparently, some Canthan influence. The second is a connection with a criminal element.

There are two possible ways in which these two threads can be reconciled.

The first is that there has been some link between Canthan traditions and criminal groups all along. This could be in the form of some export of the Canthan gangs, such as the Am Fah or the Jade Brotherhood, having made their way to Kryta among the other refugees. However, this does seem unlikely. The organised criminal underworld of Kryta seems to have been mostly organised by, and for the benefit of, the White Mantle - an organisation based on Krytan rather than Canthan history, and which probably could not reasonably be expected to pay many respects to Canthan artwork or traditions. It is possible that the White Mantle did not manage to influence all of Kryta's organised crime, or that there are some gangs that are under White Mantle influence but where non-Krytan cultural elements have remained intact. However, there have been few, if any, signs of criminal groups with Canthan influences in *Guild Wars 2* thus far.

A somewhat less direct, if also less interesting, connection comes from the observation that the core thief has always shown Canthan influences. While the thief is considered by ArenaNet to be separate from the assassin of *Factions*, it is clear through skill and trait names (particularly in regard to dagger skills) that at least some of the techniques of assassins have been adopted by thieves. If the thief community continues to use Canthan names for certain fighting techniques, it is possible that certain thieves, even if purely of Tyrian



ancestry, maintain an interest and respect for other aspects of the culture, including using Canthan styles to decorate their weapons. It is even possible that such styles of decoration might have become tradition among some groups of thieves, without the members of such groups realising that they are Canthan in origin.

Neither of these possibilities, however, gives any explanation as to why the daredevil appeared when it did. One could certainly imagine that somewhere there was a secret organisation of daredevils that decided that the rise of Mordremoth signalled the time to reveal themselves - but we have no indication that such a group might exist.

One possibility that might bring it all together is that the daredevil may be involved with the corsairs that ply the waters between Elona and Cantha. Unlike Krytans, which were cut off from Cantha by the rise of Zhaitan, these corsairs may still be in a position to engage in trade or plunder with Cantha. As a result, Canthan influences among these groups would be stronger than in Kryta, but these would still merely be influences - the rough-and-ready nature of pirate culture would still be the dominating element. So while they're still not the precise and controlled assassins of Cantha, they may have more access to these traditions than the thieves of Tyria.

Under this hypothesis, the death of Zhaitan would have opened up the Sea of Sorrows to these corsairs. Some might then have arrived in a rebuilt Lion's Arch, relying on the city's acceptance of privateers to ensure a safe port and a place to sell goods stolen from other locations. Over time, these corsairs might have begun sharing their techniques - deliberately or otherwise - with local privateers, adventurers, and the Lionguard. These skills might then have been passed on, in turn, by the Lion's Arch contingent of the Pact expedition to the Maguuma.

In the end, there is no 'a-ha!' moment in this analysis. I think it is safe to say that there is some connection to Canthan heritage, however distant, as well as clear links to the seedy underbelly of Tyrian societies. But the same observations can also be made about the core thief. It is possible that in this case, there is no deeper story to be found - the daredevil is simply a natural extension of the thief's inherent skill set, developed by thieves who wanted to further develop their physical capabilities and acrobatic skills to give themselves a better chance when stealth fails.





EMPTY SHELL

BY **JALINAR** *from*
CHRONICLES OF TYRIA

Run

I turned my head once more to the incoming stampede. I could feel the thunderous reverberations of their approaching feet. The howls of anger and the clanging of weapons echoed in the valley. I was frozen for a moment remembering the look in their eyes. Was I truly a monster?

Hide

My body still felt sluggish from the recent events and coordinating my legs was an arduous task. One slow step at a time was all I could manage at first, my left leg still limping from the first impact. I walked off the well-trodden path and let the forest cover my escape.

The biting cold of the morning dew, the grit of dirt between my toes and the occasional snap of a twig under my bare feet were all too unfamiliar to me still. Before coming to this land I had watched it, but being able to feel, touch and hear it were concepts all too foreign.

From my prison, I had learned of this land in all its facets. The inhabitants that walked on it, built upon it, waged wars and ravaged it, but I could never understand how it felt to be among them. The Shiverpeak Mountains could have been a figment of my imagination, and it wouldn't have made a difference to me.

Dirt turned to stone as the trees thinned and I emerged at the foot of the mountain. Its sheer walls and snowy peaks blocked further progression westward. I caught my breath for a moment. Running for my life was not what I had expected of my arrival in this land. I thought of the morning's events once more to try and make sense of where I had gone wrong.

Head south

The land-dwellers had descended from the north; appearing out of thin air under a floating contraption powered by a familiar energy. First, they tentatively walked in my direction, scared of my stature as I towered over them. I opened my mouth to speak like they did, but no words came out; I did not need breath to live. I reached my hand

down instead to greet one of the humans, but a bolt of lightning sprang between us, launching him a couple of paces back. The rest of his group unsheathed their weapons and brandished them menacingly. One of the figures swung at my exposed thigh. The land-dwellers backed away instinctively as they saw a similar energy arc from my wound. A cry of pain echoed within my mind, not my own voice. My foot gave way underneath me as I took a step back. They came forward again, but with a single push I flung my assailants onto the ground and ran.

Make it stop

The chirping of the birds and buzzing of insects deafened my ears, bringing me back to the present moment. I had never heard such noises in my entire existence and somewhat missed the silence of my prison. Never fully experiencing this world had been a torture, but all these noises made it unbearable.

I walked southward until I found a small waterfall cascading from a cliff above. I knelt down and watched as leaves lazily travelled downstream. As I submerged my hand to catch one, the water boiled and evaporated at my touch. The leaf was left charred in my palm and the wind blew its remains back into the stream.

As the water settled, I noticed my reflection. My unblinking stare gazed back at me as I reached a hand up to feel my features. This body was not ideal, too conspicuous, too different from the other races. Too bright. Fear: that was what they felt when they saw me. When they saw us. They feared us.

The realisation dawned upon our collective mind as the voices started arguing once more.

"This was a mistake," one of the voices said. *"We shouldn't have left our home."*
"You mean our prison," another interjected.
"This is the only way," a third said. *"We have to warn them."*

The cacophony of voices continued to argue within ourselves

Enough. I screamed as our hand broke the surface of the water, shattering our reflection. The voices stopped as we gathered our surroundings. Noon had turned to dusk, and we needed to find a safe haven and quick. The Tyrians would be coming back any moment now.

Let's move

We rose from our position as we heard the crack of a twig behind us. We spun to find a curious individual staring at us. One of the newborns. Born from the land itself: a sylvari. It gazed at our form inquisitively.

"Wyld Hunt?" she whispered.

The word made us back away. Hunt. They were hunting us. We had to get away before the others arrived.

"I mean you no harm," she hurriedly said, seeing us backing away. She pulled her axe from her belt and set it aside on a nearby tree trump. "I'm Keara. I've seen you in my Dream."

Once more we tried to speak, but nothing happened.

"I do not know what my Wyld Hunt entails, but I definitely needed to find you," she said sitting down by the brook. "What are you? Oh, we can play this fun game I learned from the humans. You can mime it to me. Make gestures and I'll try to guess."

Should we trust her?

The voices flowed back into my mind and started arguing again. Our first experience with the land-dwellers had made most of the voices distrustful. They wondered if we should truly help them or let their own ignorance destroy them. We settled on giving this one a chance as she hadn't feared us like the others had. We agreed to her game as we raised our hand and pointed at the flowing water.

"Oh, the brook? No. The water? Probably not." She chuckled to herself.

I swept my palm above the water, careful not to disrupt its flow this time.

"Flow?"

We nodded in response then put our palm to the ground. The dried plants sizzling under our touch.

"You flow underground? I'm not sure I understand. How can something flow through solid earth. Unless… " Pulling her backpack off, she rummaged through it for a moment. Some sheets of paper, rations, and a few bits and bobs were strewn around the sylvari before she pulled a worn leather-bound book out.

"I know I've read it somewhere. It must be in my notes, I know it," she mumbled as she turned page after page. "Here it is. *'Understanding the flow of Magic'* by Taimi. 'The transcendent magic channels that span the globe. Old-fashioned synergetics texts call them ley lines. Normally, you can't see them or touch them, but they're real. Magic finds its own path, like rivers running to the sea.'" She looked up from her book for a moment staring at us as if she was seeing more than our physical form. "Is that what you are?"

I nodded and the voices inside agreed for the first time. “But, why are you here? Why would the Mother Tree send me to find you? You might be one of a kind. Some kind of ley-energy anomaly. Is that rude? Sorry.”

How could we explain our purpose through a series of simple questions? The issue at hand could be devastating for the survival of every race. Keara tried to reach a hand over to us.

We can’t hurt this one

We pulled away from her, but our foot caught on one of the baubles left on the ground and we tripped into the brook. The water fizzled and bubbled against our body as we pulled ourselves back on our feet and looked at what we tripped over.

“I’m so sorry, I just left my things lying around like that. Being organized wasn’t one of the traits I picked up from the Dream I think,” she said, apologizing profusely. “I think you tripped on Plidd’s data crystal, sorry.”

Data crystal. The object looked of asura design, maybe it could help us.

Perfect

Small sparks shot out from its edges to my fingers as I approached it. It was one of the only items we could hold in our palm without destroying it. We felt the information contained within it. It flowed through us like we flowed through the ley lines not too long ago.

“Is that what you need?” the sylvari asked.

We shrugged, unsure, and concentrated on the crystal. The glow of our skin started flowing toward the crystal as we made our information pour into it.

We are from the ley lines. We were born when the Elder Dragon energy poured into the veins of Tyria. This land is sick. What happened in the Fen will happen elsewhere. We used some of the magic to create this shell and warn you. Save Tyria.

We put the crystal back on the ground as its bluish tint shifted to the orange of our glow, gently illuminating Keara in the growing darkness. We could only hope it reached the right individuals now.

“What did you do to it? Plidd won’t be happy if his research notes are gone,” she worried. “Did you hear that?” she said, turning to the woods and grabbing her axe. “People are coming this way.”

We felt them approaching before Keara spotted them. They were the same footfalls as before we entered the forest. There were less of them this time.





An asura, a norn, and a charr emerged from the forest into our clearing. “There it is,” the norn exclaimed as they drew their weapons.

“Get away from this monster,” the charr growled.

“By whose authority?” Keara replied, stepping in front of us.

“Move aside, twig. This creature almost killed us,” the asura snapped as he pointed his rifle at us.

“Get back! I won’t let you hurt my Wyld Hunt.” Keara swung her axe in a wide arc summoning vines from the undergrowth to snare the trio. She turned to us and yelled. “Run! I’ll find you again.”

RUN

We hesitated for a moment before turning around and leaping across the brook. We ran back into the cover of the forest to hide from our pursuers. Our escape was short-lived as we felt the bitter cold of steel dig into our throat. Our view of the world spun as our body lurched to a stop and hit the ground. As our vision regained focus, we saw what had stopped us: wires, strung between the trees at different heights throughout this portion of the forest. Footsteps and voices approached as we attempted to rise. Panic overwhelmed us as a kick to our lower back pushed us against the rocky ground and two sharp spears pinned our arms down.

“You can’t run this time. Kill it,” the human we injured ordered, his features barely illuminated by the light of the moon piercing through the canopy.

The blades and bullets carved into our body. The multitude of voices screamed into our mind. Why would they do this? We only want to help. We felt each other being ripped from this empty shell we created. We tried to pull our arms free from their restraints, but the magic had grown too weak. One by one the voices fell under the blows of the Tyrians, our collective ley energy dissipating piece by piece, until only the I was left, then there were none.

Nothing.

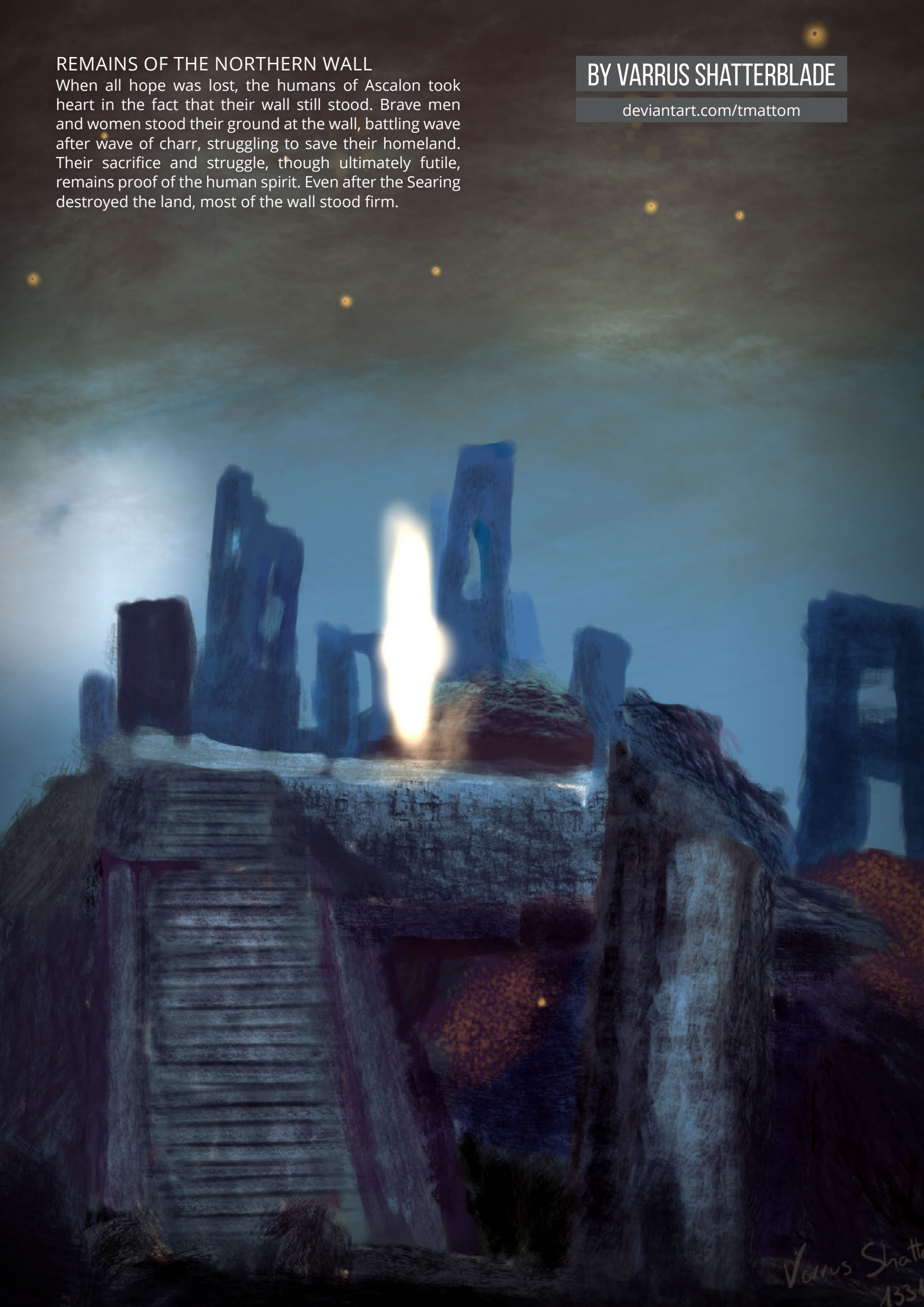
I found myself floating once again in my prison. The endless flow of ley-line energy coursing through the ground where I was unable to feel wind, unable to see the water flow, unable to hear the chirping of the birds anymore. Having been ripped away from the world, all I had now was knowledge, know the violence of the world above, know the imbalance of magic throughout Tyria. I now knew that we were never meant to gain access to consciousness and that we were only an ephemeral anomaly on Tyria. I knew that we were unwanted there, but someone had listened to us. I could only hope they would be the change Tyria needed.

REMAINS OF THE NORTHERN WALL

When all hope was lost, the humans of Ascalon took heart in the fact that their wall still stood. Brave men and women stood their ground at the wall, battling wave after wave of charr, struggling to save their homeland. Their sacrifice and struggle, though ultimately futile, remains proof of the human spirit. Even after the Searing destroyed the land, most of the wall stood firm.

BY VARRUS SHATTERBLADE

deviantart.com/tmattom



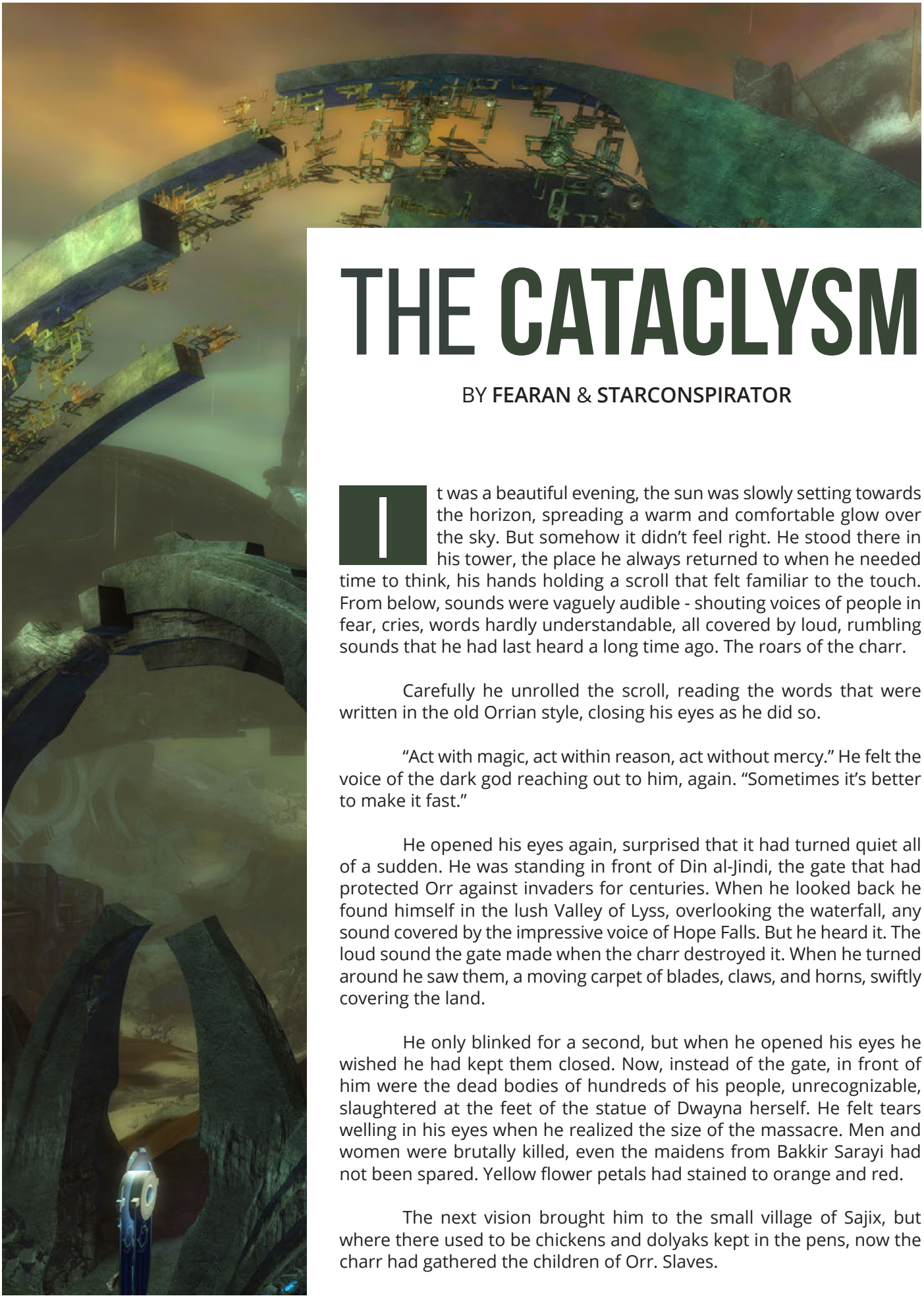


BY PERN

artstation.com/pern

THE BURNING FOREST

This volcanic vent is the site of the Flame Legion's Godforged rituals. These charr shamans rely on powerful magic, embracing its power unlike the other High Legions. It is here that the charr worshiped their leader, Gaheron Baelfire, who was trying to become a god. Long ago, the charr's homeland held another burning forest, a land set on fire by the titan Ignus the Eternal, one of a race of demons that all charr once worshiped as gods.



THE CATACLYSM

BY **FEARAN** & **STARCONSPIRATOR**

It was a beautiful evening, the sun was slowly setting towards the horizon, spreading a warm and comfortable glow over the sky. But somehow it didn't feel right. He stood there in his tower, the place he always returned to when he needed time to think, his hands holding a scroll that felt familiar to the touch. From below, sounds were vaguely audible - shouting voices of people in fear, cries, words hardly understandable, all covered by loud, rumbling sounds that he had last heard a long time ago. The roars of the charr.

Carefully he unrolled the scroll, reading the words that were written in the old Orrian style, closing his eyes as he did so.

"Act with magic, act within reason, act without mercy." He felt the voice of the dark god reaching out to him, again. "Sometimes it's better to make it fast."

He opened his eyes again, surprised that it had turned quiet all of a sudden. He was standing in front of Din al-Jindi, the gate that had protected Orr against invaders for centuries. When he looked back he found himself in the lush Valley of Lyss, overlooking the waterfall, any sound covered by the impressive voice of Hope Falls. But he heard it. The loud sound the gate made when the charr destroyed it. When he turned around he saw them, a moving carpet of blades, claws, and horns, swiftly covering the land.

He only blinked for a second, but when he opened his eyes he wished he had kept them closed. Now, instead of the gate, in front of him were the dead bodies of hundreds of his people, unrecognizable, slaughtered at the feet of the statue of Dwayna herself. He felt tears welling in his eyes when he realized the size of the massacre. Men and women were brutally killed, even the maidens from Bakkir Sarayi had not been spared. Yellow flower petals had stained to orange and red.

The next vision brought him to the small village of Sajix, but where there used to be chickens and dolyaks kept in the pens, now the charr had gathered the children of Orr. Slaves.

Vision after vision appeared in front of him. His people slaughtered. Children crying. Houses set ablaze. Nothing remained of the Orr he used to know - it was enough to bring him to tears. Now crying, he witnessed the brutal beasts invading the City of the Gods, no man or woman spared at their hands, his king murdered. In his place, the charr, the new rulers of Orr.

Khilbron opened his eyes and at that same moment he was wide awake. He took some deep breaths to slow his racing heart. This dream, this nightmare, had to mean something. In the past few weeks he often woke up like this, bathed in sweat, the vision of the charr invasion fresh in his mind. Every time he dreamed he remembered more, and every time it became more real.

They had come from the east, from the Blazeridge Mountains, a ferocious race of sentient catlike beings. They called themselves charr and they had come for revenge. Hundreds of years ago the humans of Tyria had chased the charr out of their lands in Ascalon, and now they had reclaimed that which was once theirs and were spreading southward.

A year ago they marched against the kingdom of Ascalon, causing great destruction when they, led by their shamans, called flames and burning crystals down upon the city, destroying it and searing the lands all around.

And in his nightmares these beasts were now marching on to Orr.

His heart skipped a beat when he suddenly realized what he had seen. In his nightmare the charr had slaughtered people at Sculptor's End and the temple of Dwayna, the Cathedral of Zephyrs. He had seen the yellow flowers, stained with blood. Every year the Maidens would lead the procession from Bakkir Sarayi to Sculptor's End where they would honor Malchor the Sculptor and his love for the goddess Dwayna. Every year they would bring wreaths of yellow flowers, placing those where he sacrificed himself.

Once a year.

Today.

"Act with magic, act within reason, act without mercy." He heard the voice of the dark god resonating in his head. "They are coming."

A short knock on the door made him come to his senses again.

"Enter."

The door opened smoothly revealing his personal assistant Terick, who, for a brief moment, had a strange smile on his face.

"Yes?" The words escaped more angrily than he intended.

"There is a messenger waiting for you in the hall, Vizier," Terick said, the expression on his face turning serious now. "She says she wants to speak to the king. She says the charr are marching on Orr."

"It is as I showed."

Khilbron bowed his head, recognizing the power of his dark god.





"The honorable judge, advisor to the king, Vizier Khilbron is arriving," the loud voice of the guard announced, letting the people in the hall know the Vizier had arrived. Like magic, they moved to the sides, leaving a broad path for the Vizier to walk through.

He had not realised that so many people would wait for him to arrive that early. He usually came hours later. He shook his head. Now was not the time to listen to their problems. He first had to deal with this messenger then convince King Reza that time was of the essence, that they had to take up arms, use every possibility they had, that this was their only chance.

The Vizier smiled kindly when Terick opened the door to the meeting room at the end of the great hall. Inside, a small figure stood in the corner. When she turned around he recognized her: one of the captains who was stationed at Din al-Jindi. She kneeled respectfully.

"They are coming, your honor." Her voice trembled lightly. "The charr are on their way."

His brain started working fast. "What do you know of their army?"

"There are hundreds, thousands of them. We can't hold them off much longer," she shook her head, fear visible in her eyes. "They are killing everyone they encounter, bringing with them fire and monsters. It will not be long before they reach Din al-Jindi, and I am not sure the gate will stand."

"I will talk to the king." He smiled reassuringly. "And don't worry, I have a plan. Gather as many able people as you can."

Vizier Khilbron rushed up the stairs, Terick close behind him, knowing too well King Reza probably was still sleeping. This time he didn't follow protocol. He didn't wait patiently for any doorkeeper to open the doors, but instead used his magic from afar, leaving the servants and anyone else who witnessed his hurry, surprised and in a light form of shock.

"Your honor! You can't..."

Instead of listening, he strode through the now-open golden door to the king's private quarters, staring Terick down when he tried to follow. In the corner of the room King Reza was sitting in his chair, enjoying his unusual breakfast. Bowls filled with fruit, sweet and spicy beans, salads, satay and even soup. Dozens of sweet bean buns, omnomberry cakes and dragonfly cupcakes were nicely arranged on the plates.

"Sit down, dear Khilbron." The king smiled at him, his voice a bit unsteady.

"I don't have time to sit down your Majesty."

King Reza frowned and looked at the musical instruments, hanging on the walls. The final notes of the song left the room as mysteriously as they entered, a composition made hundreds of years ago. He handed the Vizier a glass filled with red wine that held a deep purple hue. "There

is always time to sit, and there is always time for Amethyst. Even in the darkest of times."

The Vizier complied and sat, taking a sip of the velvety drink, its exquisite bouquet so easy to recognize, but so hard to copy. It had been a kingly gift prior to the Searing, but now it was priceless. He took another sip, enjoying that short moment where everything seemed in order, and closed his eyes.

He found himself in the tower again, putting down an ancient chest. He knew he had seen chests like this before. While his hands opened the chest, his mind searched for where he had seen it.

"Khilbron!" King Reza's voiced snapped him out of his vision. "What is so important that it cannot wait until later, dear friend?"

"The charr are marching on Orr, my king." There was no easy way to say it. "They will destroy the city if we don't take action immediately."

King Reza nodded and reached out to his glass of wine, his hand trembling slightly.

"We have to do something, your Majesty. We have to use the Forbidden Scrolls!" The Vizier was almost begging. "We can't let them come any closer. We can't let those savage beasts rule our lands! The scrolls are our last chance!"

"We cannot and will not use those scrolls, Khilbron. The gods themselves have forbidden it, and we still have some of our troops protecting us up north. With the help of the gods, the gate will stand strong." The king smiled, a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Our lands have always been blessed by the gods and they will always protect us."

"They are no match for the charr!" The Vizier, angry and desperate, tried to reason with his king. "The gate will fall if we don't act with every force we can gather. The troops we have left are no match for those savage beasts and their Titans."

"The gods will help us." King Reza frowned, resolute. "But the gods would never forgive us if we use the scrolls, they are forbidden for a reason. I'm sorry, my dear friend, but this is how it is."

"They will overrun us!" Upset, the Vizier stood up, almost dropping the glass of Amethyst on the floor in his haste. "We have no choice... I have no choice!" He left the room as fast as he could, leaving behind his old friend. "I wish he could understand," Khilbron thought sadly as he hurried down the hallway.

Outside Terick was waiting, standing as close to the half-open door as the guards allowed him.

"You knew he wouldn't listen." His friend smiled when they walked away. "The five gods abandoned us long ago; they cannot help us anymore. But we can still count on our dark lord, he knows it all."

His brain fogged, he nodded. "It seems we have no choice."





He made his way to the Vaults of the Hidden, ignoring everyone who tried to capture his attention. Around him, the city was in an uproar, soldiers and servants scurrying every which way as they prepared to meet the charr in battle. Somewhere along the way, he lost his assistant. His thoughts created havoc in his mind, his loyalty split between his king and the god he revered. The guards at the vault were reluctant to let him enter, but one glare made them change their minds. He entered and knew which chest he had to take. Not staying in Arah any longer, he used his portal scroll to his tower.

It felt as if he was dreaming again. He heard the sounds and cries of his people, the loud roars of the beasts. Carefully he opened the chest to reveal the forbidden scroll. He unravelled it, just as in his nightmare, but this time he understood what it said.

"Act with magic, act within reason, act without mercy."

Looking out from his room, his eyes lingered over the lands of Orr, smiling at the view he loved, his heart broken. The beauty and magic kept inside Arah, created by the gods, would be lost forever. The grand halls of the city would collapse, the bright colors would fade and its endless music would be gone. But his people would not suffer at the hands of the charr. And he did the last thing he had to: he wrote to his king.

Your Majesty,

I write this knowing it will never reach your eyes. I've been faithfully yours since the moment I entered your service - I have never wavered, and I never will. I tell you this because you may not understand what I'm about to do. I belong to you, yes, but also to the dark god. He has shown me how to end this war. And the price is steep.

I will read this scroll, fully knowing the consequences. Orr will be gone. Perhaps forgotten. But it will not be remembered as a land conquered by brutes. To me, that is worth the sacrifice. I'm sorry, old friend - and I hope one day, when we meet in the afterlife, you will greet me with forgiveness.

He closed his eyes and it was as if his spirit had left his body. He felt like he was floating, high in the sky, overseeing the green and fertile lands of Orr, the bright blue of the Unending Ocean far away. The sun was setting slowly, but still warming his body. He could see the temples of the gods, the small human villages and Arah, in all its grandeur.

He also saw them, the charr. Thousands of them. Marching onto Orr, a blazing threat.

In his mind, a flash caught his attention, coming from his tower.

He was still there, standing in his tower, scroll in hand. Opening his eyes, his consciousness returning to the present, his gaze lingered on the magic words before him.

"Such power was never meant for mortals," he heard King Reza chide in his mind.

"But it is the only thing that will save our lands," he replied. He thought the words penned beneath his bony fingers, lingering on them before forming them silently with his lips. He could feel the power gathering around him, ready to be unleashed by the spell. He took a

deep breath and whispered the words... once, then again a bit louder. Swallowing his fear, he spoke the spell aloud.

There was a blinding flash, then another followed by another, until they melded together, filling the tower room with a molten ball of unfettered magic. Brilliant silver stars shot from the tower, trailing searing fire through the air behind them, each on a mission to destroy a charr soldier. They found their prey and consumed them. The charr dissolved where they stood, frenzied screams ending sharply as the beasts disintegrated into ash. Like a pyroclastic cloud, ash, dust and fire engulfed the lands, burning and burying everything. The people of Orr had no time to flee, many had no time to even realize what was about to happen before they were overwhelmed by the spell. Then the rumbling and shaking began, shivering through the very depths of the land. Buildings swayed and towers toppled and slowly, inexorably, the land began to sink. As it shifted, a massive flood invaded the coast, surging inward, tossing everything that had once been into a pile of rubble.

It spared no one.

When the dust settled and the waters calmed, all that was left of the once great City of the Gods and the blessed country around it, were the tales in the memories of the people.



Darkness pays Orr a visit.
With billowing robes of blackened silk,
She beckons us, arms outstretched.
I see my brothers walk forward, greet her as a friend.
So many fold themselves into her embrace.
And even over their cries, and the roars of the beasts,
I hear Darkness call to me with a promise.
But I close myself. I will not join her yet.
Another call is more beautiful,

- Carved Poem



ANOMALOUS VISION

BY AMALA

There was something satisfying about being in the Dragon Lab. Maybe it was the refreshing aesthetic of hexagonal columns of igneous rock, just lightly dusted with moss. Or maybe it was the retro Rata Novan tech. Brizzi, however, theorised that her comfort was a biological throwback from when her people were subterranean dwellers. For a moment or two, she enjoyed devising experiments that could prove or discredit this theory – experiments she would never have the time to run. Regardless, the maze-like depths of the jungle had a beauty that you could really appreciate once you'd cleared out all the chak.

Your soul will suffer for millennia in my domain, promised the voice inside her head. The latest taunt from Mallyx the Unyielding came as little surprise.

Brizzi rubbed her face. She looked down and saw Taimi working at one of the Rata Novan terminals. "Taimi, I'm here," Brizzi said, stepping around ancient golem parts on her way down. "What did you want to show me?"

"Commander!" Taimi looked up from her datapad, still tapping away at it for a few more moments. "Firstly, how are you? You doing good?"

"That's not the biggest question right now." Brizzi glanced at Taimi's terminal. It showed the magical potency of varying locales and compared the readings from before and after the bloodstone explosion. "We need strategies for both Lazarus and Primordus. There's also Caudecus, but the Shining Blade will need to handle him for now. He wasn't overjoyed to see his mursaat god, so we should treat them as–"

Taimi groaned. "You're avoiding the question. Again! I asked you how you were, because I'm..."

"Don't say it, Taimi."

"...*worried* about you." She put down her datapad. "Lately you've been a little, how can I put this... worn down?"

I will twist your spirit into a horror this world has never seen!

"Oh please," Brizzi said. "I'd like to see the echo of a dead demon do that."

"See!" Taimi said, gesturing with both hands. "This is what I mean! You spend all day talking to the evil voices in your head and you're under all this tremendous pressure and now there's... ergh." She scrunched up her face. The younger asura had a habit of letting her words run a bit further than she wanted them to.

"Now there's what?" Brizzi asked, cracking her knuckles. Problem after problem. There was a time when her greatest anxiety was college deadlines.

Taimi sighed and limped to one of her workstations. "Take a look at this." On the surface was a petri dish with a sliver of red crystal. "This is a small sample of a shard found near the Jaka Itzel camp. As you've no doubt already concluded, it came from the bloodstone explosion which nearly... killed you." Taimi shook off a thought. "Luckily, none of the Itzel came into contact with the substance before it was found by my krewe member who, what do you know, just happened to be in that area with all the correct equipment to safely remove it."

"Nice catch, Taimi."

"No, it's not. You see, although I sent some people around the jungle, I seriously underestimated the force of a bloodstone explosion." Taimi turned on the monocoloured blue map of the jungle. She made a few adjustments and it was replaced with a map of the continent. Multiple dots appeared.

"According to a super-secret source that I'm not at liberty to divulge, the Consortium have been finding significant slivers of bloodstone... everywhere! It's bad enough that they're trying to get their greedy little hands on those shards, but it gets worse! These shards are mutating wildlife–"



The crackling sound of a magical discharge startled Brizzi into Dwarf stance. An anomaly appeared between them.

"Glitch!" Brizzi cursed as she unsheathed her weapons.

No one shall harm my allies! Jalis Ironhammer declared.

The faceless entity stood there, static, save for the flow of magic that made up its form. Brizzi had chased giant versions of this thing across Tyria for the last few weeks, but here was one that could be human-sized. Sparks! The big ones had been known to cause massive expulsions of magic. She had to protect Taimi.

A second thunderclap of magical discharge, and the anomaly vanished.

"Uh... Commander?" Taimi tilted her head in confusion. She hadn't seen it. She hadn't seen it? Brizzi sheathed her weapons with deliberate calmness. What in the Alchemy... a hallucination?

"Sorry. Lack of sleep. Mallyx." Inadequate excuses. Brizzi managed a one-sided smile before turning to face the map. "I'll see what I can do about this."

◆

Brizzi snaked a path through the clumps of asura who were perusing the marketplace wares of Rata Sum. No sedate walk today then. On observation, the number of asura present was typical for the time of day, but the sum of lumbering golems had increased. This either indicated a security threat or, as is more likely, a new batch of Peacekeepers. Those new recruits could never resist tinkering and testing. Some progenies had even gathered to watch for the inevitable glitches.

Brizzi checked for a mirrored surface as she passed by the stalls. A reflection from an armour piece, perhaps? No,

asuran cultural armour was too ornate for her need. Anyway, there was no point speculating before reaching her lab. It was just illogical to dwell on the image of those Vigil soldiers with their red, glowing eyes or on how their proximity to the bloodstone explosion had cost them their minds. Brizzi had been close to the explosion, she had then spent an extensive amount of time in Bloodstone Fen and had since been chasing giant, bipedal coalescences of magical energy in her spare time. If she checked now, would she see a red tinge in her eyes?

She half-raised her hand to rub her eye and then forced it down. No. It would be fine. There wouldn't be anything there. Of course, having perfect vision only made the 'seeing things no one else can' problem more disconcerting.

A thunderclap of magical discharge.

Brizzi touched the hilts of her weapons, shifted her feet and scanned the marketplace. There. Behind the progenies!

"Replicating glitch!" she cursed.

The progenies saw her and squealed in delight before turning back to the golems, wondering what fantastic error had Brizzi ploughing through the marketplace crowd. A few choice words were shouted her way.

The anomaly vanished.

"Sprockets! I missed it," huffed a progeny with a bow reminiscent of Taimi's. "Which one was faulty?"

"Yeah, what was the glitch anyway?" Another progeny scowled and scratched his ears. "Will it precipitate a second golem revolution?"

Brizzi wiped her face and then grinned at the kids. "You know what, instead of reporting it, I'll give you guys another chance to spot it. Your observational skills may not be there yet but... keep an eye on that one." She pointed at a perfectly functional golem. The kids peered at it with intense concentration, discussing every detail.

She walked past them, dropping the grin. What was happening to her?

Stepping through the portal into the Applied Developments Lab, Brizzi wondered if she should confess the hallucinations to Taimi. How would Dragon's Watch react? Would they question her sanity, her decisions, her mind? That kind of instability within the group would be abominable in this time of crisis. Tyria was at stake. No, she just needed to grind this Snaff Prize-winning brain to the problem and eliminate it before it became dangerous.

Brizzi laced her fingers and cracked her knuckles. The Applied Development Lab may not be as exclusive as the Dragon Lab, but the diamondism architecture had been the constant backdrop of her studies for most of her life. She could do this.

So, for hours she searched her library of datapads for anything that could relate, even tangentially, to what she was experiencing. As her stalker was a ley-line anomaly, she tried to find every scrap of information she could on ley lines. The pool of information was limited in this case and none of it related to hallucinations. There was frustratingly little literature on the Thaumanova Anomaly as well.

With some hesitance, she changed direction and delved into the mental health route. By the end of it, she had loosely self-diagnosed herself with several acute disorders to varying degrees, and while they should be addressed at some point, they were not the current priority. In terms of hallucinating, she couldn't find anything that fit well enough with what she was experiencing.

As night came, the other asura left the lab. She should go too, before sleep deprivation became a

hindrance. Brizzi powered down the console, walked out into the night breeze and listened to Rata Sum's rushing waterfalls. It usually calmed her.

The thunderclap of the anomaly. It stood in the open grass, glowing in the darkness.

"What do you want?!" Brizzi shouted. Her own vehemence shook her more than the anomaly, but Destroyers take it, this thing made her question *her mind*.

Alone and without the context of having others to protect, Brizzi noticed something she hadn't before. Its head was bent forwards as if it was looking at the ground. Its shoulders were sagged, and its arms were limp. Its whole posture indicated that it was... sad?

It vanished.

It may not wish anyone harm, Ventari said within her. *You should reach out.*

"An interesting proposition," Brizzi said. She sighed, knowing catastrophe often occurs despite intentions.

◆

By the time Brizzi arrived, Seraph Observers was a ruin of collapsed tents and splintered wood. One Seraph held his broken leg, face twisted in agony as he watched his squad fight the monster. Brizzi pulled out her weapons and joined the melee against the unlikely enemy: a giant moa with eyes that radiated the red light of bloodstone madness. It screeched.

Taimi's voice broke out of the communicator. "Commander! I'm reading a high magical concentration at your current location. What the heck is happening there?!"

Brizzi dodged a peck that would have bitten her head off. "Mmph. Confirmation that shattered bloodstone should not enter an avian diet."

"Oh boy."

Brizzi helped up a Seraph that had collapsed near her. "You're okay. We can do this." Together they charged back at the moa. The red light in its eyes surged. From them it fired two beams of focused energy. Brizzi caught it with a gauntleted hand, swung her arm and 'broke' the line of magic. Thank the Alchemy Taimi devised this method to counter such magical abilities.

"Dwayna bless you, Commander," a Seraph said. "This oversized chicken has been destroying us with that move."

Brizzi nodded, not taking her eyes off the innocent creature. "Everyone keep to me! I can protect you from its attack." Not the best rallying words, but in the heat of battle, it was enough. The moa's bloodstone abilities were its greatest threat. If Brizzi could manage to keep its attention, she could safely counter–

The thunderclap of the anomaly. It was right beside her. So close. She reached out. "What are you?" Her hand passed through and its second thunder deafened her. She staggered back and tried to blink away the afterimage of cracks spreading out from a single point of origin. Faraway, she heard the moa screech. It wasn't on her. A human screamed. In that moment of anguish, Mallyx made his demand.

UNLEASH ME.
Brizzi embraced the darkness.

◆

From the rocky ledge where Brizzi sat, she saw sunbeams reach the earthy floor of the Maguuma

Jungle. If she turned to her left, she would see the scars of battle. Before the Seraph left to help their wounded, they had thanked her. They thought she had saved them.

"Commander?" Taimi called through the communicator.

"Yes, Taimi?"

"You know that Seraph squad would have been annihilated without you, right? As far as I know, fighting angry bloodstone abominations isn't part of standard training."

I should have been better.

"There's something else, isn't there?" asked Taimi. "You're keeping something from us."

"It's..." She couldn't.

"It's...? Commander, I'm here for you. We all are! Something's bugging out your system and I hate seeing you like this. What is it?"

"Taimi, I appreciate it, but..." Brizzi shook her head. "It's okay, I can deal with it."

A Seraph died.

"No, you can't! I mean..." Taimi sighed. "Okay. Fine. Commander, we trust you, but please, whatever you're going through, don't go through it alone. If there's some reason you can't talk to us, then reach out to someone else. Don't pull a Caithe, you know? You have friends."

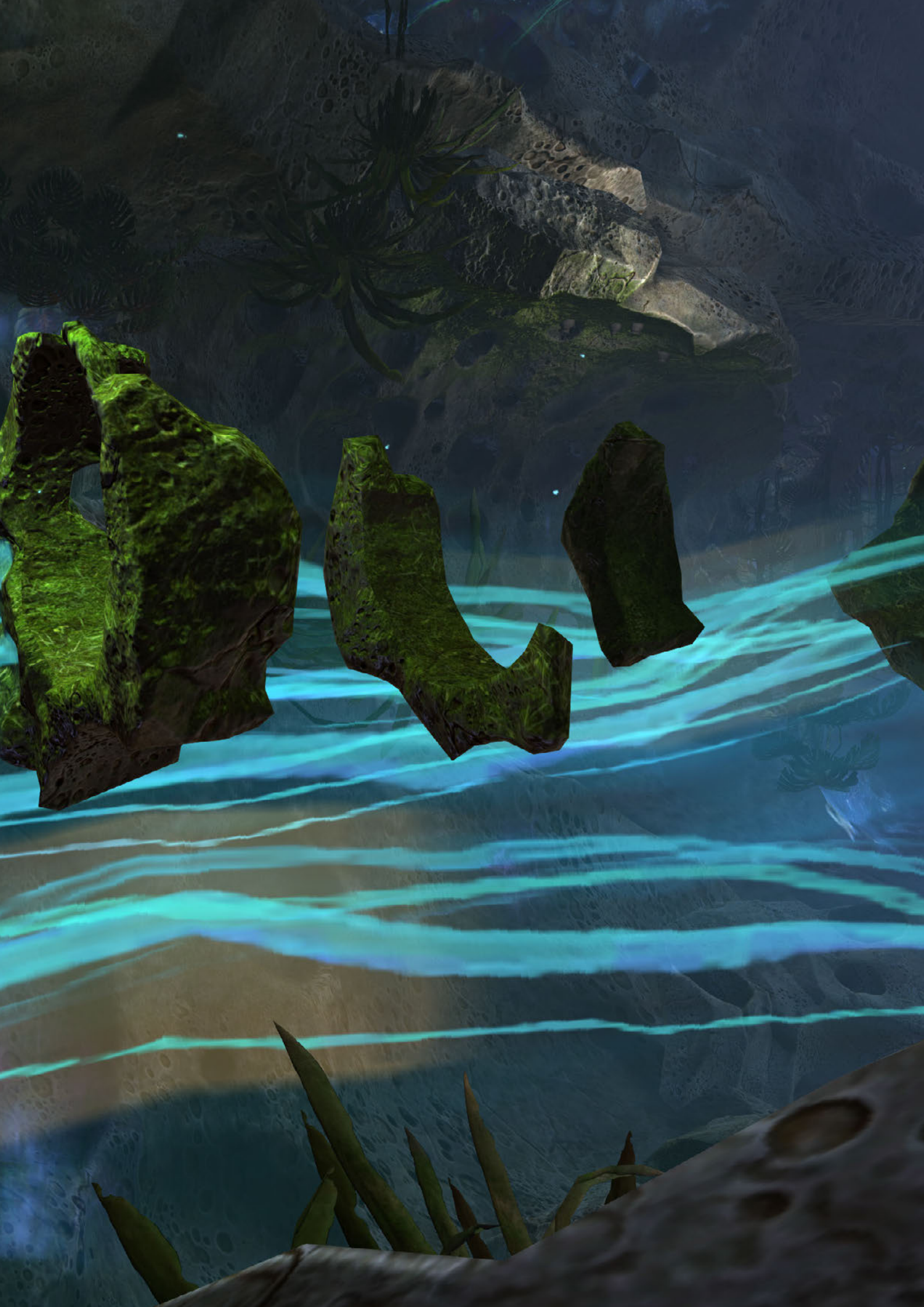
Brizzi sniffed. The thunderclap of the anomaly sounded from afar. She saw it watch her from the remains of the Seraph Observer camp. "Don't pull a Caithe?" Brizzi snorted as she wiped a tear. "You really know how to put things into perspective."

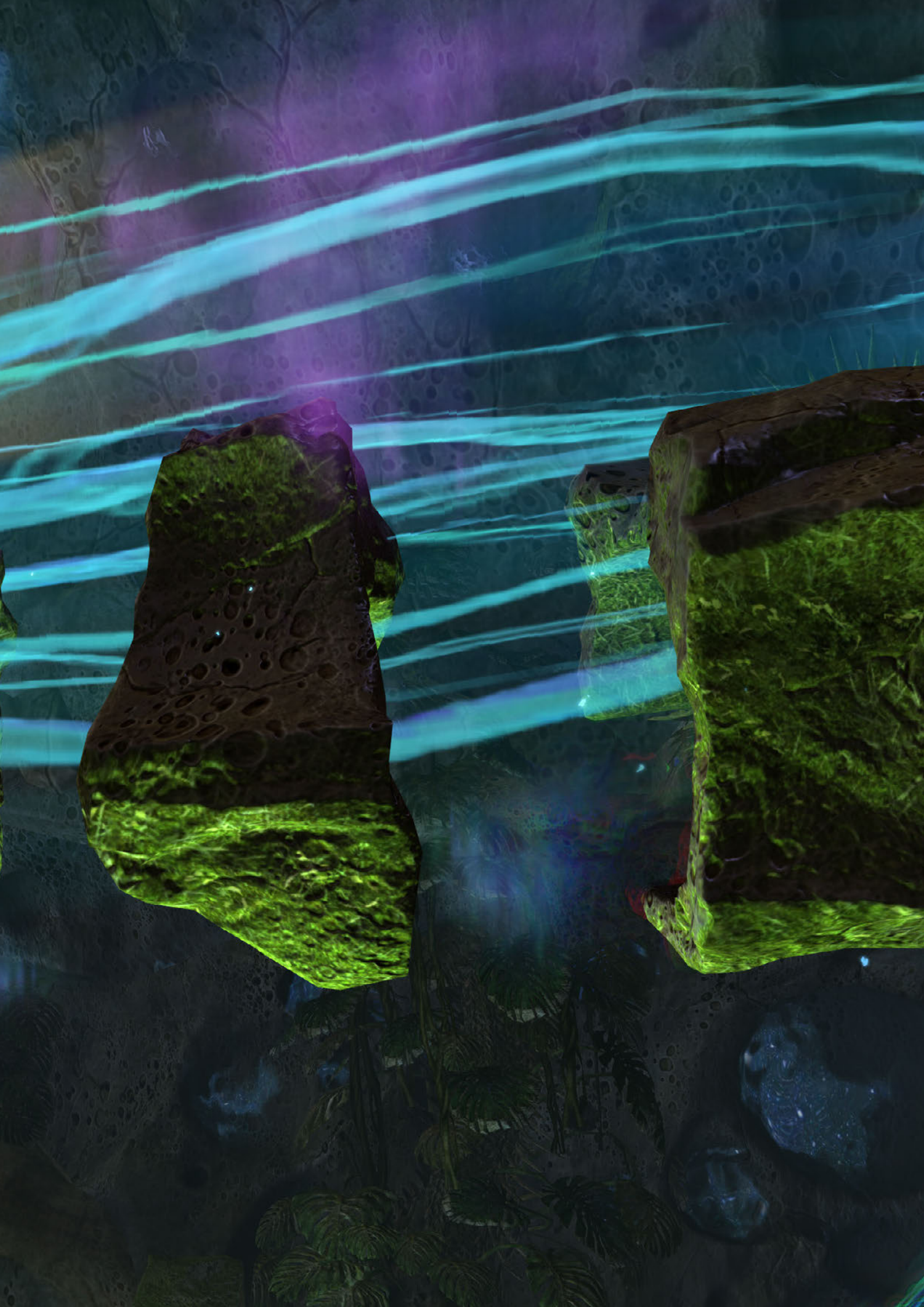
"I know, right? Witty observations are just another part of my repertoire of magnificence."

Brizzi let herself chuckle. As she thought about the friends she could contact, she felt an aching regret for not being able to tell Taimi and the others. Still, it was for the best. There was someone else who came to mind though: Ogden Stonehealer. The scholarly dwarf might have an answer.











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