

Gaíscíoch

MAGAZINE

Dream Builders

Soulbound Studios shares their journey
creating the ambitious Chronicles of Elyria

GAISCIOCH MAGAZINE ISSUE 8, 2016



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Welcome to Issue 8 of Gaiscioch Magazine! This issue concludes our second year of publishing for us and we felt that the perfect theme for this magazine was Dream Builders because we had a dream to publish a magazine and went out there and made it happen.

Our dreams and goals are often achieved by traveling the long and hard road that requires patience, perseverance, and a well thought out plan. The best dreams always improve our character along the way and evolve us into something new.

This issue features some very interesting stories of personal growth and reaching for those dreams no matter how extravagant they are. You'll see first person stories from the creation of the most ambitious MMORPG project to date, Chronicles of Elyria. Epic music and trance musician, R Armando Moribito shares his journey with us. The visionary behind the innovative Das Tal sheds light on their journey and J. Todd Colman speaks about his passions behind Crowfall.

This issue is filled with first person accounts of success and dream building. We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome your feedback. Thank you for your continued support!

Slán go fóill!

Benjamin Foley

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Gaiscioch Magazine is a quarterly, volunteer driven, no-profit, digital magazine for game developers and enthusiasts alike.

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All correspondences from Gaiscioch will be from an email address on the "@gaiscioch.com" domain ONLY.

A Special Thank You to Our Supporters

We would like to take a moment to thank all of our readers for their continued support and encouragement. Without your support we would not be able to keep this magazine going.

In addition we would like to thank the following companies who have our undying gratitude for their support of the Gaiscioch Magazine & Livestreams productions. These companies have shown their support by providing interview opportunities, special access to their games, and social media exposure for our publication.

Without the support of our readers and the contributions from gaming studios we could not make this magazine so successful.

We are happy to report that Gaiscioch Magazine has been read more than 100,000 times by over 17,000 unique readers to date. This is a huge accomplishment for a team that is staffed entirely by volunteers and we thank all of you for your continued support.

Thank You!

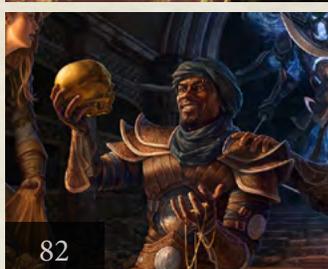
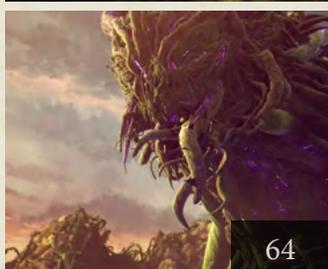
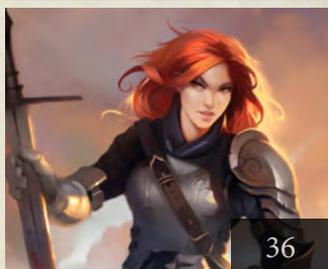
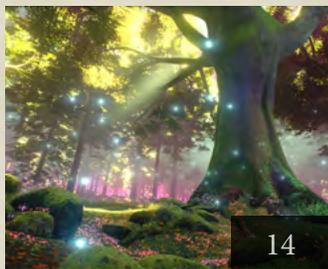
ISSUE 8 MAGAZINE SUPPORTERS



LIVESTREAM SUPPORTERS



Please Note: Gaiscioch Magazine & Livestreams does not bias it's reviews, previews or livestream content. We do however only show games that we think you will enjoy. We do not believe in bashing game titles therefore we will only publish & stream games we think our audience will enjoy. If you would like us to review your title, and think our audience may enjoy it, please send an email to: magazine@gaiscioch.com for further review. If we think your game is right for our audience we'll stream it or publish it.



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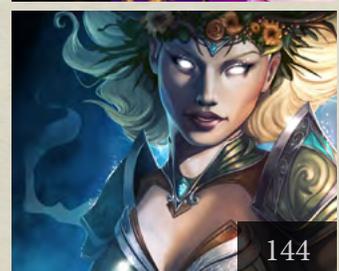
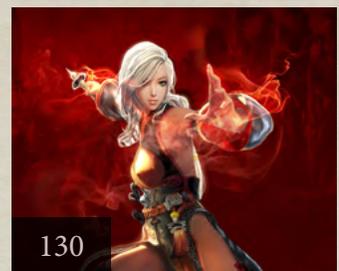
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ABOUT THE GAISCIOCH FAMILY

The Gaiscíoch (pronounced Gosh-Kia) began on November 11th 2001 in the industry pioneering MMORPG “Dark Age of Camelot”. They began on the Nimue roleplaying server with a focus on creating a fun and enjoyable community for players of all ages and skill levels.

The Gaiscíoch takes it’s name from an Irish legend found within the “Lebor Gabála Érenn” and “Cath Maige Tuired” which chronicle the first people of Ireland, the Tuatha de Danann. Specifically the First Battle of Moytura where the Tuatha de Danann hand picked the most honorable and loyal warriors to fight alongside the Celtic Gods in a battle against the Fir Bolg. These warriors were known as the Gaiscíoch.

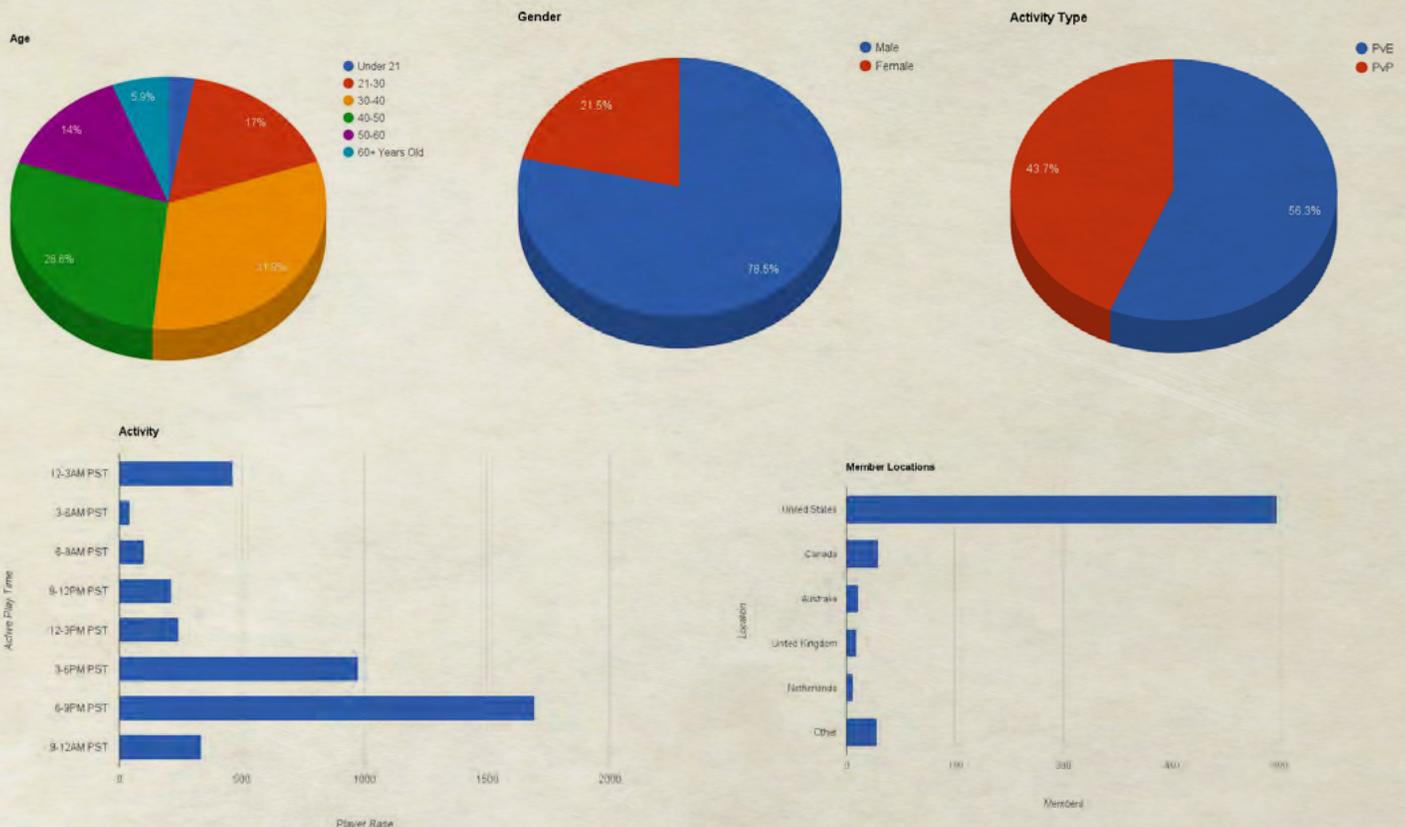
The Gaiscioch are a social gaming community with a relaxed approach toward gaming. They allow

their members to play how they want, when they want, as long as they want and do not constrict them with quotas or requirements.

The overall focus of the Gaiscioch is to support the server communities and real world communities they are part of. They accomplish this by hosting public community events, participating and hosting community forums, interacting with game developers, and providing new players information through our in-game advisers and out-of-game guides, maps, and videos.

With a strong focus on community our endgame goal is to create memories, friendships, and participate in the overall success of the community. It is through gaming, athletic competition, and social interaction that we forge new friendships and relationships.

Gaiscioch Winter 2016 Demographics



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Don't Get Phished

BY: THE "REAL" BENJAMIN "FOGHLADHA" FOLEY

Although the term "Identity theft" has been around since the 1960s, the computer age and the growth of the internet has led to its proliferation. "Phishing" is one aspect of identity theft. It relies on convincing the victim that they are interacting with a "trustworthy entity", such as a corporation or known individual. Depending on the severity of the identity theft, it can be a minor nuisance or it could result in total decimation of your reputation and financial stability. Either way, it is a crime in most parts of the world.

Over the past few months, a person from China has posed as me. This unscrupulous person wrote to developers and media affiliates seeking access to beta releases of some games, exclusive tchotchkes, and press copies of other games. He then turned around and sold these on various websites.

This issue isn't related only to theft of games and items from developers. Many popular phishing campaigns try to obtain your login information by putting up fake web pages. Other thieves use malicious scripts that inject keyloggers, which are

programs that record every keystroke you make. Other hackers try to learn your vital personal information to help that cousin you never knew you had in South Africa--at your expense, of course.

BE OBSERVANT

The best way for you to protect your business, game accounts, and financial information is to look first, act last. Due diligence can save you a lot of heartache. Check the "from" address of your emails. If the sender's email address is not the same as the site from which he or she claims to be, it's likely a phishing campaign. Don't click on any links!

The second telltale sign is when the links within a document appear to be from one place but actually go to another. If you hover your mouse over the links without clicking on them, you will see the real website link in your email client. Usually, it is located at the bottom left of the window.

UNDERSTANDING DOMAIN NAMES

Some common techniques include modifying real URLs (the website address) with slight changes. So bankofamerica.com becomes bankofamerica.ru. This fake domain name is owned by a malicious entity.

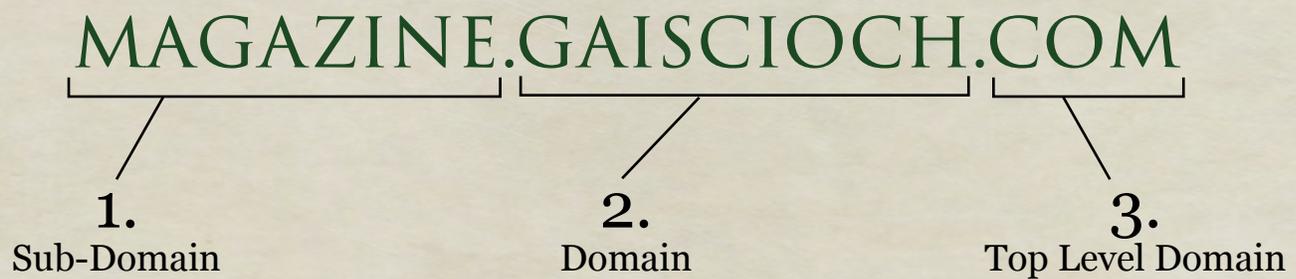
I will try to give you a little insight on how internet domain names work. There are 3 parts of a domain:

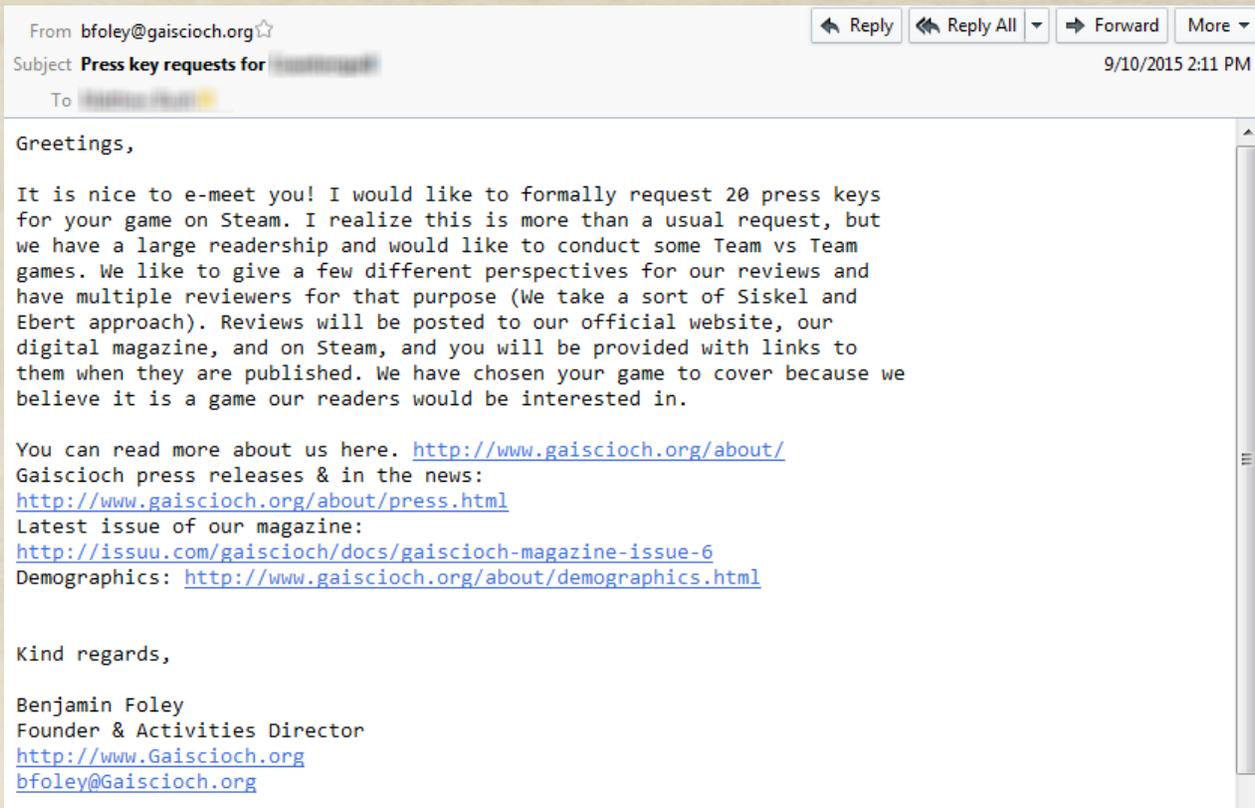
- 1. The Sub-Domain** - This is the prefix to the domain, and servers can be configured to handle them differently. For example: magazine.gaiscioch.com points to the magazine site while www.gaiscioch.com points at the community site. These can be created without needing to register a new domain. Any system administrator can create an unlimited number of these sub-domains on any existing domain. They also can point to entirely different places. For example, ts.gaiscioch.com points to a TeamSpeak server. The common mail.domain.com sub-domain points to a mail server.
- 2. The Domain** - This is the part between the dots. This is the cosmetic name of the site.

- 3. The Top Level Domain (TLD)** - This is the extension at the end of the domain. It can vary, and can include endings like .com, .org, .net, .edu, .info or one of over one hundred new cosmetic TLD's such as .company, .university, .food, .me, etc.

When you type `http://www.gaiscioch.com/` into a web browser it sends a call out to the Top Level Domain server (such as .com) which asks for the location of gaiscioch. The TLD server replies with the address of the Domain Name Server (DNS) entry registered for gaiscioch.com. It then sends a request to the gaiscioch.com name server to find the location for the protocol (http, mail, ftp, etc) and www subdomain. This is how domain names work.

So bankofamerica.ru will send your data to a very different place than bankofamerica.com. The .ru TLD server would have an entirely different registration than the .com TLD server. So you would likely end up somewhere you really don't want to be.





INVESTIGATING THE PHISH

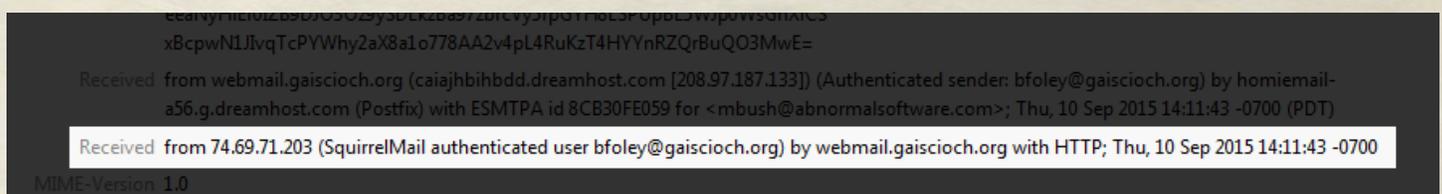
In my case, this gentleman from China used the email address @gaiscioch.org to pose to as @gaiscioch.com. Above you can see an example of a Phishing campaign masking as a letter from me.

This looks very similar to something from the gaiscioch.com site, yes. However, there are some tricks I'll point out so you can recognize these spoofs.

First and foremost, the easiest way to check if something is legitimate is to use Google. Take off the .ext part (the .com, .org, .info, and other endings) and search the almighty Google with that website name. See what appears. If you search for Gaiscioch, you won't find Gaiscioch.org anywhere.

You will, however, find Gaiscioch.com. If the suspicious website doesn't show up in the search results, it's likely that it's not legitimate.

The second thing you can do to check if a site is the real one is to use a tool to **do an IP lookup** of the sender. The IP (short for "Internet Protocol") is a series of numbers that tells the internet where the website is based. To find this IP address go to View > Headers > All in your email application and you should see a lot more information than the simple To: and From:. Inside this massive amount of unreadable text you should see a few lines saying "Received:". You're looking for the one that says "authenticated user".



BE SMART, PROTECT YOUR ASSETS

Now in this case, bfoley@gaiscioch.org is using his webmail account to access email that doesn't relay the end user IP address. It just relays the webmail server IP address 74.59.71.203. This can be anywhere in the world. In some cases you'll see a much more detailed description including the IP address 127.0.0.1, a long domain name (the internet service provider's reserved address for that user), and an IP address in [brackets]. Any time you see 127.0.0.1, this is the loopback address which points back at yourself. If you were to attack 127.0.0.1 you would be attacking yourself. This is an indication that this IP address is the base machine that sent the email. In the case of WebMail-sent emails, you'll need to dig a little deeper to find their true location.

To locate a website's true location, you can **check the whois information** for their domain by going to a site like [MX Toolbox](http://mxtoolbox.com/SuperTool.aspx) (<http://mxtoolbox.com/SuperTool.aspx>). You can type "whois:gaiscioch.org" into the search and see that it was registered by a man out of China.

```
Registrant ID: c0669605a0c3761f
Registrant Name: Guiying Zheng
Registrant Organization: ???
Registrant Street: F2 BLdj,5 No.37 Chaoqian
Registrant City: Beijing
Registrant State/Province: Changping District
Registrant Postal Code: 102600
Registrant Country: CN
Registrant Phone: +10.89721374
Registrant Phone Ext:
Registrant Fax:
Registrant Fax Ext:
Registrant Email: admin@gaiscioch.org
```

Now, the original "whois:gaiscioch.com" was registered by one "Benjamin Foley" out of Oregon. This is a dead giveaway that the websites are not the same and that the owner of gaiscioch.org is not who he claims to be.

If you have any doubts about the authenticity of an email or other communication, reach out to the known contact from the official website you found on Google. It's better to ask first than to send off some press access keys or other valuable information to someone who will sell them or leak sensitive game information using someone else's name.

I can't tell you how many times I have approached a company and their reply was, "what happened to the assets we sent you already?" It's heartbreaking to see so many game developers get scammed out of their products. A little due diligence could go a long way in protecting their products and keeping their hard work out of the hands of malicious thieves. When in doubt, reach out.

P.S. Who says "Nice to E-Meet you" anyways! I mean really! Is this the 90's?





Dream Big Achieve Bigger

BY: BENJAMIN "FOGHLADHA" FOLEY

If life has taught me anything, it has been that what you think you can achieve is usually a far underestimate of your true potential. We as humans try to default to safe, secure, and stable. While this is a comfortable place to be, it often times shackles us and keeps us far away from success.

Having the ability to dream and reach for those dreams gives our life momentum. It propels us forward and keeps us from growing stagnant. You may have heard of the concept of thinking where you want to go tomorrow, this month, this year, in five years, and in 10 years.

Now the thing about goals is they are easy to make and rarely ever happen as we expect. Take for example my childhood dream of being a truck

driver. When I was a kid, that was the thing to do. I wanted to drive semi trucks. But as I grew, and learned trucks no longer interested me, my goal changed. This isn't a failure to obtain a goal, it's a natural evolution of your perspective. Sometimes the things we want don't last the test of time and by the time we get there we no longer want them.

Another example in my lifetime was my current profession. When I was a child, did I dream of being a Web Developer? Of course not. The web wasn't invented yet! As a matter of fact when I enrolled at San Jose State University I planned on having my focus in Fashion Design. Can you believe that? This guy enjoyed designing formal attire in his spare time. But I was really, really good at making web pages. No matter how much I tried to resist becoming a programmer, when I

needed to make a living that's where I ended up. I was good at it and people came in droves to have me build their websites. This wasn't my plan, not even vaguely where I thought I would end up. But at the time I laid the plan, I didn't even know about the web. Plans change as the world changes. We must adapt, we must find that which drives us forward and harness it to propel us further.

The key is that we must have the courage to drive forward and adapt as the situation changes. Being flexible on our goals allows us to adapt to change. Many things can push us away from our goal, some of them might even end up changing it all together. But the most important is that we keep our sight on the future and where we want to go.

FORWARD THINKING

I have a simple saying. "Focus on the past, Trip over the future." It is easy to look back and find places in your life where you felt like you failed, or have regrets. If you choose to dwell on these they will render you complacent and ensure that you stay right where you've always been and keep you wallowing in defeat. That temptation to continue focusing on the past is what kills any chance of ever obtaining our dreams. Don't let the past dictate your potential.

Set a course. Make a plan. Figure out what needs to happen to get you to where you need to go. Focus on the next step to get you there. Be ready to change and adapt at a moments notice and remember even the best laid plans go sideways. You need to expect that and be ready to alter your plan to accommodate.

It's important that we continue to drive ourselves forward. Whether you choose to be a successful business professional or a humble charity worker,

at the end of the day, having a goal and reaching for it will drive you forward and keep you pushing to become a better version of yourself. You never know, you might just surprise yourself.

STAY FOCUSED

Even though the plan may change along the way, the important part is to continue thinking forward, thinking progress, and keep that dream in front of you. Personal dreams are like a good unicorn or treasure at the end of the rainbow. They're just out of sight and we always put them on this pedestal expecting magical angels playing horns, and people cheering at us, and a pink elephant in a tutu dancing for us (no wait that's just my dream). But really, a dream is motivation. We need to make sure that there is always a next step or we'll fall into complacency and become lazy.

For some of the stories shared in this magazine, it was this drive that propelled some of the most successful people in the world. Taking the discouraging moments and turning them into fuel to push forward. In the right light even the bad moments, the setbacks, can be part of your tale of success. You just need to put it in perspective and realize the greatest stories of success are riddled with challenges, hardships, and hard work. It's all part of making the dream possible.

Keep your chin up, prepare for change, always put one foot in front of the other. No matter how dark the world becomes, you can be a light that shines through. The only person who can stop you, is you and your own ambition. Opportunity knocks, and only you can answer the door. Take initiative, go out into the world and tell the story you want your life to be about. A little courage and a lot of tenacity will go a long way to making your wildest dream possible.



Ambition Meets Innovation in **Chronicles of Elyria**

By: Benjamin “Foghladha” Foley

Each week I spend roughly 8 hours scouring the internet for new and interesting concepts coming toward the MMO world. As a leader of a very large community, I always have to keep my eyes on the future and see the road before us. Along my journey I stumbled across a new title that simply blew my mind.

Chronicles of Elyria is a fresh new concept to the MMO scene. It is by far the most dynamic and immersive MMO I have seen. While in most games you play a solitary character for the length of the game, Chronicles of Elyria sends you on

a journey through the lineage of a family. In the time you play you experience the life of a young lad or las, who grows into adulthood. As they mature decisions you make will prolong or shorten your life. Upon death you continue your story through your progeny.

As a programmer, this game makes my brain hurt. The amount of logic and attention to detail is phenomenal. Fortunately for me, we are blessed with the opportunity to speak directly to a developer who can help explain this massive undertaking of a game.

Greetings! Thank you so much for joining us today to talk about your new title Chronicles of Elyria. Before we get started can I ask you to introduce yourself and your role in Chronicles of Elyria?

Thank you! It's a pleasure to be here. My name is Jeromy Walsh. I'm the Owner of Soulbound Studios and am currently acting as both the Technical and Creative Director on Chronicles of Elyria. I've spent the last 15 or so years as a software engineer and game developer, working for companies like Liquid Entertainment, Pandemic Studios, and Microsoft, and am super excited to be working with a talented team on our own game now.

Just with a quick glimpse at the scope of this project you can tell this is quite a project. How large is the team working on CoE?

Absolutely. We currently have nine people directly responsible for the development of the game and

its assets. We have an additional three people doing community management and outreach, as having a close connection with our community is extremely important to us.

That said, we're growing rapidly at the moment so our team size is a bit of a moving target. In the last week we've hired a new 3D Environment Artist as well as a new Animator. And we're not done yet. We'll be bringing on another three to four people over the next three months.

What type of technology is making this game possible? Are there any engines, software packages, or techniques that have made development easier?

Definitely. So, on the client-side we're leveraging the Unreal Engine to dramatically reduce development time. Having an established asset pipeline that allows us to prototype landscapes and to visualize objects in the world quickly has





saved us a ton of time. And that's not even talking about the run-time benefits. We're really happy to have UE4 support for rendering, animation, physics, user input, user interfaces, etc. right out of the box. And the quality is really good as well. People are constantly amazed by how good the game looks. We recently took a screenshot of our new grass shader, along with a new sky. It looks almost photo-realistic.

In addition to that, we're currently doing internal testing of a few client libraries for things such as global illumination, physics, and destructible objects. But we can't talk about them for NDA purposes.

Finally, we are talking to some middle-ware companies to license some additional back-end technology. We've already got a lot there, but as a small studio it's important we leverage as much existing infrastructure as we can. If we do end up licensing any of the server-size middle-ware, we'll

definitely make an announcement about it, as it could be big news.

What system are you most proud of? Is there one piece of this massive game that you think shines above the rest and why is it your favorite?

Well, we're still in early development and our engineering hasn't caught up with our design quite yet. So I think there's a difference between the systems I'm proudest of as a designer, and the systems I'm proudest of as an engineer.

From a design perspective, I'm most-proud of our dynamic story engine called the Soulborn Engine. While it's still in early development, and the nature of it means it won't be fully functional until near the end of the project, we believe it's our story engine that's going to make this game feel different from any other MMORPG.



We're working to create a world that feels constantly in motion, with events transpiring on the personal, local, regional, national, and global scale. If we nail the design, players can expect to split their time between the things they want to be doing – exploring, crafting, producing, role-playing, building, etc. and responding to the events that are happening to them – not just around them. These events will feel consequential, and with luck, players will really enjoy the interaction with the world and the stories it creates.

From an engineering perspective, I think the team is proudest of the aging and dynamic body mechanics. These are closely related and basically mean that as time passes, characters are constantly aging and changing. Their faces, skin, and bodies slowly show the passage of time. It's very subtle, and often times community members are surprised to see the difference when they go back and look at what the character looked like decades previously. The dynamic body system means your character's

leanness and weight changes dynamically. So you could end up with a fairly portly character, or the next Conan. The combination of the aging mechanic, and the dynamic body mechanic, means characters look radically different. All of this is technically challenging as it requires animation blending across multiple dimensions and needs to be developed in such a way that armor still looks good as the character's body changes.

I heard you recently made changes to the Skill System in Chronicles of Elyria, compared to what you'd written about in earlier design journals. Can you tell us a bit about what those changes are and what motivated those changes?

Sure. I'll start with the why first, and then talk about the what. When designing the skill system for Chronicles of Elyria we had a few design goals in mind. First, we wanted the different skills to be challenging and immersive, and to require a

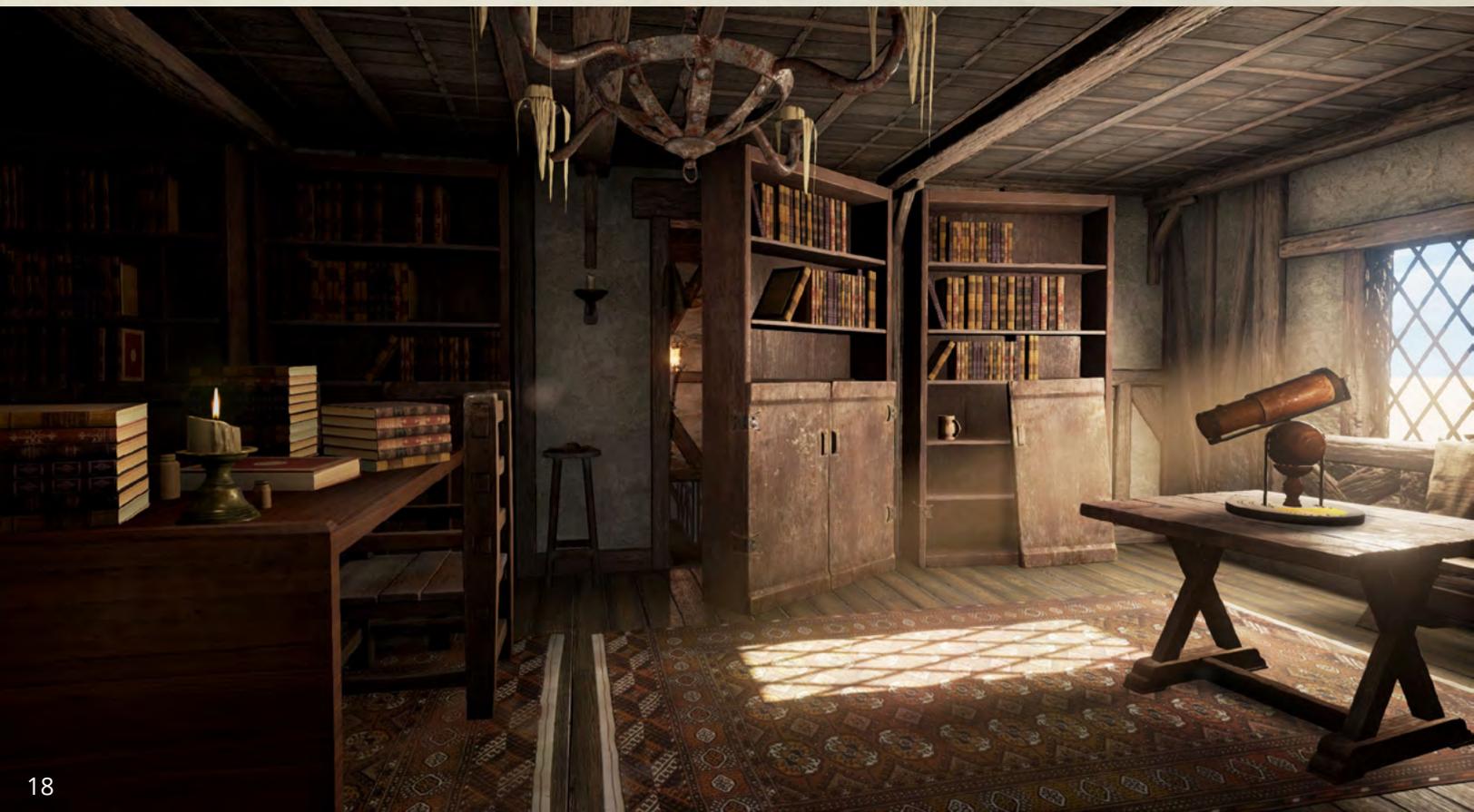
combination of both character skill, as well as player skill. We also wanted skill-building to be communal. This is an MMORPG after all, not a single-player RPG. The other thing we wanted was a way for players of roughly the same skill-level to be able to play with others of the same skill, regardless of what their characters' skill-levels were. We know our target audience is a little older, likely have careers and families, and we wanted to make it so that our audience could easily jump in and out of the game without falling too far behind.

So what did we do about it? Well, to begin with, we'd always had it in mind to allow players to teach one another. But previously, we were stuck in the rut seen by other MMOs where you had to reach some skill level, let's say a skill of 20pts before you could go to someone so they could train you and you could "unlock" the new skill. This felt very discreet though, and didn't really encourage teamwork. So we've made a change to how skills are learned. Now, skill development is largely a cooperative mechanic. To first learn a skill, you

can either read about it, or to expedite the process you can observe others performing the skill. This is true whether the skills are some kind of crafting skill or a combat technique. By partying up with someone and either adventuring or becoming part of the crafting process, you gradually learn a bit more about the skills they're showing you.

After a while, you'll be able to practice the skills yourself with the guidance of others, and then finally be able to execute your skills on your own. This whole process firmly creates a master/apprentice model, and creates a new reason for players to go out and interact – to find masters who have skills they want to learn. It also means that as your character reaches their golden years and is unable to perform the skills as well as they used to, they're more likely to take on the role of wise old master, and pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

The other change we've made recently is introducing a new mechanic called "Bolstering".



There's nothing magical about it. When we play alone, it doesn't really matter what our skills and attributes are. We self-regulate the challenges we take on so we feel productive. It's only when we team up with others that differences in stats become apparent. I despise that feeling in games like Diablo 3 where you're partying with a group of friends who are higher level than you. They're either forced to come down to your level, or you're forced to roam around with them. In the latter case, you feel utterly useless as you do no damage to monsters, and you die if you're even looked at by an elite mob.

So what we're doing to remedy this is allowing family members (those in the same in-game family as you) to bolster their siblings/children, etc... If you're in a group together, the weaker individual's stats are brought up in parity (not equality) with the stronger character. This means when grouping up with those more powerful, you're "bolstered" by them, and become more powerful yourself. This encourages playing with your real-life friends

who have a bit more free-time than you do, rather than discouraging it. It also means you should be more careful about who you pick on in the game. You never know who their big-brother might be. And when he comes to seek revenge with his little brother, both of them are going to be stronger as a result.

Let's jump into the plotline. As the game begins, what is the general backdrop to your story?

So, this is one of the things we're doing with this game that adds an element of intrigue. Rather than being completely forthcoming with our established lore, mythology, and cosmology, we're intentionally withholding a lot of that information from the player. Our goal is to enter game launch with players knowing roughly the same things that characters would.

Instead of saying "Here's the list of gods", we've instead introduced multiple religions into the





world, each of which has their own sets of deities (or none at all), and each believe they're right.

Similarly, we don't have a single cosmology or story of how the world has been created. Instead, each religion or culture has their own belief – some may be right, some may be wrong, or maybe they're all wrong.

We're doing this because a lot of conflict in our world is notably about what we believe, not what we know. By introducing diversity into our lore, and then providing incentive for the players to fight amongst themselves, we're creating further opportunity for conflict and a compelling story.

With all that said, the general backdrop is a low/mid-fantasy world in which some cataclysmic event, thousands of years past, has split the world into different planes of existence. Magic, if it ever existed, has long been forgotten, and if gods ever existed they appear to have abandoned the world. But as time passes, depending on player actions,

we may yet feel the presence of the Ancients, we may once again see the effects of magic, and most significantly, we may see the planes once again begin to converge.

What can we expect from the character creation process?

In *Chronicles of Elyria*, players aren't just playing a single life of a single character. Instead, they play as a soul reincarnating over multiple lifetimes. As a result, players begin character creation by picking the soul they want to play.

Next, they decide whether they want to play as a Ward – a younger individual who doesn't have a family and has grown up in an orphanage, or as the child of a player-ran or NPC-ran family. In the latter case, some of their choices in appearance, etc. are constrained by the family they choose. This is because character creation is genetics based, and family members will often be recognizable by some common traits.

Next, they'll choose their birthdate, which influences which family they can choose and also helps set their destiny.

Finally, players will select the family or orphanage they're from and will then be able to customize the appearance and/or skill set of their character.

No matter what choices they make, however, character customization doesn't end with character creation. How they play their character will have as much impact on what their character ends up looking like as what they set the sliders to during character creation.

Let's talk about death. Death in CoE takes on a somewhat beautiful form. There are three types, Incapacitation, Spirit Walking, and Permadeath. Can you tell us a little about each of these?

Absolutely. Incapacitation is the least costly form of death. It's what most animals will do to you, and it's what many NPCs will do to you. When you're incapacitated you're simply knocked unconscious for (currently) three minutes. During this time other players can cut your purse, and take any weapons or other things you had in your hand. For example, if you were carrying the reins of a pack-



horse or other form of transportation. But this form of death doesn't come with any long-term costs aside from needing to replace a couple items.

The next form of death – Spirit Walking, is what happens when someone incapacitates you and then performs a coup de grace. This is a killing stroke which forces your soul out of your body and back on to the astral plane. Players will then have a time-limited journey they have to take to make it back to their body before it perishes. And yes, we do elegantly handle DC's and network related problems that can occur. While the player is Spirit Walking, pretty much everything but clothes they are wearing can be looted. Someone can take their backpack off and look through it, they can take any rings or other jewelry off, their boots, gloves, etc. The only thing that can't be looted is armor, and of course, things that can't be easily discovered, like hidden pockets.

Finally, we have Character Permadeath. This is

when you fail to make it back to your body in time. This most happens in the later years of a character's life when their connection to the physical world is the weakest. When this happens, the character dies, and the soul returns to the Akashic Records (soul selection), to be reincarnated into the life of another character.

I have to admit the whole Spirit Walking idea, really piqued my interest. The idea of being tied to the world by the ones you loved has a bit of beauty to it. Talking about family ties, can you explain to us the "Family" concept and how it applies in CoE?

Sure. In short, a Family in Chronicles of Elyria is a type of social organization you can choose to join at character creation.

Families in CoE serve a couple different purposes. First, it's a social element. Players who are just





starting the game often look to guilds in order to help them out. However, guilds in CoE serve a different purpose. So when beginning Chronicles of Elyria it'll typically be the family you look to, in order to get early assistance. The family you join provides you room and board, they give you maps for navigating local landscapes, and they give you a set of starter equipment.

Second, it's through families and dynasties that towns tend to develop. It's through the process of friends and families settling next to each other, building shared resources, etc. that hovels become villages, villages become towns, and towns become cities. And over time, the larger dynasties will begin to spread out, gain more influence over their region, and can eventually make a claim on the local County, taking over as the region's nobility. Through increasing the size and influence of their dynasty, they can eventually work their way all the way up to higher tiers of nobility, eventually making a claim on the throne itself.

I think your game has a lot of potential to teach people about life and how it connects from one generation to another. My only worry is the griefer. How does CoE plan on handling the players who play solely to ruin the experience of others? In a game where permadeath exists how can players like my mother, who plays games with caring and compassion for all, be protected from players who seek to ruin the experience for others?

No surprise, that's one of the first questions we're asked when we tell people we've got character permadeath in the game. The short answer is, killing, or really any crime in Chronicles of Elyria, is illegal in most places. Getting caught for crimes you've committed forces you to pay a heavy cost. The more severe the crime, the heavier the cost. We're currently iterating on what those costs are, but they range from time (maybe a couple days) spent in a prison doing other activities, to atrophied attribute scores, all the way to spirit loss.

No matter which form of penalties we ultimately go with, the punishment for crimes committed will almost always be worse than the impact of the crimes themselves. For example, if you coup de grace someone and cause them to lose spirit, you'll lose the same or more spirit if you're caught.

The end goal is that crimes in Chronicles of Elyria are possible, but discouraged. We want criminals to have to think carefully about risk vs. reward. So while stealing, pillaging, killing, etc. are possible in the world, we want players to do them for a reason – a game-specific reason other than just for the fun of it.

After the game launches we'll continue to tweak the punishments such that maybe 15% of players actually have the stomach for being criminals. I know that doesn't sound like much, but 15% causing random havoc is more than enough to add interesting story elements – which is really why we allow crimes at all. More opportunities for dramatic storytelling.

In addition to punishment for crimes, it's also about opportunity. If you know your chances of getting caught increase the closer you are to a populated town, the more likely you are to perform your criminal activities outside the reach of city guards. This creates a natural safety buffer around town, where the more remote the area, the more likely you are to be ambushed. This is nice as new players or those less confident in their skills can stay closer to town where it's safer.

Many games crown kings or emperors based on how many points a certain player earns. This usually places a person concerned with themselves in the leadership seat which doesn't usually end well for the rest of us. How do you plan to put the person who is interested in leading, shepherding, and governing their people in a place of leadership. Not by earning self gratifying points but by leadership ability. How do you plan to get "we" thinkers instead of "me" thinkers in a place of power?



That's a great question, and one I haven't heard before. The short answer is that in most cases, the role of nobility and the title of Count, Duke, or King (or their female equivalents) has to be earned through successful leadership. Aside from the statistical stuff we'll add to help gauge how successful you are, you are always at the mercy of public opinion.

When you first become a Mayor in a region, you gain a new user interface that acts more like a town management simulation. You'll be able to break the parcels of land up into zones and specify where markets should go, blacksmiths, inns, taverns, etc. Each new building constructed by the town's members will help add value and resources to the overall community. If you're an effective Mayor, and everyone prospers, you'll be able to stay in power longer.

As you grow your influence, as the town gets larger, and your dynasty develops, you may eventually be able to become a Count. As a count, you're now

responsible for a larger area of land, and multiple towns or Keeps. Now your focus is much more on resource management. You need to make sure your region has appropriate military defenses, a thriving economy, and enough trade to keep your region in the supplies that it needs. As with before, if you're an effective leader your entire county will prosper. If not, you'll be ousted by a pretender and lose your role as Count.

This same process continues as you advance to Duke, and then eventually to King, where you can set national laws and tax rates. At each step of the way your ability to advance depends on your popularity, your success in managing your estates, and the prosperity of your domain.

I would like to take an opportunity to talk about Guilds. How will guilds tie into the big picture? What is your vision for communities within CoE?



When designing Chronicles of Elyria we've thought hard about why people play MMOs and have attempted to cater to wide variety of player needs. We've also thought a lot about different player scenarios. In particular, we've thought about individuals playing solo, couples who want to play together, small groups of friends, families, or co-workers who might enjoy playing together, and finally the larger established guilds out there.

For each scenario, we've tried to ensure there's a path of progression and something for each of the groups to do. In the case of in-game guilds, they've really been designed with the larger player guilds in mind.

Guilds in Chronicles of Elyria are a bit different than guilds in most games. In CoE guilds are businesses and are more like traditional guilds. There's blacksmithing guilds, tanning guilds, assassin's guilds, and even thieves' guilds. In all cases, the guilds employ members of the community to perform services for them. In exchange, the guild provides services such as exchange of information, access to resources, and the ability to produce or perform their trade faster.

One of the main differences is that in most MMORPGs guilds are intentionally centralized. If there's a guild hall, it exists in one location. In Chronicles of Elyria, it'll be fairly common for the guilds to stretch across multiple counties, duchies, or even kingdoms. Seeing your guild's sigil on a smith, an inn, or bank lets you know immediately that you're among trusted members of your guild. Whether or not they're friends or not, is debatable.

One of the other differences is that you can be in multiple guilds simultaneously. That is, you can be a member of a blacksmithing guild, as well as

a thieves' guild. However, it would be a conflict of interest for an identity to be a member of multiple blacksmith or thieves' guilds simultaneously. So if you want to perform any kind of espionage, you'll need to don a new identity and put on a disguise before you attempt to join that second thieves' guild.

How large can these communities get? What role will they play in the game world?

There's really no limit to how large they can get. With the ability to distribute your guild across multiple locations, appoint middle managers, etc. they could quite easily reach hundreds or thousands of players for the larger guilds.

As to what role guilds will play, their services, or lack thereof, could have huge impact on a region. And if an aggressive guild wants to attempt to create a monopoly in a region they could make it difficult for other smaller crafters or organizations to form. I'm excited to see what kinds of cartels are established, and what the community and in-game governments will do about them.

Can they take ownership in towns and villages and use that ownership to help others and benefit the player base at large?

That's the idea. Good guilds will establish themselves in starter towns to help provide services. In exchange, they'll have a constant supply of customers to help them fund their business.



What is your rough timeframe for deployment? Are you looking at 2016 for early testing and launch sometime in 2017? Or is it more distant than that. Granted game development is organic and nothing stays the same or goes according to plan, but in the perfect storm when would you like to see the product launch?

You're absolutely correct. We're still in early development and so the "Cone of Uncertainty" is still very large. In particular, we're currently self-funded, but that's going to have to change in early spring. We'll be running a Kickstarter campaign which will determine how much additional capital we have to work with. Once we know how much money we'll have to fund the game, we'll have a clearer picture of when the game is likely to be finished.

With that said, we have a good idea of when we'd like the game to be available to our players. At the moment, we'd like to be feature-complete by the

end of 2016 with some closed alpha testing, with additional testing and an extended early access happening the first and second quarters of 2017, and a broad release date of Q3 2017.

What platforms will the game be available on? Will it be region locked? Can players from all over the globe play together?

The Unreal Engine is portable across a lot of different platforms and operating systems, so we're leaving our options open. However, we're testing and developing on Windows PCs at the moment and that's the experience we're optimizing for.

As for regions, we do plan to host servers in multiple regions – NA, EU, AU, and JP, for example. Whether or not players will be able to play across regions is still undecided. The approach we're taking is to assume there is cross-region play until we discover a reason there shouldn't/can't be.

This issue of Gaiscioch Magazine is titled “Dream Builders”. Now, I know this game has been a passion of yours for a very long time, but you’ve just been able to pull a team together in the last year. Can you tell us what it’s like finally building your dream?

It honestly hasn’t sunk in yet. I mean, on the surface it feels amazing, but also a little surreal. I absolutely love seeing the game come to life within my team. I also really enjoy interacting with the community the way we do.

We knew early on that the unique nature of this game would require crowdfunding to get it funded. But because we know the community are our investors, we’re bringing them along with us every step of the way. We do weekly Q&A’s on a community member’s YouTube channel, we’re as open and honest as we can be in our forums, and we’re almost always in IRC answering questions. We really feel like if the community is going to help make this game a reality, we need to treat them with the candor and respect they deserve from the very beginning. Not just when we’re asking for money.

That all said, actually being here and making this a reality is a ton of work. There’s no shortcuts. As the head of a small studio I wear a lot of hats. I’m currently acting as the Technical Director, Creative

Director, Producer, the HR person, the accountant, the IT guy, and one of the programmers. That means that on any given day, at any given time, I’m doing something CoE related. There really isn’t much down-time right now and it’s been literally weeks since I’ve played a video game, other than what we’re developing.

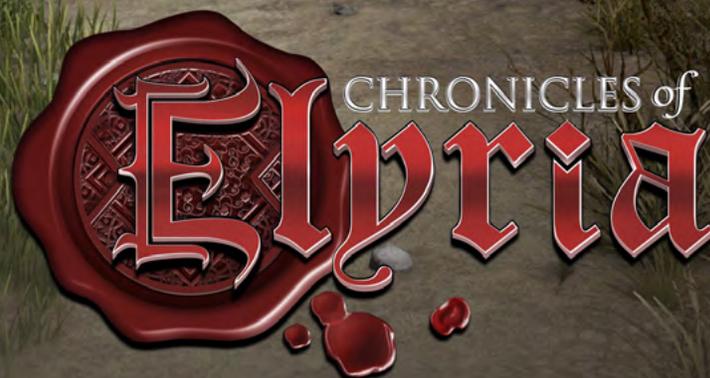
Is it all worth it? Absolutely! At the end of the day, the hard work feels like I/we are really earning our keep. There’s something extremely gratifying about putting your all into something. Putting your all in, like you’ve never done before. It’s such a great feeling to just let the work become your focus and really let your dream consume you.

Final question, what do you hope players take away from playing CoE?

We really want them to take away that it’s all about the journey, not the destination. Each of us have an opportunity to tell our own story, and live our own lives. This is true both in-game, and out-of-game. Whether we’re talking about Elyria or Earth, we each have a unique set of memories, skills, and talents that define who we are. And whether we’re talking about Elyria or Earth, and no matter what your religion, each life matters. You should take every opportunity to develop yourself, connect with those around you, and decide what legacy you’ll leave behind when you’re gone.

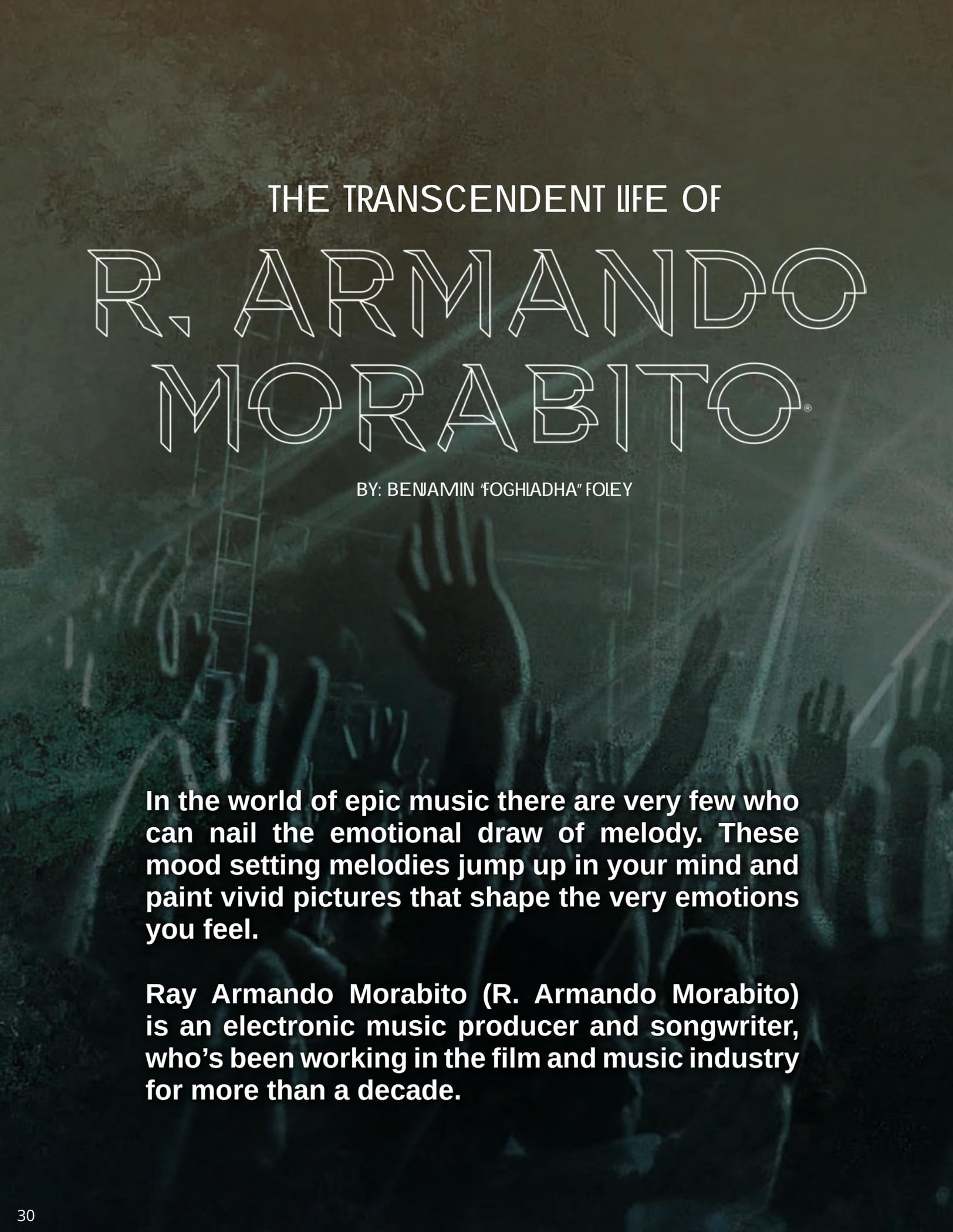


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THE TRANSCENDENT LIFE OF

R. ARMANDO MORABITO®

BY: BENJAMIN 'FOGHIADHA' FOIEY

In the world of epic music there are very few who can nail the emotional draw of melody. These mood setting melodies jump up in your mind and paint vivid pictures that shape the very emotions you feel.

Ray Armando Morabito (R. Armando Morabito) is an electronic music producer and songwriter, who's been working in the film and music industry for more than a decade.

Thank you so much for sitting down and discussing your art, music, and life with us today. First off I'd like to give you a chance to introduce yourself. Can you tell us a little bit about you and your life so far?

Thanks so much for having me! About my life- well I was adopted from India when I was 6 months old, and spent the first 23 years of my life in Italy. I was always passionate about music and films, and after my Bachelors studying Art History and Semiotics, I felt like I wasn't going in the right direction and wanted to explore other career paths. I was accepted to the London Metropolitan University and got my Masters in Filmmaking / Directing. I spent the next four years working on commercial projects and writing music for my own films and other friends' films for fun. I was lucky enough

to direct commercials for Levi's, Kodak, Audi, and one of the TV spots for the BBC covering the Beijing Olympics.

In 2009 I moved back to Italy and continued working as a director and also opened an advertising agency. We did marketing campaigns for clients mostly in the medical field. I met my wife Tina in 2013 while she was on tour through Italy with the Michael Jackson THE IMMORTAL World Tour by Cirque du Soleil, and we moved to Los Angeles together later that year when she left the show.

Born in India, raised in Italy, educated in England, working in America, you've seen and lived in a number of wonderful places. Out of all the places you've been which has been your favorite?

I love London, it's a beautiful city and I have many friends

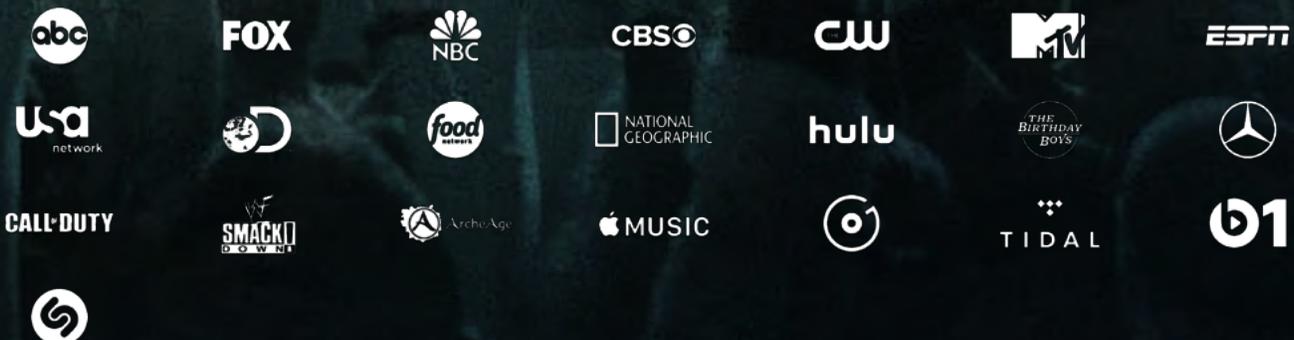


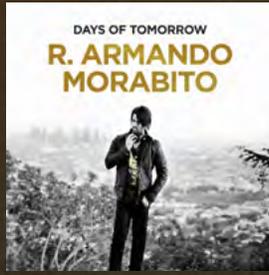
there. I have so many great memories from my years living in the city. I've lived in Los Angeles for two and a half years now and still feel like a tourist sometimes, but so far it's pretty awesome.

When did you know that music was going to be your passion and you wanted to turn it into a career?

I always loved music but only started focusing on music as a main career path two and a half years ago when I moved to Los Angeles. I was encouraged by good feedback on the

music featured on





songs I posted on Facebook, SoundCloud and Youtube and that gave me a push to continue down this road. My fans are the reason I make music.

But you didn't stop there, you chose to go higher by pursuing grander dreams including the creation of your own Marketing and Advertising company. What was the motivation behind starting a full on Marketing studio and what lessons did you take away from that experience?

Marketing and advertising isn't my main thing, but I use the skills I learned from the past for my own products, as well as, my wife's.

Now I have to ask. How did an entrepreneur & music producer from Italy cross paths with the world-renowned cellist? How did you meet Tina Guo?

I first discovered Tina from her work in Inception and seeing her in a YouTube video of the live performance at the movie

premiere. I started following her work, and saw that she was coming to Turin, Italy with the Cirque du Soleil. I messaged her on Facebook and that's how we met.

I understand the two of you formed a second business, a music production company. How did this business differ from your marketing studio? Were there a lot of similarities in business processes that easily transitioned to the new company?





We formed MG Music Int'l, our production company, when we started collaborating on songs. Now, Tina is in charge of the business side and I do most of the music production.

Can you give us some insight into how your typical project comes together? Say you land a deal with a new MMORPG on the market to create a song for a trailer. What is the creative process that you go through? Do they give you the video and you write the score to it or do you produce the music and they build the video around it? What are the steps in completing the project?

It depends on the situation. A lot of our music is licensed, and that placement along with others was done through APM Music. Clients look through databases and pick tracks that fit their projects.

Recently, I was asked to write original music for a trailer for an upcoming feature film, and the picture

was edited to match the music.

What is your creative process in writing music?

Writing music for me is a bizarre process. I don't read music although I did study piano when I was really young. I somehow forgot everything except for the basic playing process, which I use to program all the music and instruments in a song or score. I'm very lucky to live in this age where the technology allows me to produce full works with my limitations. Usually I start a writing session with some random playing and warming on my keyboard with Logic Pro X open, and sometimes good ideas come out from that. I always save the good ideas in separate files and then go back the next day to listen and decide if it's something to delete or expand musically on.

I started making music when I was 17, also on the computer, so I'm not a composer in the traditional sense- I think of myself more as a music producer

and songwriter.

So far you've released one album "Days of Tomorrow" in 2014 and word on the street is that you're working on a second album as we speak. Do you have an estimated timeframe for the second album's debut?

I'm aiming for a 2016-17 release for my next album, "My Infinity". The new album is going to be very different from "Days of Tomorrow." It will feature songs with featured singers and the genre will be in the Electro and Progressive House / EDM vein.

I've noticed in your latest songs a little bit of trance and dubstep influence sneaking into the songs. Can we expect more of this in your new album?

Yes, I feel like my two latest releases, which are both remixes, define my transition to this more electronic style. The first type of music that I started writing when I was 17 was EDM and I'm going back to my roots.

What type of tools and techniques do you use in producing your music tracks?

I use an Apple Mac Pro computer with Logic Pro X and use a variety of samples and plugins. I rarely use live musicians except for featured singers or soloists. I produce all of my music in my studio here in Los Angeles.

Now your creative talents go well beyond music. What other forms of art do you enjoy?

I'd love to go back to directing some projects at some point, probably starting with my own music videos.

What achievement are you most proud of?

I'm really grateful to have fans that are very supportive of my music. I've never had fans before and it's a great feeling to know people enjoy my art. It's an honor to be able to put out music for them.

If you could offer one piece of advice to a young entrepreneur, what would it be?

I don't think I'm an expert on this and my wife Tina would be better to give you an answer on this because she's an amazing business person aside from being a great Cellist. I'm grateful to have her as a partner on the business side.

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REINVENTING THE THRONE WAR SIMULATOR

By: Benjamin "Foghladha" Foley



For those of us who remember Shadowbane, you can recall many epic battles fought among rival clans. Both with swords and with politics, the Throne Simulator was born. J. Todd Coleman was at the forefront of this new form of PvP MMORPG as one of the creators of the game Shadowbane.

Today, J. Todd Coleman joins us for a first look at his evolution of the Throne War simulator in the form of Crowfall.



Thank you for agreeing to this interview. We're all really excited to see Crowfall come to market. Can we start by having you tell us a little about yourself and your background?

Sure. My name is J. Todd Coleman, and I make MMOs... that's basically my career in a nutshell. In college, I studied business management and computer science and I've been an entrepreneur (basically) since graduation. I have an odd blend of "business management" skills (production, marketing, fundraising) and game design (writing, systems design, database design.)

My first venture was a database tools company called "Reliant Data Systems," which was an early player in the ETL space... but that's boring, so let's not talk about it. The only important fact is that my ex-business partners and I sold that company to Compuware Corporation, and

then we used those funds to start Wolfpack Studios, our first game company.

Wolfpack was created with one purpose: to create Shadowbane, an MMO that focused on territorial conquest in a fantasy world. You can see echoes of the Shadowbane vision very clearly in the design of Crowfall. Unfortunately, though, the legacy of Shadowbane is mixed: it had a bold, unique design vision that many players loved, but it was plagued by technical issues at launch. Wolfpack was sold to Ubisoft corporation, and my business partner and I left shortly thereafter.

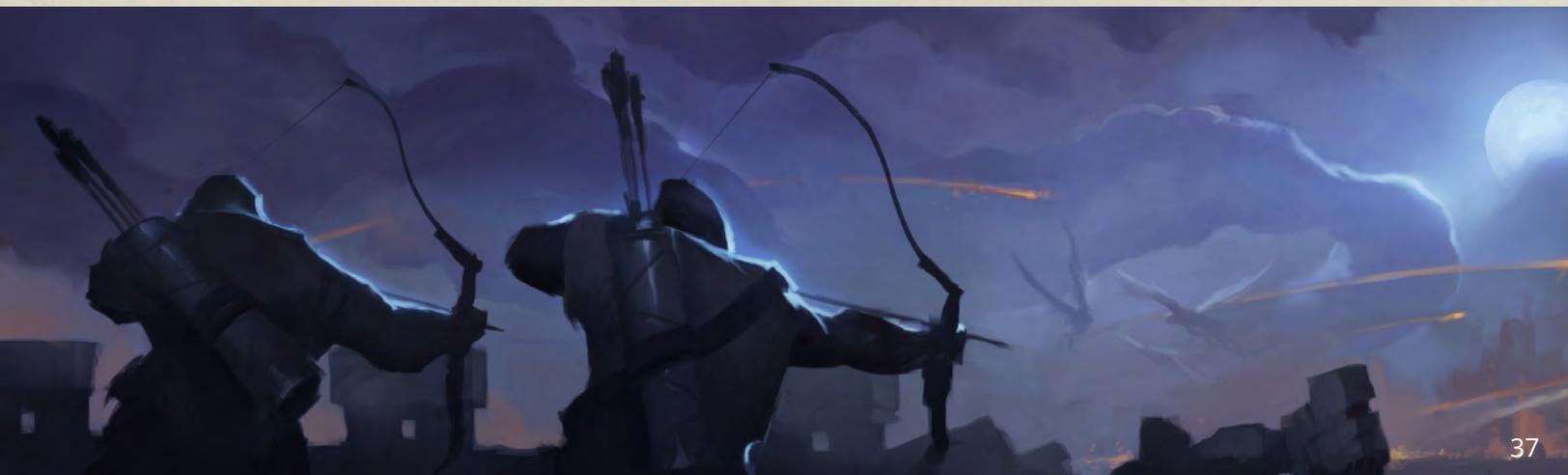
With Wolfpack behind us, we came up with another game idea – a family-friendly MMO set in a wizard school, where you collect "spell cards" to summon monsters like pokemon. That game was Wizard101 and it was enormously successful. I spent 8 years at that company, and it was a fantastic ride. But then I

left, because I felt like it was time to do something new.

That "something new" came along pretty quickly. I partnered with Gordon Walton to start ArtCraft Entertainment and build Crowfall.

In your career, if you can name one technology or technique that made the development process easier, what would it be?

In terms of MMOs, there are a few. Unity is a big win, because a significant portion of your development budget typically goes into the creation of your engine and all the tools that surround it. Cloud computing is huge, because it means we don't have to spend a few millions of dollars up-front to host your game servers; it also means that you can scale up your operational footprint almost instantly, if-and-when your game gains popularity.



And, of course, crowdfunding is making this entire new generation of MMOs possible – not just us, but games like Shroud of the Avatar and Camelot Unchained. Publishers have become increasingly risk averse when it comes to MMOs, and traditional venture capital are notorious for not wanting to invest directly in games (when they do, it's usually after the game has become a hit, and the company is looking for financing to double down on existing momentum.)

If you look at all of the interesting games on the horizon, they are almost all imports (games that did well in a foreign territory that are being adapted for western markets) or visions

that were compelling enough to attract financial support via crowdfunding.

You've seen a full range of game development and participated in the industry for most of its advancing years. Can you tell us a little about the days past of being a Game Master for the MUD Scepter of Goth?

Yeah, I was just a kid when I was a GM on scepter of goth. They hired me without knowing how young I was, because they had never met me in person.

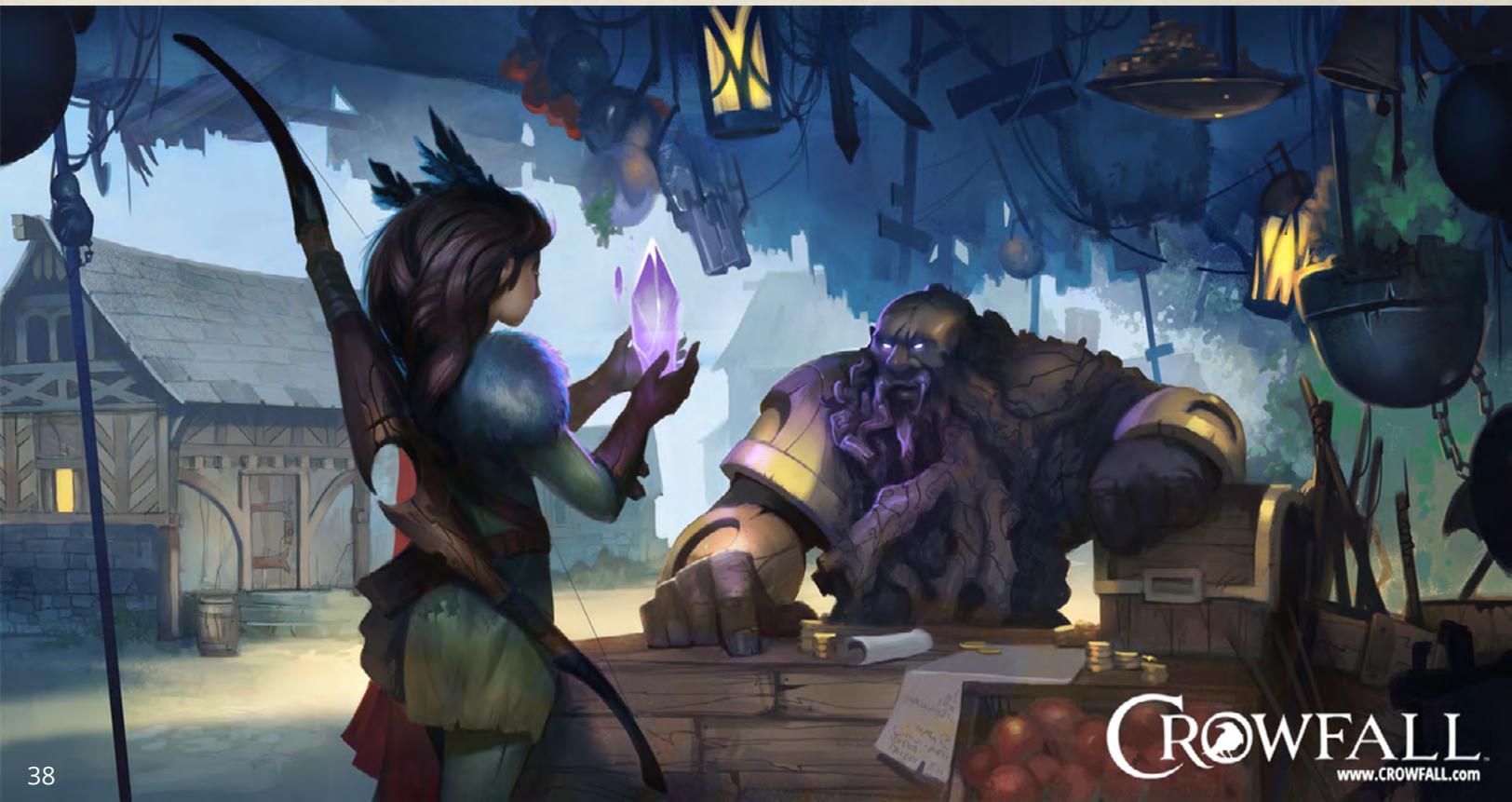
It's funny, because this was pre-textbased MUDs, which of course pre-date MMOs. Talk about "not-so-massively" multiplayer

games... Scepter only allowed up to 7 people to play at once, all via dial-up modems.

Even then, I could tell this type of gaming was special. When you add other players into the virtual environment, even just a few, it takes on a weight – that sense of shared buy-in – that you really can't get from a single player game.

I never predicted a hit like World of Warcraft, of course, but then again no one did. Not even the guys at Blizzard.

When did you know that you wanted to make games for a living? Was this something you always wanted to do?





I've always found the process of making games to be more fun than playing them. In college, though, I was told very directly by my professors: stop screwing around with games. That's not a valid career path.

I believed them, which is why my first start-up was in database tools. Even at Reliant, though, I spent most of my free time either playing or working on text-based MUDs.



You've managed to take a dream of ambitious youth and turn it into a successful career that has taken you through several of the most influential titles in gaming history. With games like Shadowbane and Wizard 101 lining your past, and the ambitious Crowfall on the near horizon, what would you attribute to bringing this dream into reality?

Well, first, I served my time on a host of games that you've never heard of. Between Scepter of Goth and Chaos Mud and all of my early (failed) attempts to make an isometric 2D mud, I clocked my 10,000 hours before most people even knew that this genre of gaming existed (because it didn't, yet.)

The other major factor is: I'm not just driven to make great games, I'm driven to build

successful game companies. That means I do a lot of things that are outside of design: pitch to investors, build and maintain financial spreadsheets, negotiate contracts, work on hiring plans. I throw myself head first into all the stuff that "doesn't seem like much fun," and doing that buys me the opportunity to keep doing the things that I really enjoy.

Let's talk about Crowfall. Can you tell us the general premise of the game?

Yes. The core of the idea is to break the traditional "amusement park" model of MMO design.

MMOs are a lot of fun, but at some point players recognize that they aren't actually affecting the world around them. It's a simple simulation, designed to continually return to a "fresh" state so that new players can

experience the same content with limited variability in the experience.

That's cool, and it certainly scales well to higher and higher player loads, but it also means that players can't really DO anything impactful. The game is made to impact them, but they aren't allowed to impact the game. Which means that they aren't really active participants in the experience. The sense of interactivity in the world is largely an illusion.

We want to change that. In a game like Civilization (one of my all-time favorites), the players aren't just -experiencing the world -- they are shaping it. You collect resources. You claim

terrain. You go to war with your neighbor until one of you wins and the other is wiped off the map.

That's the design goal we set out to solve: how do we bridge that experience with an MMO? Allow thousands and thousands of players to participate in a shared experience where the actions of one player can forever change the world?

The answer is to break the persistence in half: characters (meaning your dwarven warrior or elven rogue avatar) are persistent. You advance your character and you keep that advancement forever.

Worlds, though, are not. Each

world isn't an "amusement park" that can't be altered. It's a Campaign World, and we give the players the ability to break it. Like a Civilization map, it doesn't last forever -- it only lasts until someone wins. (Typically, a few months. but it could be longer or shorter.)

Because the worlds are temporary, because they go away forever once someone wins the strategy game, we can let the players wreck the place. We don't hold ourselves to the idea that everything in the world needs to reset for the next player. Instead, the world can be constantly changing based on the actions of (and interactions between) the players.



You can build a castle. You can burn down a forest. You can dig a moat. You can build siege equipment and lay siege to your neighbor.

We have a whole bunch of other cool things that we are doing (like the Eternal Kingdoms, where you can build your own continent with mountains and rivers and castles without fear of them being destroyed – or our passive training system, where you can train offline) ... but the heart of our vision, what makes it so unique, is the idea of permanent characters and temporal worlds.

We call it “Eternal Heroes, Dying Worlds.”

As you know in an MMO environment, community can make or break a game. How do you intend to make Crowfall a community friendly title? What type of activities can communities do together?

Well, I certainly agree with you, it is all about community -- but remember, community comes about in different flavors. Making friends and allies is only half of the equation; having a rivalry with another player (or guild) can be just as sticky.

This is an area where our game design is naturally strong. Crowfall is a game about guilds and noble houses vying for control of a virtual world,

and that means it naturally lends itself (as a condition of winning and losing) to building those allies and enemies. If Shadowbane is a good indicator, the game should have a natural stickiness that leads to a vibrant community that will play for years.

While discussing Guilds, how large can guilds become and will there be alliances?

We actually have a hierarchical guild structure. Guilds can recruit players, or sub-groups (which are basically groups-within-groups). There is a technical limit to the size, but I think it's something like “a guild can hold 400 players or sub-guilds, and each sub-guild





can contain up to 400 players.” Realistically, I don’t think players will ever hit that limit. Alliances will certainly happen; we’re not sure at this point how much of that will be through a structured system and how much we will leave it up to guilds to work out on their own.

Will there be some form of Guild Progression to give a community targets to shoot for?

Of course! Campaigns can be guild-focused (meaning you and your guild are striving for territorial control together) and that is a MUCH stronger set of cooperative goals than you’ve likely seen before in other MMOs.

We also have the Eternal Kingdoms, which are permanent servers that you can use as political and economic hubs between Campaigns. Some

guilds won’t care about the EK, but other guilds absolutely will.

We designed the game to have three vectors of advancement:

Glory (conquer territory), Wealth (build a kingdom), and Power (rule an empire).

The first of those centers on the Campaign Worlds and combat. The second is the economy layer and crafting, the third is



about the interplay between those two – the social side of the game (recruiting vassals, making allies, hiring mercenary companies, etc.)

Crowfall is well known for its PvP focus. Is there any PvE in this game? Are there safe zones where you're free to adventure without risk of being ganked?

There is PvE, but it's not

structured into a series of linear quests. The monsters exist to provide (low level) resources and to increase the threat level of the universe – like the zombies in an episode of *The Walking Dead*.

Because the Campaign Worlds are basically stand-alone games, that always means that we can change the rules between the different Campaigns. Again, to use my *Civilization* analogy, we will offer campaigns with more

(or fewer) resources, with more (or less) land -versus- water, or more (or fewer) mountain ranges.

We have arranged the worlds on a spectrum: at the one end, you have the *Eternal Kingdoms*. These never go away (i.e. they are completely persistent, like a traditional MMO), they are player-run and the owner of the world can turn on or off PvP whenever they like. We offer

Campaigns that are faction based (3 faction, 12 faction) and other Campaigns that are for guild warfare.

That's the really cool thing about ditching the traditional MMO model where every realm or shard must be the same. We get to make dozens of variations of the rules, and let the players decide, over time, which one(s) they want to play.

Pure PvP games have a long history of having an initial rush to max level and then farm the new players just coming into the game. I myself have seen this in several games and it often is the reason I quit playing. How does Crowfall intend to discourage griefing of low level players by high level players?

We use passive training (like

Eve Online) to determine advancement, and our power curve is really shallow.

Which means:

- **First:** there is no “rush to the max level”.
- **Second:** a maxed-out guy should be nervous of meeting 3 to 4 random guys in a dark alley.
- **Third:** you get to pick the type of Campaign world that you want to join.

Given all of the above, I don't think the term “griefing” really applied. Part of the game is knowing where to go, and being prepared for the conflict that you might find there.

So the endgame is to take the throne. You've seen several games in recent years try this. Most of which were unsuccessful in making the

mechanic fun for anyone other than the king/queen. Some make the king/queen a God which can wipe out armies by himself, some make the king/queen make the soldiers around them stronger. What is Crowfall's take on the royalty system and how does it play into the game?

If you recall, earlier I mentioned that the three vectors were Glory, Wealth and Power. Our goal is to make those three separate tracks; you don't “win” the Power game and suddenly get a huge artificial influx of combat skill (Glory) or resources (Wealth).

A lot of games tend to cross these lines; in order to be a great crafter, you HAVE TO level your character through combat. We're trying to keep those separate, otherwise (to steal a quote from the Incredibles), “if everyone is





special, no one is.”

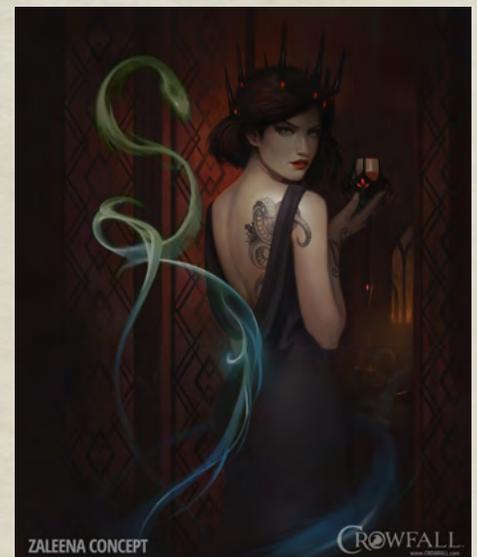
If you want to be great at combat, you need to work at it. If you want to be an amazing crafter, you need to work at it. If you want to be a legendary monarch, you’re going to have to work at that, too. Some of it will be social capital (who you know and recruit),

some of it will depend on skill advancement, some of it will rely on your ability to “manage” your kingdom effectively. This play style is the most free-form, as it really requires you to work with other players and “negotiate” what it means (and what it requires) to be a monarch.

How does one become a king

or queen? Is it based on who plays the most or is it based on actual leadership ability?

There isn’t an artificial system for it. Yes, we have a guild management system coming online. We also have a fealty system that allows you to recruit vassals and carve up





your kingdom and delegate the management to those vassals.

But those are tools. The political track is really free-form; there isn't a series of repeatable tasks (or a mini-a game that you can play) to "become politically powerful." It's all soft skills, dealing with your fellow players.

As a fan of siege warfare, I

have to ask, How are siege weapons controlled? Is it a skill based style (like Worms, Artillery, or Guild Wars 2) with hold and release for distance and angle or is it a select a ground target to aim and fire at (like Warhammer Online, Dark Age of Camelot and Elder Scrolls Online)? Also will it be free placement or fixed

placement?

We're working on this system right now, and it's the focus of a large update that is coming later this month... which means that we aren't ready to talk about it yet. We'll be answering these questions, soon, though as our next big deliverable is Siege Perilous and it focuses on castle destruction and siege mechanics.





We're hoping to get that into testers hands in March.

Lastly, what advice would you offer to a young ambitious version of yourself, what pitfalls would you avoid, and what lessons should they embrace?

Education is helpful, but my lessons didn't come from a "game design" class (because they didn't exist at the time). I'm sure those programs are cool, so ok sure, take them if you can – but not at the expense of getting a broad base of knowledge: history, literature, creative writing... honestly, find stuff that

really interests you and learn the hell out of it. The things that you find interesting are the things that will worm their way into your game visions, years later. No one is going to hand you a bunch of money to make your dream game. It doesn't work that way. There is typically only one reason people-with-money will



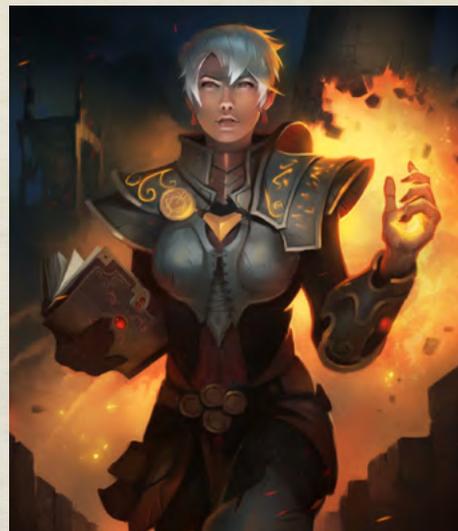
give you money: so that you can make them more money. You need to figure out (and be able to convincingly explain) how you can turn \$20 into \$2000, or \$1 million into \$100 million. (Unless you have a rich uncle, I guess. I don't know, I don't have one.)

Find partners. Some people are multi-talented and can do everything. I'm not. Most people are not. So figure out what you're good at (for me, it's design and writing) and find

other people who aren't good at that. Partner with those people.

At the beginning, the quantity of your work is FAR more important than the quality of your work. The story of the child prodigy, who sits down at a piano and magically plays Beethoven at age 4, is a great story. It's also completely false. Are some people naturally gifted at things? Sure. But in my opinion, that pales in comparison to experience. Make games. Write stories. Design games that you'll

never make. Every time you do it, no matter how bad it turns out, the next time will be a little better. Do it long enough, and you'll get good. Do it good and someone will hire you. Then you can learn to do it great. And when you can make something great, you'll have something to show to someone-with-money and make a convincing argument that they should trust you to turn \$1 into \$100. And THEN you can make your dream game.



CUSTOMIZE HERO

APPEARANCE | RUNES

♈	AMBIDEXTERITY	-5
♁	DEMONIC BLOOD	-10
♋	POOR EYE SIGHT	+10
♏	EAGLE EYE	-5
♌	ERUDITE	-5
♊	FLEET FOOTED	-10
♋	GIANT'S BLOOD	-15
♁	DIM WITTED	+10
♎	LUCKY	5

CREATION POINTS **5**



♀ FROSTWEAVER

INFO | PROMOTION CLASSES

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH	+10	40	DEXTERITY	+5	65
SPIRIT		20	INTELLECT	+5	45
ARMOR		80	MOVEMENT	+10	115

STATISTICS

WEAPON DAMAGE	21-38 ▲	WARMTH CONVERSION	80%
CRITICAL HIT CHANCE	15% ▲	DASH COUNT	3
CRITICAL HIT DAMAGE	141% ▲	LIFE ON HIT	15
POWER DAMAGE	120%	HEALTH REGEN	10/s
POWER COOLDOWN	0.5 s	HUNGER RESISTANCE	12% ▲
FIRE DAMAGE	11%	FIRE RESISTANCE	3% ▲
ICE DAMAGE	28%	ICE RESISTANCE	18% ▲

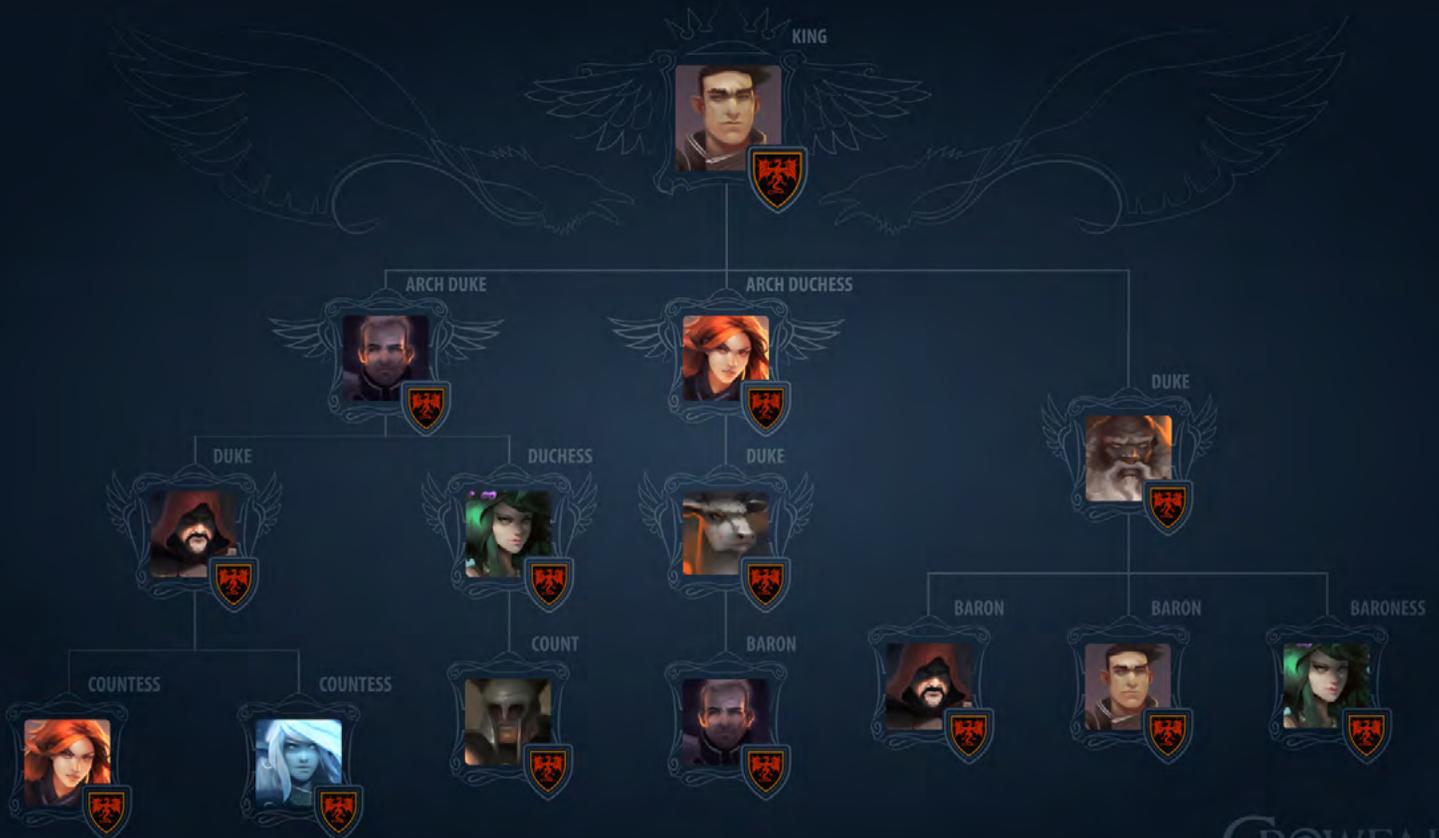


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DAS TAL

BRINGING PVP TO NEW HEIGHTS

By: Benjamin "Foghladha" Foley

If you have been around the gaming scene for awhile you have seen the rise of the Massively Multiplayer Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) into stardom. More recently we have seen the ascent of the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA).

In spite of the "multiplayer" similarities there are very few games that have successfully created a synergy between the MOBA and the MMORPG genres. Das Tal hopes to be one of them. Its stylish looks and unique concept is intended to break the barrier between the

two gameplay styles and create a new generation of gaming.

Das Tal is an open world survival arena that brings MOBA tactics and Sandbox MMO strategy into one coherent picture. The game rests on the three defining pillars: Meaningful Conflict, Skill-Based Combat, and Constantly Changing Worlds.

Recently the Gaiscioch Magazine had an opportunity to sit down with the Das Tal development team and discuss their interesting and innovative title.

Greetings and thank you for joining us today to talk about Das Tal. Before we get started can I have you tell us a little bit about yourself and your role with Fairytale Distillery?

Thanks for having me! I'm Alex. I've been dreaming about Das Tal for many years and today I wear many hats in the studio. As the Game Director I am the person who has to make final decisions about everything related to the gameplay. As the Managing Director I am in charge of all things business -

which generally means making sure that every team member can pay their rent in time. There are many other jobs like giving interviews, doing the taxes and wiping the office floor, but these are the most important ones.

Das Tal is built on three defining Pillars. The first of which is Meaningful Conflict. Can you tell us a little about what this means to you and how we can expect to see it pan out at launch?

Meaningful conflict is my way of saying that our game is all about PvP. It's the core, bread-and-butter play experience that we love. But not in the way that you might have in your average

Counter Strike or Chess game where winning or losing a single round often does not mean much. In Das Tal there is always a reason why you fight and there are reasons to sometimes not. For example your clan might want to take over a major source of obsidian in the game world. Very likely this will turn into a large-scale war with many other guilds – but maybe you'll decide to go for a diplomatic approach instead. Because you know that such a war will take a long time, will be costly and full of risks. It might end up threatening to take away the settlement that you built over weeks. And believe me – defending your possessions in such a siege fight comes with a lot more adrenaline than a couple of short arena game sessions that

you might otherwise have played on that evening.

The second pillar is Skill-Based Combat. How does Das Tal bring Skill-Based content into the game? What is the typical length of a fight?

Skill-based combat means that we give you 100% freedom in how you use your abilities. In Das Tal you freely aim every single ability and they generally do not distinguish between friend and foe. So if you decide to throw a massive fireball into a group of combatants then you need to make sure it does not hit a stray ally of yours and blow up your own group accidentally. Same thing goes for healing abilities





– if you're not careful then you might well heal the enemy tank instead of yours. Though sometimes this might actually be something that you want to do depending on your strategy.

Fight length depends a lot on the circumstances. If you run around solo, you might encounter someone and play cat-and-mouse for two minutes. A team fight for a resource spawn or other key locations might take 15 minutes. And a massive settlement siege or the end game event can take a couple of hours.

Now there are some really innovative pieces of combat in Das Tal. Can you tell us a little about the unique features that Das Tal brings to combat?

I've already talked about the pure skill-shot and friendly-fire part of combat. There are other aspects, too. For example, every character has a very limited line of sight and – amongst other things – a blind spot in their back. So there is ample room for backstabbing when you approach your enemies from the right angle. You could also

hide in tall grass and set up a great ambush. But one thing you have to be aware of is that every character in Das Tal leaves behind footsteps. So while you might think you are the hunter you might well be the hunted – bounty hunters can easily trace your steps if you are not careful.

From the game world side, Das Tal offers Constantly Changing Worlds. Can you explain to us what this means and what we can expect to see?

Constantly changing worlds

“Constantly changing worlds mean that we intentionally limit the lifetime of every game world.”



mean that we intentionally limit the lifetime of every game world. And when this world ends, there are some winners and many losers. And then we go again and play on a new game world where everybody starts on even ground. But this time around, things are different. There are of course other players around, new allies and enemies. But we also intend to change both the game world and the game's rules for each server. So while you might have found a player settlement in one spot of the map in your last game, this time you might find a mob camp. So exploration is always a big part of playing on a new game world.

And we go even further than that. We even change the rules of

the game with each world. So in one game world there might be absolutely no magic damage. But instead we might have low gravity and increased run speed. And maybe on this game world you do not have unlimited respawns but instead a certain amount of lives? The possibilities and combinations are endless. Every game will be a new exploration not only of the world space but also of the possibility space and game balance.

One of the major driving factors for communities is City Building in Das Tal. Can you explain to us a little about the city building plan and how guilds and communities can help build the game world?

Settlements are important because only here players will be able to craft the strongest gear, upgrade their combat abilities to the maximum and – in general – find a safe space for awhile. And while we believe that being in a clan is one of the best ways to play the game, we will also allow for other constructs. So for example next month we'll add the functionality for clans to open their settlements to other players –newbies, lone wolfs or allied clans. There might be a cost attached to using the clan facilities and that's intended – we want lots of bartering and the creation of long-term alliances to happen.



PvP isn't all that Das Tal has to offer, I understand that there are several random events that take place through the game world and offer exciting PvE content for adventurers and guilds to participate in. Can you give us some insight as to what we can expect to see?

There are always events going on in the world of Das Tal. Some of them are very common, such as meteors made of precious materials crashing down in the valley that you can loot once you've defeated their guardians. But you will always have to make sure that you defend them from other players as well. The same goes for bigger events such as caravan raids, the daily fight

for resource spots or even the massive end fight that concludes every game world. There is always a very strong PvP component attached to every event – even though the event might not spell that out explicitly. That's what happens when you create an Open PvP game with no safe zones or criminal flag nonsense.

Now for my personal favorite, Siege Warfare. There's nothing like the smell of burning oil and greek fire. How does Siege Warfare tie into Das Tal and how large of sieges can we expect?

Sieges in Das Tal are always multi-stage (and multi-day) events. In the first phase you

have to drop a war offering close to your target settlement and defend it for only a couple minutes. A day later in the second phase you really have to set up shop outside of their walls and again defend your claim on the siege. And every clan that comes by can decide to challenge you and – if they defeat you – continue the siege. Once this has been decided, the very last phase of the siege happens a couple days later on a time specified by the defender. Here, the fight will engulf the whole city and for the first time make its city walls attackable.

Are siege weapons skill shot based or are they ground target based?

There are no siege weapons as of yet. When we add them, expect them to be 100% skill-based as the rest of our combat system is.

Guilds will be a critical part of this game. Can you share a little about how your guild system is built? In regards to Guild Progression, Size, Rankings, Alliances, and their ability to be seen and heard within the game world.

As of now our guild system is very basic. There is a global guild chat, XP sharing and of course access to the guild's settlement. We're

also just adding the option for guild members to vote for their guild leadership. This is going to be a very interesting experiment, since guild members will be able to change their vote for the guild leader at any point in time – so we expect a lot of internal politicking to happen soon. Alliances are not in yet but you can expect similarly interesting systems.

Guilds are generally not restricted in size. So having more members is useful in many ways. Only that not all of our leaderboards are built for large clans. One, for example, is specifically designed to allow small clans to compete with large ones. It's called "efficiency" and it measures your impact

on the game world divided by how many clan members spent time in the valley. And of course more guild members mean more stray fireballs – so you might instead want to go for smaller, highly trained force for major engagements.

Will there be any out of game method for looking at a guild's progress via a website for new players looking to connect with an effective community?

Yes. Though do not ask me about the details yet. This is on our development roadmap for later this year and right in the process of being designed. I can tell you that we want clans to be entities that persist over game worlds



“Dream big. Think sustainable.”

and between game sessions. So there will be stat tracking and progression for your clan that happens outside of each game world.

Overall, as a developer of one of the more ambitious titles coming to market, what has been one of the biggest challenges of bringing this game to market?

Being short on cash and time. Our game budget so far has clocked in at under \$200,000 and we know that our colleagues who currently develop their own sandbox MMOs have budgets that are in the \$5 to 10 million region. So we obviously do not have as much cash to spend on the production of art

assets, which required us to be very creative and frugal in this department.

We also do not have as much time to spend on communications and marketing. So while other teams might be able to release 20 minutes of video interviews per week, we have to be very selective in how we spend our time. While other studios would just have told their PR agency to talk to you, at Fairytale Distillery you get myself to talk to. Which is a ton of fun – but obviously means that I did not spend the last hour working on the game design.

If you could offer a piece of advice to others who might be dreaming of becoming

a game developer, what would it be?

Make games. Start very small. Do game jams. Meet other developers. Dream big. Think sustainable. Do not ever ask for permission. Have fun.

Where can we learn more about Das Tal and get involved in its development progress?

Depending on how often you want to hear from us I'd send you to our [mailing list](#) (updates every other week), [our blog](#) (updated weekly) or our various social media profiles.







PLATFORM GAMING: INDEPENDENT THROUGH THE AGES

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RISE AND CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF INDEPENDENT DEVELOPERS IN GAMING

By: Edward "Screenager" Orr

Recent history is littered with the vapid carcasses and wasted potential of unsuccessful games. Hulking monstrosities are regularly launched onto the red carpet with all the slick gloss that only AAA game studios can muster, dazzling the buying public with charm and eventually ending up on the covers of the gaming rags for all the wrong reasons. No matter how enormous the studio, experienced the developers, or talented the designers, abject failure is easy to achieve. However, between the shelves of generic shooters and incremental sports sims, a few genuinely original titles still stand out amongst their peers and continue to bring adventures to players.

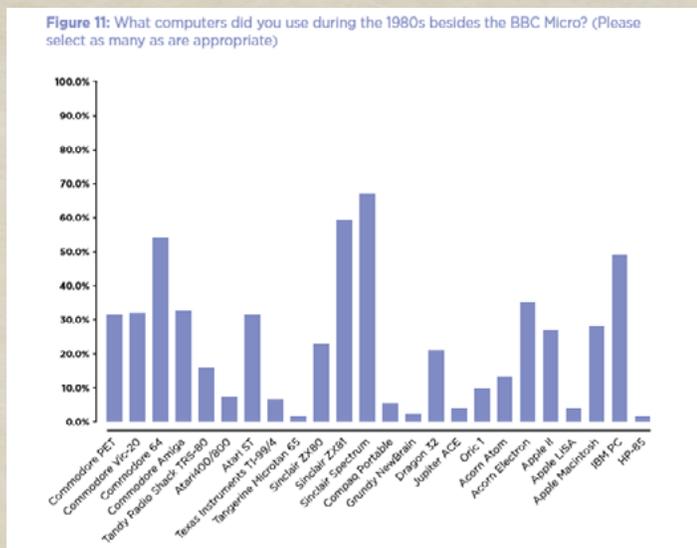
THE BEDROOM CODER

Some of the most individual and innovative titles to adorn our screens do not necessarily come from large studios. Rather, they are born of independent thought and original concepts. These are the

successes of the independent sector. Small teams and bedroom coders have been part of the gaming industry for almost as long as home gaming systems existed. These dreamers were initially able to bring quirky, crazy, and creative ideas to reality thanks to the early era of home computing. A fortuitous explosion in microprocessor technology in the early 1970's and frugal economics produced a series of systems that entered homes with little functionality beyond their core operating system and the BASIC programming environment. While this was not ubiquitous across the market, the BASIC compiler allowed end users to construct, manipulate, and control what the box in their front room actually did. From reprogramming software, hacking code, to building their own fantasies, the emerging home computing market brought about the birth of the indie scene.

THE LEGACY OF THE MICROPROCESSOR REVOLUTION

A swathe of affordable, easily to access computers gave players the tools to start building their own worlds and engaged a generation of innovative software developers, in the seventies and eighties. Respondents to a Nesta survey (Blyth, 2012) on the legacy of the BBC Microcomputer revealed that the majority of participants initially engaged with computers such as the Micro, Atari, and Commodore during this period and used them predominantly to play games and code.



Above Graph taken from (Blyth, 2012)

This, in part, helped cement a legacy of computer innovations. Some of the UK's most successful software developers started programming during this period. Richard Jones, a founder of Last.fm, began programming on the BBC Micro. The Sinclair ZX81 even influenced the town of Dundee, where a cluster of development studios produced smash hits like Lemmings and Grand Theft Auto.

The impact of the computer revolution cannot be understated but its impact was felt far before the turn of this century. Ironically, early game studios,

of the type that sprouted in the seventies and eighties were compared to modern day indie teams by Edmund McMillen of Team Meat (Parker, 2011) and this is somewhat true. Games such as Manic Miner, Populous, and even Football Manager are examples of titles born of this creative spark which still resonate in today's market.

The first incarnation of a football management simulator kicked off in 1982 and was developed by Kevin Toms, a professional computer programmer from England. His inspiration spawned a whole series of management simulators and the name Football Manager is still used today. Sports Interactive's own Football Manager was developed by two British brothers, Paul and Oliver Collyer, in the early 1990s and released under the name Championship Manager. The Collyer brothers represent a story that typifies many independent developers at this time. They developed the Championship Manager game in their bedroom and initially published the game on the Amiga and Atari ST, in September 1992. Despite a lack of interest from some major publishers, the success of the game led to a series of sequels that span multiple platforms and continue to be global hits. The latest iteration still ranks in the UK top 30 (GFK, 2015) games chart at the end of 2015. The fate of the Championship Manager franchise also typifies the current state of the gaming industry.

As gaming moved out of a period of revolutionary growth, originality waned and the influence of mavericks faded. Iteration replaced original thought and financial realities took hold. Massive studio titles, sure fire hits, and open goals are the dominant feature in the remainder of today's charts. The market is now ruled by the biggest players on the pitch. Huge studios and massive games accompany revenues (Gibson, 2015) that

now far exceeded the traditional video and music industries. This appears to be an ongoing trend despite the increasing dominance of the largest studios, many independent developers are finding an audience.

STEAM AND THE RESURGENCE OF THE INDIE

Valve's Steam platform now serves as the largest single digital distribution platform for video games on the Internet. Steam users spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year, but it has only recently risen to prominence. Steam was unveiled at GDC 2002 as a method of updating games when the largest publishers and retailers held an iron grip on the gaming industry. Now, it is a colossus, generating massive revenues for game producers (Chaing, Steam and Valve Worth Billions, 2011) (Chaing, Valve Online Mayhem, 2011) and allowing independent developers a major avenue into player's homes.

The pervasiveness of the Internet is a significant factor in the rise of Steam and the following success of several independent developers. As with many industries, new technology played a disruptive role and undermined the traditional status quo that existed between publishers and physical retailers. As the reach and throughput of the Internet grew, it allowed many developers to use digital services, such as Steam, to take their games directly to customers.

Audiosurf is a rhythm based puzzle game and one of the earliest break out indie hits on steam. It was created by Dylan Fitterer and published by his own company, Invisible Handlebar. Players spend their time careening around a track, riding their music, and competing for the best possible score. As one of the first games to leverage the Steamworks

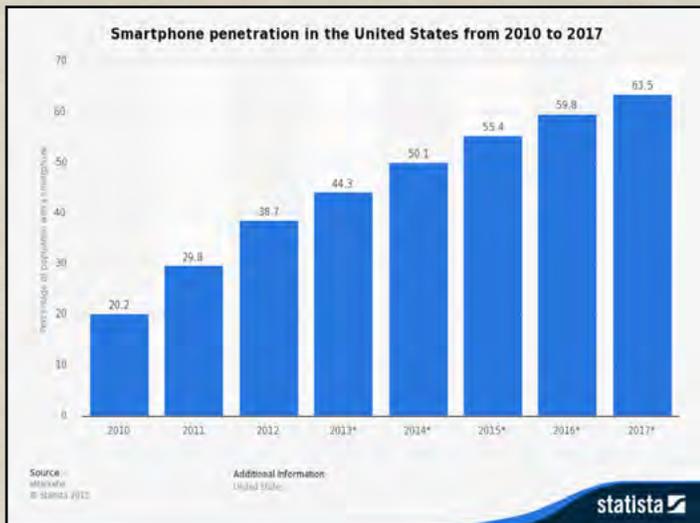
SDK, it quickly topped the Steam sales charts after releasing in February 2008.

This was followed by a multitude of titles including Castle Crashers, World of Goo and, later in 2011, Limbo. Each of these met with phenomenal critical and financial success for their creators. They signaled a change in the existing dichotomy between large studios and publishers. A deluge of additional distribution avenues now exists across multiple platforms. Steam, Windows Store, Xbox Arcade, and PlayStation Store all allow small and independent developers to bring new adventures directly into the public's hands.

Developers that embraced digital distribution quickly found an audience. Castle Crashers made over \$25 million and Minecraft, thus far, has sold over 20 million copies on PC and MAC platforms. This makes Minecraft one of the most successful titles of recent times and cost Microsoft roughly \$2.5 billion (Centre, 2014) to acquire. Primarily created by Markus Persson and maintained by Mojang AB, it is a sandbox experience that allows players to build their own adventure from the ground up using a variety of virtual tools. Simple graphics, no narrative, and a dependency on emergent gameplay enables Minecraft to subvert many of the traditional tropes of a chart topping video game.

Minecraft did not just top the steam charts, it continued to sell millions of copies across various platforms. In 2011, it exploded onto mobile platforms with Minecraft: Pocket Edition, selling more than 30,000,000 copies. Minecraft: Pocket Edition became a success in its own right and still remains the most popular paid iPhone app (Top iPad Games, 2015) across various territories.

Mobile gaming has embraced an astronomical surge in recent years. Driven by a fortuitous series of circumstances, devices that are increasingly inexpensive, efficient, powerful, and interconnected have fueled the incredible market growth in mobile computing. It is expected that over half of the population of the US and China (Smartphone Penetration China, 2016) (Smartphone Penetration US, n.d.) will own some type of smartphone in the next few years. Countless millions of people carry computing power that easily outstrips the Apollo missions. Both Moore's and Laws predict that this trend is unlikely to change soon and by extension, the mobile user base will keep on growing.



Find more statistics at Statista.com

JUMPING PLATFORM

Mobile gaming revenue is, similarly growing and may reportedly overtake traditional console income (Gaudiosi, 2015) in 2015. The massive expansion of mobile has similar parallels to the evolution of home gaming. The spirit of the bedroom coder has also found new life in the mobile market. While the 90s sounded the death knell of the bedroom coder, with Nintendo even dominating 90% of the console market (Goodkind, 2014) at one stage, the turn of the century is delivering a revolution in the

palm of players' hands. Industry experts such as David Darling, co-founder of Codemasters, have emphasized the importance of this new platform (The BBC Microcomputer and me, 30 years down the line, 2011) and today's mobile charts already feature Mojang, Telltale, Coffee Stain, and Bossa Studios. Each of these independent studios have embraced the mobile market and enjoyed substantial rewards for this innovation. Solitary developers can also succeed in the mobile market, just as during the early era of home computing. Nguyễn Hà Đông created Flappy Bird in just a few days, using spare assets and forged an infuriating simple game. The title harks back to games produced by early independent developers, with simple gameplay and a considerable challenge. Flappy Bird's surprise success resulted in \$50,000 (Terdiman, 2014) a day in advertising revenue for the one-man operation.

Mobile gaming will continue to provide a valuable space for independent developers to create but as this market matures the room for standout innovation is likely to shrink. The commanding influence of the largest entities can already be seen in games like Clash of Clans and Candy Crush, dwarfing indie sales and grossing upwards of \$1 billion during 2014. (Infographic: 2014 Digital Games Year in Review, 2014) Supercell even spent \$9 million on their Superbowl advertisement for Clash of Clans, spending more than Monument Valley made throughout 2014. (Crawley, 2015) (Monument Valley in Numbers, 2015) Blizzard's recent acquisition of King, makers of Candy Crush Saga, for \$5.9 billion and NCSoft's recently founded Iron Tiger studio highlight a definite step change in the mobile marketplace. Successful AAA publishers are bringing more titles, and money, into the hands of gamers which will compete with independent titles.

A NEW REALITY IN GAMING

As the margin for success tightens in mobile gaming, innovators will continue to create new experiences on alternative platforms. Virtual Reality (VR) has come to public prominence with the launch of the Oculus Rift Kickstarter campaign and the initial release of the first development kits. Since 2012 a multitude of titles and several exquisite technical demonstrations have appeared. Capcom's Kitchen and Sony's The Castle are both fine examples of what VR can achieve but they have been superseded by adventures that bring players into a whole new world.



A myriad of independent and original creations were showcased at the 2015 Oculus E3 presentation. RPGs, to platform adventures, and mind bending puzzles all wowed the viewing public and one of

these was Esper, by British studio Coatsink. A relatively small team of around twenty-something developers, Coatsink was founded in 2009 by Tom Beardsmore and Paul Crabb. By 2015 the studio released Esper, a collection of mind bending ESP perplexities. Esper challenges players to complete a collection of puzzles using a series of gravity defying powers and after launching into the Gear VR store, received critical acclaim.

Esper isn't the only British indie developer to showcase the power behind the upcoming VR revolution. Bossa Studios, creators of Surgeon Simulator and I Am Bread, have expanded from PC and mobile markets into VR. Surgeon Simulator ER throws players into an alien operation, drawing on all the shaky physics and utter nonsense that makes the original Surgeon Simulator so much fun. It utilizes the incredible power of the HTC Vive headset to draw players into the game and add a whole new element of insanity to the experience. As part of the HTC Vive's showcase line-up, it appears that Bossa Studios understand the importance of continuing to expand into emerging markets.



Sony, Valve, Oculus, HTC, CCP, and Google are just a few of the larger names invested in the VR market and it will undoubtedly be a competitive space. With analysts predicting dramatic sales of associated hardware, in the millions, during the next 12 months there is definite confidence that the public is ready for a lucrative step into VR. As these new markets emerge, innovators and independent developers will continue to create new experiences. VR and AR have already been

highlighted as a potential disruptor for mobile gaming (Digi Capital, 2015) and the agility that small teams have, allows for faster movement than the gargantuan monoliths of the AAA world. Technology is progressing at an astounding rate and gaming is reaching out into new realms. While independent developers are able to take risks, innovate and reach consumers directly, the era of the bedroom coder is far from over.

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GUILDWARS



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Heart of Thorns Survival Guide

By Susan “Lakshmi” Warren

Many players find the Heart of Thorns expansion bewildering. Intricate, layered maps and tough enemies make it very challenging to find a safe path through the region. Masteries can help enormously with both these problems, but the ol’ “chicken and the egg” riddle comes to mind: *how do you survive long enough to earn those masteries?*

2. Bouncing Mushrooms
3. Exalted Markings
4. Updraft Use

There are many more masteries beyond these basics. For a more in-depth look, see the ***Guide to Heart of Thorns Masteries*** article in this issue.

MASTER MASTERIES

Most of this article will try to answer that question, but first let’s look at why masteries help.

Masteries make it far easier to get around the Heart of Maguuma. You can glide over chasms, stealth past enemies, catapult to difficult-to-reach places and even teleport across the map. They are very useful—and fun!

The first four masteries you should get, in order, are:

1. Basic Gliding

FILLING THE XP BAR

While it’s true you should focus on getting those four masteries first, there’s a catch. How can you earn the experience to unlock those helpful masteries *without first having the masteries?*

The too-simple answer is “just play Heart of Thorns.” Complete events, kill enemies, explore, do adventures, harvest, do the story, etc. While that’s certainly where the XP comes from, there are some tactics that will help you get XP faster, and with less frustration.

TACTIC #1: START STURDY

The masteries you earn in HoT are shared by all your characters. For your first character to set foot into HoT, choose one that excels in survivability, DPS and mobility. Later, when you've unlocked some "getting around" masteries, you'll find HoT is much more enjoyable on your less durable characters.

TACTIC #2: BOOST YOUR "ALL SOURCES" XP RATE

There are two broad categories of Experience boosts in open world content: Experience Per Kill boosts and Experience From All Sources boosts.

"All sources" XP boosts are particularly powerful for Heart of Thorns content. In addition to experience from kills, you also get xp from events, map completion, exploration, harvesting, some achievements, and finishing story chapters.



All sources experience boosts come from only three sources:

- **HoT-era Experience Boosters.** These add 50% to all experience gained while in a HoT map (except from crafting). You can buy a 2-hour version from the Black Lion cash shop, or sometimes get one in-game from an achievement chest or a Black Lion chest.

If Guild Wars 2 budget prevents you from buying boosts or Black Lion chest keys from the cash shop, consider buying the 30-minute version from the laurel merchant for 1 laurel each.

- **Guild XP Gain.** If your guild hall has unlocked this buff, you can get it for free from Nathan the Bartender. It adds up to 10% more experience.



- **Fireworks.** Setting off fireworks from the Lunar Festival gives you a buff for another 10% experience. Each firework buff lasts only 5 minutes, but you can set off several to stack up to 2 hours duration.

Use all three together and you'll get up to 70% more experience for everything you do in Heart of Thorns. This provides a very noticeable increase to your mastery XP progress!

TACTIC #3: XP IN A BOX

There are several types of HoT "bouncy chests" that reward XP, and the "all experience" boosts affect them! The XP is awarded as the bouncy chest is cleared, not when you open the chest from your inventory.

These are the common HoT bouncy chests and the base XP they contain:

- **Map cycle chests, varies by Contribution and location:** up to 90,000 XP
- **Hero Challenge daily chest:** 34,671 XP
- **Adventure daily chest:** 13,335 - 24,003 XP
- **Adventure first time chest:** 26,6670 - 80,010 XP
- **Map completion chest:** 8,001 XP

With max "all XP" boosts of +70%, each hero

challenge daily chest is worth nearly 60k experience! At that rate, just 9 hero challenges would fill the XP bar for a tier one mastery.

TACTIC #4: MORE XP FROM KILLS

You'll get plenty of opportunity to kill mobs in HoT, and fortunately the "experience from kills" boost is pretty common. You'll get it from:

- **Pre-HoT Experience Boosters, including Enchanted Reward Boosts:**
+50% XP from kills
- **Food and utility buffs:**
+10-15% XP from kills
- **Killstreak Experience Boost:**
+10% XP from kills per stack, up to +100%
- **Banners:**
+10-15% XP from kills
- **Communal Bonfire:**
+10% XP from kills

Another way to get more experience from kills is to target enemies that don't get killed often, since these offer bonus XP.

ON THE (META) CLOCK

Fighting in a group to advance the zone meta event is a great way to get experience from both events and kills, and earn the mastery points you'll need to complete your mastery unlocks. It's also a great way to get loot and help with harder fights.

Unfortunately the metaserver system can make it quite challenging to find an active map, since players are often shunted to empty maps. The workaround is to use Looking for Group tool (LFG) to find and taxi to an active map.

You'll also need to know *when* to look for a group. Just like the Vinewrath in the Silverwastes, you might choose to taxi in a bit before the main event. Alternatively, just like the Silverwastes, you might prefer to get more XP and currency by working on the smaller events leading up to the final fight.



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Event timers

(Redirected from Event timer)

This page contains a visual representation of the events across Tyria at the current moment in time. It displays world bosses, meta events in the Dry Top, and meta events in the four Heart of Thorns maps.

22:13 UTC (14:13 UTC-8) Next 2 hours

World bosses

14:00 [&BE4DAAA=] The Shatteror	14:15 [&BMIDAAA=] Svanir Shaman Chief	14:30 [&BLAAAA=] Modniir Ulgoth	14:45 [&BEcAAAA=] Fire Elemental	15:00 [&BNQCAAA=] Golem Mark II	15:15 [&BEEFAAA=] Great Jungle Wurm	15:30 [&BHoCAAA=] Claw of Jormag	15:45 [&BPcAAAA=] Shadow Behemoth	16:00 [&BKgBAAA=] Admiral Taidha Covington
14:00				15:00 [&BNUGAAA-] Karka Queen	15:15			16:00 [&BNABAAA-] I equal the Sunless

Dry Top

14:00 Crash Site	14:40 Sandstorm	15:00 Crash Site	15:40 Sandstorm	16:00 Crash Site
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Verdant Brink

14:00	14:10 Night Bosses	14:30 Daytime	15:45 Night	16:00 Night	16:10
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Auric Basin

14:00	14:45 Challenges	15:00 Octovine	15:20 Reset	15:30 Pillars	16:00 Pillars
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Unlike the Silverwastes, however, Heart of Thorns maps run their meta on a two hour cycle. There are several apps and web pages that show an HoT event timer, but one of the easiest to remember is on the official wiki. In fact, you can open it from in-game using the following command:

/wiki event timer

The timer apps do a nice job of showing you what is happening now, but they don't show you when players tend to put up taxis. I've added blue arrows to the HoT Meta Clock illustration article showing the typical times to taxi for the "main event".

Here are some LFG tips to catch the main

- event in each map:
- **Verdant Brink.** In LFG, look for "VB T4" about midway through the "Daytime" phase.
 - **Auric Basin.** In LFG, look for "AB meta" about midway through the "Pillars" phase.
 - **Tangled Depths.** In LFG, look for "TD meta" about midway through the "Help the Outposts" phase
 - **Dragon's Stand.** Instead of using LFG, waypoint directly to Pact Base Camp waypoint. Arrive at least 15 minutes before the map resets and join a squad. After reset (and dying), revive and taxi

to the squad leader. You want to do this as quickly as possible, since the leader's map often fills very fast. Once there, drop the "taxi" squad and join the squad for your lane.

In my experience, this is the most reliable way to get into an organized Dragon's Stand map that will complete the meta successfully. If you decide to use LFG instead, try to get into a map as close to the reset time as possible.

If you are looking for folks to help with map completion or achievements, open your own group in LFG and taxi people to your map. Alternatively, use /map chat to group up immediately following the meta on a busy map.

SURVIVING THE JOURNEY

Enemies are quite a bit harder in Heart of Thorns than in the parts of Tyria we've enjoyed for the first three years of the game. To survive (and thrive!) you'll need exotic gear or better, a good build and a few tricks up your sleeve.

For builds, I often run one designed for sPVP. These tend to offer a little more survivability than dungeon builds, but still have enough DPS to let you progress at a comfortable pace.

For skills, I recommend you consider:

- **Dodge & Evade.** If you haven't mastered dodging yet, now is the time! Additional skills or traits that add more Evades are super helpful in HoT.



- **Projectile Reflection.** There are some new archer enemies in HoT, and they hit like a freight train. If possible, keep a projectile reflect or block skill handy. Or plan to avoid these monster hits by dodging.
- **Stun, daze, knockdown, launch, pull.** These “hard” CCs are the key to quickly breaking a Defiance bar to deprive your enemy of it’s big attack, and make it vulnerable to your DPS.

A venerable gem of military wisdom helps here too: *know your enemy*. Some of the most deadly new enemies are easily countered when you learn their tells.

More than anything else, I recommend

patience and a sense of fun. Heart of Thorns is a huge region, with plenty of places to get lost (and plenty of ways to be defeated). If you find HoT intimidating, try going ‘bite-sized.’ Every map is organized by outposts (or lanes), so one good way to really learn a map is to master each outpost before moving on.

Personally, I find Heart of Thorns a beautiful, rewarding, and engaging place to spend my time. As you unlock masteries, learn your way around and develop ways to fight the new enemies, you may start to agree!





A Guide to Heart of Thorns Masteries

By Susan “Lakshmi” Warren

If you’ve dabbled in the new Heart of Thorns zones, you’ve surely wondered which masteries to unlock first. There are a few ways to answer this question, so let’s get started.

THE SIMPLE ANSWER: GLIDING

Nearly everything you’ll do in the new zones is better with gliding. You’ll be able to reach more places, travel more quickly and avoid lots of combat along the way. The difficult, confusing HoT maps suddenly become easy to navigate, scenic - even relaxing - once you’ve unlocked enough gliding masteries.

And how much is enough? Your goal should be **Advanced Gliding**, the rank 5 mastery. You’ll

unlock some other great gliding skills along the way, but Advanced Gliding is where it all comes together into a fun, rewarding ability that you’ll miss every time you step out of the Heart of Maguuma.

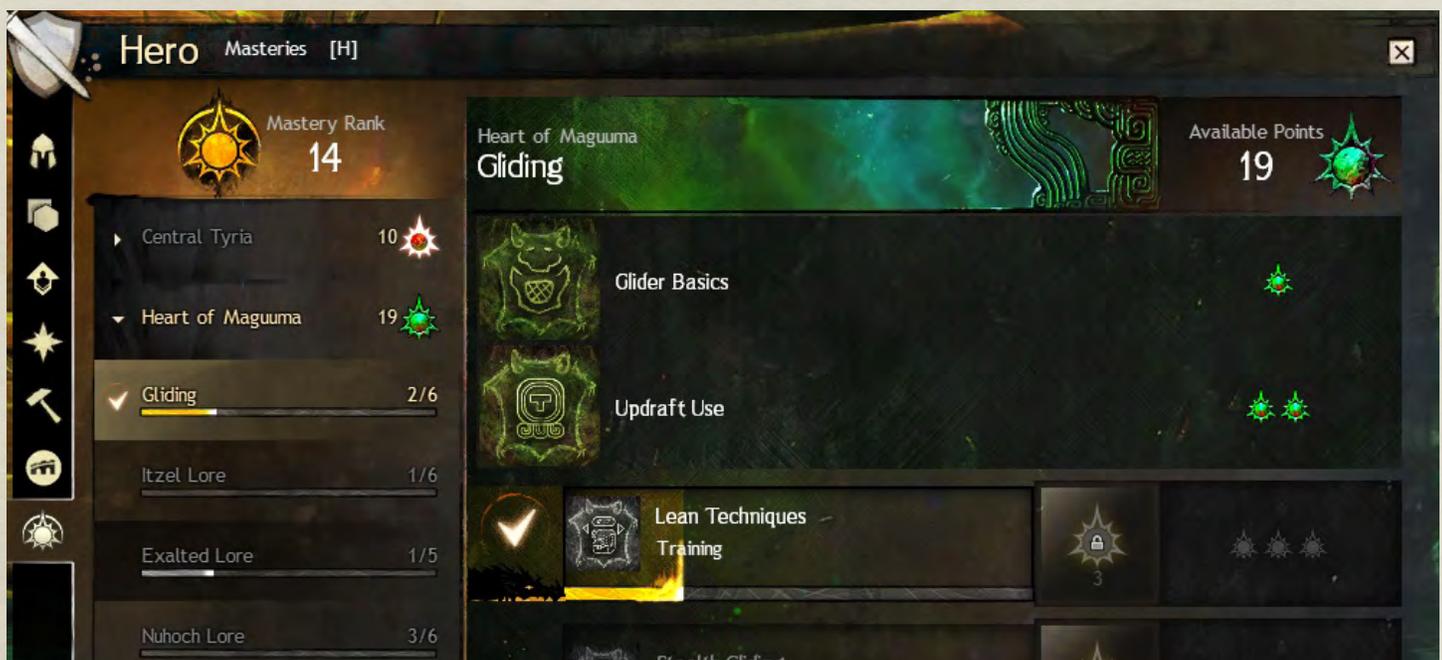
A BETTER ANSWER: SIX TO GRAB FIRST

It’s going to take a while to gather the experience and Mastery Points to unlock Advanced Gliding. Meanwhile, there are some excellent “cheap” masteries in the other lines that make it much easier to get around.

What’s more, several of these tier 1 and 2 masteries are required (or just plain handy) to progress in

the story. Here's the recommended order for unlocking them:

- 1. Basic Gliding.** You don't have a choice: the game forces you to unlock this mastery first. But it's not a hardship; gliding is incredibly useful (and fun!), even in the basic version. *Required for story step 3: Establishing a Foothold.*
- 2. Bouncing Mushrooms.** This is the first mastery in the Itzel Lore line, and it's another great way to making getting around easier. Bouncing Mushrooms catapult you to places that are slow or difficult to reach otherwise. *Recommended for story step 5: In Their Footsteps.*
- 3. Exalted Markings.** This is the first mastery in the Exalted Lore line. This mastery grants the ability to interact with Exalted devices, usually a teleporter or a door. Most of these are in Auric Basin, where they are quite useful.
- 4. Updraft Use.** Updrafts (Gliding 2) work as a sort of elevator to let you glide higher. Better still, updrafts refresh your endurance so you can glide farther, too. It's a really nice enhancement to basic gliding. *Required for story step 9: The Predator's Path.*
- 5. Nuhoch Hunting.** The first mastery in Nuhoch Lore causes additional loot bags to drop from the enemies you kill in HoT zones. Each bag contains between 5 and 105 zone currency. Nuhoch Hunting isn't quite the game changer that the first 4 masteries are, but still—more shinies!
- 6. Nuhoch Wallows.** This is the second Nuhoch Lore mastery, and the final one I recommend for everyone. Wallows are present in every Heart of Maguuma zone, and teleport you instantly to another part of the zone. Zoom zoom!



THE PERSONALIZED ANSWER: WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?

You've unlocked the basics, and Advanced Gliding is on your bucket list. But there are quite a few other HoT masteries. Which should you grab as you explore the Heart of Maguuma?

The answer: it depends on your goals. Several masteries, including some very expensive ones, have a narrowly specialized purpose. Unless they advance one of your goals, you might prefer to get something more useful first.

Here's my take on which masteries do the most to support common goals.

GOAL: EASY TRAVEL

You're harvesting, or just trying to run through without fighting.

We've already covered most of the best options for travel in the earlier answers (basic gliding, bouncing mushrooms, updrafts, wallows and of course advanced gliding). I want to highlight a couple more that I rely on for easy travel.

Blazing Speed Mushrooms. These are practically everywhere in HoT, and help in a couple ways. First they grant a 20 second speed boost. It's a little faster than Swiftiness, and even in-combat it's about like Super Speed. Very nice! In addition, running over a mushroom removes movement conditions like cripple and chill. Best of all, you also get 20 seconds of minor Quickness, so your harvesting completes a little faster. *Itzel Lore 3.*

Stealth Gliding. I use this very often to avoid or evade the enemies I pass. To activate, just tap your dodge key while gliding and you'll be stealthed for a few seconds, or until you land. Even jumping





off a nearby rock and stealth gliding for a couple seconds can be enough to outrun the bad guys!
Gliding 4.

GOAL: MAP COMPLETION

The explorer in you wants it all: every hero challenge, mastery point, achievement - the works!

Every gliding ability you can unlock helps enormously. **Lean Techniques** (Gliding 3) lets you glide a little longer, or lose a little less altitude. If you are falling just short of your destination, this might be the answer.

Several hero challenges, mastery points and points of interest are covered by a fog of insta-death

poison. To travel safely through these areas you'll need the **Itzel Poison Lore** mastery (Itzel Lore 4). It is also quite useful during the Dragon's Stand meta event, where being able to complete local events in poison areas will earn you achievements and mastery points.

Nuhoch Stealth Detection (Nuhoch Lore 4) is useful in a couple ways. It lets you see HoT mobs that are stealthed, so it's fantastic for fending off those pesky snipers and bladedancers. This mastery also lets you see stealthed mobs for achievements, and Treasure Mushrooms.

The final mastery in the Gliding line, **Ley Line Gliding**, is very fun, and if you love gliding you'll love it too. But it's optional - ley lines are uncommon and most of the content reached by ley

line gliding can often be bypassed with a mesmer portal.

GOAL: CRAFTING AND COLLECTIONS

You want to unlock great new gear and skins.

Step one is to unlock the Itzel, Exalted, and Nuhoch vendors mastery in the matching “Lore” line: **Itzel Language, Exalted Acceptance, and Nuhoch Language.**

The vendors sell a variety of items for zone currency: chest keys, new stat set gear recipes, cooking recipes, zone-specific armor and weapons, minis, tonics and collection items.

For the collections that award ascended gear you’ll also need some special-purpose masteries:

Specialization weapons

- Stealth Gliding (Gliding 4)
- Nuhoch Stealth Detection (Nuhoch Lore 4)
- Exalted Gathering (Exalted Lore 5)

Magister’s, Lightbringer’s and Warmaster’s Packs

- Itzel Leadership (Itzel Lore 5)
- Exalted Purification (Exalted Lore 4)
- Nuhoch Proving (Nuhoch Lore 5)

Luminate’s Backplate.

- Exalted Acceptance (Exalted Lore 2)
- Exalted Purification (Exalted Lore 4)
- Exalted Gathering (Exalted Lore 5)

New Legendary weapons. For the new legendary weapons, you need to unlock every Heart of Thorns mastery, as well as the Legendary Crafting line from the Central Tyria track.

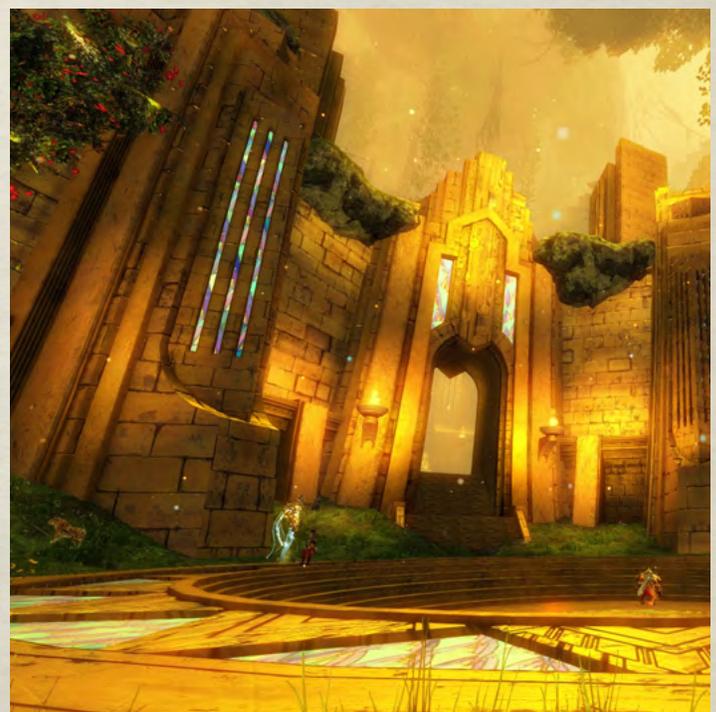
WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

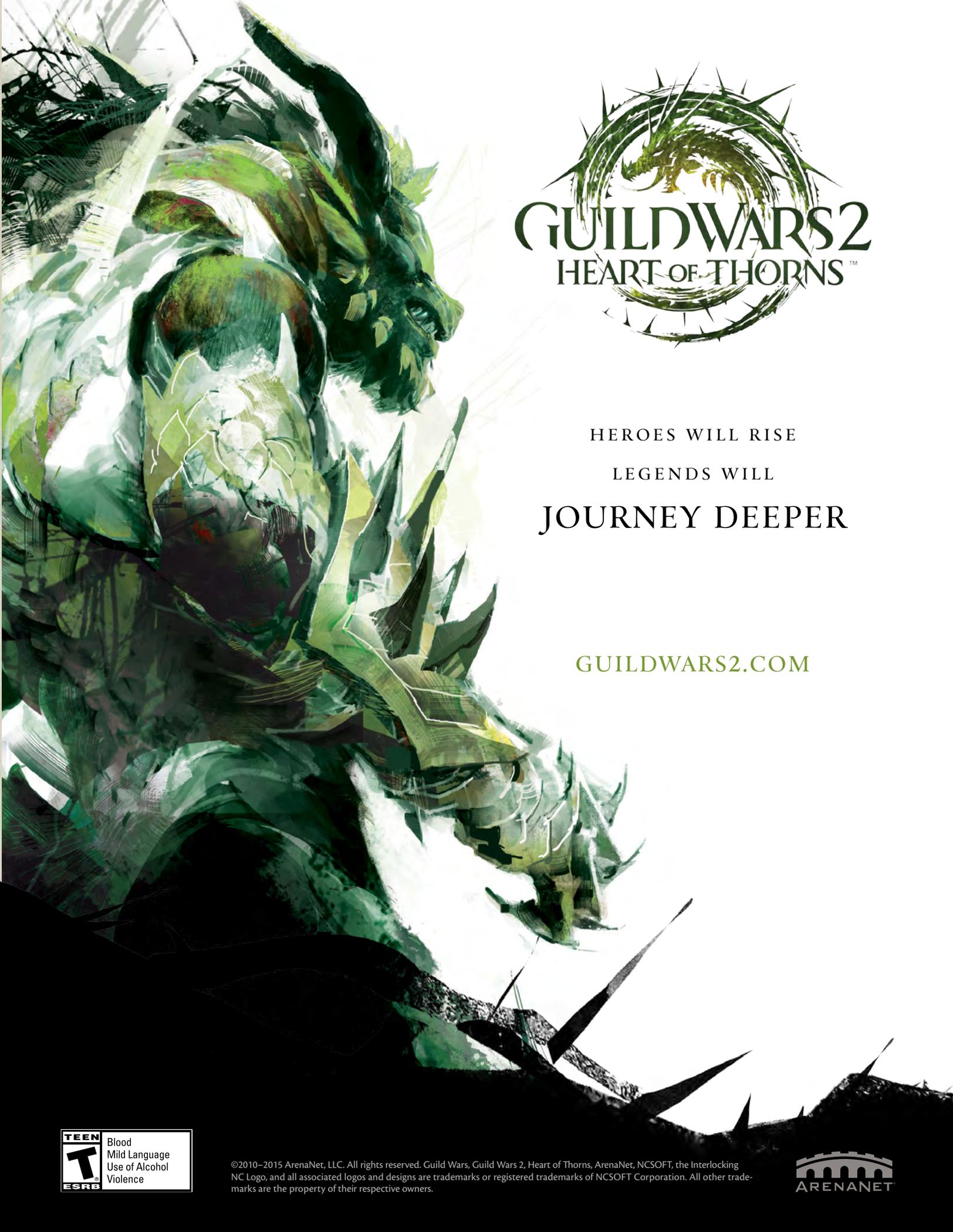
The remaining masteries can improve your ability to fight while in HoT maps, situationally.

Exalted Assistance (Exalted Lore 3). For some challenging fights in Auric Basin, this mastery lets you summon an NPC that stands by to revive a nearby downed player. It can be quite helpful if you are fighting near your Exalted helper, especially solo. In large fights like the Legendary Vinetooth, however, the NPC’s extremely small range means it often sits on the sidelines doing nothing.

Adrenal Mushrooms (Itzel Lore 6). Running over an adrenal mushroom instantly refreshes all your cooldowns, making all your skills available again -- fantastic! They can be found in open world and story instances, although there are many hard fights with no adrenal mushroom at hand.

Nuhoch Alchemy (Nuhoch Lore 6). Dodging clears chak goop, which can be quite helpful. Unfortunately, dodging doesn’t clear chak goop from pets and minions.





HEROES WILL RISE
LEGENDS WILL
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Blood
Mild Language
Use of Alcohol
Violence

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Guild Wars 2 Pro League Finals

By: Edward "Screenager" Orr

ABJURED AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

On February 20th the very first Guild Wars 2 Pro League final took place at ESL's new Studio One, in the UK. Gaiscioch was lucky enough to score a front row seat as four teams took to the stage in an effort to become Pro League Champions.

Studio One is an innocuous looking building from the outside. Hidden on the outskirts of Leicester, sandwiched amongst a corrugated forest of auto shops and timber yards, it is shaping up to be the perfect place

for ESL to showcase the very best competitive talent, in front of a live studio audience. The end of Guild Wars 2's inaugural Pro League season brought four teams to Studio One to compete for the first place prize and a share of a \$100,000 prize pool. Rank 55 Dragons and Vermillion represented the best of the EU competition, having ranked first and second during the Pro League, while The Abjured and Team PZ carried the hopes of the NA audience with them.

The introduction of the Pro League system heralded a

significant change in the way ArenaNet curate competitive play in Guild Wars 2. After a radical overhaul of in game PvP systems, including the introduction of tiered progression, existing competitive formats were demolished and the foundations of a new partnership laid with ESL. The Pro League roadmap is fundamental to this partnership and was announced by Joshua "Grough" Davis and John "Logopai" Corpening on October 14th, 2015, as part of an official blog post.

The inaugural Pro League finals



brought the best competitors together and introduced some fairly significant changes to the tested format of previous World Tournament Series. Semi-final and final rounds are now single elimination and the best of five match format is spread over 4 maps, chosen by the competing teams. The winning team now takes home a \$50,000 prize, a huge increase on previous competitions, and a new Pro League cup.

The competition format is not the only thing that changed for the Pro League finals. February saw substantial balance changes in game which disturbed a relatively mature meta. Out went bunker builds and slow creeping

scores lines and in came DPS builds, high burst damage and a hefty avalanche of kills. With barely weeks to rework existing strategies, these meta changes had the potential to throw the Pro League finals wide open, and they really did.

The Abjured were considered by many to be the tournament favourites for this final and took full advantage of the meta changes, especially against their first opponents. Five Guage, Nos, Phantaram, Wakkey, and Magic Toker put Vermillion to the sword, early in the semi-finals. The Abjured's repeated success in the World Tournament Series gave them a wealth of LAN experience and

a definitive psychological edge over their first opponents of the day, Vermillion.

Despite taking the EU scene by storm and proving themselves entirely capable, Vermillion were decisively outplayed by The Abjured. An ultimately unconvincing outing saw Vermillion, going down with a deficit of over three hundred points on their first map. While Vermillion snatched a consolation victory during the semi-final, by pushing back the Abjured on the Temple map, they were consistently decimated during team fights and their performance did not improve.

After sweeping past their semi-

final competition, the Abjured met sterner opposition in the form of Europe's Rank 55 Dragons, during the final match of the day. Rank 55 Dragons, consisting up of Oracle, Levin, Texbi, Zan, and Mancow made their way to Leicester after ranking first in the EU Pro League season. They subsequently dispatched Team PZ in the very first match of the day to setup an NA vs EU final.

With three previous members of The Civilised Gentlemen, in their roster, Rank 55 Dragons were always going to pose

a significant threat to The Abjured's hopes of another international PvP victory. From the off, Rank 55 Dragons looked to be under pressure from the NA superstars, just as Vermillion had been the previous round. While The Abjured's cries of encouragement reverberated around ESL's Studio One, the Battle of Kyhlo was won by the Americans, scoring an early victory.

The Abjured showed particular strength in team fights, bogging down opponents in battles

and hampering their ability to gain any traction. This team strength only stretched so far and as the remaining rounds kicked off Ranked 55 Dragons quickly adapted. They rotated well, refusing to get drawn into unrewarding fights and benefited from some fantastic holding actions from their resident Engineer, Zan.

After pulling back an initial loss, Rank 55 Dragons went on to chalk up victories on Forest of Niflhel and Legacy of the Foefire maps. The finals fell to Rank 55



Dragons after an outstanding performance on Temple of the Silent Storm, finished off with a triple point cap, for the first place prize.

Ultimately, whoever won the Pro League Final's would have been a worthy winner and the impact of the Pro League Finals reaches further than middle England. The Pro League is a mature strategy, well implemented and providing great incentive to get involved. Several routes into the competition, a short competitive season, significantly increased prize pools, and an actively engaged audience makes Guild Wars 2's Pro League a series worth watching or playing in. With season 2 on the way, pick up your sword or tune into Twitch for the next Guild Wars 2 Pro league.





The Elder Scrolls

— O N L I N E —

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By: Althea “Briseadh” Damgaard

Zenimax has given us a basic layout for the year with things getting vaguer the further out they are. The developers want to keep us focused on what is coming next while letting us know they have more in the works. They like to keep their cards close to their chests and not reveal details until the changes are near release on the PTS (Play Test Server).

I have to admit that I like this only because it allows them not to put some things in concrete until they are sure how they are actually going to accomplish it. I’ll do my best to sum things up because the patch notes for the first quarter release of the “Thieves Guild” is close to 50 pages or so. If I copied from the PTS patch notes, or as players have come to call them “natch potes,” I made a note to that effect.



1ST QUARTER RELEASE THIEVES GUILD DLC

Abah's Landing is where you will go to join the Thieves Guild. However, I don't see it in my map list. I won't spoil the fun, but the hint is to go check out an outlaw's refuge for a quest giver. A new Larceny system and the Thieves Guild-only passives will add to what you can achieve joining this nefarious guild. Your Legerdemaine skills will get a good chance to be leveled if you have not maxed them out yet.

Hew's Bane is a desert peninsula in Hammerfell. It contains fun areas of Hammerfell never seen in an Elder Scrolls game before. Abah's Landing is one of the most elaborate cities in the game, and it's the jewel of Hew's Bane. It includes many back alleys, catwalks and hidden alcoves. Be wary as you explore, for you never know what you might find or what might find you. Much like Wrothgar, the nodes level to your character's crafting level, your loot is at the character's level and you are battle-leveled up to fight mobs set at veteran

rank 16. Currently, the PTS has all nodes at your maximum crafting level, which is a slight but welcome difference from Wrothgar.

The Larceny System includes (straight from the PTS patch notes):

- **Guild Job Quests** - Kari, a precise Nord woman who keeps accounts of the guild's finances, as well as accounts of information and rumors runs the Guild Job Board. Travel all around Tamriel doing jobs for the Thieves Guild. These include pickpocketing, unlocking safeboxes, gathering specific categories of items for consignment requests, and more.
- **Heist Quests** - Find Fa'ren-dar, a tough male Khajiit who works on the far side of the Den, near the sewer drain exit. He runs the Heist Board. These heists require sneaking, avoiding traps, and getting in and out of special instanced heist areas with your

prize—earn special bonuses for completing the heists undetected and within the time limit!

- **Reacquisition Quests** - Seek out Spencer Rye, a fancy Breton man who runs the Reacquisitions Board, which is set up just outside the Thieves Den. Kill group bosses and complete delves in Hew's Bane. This sounds similar to daily quests in Wrothgar that many of us have enjoyed.

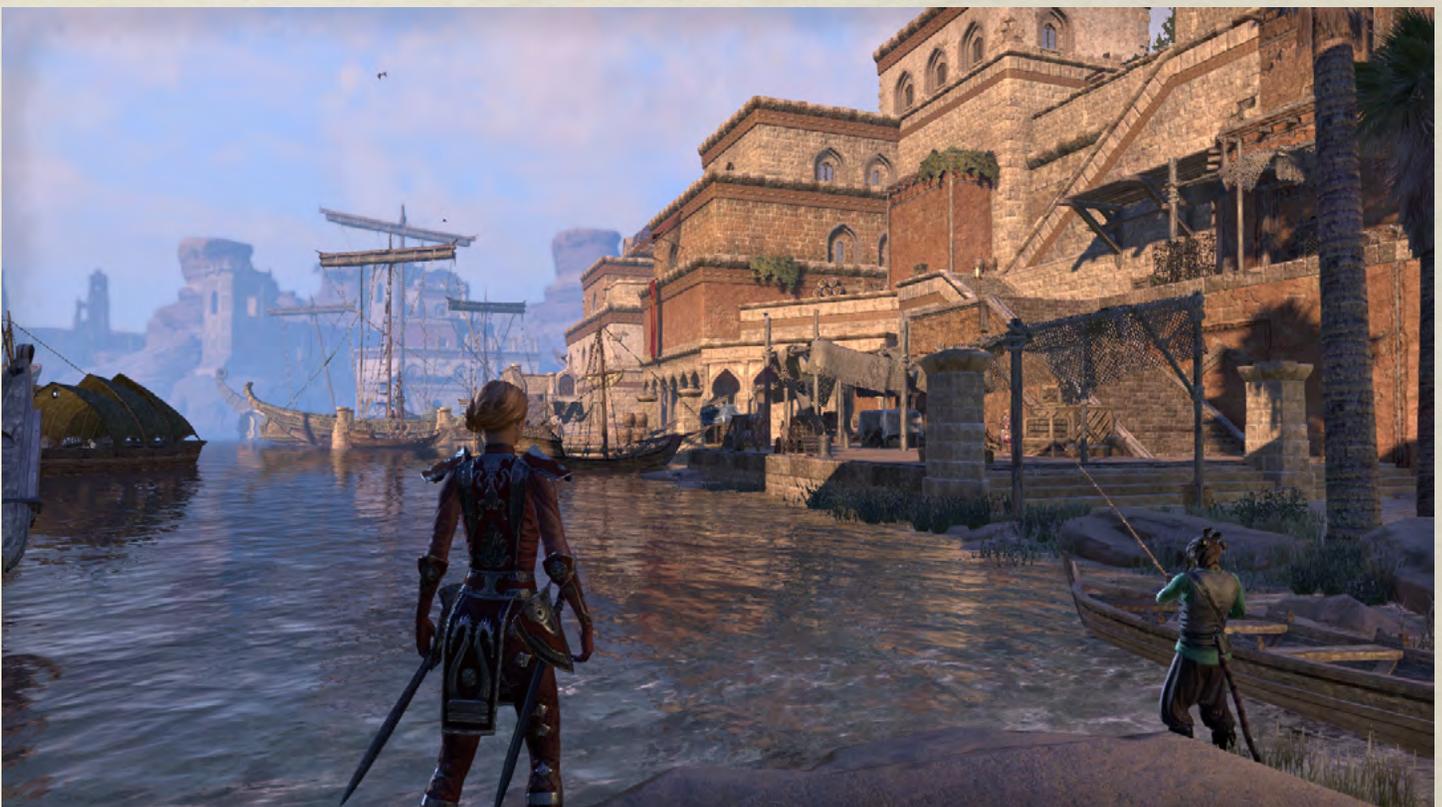
There are quite a few new criminal activities being added to the Justice System. There are three new activities, and Trespassing goes beyond picking locked doors as follows:

- **Trespassing** - There are places in Abah's Landing and at least one village nearby adventurers are not to go. Just being there will cause you problems if detected. It will be recorded on your Justice Meter just like picklocking your way into a house and being

seen. In this case, it may not even be a door you have to go through. Each entrance is clearly marked that you will be trespassing. Stay unnoticed or suffer the consequences.

- **Guild Jobs** - The Thieves Guild may request you to acquire certain items. Categories have been added to stolen goods to let you know if you have acquired the correct ones for the job.
- **Bounty Pardons** - Given the Thieves Guild has certain "connections," they may at times reward their members with documentation which conveniently erases past misdeeds (to a point). (Straight from the patch notes).
- **Hidden Panels** - Things can be hidden in plain sight, but the discerning eye may observe what the average person may not. You have the chance to find these secret stashes if you pay attention.

A full passive skill line has been added for the





Thieves guild. These six new passives will assist you with your Thieves Guild work and are unlocked as you level with the guild. They are (straight from the patch notes):

- **Finders Keepers** - Access new troves of stolen goods throughout Tamriel
- **Clemency** - Talk your way out of trouble
- **Veil of Shadows** - Reduce the range of your criminal acts being witnessed
- **Timely Escape** - Make a dramatic escape from the guards
- **Swiftly Forgotten** - You just have one of those faces that the guards tend to forget about faster than others
- **Haggling** - Get every coin you deserve for those stolen goods

NEW 12-MAN TRIAL - MAW OF LORKHAJ

An ancient Khajiiti shrine known as the Temple of Seven Riddles has been claimed by the dro-m'Athra—ancient, moon-hating spirits from the heart of the Great Darkness. The monks residing within the temple, led by Moon Bishop Kulan-dro, have all been corrupted and possessed. Now, they lurk within the shadows of the Temple, preparing

to spread their dark influence to the Khajiit of Elsweyr and beyond. Fearing the worst, the Moon Bishops have dispatched a group of Twilight Cantors to the scene. These powerful monks are no match for the evil within the temple. The order's leader, Chief Crier Adara'hai, asks for the player's help in banishing the dro-m'Athra and resealing the boundary between Mundus and the dark realm of Namiira. (Straight from the patch notes because I love how they wrote it up).

This trial can be found in the southwest section of Reaper's March and includes both normal mode and veteran modes. There are two ways into this trial, including the usual travel to its entrance or talking to Bakhum, a Khajiit on the docks in Abah's Landing to receive the quest, The Dark Moon's Jaws. This quest will take you directly to the trial.

Here's a new twist. This trial will scale to the leader's level, much like the dungeons do now. To qualify for the leader boards, you must do it on veteran mode at veteran rank 16 (VR16).

There are unique sets, including armor, weapons and jewelry, only available to this trial that can



be acquired in either mode. They include unique, group-based PvE bonuses.

NEW COLLECTION CATEGORY - ASSISTANTS

These non-combat assistants can be called up from the Collection system. You cannot have one of these active at the same time as a pet. Some of the things they will be able to do is sell or fence goods and perform banking for starters. They will not be limited to those activities.

SAVING PROGRESS IN VETERAN MAELSTROM ARENA

All progress will be saved in the Veteran Maelstrom Arena, and a new quest named “Veteran Maelstrom Arena” will be added to coordinate the saving function. You will be able to have this quest along with the already existing quest for running the veteran arena. Per the patch notes, if you make it

to a certain area of the arena and have to logout, you will have a portal to return to that point. If you choose the portal to complete the arena, you will not be eligible for the leaderboards. Due to timing and other factors being included in the leaderboard standings, you must complete all steps of the veteran arena in one run.

LOYALTY REWARDS

Starting with this DLC, the reward of a vanity pet or item, will be rewarded for every DLC pack you own. If you are a Plus member, you will have access to them while you stay a Plus member. The available vanity pets are an Echalette for Orsinium and a Jackal for Thieves Guild, both of which will be found in your Collections.

You must complete a new achievement to get these vanity pets, which occurs when you walk into the main city associated to the DLC: Orsinium,

obviously, for the Orsinium DLC and Abah's Landing for the Thieves Guild DLC.

All future DLCs will have some sort of reward associated with them.

OTHER DLC RELATED UPDATES

The DLC also includes several new sets that can be crafted or set items beyond the ones already mentioned that are connected to the trial. Some older sets are also being revamped, though the details are sketchy in the patch notes as to what specifically.

Introductory quests for both Orsinium and Thieves Guild have been added to Collections under a new tab.

GAME UPGRADES AND ADJUSTMENTS

GROUPING TOOL UPDATES

- Broken into three parts: Regular grouping, the Dungeon Finder, and the Alliance War.
- Cross faction parties without using the grouping tool. This does not include Cyrodiil or Imperial City where PvP between alliances occurs. You also will not see your party members of differing alliances outside the dungeon.
- Queuing for multiple dungeons at once.
- Bonus experience and items for completing a random dungeon. The first time will give a fairly sizable chunk of experience, but this decreases as you continue to do random dungeons. Also the first run will give a blue item and subsequent will be a green item. There is also a chance of getting a style item or style item fragment for a rare style.





64 BIT CLIENT

This version of the client will be downloaded with the patch and will open automatically on any system that is 64-bit compatible. This will fix a large number of crash issues as well as improve memory usage. For the Mac, it is recommended to have 8GB of RAM, since having only 4GB may cause a negative performance.

CYODILL UPDATES

Azura Star and Blackwater Blade will limit the Champion System. You will still earn experience towards champion points, but you will not be able to spend them while in these campaigns. You will have to wait until you leave the campaign to spend them. Also, all Champion System abilities will be inactive while in either of these campaigns.

Adhazabi, a merchant, will sell powerful item sets not available in Cyrodiil for a hefty amount of AP or gold. He will be located at the following spots: Western Elsweyr Gate, Northern Highrock Gate, and Southern Morrowind Gate. He will only be available during limited days and times. Obviously, he must have time to restock, eat, sleep,

and whatever else a merchant of such esteemed goods may need.

Forward Camps are back! There have been a few changes, as listed:

- You can respawn at the Forward Camp if you die within the a radius of it.
- The radius of a Forward Camp has been greatly reduced.
- There is a global respawn time of two minutes before you can use a Forward Camp again.
- They can be purchased from Siege merchants for 20,000 AP (Alliance Points).
- You must be at least Alliance Rank 6 to buy and deploy a Forward Camp.
- Any member of your alliance will be able to use the camp once deployed.

CHAMPION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

A lot of work went into balancing and making all the stars viable choices. The Warrior (red) and the Mage (blue) tree abilities are more closely matched to counterbalance defensive and offensive abilities. Infrequently chosen abilities have been improved

and consolidated, which should give greater build diversity. The tooltips and effects have been updated to help explain the bonuses.

New Crafting Motifs (straight from the patch notes)

This update introduces a host of new crafting motifs to learn:

- **Outlaw:** Found in the delves and world bosses of Hew's Bane from the Thieves Guild DLC game pack
- **Trinimac:** Received from Orsinium Daily Delve quests
- **Malacath:** Received from Orsinium Daily World Boss quests
- **Alliance Motifs:** Found in chests within Cyrodiil and Imperial City
- **Soul-Shriven:** Received from completing the Cadwell's Silver quest (anyone who has already completed this quest will receive this style)

- Those who complete Cadwell's Gold will receive a special item that you can perhaps wear on your head...

I rather like that little caveat at the end. Who doesn't like Cadwell and his unique headgear?

FINAL COMMENTS ON THE FIRST UPDATE OF 2016

One caveat is that all those wonderful trophies acquired from public dungeons will now have their own Collection section called Mementos. If you deleted them from your inventory, don't worry. Logging on your characters unlocks them in your collections for the ones you have completed. It's a space saver for those who wanted to keep some if not all of these just to mess with the effect.

There are plenty more tidbits buried in pages of patch notes for the PTS used for this article writing, but this sums up the major items for the Thieves



Guild DLC and the main game updates to come to live on March 7th.

ITEMS FOR LATER THIS YEAR

Second quarter will bring the Dark Brotherhood DLC and the removal of veteran ranks. Hopefully, the timing will work that I can have an article all about it for our magazine release around June 1, issue 9.

Housing - There are no details of exactly how this will fit in.

Barber Shop - it may not be called this, but there will be the concept of one. So, for all of you who hate your character's look, you will be able to adjust it by the end of the year.

PvP - This has no actual date, but they are looking at adding capture points in the various "city" hubs around Cyrodiil and in the Imperial City. They

are still looking seriously at adding instanced PvP, as well. I think we may see the capture point addition first, but saying anymore would be more speculation.

Nameplates - These are coming, though adding the guild tag to it may not happen. Part of this is because the game allows you to be in five guilds at once without needing to represent any one of them. This would force the game engine to track a lot more information. In addition, Zenimax would have to change the UI interface so that you could select which guild you want to display.

CONCLUSION

We should be seeing a lot of new things this year. The game is definitely staying alive despite various things causing delays last year. Will all the changes be good ones? It depends on the viewpoint, but I'll be sticking around to see and updating you in further articles.







AETHERIAN ARCHIVE TRIAL GUIDE

By Robert J. 'Jairone' Mann

Aetherian Archive (AA) is one of the trials in Craglorn in the game, Elder Scrolls Online. It is the domain of the Mage celestial. For those unfamiliar with the celestials, you can consider them the zodiac spirits of The Elder Scrolls series. There are several times when the mage talks with the raid group during this trial, usually to insult the players who can't possibly understand anything. Before we worry about the Mage, however, there are a number of obstacles in the way. Let's start at the first door of this trial.

The first door in AA puts you right in the action, so you should prepare before going through the door. You will need to split into groups for several portions of this trial. There are convenient tables near the door which can be used to split your raid

into three groups of four:

- A left group with three DPS (damage per second) players and a healer
- A center group with the tank and three DPS players
- A right group with the second healer and three DPS players

This preparation will help you get on your way. Have somebody designated to run the Rapid Assault skill from the AvA assault skill line. Use it just before entering the first door.

Entering the first door starts the "corridor of fire" event. A short run up some stairs and into Fire Atronachs is waiting just for you! There are three

fire walls that pop up in order, roasting people. Technically you could work on avoiding them, but there's really no need to do so. Everyone except the tank should run past the atronachs, then turn around and defeat them.

After you survive that, you'll reach the second door. This time, you will run an ice-themed gauntlet. Here is where Rapid Assault is very important, because the whirls of cold in this hallway will root players in place. By using this skill, you can avoid this being an issue for everyone at one time. At the end, two Frost Atronachs await you. Again, DPS players and healers should run past, then turn to engage the enemies.

The final hallway of elemental-based trouble is filled with lightning. Again, use Rapid Assault and just run past them. This time, however, you reach an area that is more open and face a large pack of humanoid foes. The tank should run in, and everyone should kill these foes *en masse*.

Grouping close together will allow the healers to be more effective at using their skills, especially if everyone also maintains enough health not to melt when hit with a little heat.

LIGHTNING STORM ATRONACH

The Lightning Storm Atronach will show up once the players drop down into the lower area and move close enough to the summoning platform. There are two approaches to the fight. The group can either cluster together in front of the boss while running to light beams or bunch up in front of the boss while healing hard.

ABILITIES THAT THIS BOSS USES:

- **Shocking Blast:** A single hit attack against everyone in range. This attack is of minimal threat so long as you are grouped up.
- **Light Beam:** The light beam shows up as a safety marker against the storm attack of this boss. You can ignore this if you are



trying to heal through the storm. If you are not planning to heal through it, you must run to the marked location to avoid the massive damage that the Harsh Storm ability inflicts to all players.

- **Harsh Storm:** The boss unleashes repeated attacks causing massive damage to everyone for about eight seconds. Having an off-healer and using the Nova or Veil skills at this time is important to group survival. Extremely powerful healers may manage without off-healing, but most parties will find it's more effective to have an extra healer.

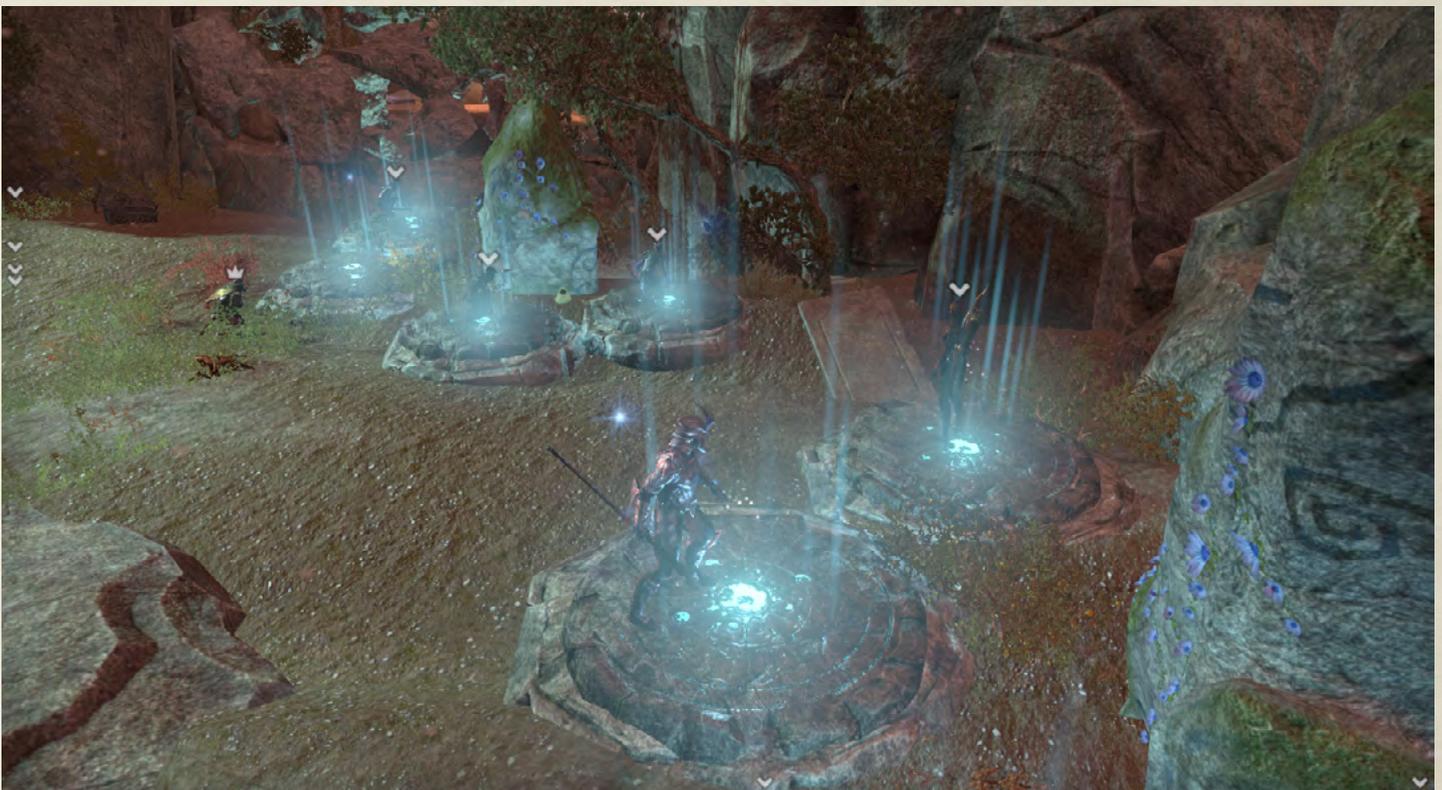
What does the group reach next? Platforms! This mechanic will show up multiple times in AA. In this section, you need three groups, since the twelve platforms are set up as three distinct groups. Remember that all twelve platforms must be activated for them to work. Each platform

should have one member of the designated group on it with the center group crouching for stealth. You can verify that you activated your platform by watching it sink slightly when you step onto it.

The left and right groups should kill everything as quickly as possible. When they are done, they should run down to join with the center group.

The center group should wait for the all-clear signal from both the left and right side groups. The enemies in the center will keep respawning unless both sides are cleared first. Once the enemies on the two sides are defeated, the center group can engage their foes.

Wait--there are more platforms! This time, they are all located in one big cluster. Activate them, and you will arrive back at the Lightning Storm Atronach area. The floating rocks will coalesce into a bridge. Give it enough time to finish, since trying to jump across the pieces can cause you to fall off the side to your death (yep, been there, done that.)





After a little fight with some foes, you arrive at yet another set of twelve platforms. Once all of these are activated, the raid group will be ported to the next boss.

FOUNDATION STONE ATRONACH

This boss fight requires coordination, and discussing the methods of dealing with the Chainspinner's vile circle of harmful chains before engaging it is very useful. Players will once again be grouping on the tank.

ABILITIES:

- **Adds:** New Chainspinners and Nullifiers will be summoned regularly. The Nullifiers are a minor issue at best, but the Chainspinners must be killed as soon as they spawn.
- **Chainspinners:** Chainspinners place a circular effect on the ground that harms

anyone inside it. These enemies target a spot near a random member of the group. This means there will be two possible locations for the chains. The first will be almost directly under the main boss. The second will be centered on the group. Clustering helps control these attacks so that players don't get trapped. No more than two Chainspinners should be alive at any time the boss is above 20% health. Moving carefully will make or break your healers in this fight, and again an off-healer can be very useful to allow a little time for magicka regeneration for the main healer while learning to get out of the bad areas swiftly. Here are some tips on how to handle these monsters:

- **Under the boss:** Step back slightly so that you are out of the area of effect (AoE) circle, unless another AoE is placed in the group.



□ **In the group:** The raid group should circle right or left around the boss. Players should move just far enough to get out of the danger spots, then cluster together again.

□ **Handling more than two chainspinners when the boss has greater than 20% health:** The group isn't killing chainspinners quickly enough with splash damage and area attacks. Destroy them and then return to attacking the main boss.

● **Pound:** The boss slams the ground several times, dealing damage to all members of the group. Healers should be using area heals for this to make the fight far less painful. This ability is not really a threat unless you are not clustered together, although a bugged instance can cause this skill to deal massive damage. If it is bugged, reset the trial.

Now the group gets to climb another set of platforms! This is like the first set of platforms, but the main difference is that once both sides are cleared the center group must fight alone. All three sides will have to cross rock bridges to move on to the next boss. The side groups should pull enemies slowly since there are far more foes this time. The raid will be overwhelmed if they try to move through this area too quickly.

VARLARIEL:

Varlariel looks like a wispmother and uses a few abilities reminiscent of them.

ABILITIES:

● **Many Drops:** The boss is constantly throwing out attacks that land in random areas. These attacks hit hard and need to be avoided. They do not specifically target players, so individuals may or may not have to move at any given time.



- **Split:** Varlariel splits off fragments that must be killed. Each time she splits, the number of fragments increases by one, starting at three. These pieces don't have a lot of health, and a few good DPS attacks should kill them in short order. Each fragment goes to a pillar in the room, starting at the pillars opposite where the group enters. Every new fragment addition will fill in pillars from back to front as the fight goes on.
- **Explode:** After splitting off fragments, Varlariel will explode. The damage of this attack scales up based on the number of fragments that are alive in the area. Killing some of the fragments is better than killing none, although ideally she will be dead before there are enough of these to be an issue.

THE MAGE:

The Mage aspect fight is a little different from the other fights leading up to this point. There are two sets of foes to deal with before the mage, with the boss spawning and engaging the party once both groups of monsters are dead. Generally, the players should group up to kill the enemies. Saving a single enemy for a while allows you time for recovery of stats. However, that time seems to be limited, and if the party takes too long to defeat it, the mage will kill the last enemy and shows up when you aren't expecting it. Prepare ahead of time for this fight, and try to hold off on killing the last enemy long enough to get in position for the Mage spawn. Then, call for the players to kill the last foe.

ABILITIES:

- **Axes:** The Mage calls upon magical axes to attack the group. The tank must taunt and hold them in place. The axes hit hard when unblocked, but DPS players and healers can survive easily while waiting for the tank to pick up axes by blocking. As the number of

axes grow, the damage increases, and so the tank will need both more healing and frequent shards to keep stamina high.

- **Mines:** Mines will appear throughout the fight at random places in the battle area. Those with a strong damage shield can remove them without dying. Use caution since mines can be stacked in one spot throughout the fight. In general, with solid DPS, you can ignore most if not all of the mines.
- **Mini-Mage:** Every so often, a mini-mage will fall from the sky. The crash landing causes damage, and it can fling you away or off the battle area. The impact can send players flying up into the sky where they can't fight. Eventually, they will fall and die. Players should learn where the landing spots are so they don't stand in them.
- **Dark Beam:** The mini-mages fire three dark beams out at random members of the group. These beams cause heavy damage and cannot be interrupted or avoided. Kill the mini-mage quickly to save your healers from having to heal through this attack.
- **Growing Corruption:** The Mage also uses a wide area attack that throws a small glob of darkness on the ground. This glob will expand to a large diameter and deal heavy damage to anyone within it. It will dissipate with time. In general, players should stay near only one other party member during phase one of this fight. When forced to move by this circle, don't group with more than two other raid members.
- **Chain Lightning:** This attack targets a random player and leaps to anyone within

a given distance. It will only hit each player once. This mechanic ensures the group spreads out. The group should encircle the central platform, with healers in range of the tank who can stand further out from it. A few melee players may be inside near the mage.

- **You Shall Not Stand:** At about 30%, the Mage slams down her staff three times. The resulting wave of force knocks back all players. At this time, players need to gather close together around the Mage, since the Mage will swap to attacking the entire group with damage every second. Healers need to use their area healing effects to keep everyone alive.

Mines do not disappear until the third slam, so be careful about where you go. If she is surrounded by mines, a single player may need to sacrifice him- or herself in order to clear her feet. Those with strong health bubbles can detonate mines to help the group. This is a very healing intensive part of the fight. The DPS players need to burn as fast as possible to defeat the Mage before healers run out of magicka.

With a little final lore, the players will conquer the trial of Atherian Archive. A portal will spawn which takes the group back to the start where they can turn in the quest and enjoy the new loot.

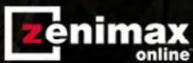
Many thanks to the members of Gaiscioch who have helped put this together! Thank you! There are too many names to mention here, as our raiding group in ESO continues to grow. However, I do want to include special thanks to Eiahn and Prissy for running the trials for us.

LIVE ANOTHER LIFE

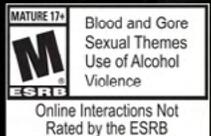


The Elder Scrolls

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A NIGHTBLADE'S ADVENTURES IN WROTHGAR

By Althea "Briseadh" Damgaard

After seeing the futility of the fighting in the Imperial City and the constant three-way war of Cyrodiil for a couple of months, I, Velaeria Vitalia knew it was time to go find something more fulfilling to do. Anything that actually might reach an endpoint or, at least, show progress to a new direction would do nicely. That's how I found myself heading to Wrothgar.

I met up with the caravan on the border of Wrothgar only to find a remnant of them still alive. The Winterborn had attacked. I

heard enough about Reachmen invading, the rebuilding of Orsinium, and unrest amongst the clans to not be surprised. I still had a letter to turn in to confirm I had accepted the invitation to help. That could wait because these people needed help right this moment.

According to Eveli Sharp-Arrow, the Winterborn had attacked and stolen the cargo. Then Chief Bazrag showed up and attacked the Reachmen, forcing them to retreat up the mountain. Since there was nothing more required by the survivors still on the road,

I headed up the hill with my blades out. I could have snuck up with my bow, but what fun would there be in that? Some close-quarter fighting out in the brisk mountain air sounded fun after so much sewer fighting in the city.

I caught up with Chief Bazrag, who seemed to have little appreciation for the Orc claiming to be king. He gave me information about the leader of the Winterborn, one Urfon Ice-Heart. I didn't meet that leader in this battle, but I dispatched plenty of his minions and

recovered some supplies. There wasn't much I could do for the Orcs caught in a cave and frozen to death. That totally ruined the atmosphere of what would have been a spectacular place to rest and look over the rugged lands of Wrothgar. It made the mountains I knew from home seem like foothills in comparison.

Chief Bazrog appreciated my help, but he hated the idea of us outsiders receiving invitations to come help. We stuck our noses in all the wrong places. Even after saying all that, he asked me to track down the Orc betrayer that had sold information about the caravan's itinerary that allowed the Reachmen to know when to attack it. I think he hated the greedy betrayer more than nosy

outsiders. I never found Orcs appealing to hang out with, but then again I've seen this disdain for outsiders in every race I've met on Nirn.

On the way to Orsinium, I met Namadin, a bookseller. Unfortunately while fleeing the Reachmen, the beasts hauling his cart spooked and a lot of the cargo and some friends went over a cliff. Worse, one of those people had all the paperwork that gave him authority to set up a bookshop in Orsinium.

After finding a safe way down the cliff, I come across Travofia, who was alive and well. She said that the harpies had snatched Jaeloreh. Of course, the person who was kidnapped was the one

who had all the paperwork. I've dealt with harpies before and had no issues purging more of the stinky birds from the world. I did just that as I climbed around the cliff and onto a rock outcropping above a cave. I had met a fellow interested in locating a whistle to control Durzag that supposedly was in the cave, but he would have to wait while I saved lives. After rescuing the booksellers, I thought about going back for the whistle.

Unfortunately, I found Jaeloreh dead in a harpy nest. The paperwork was in a pile of debris near the body. Harpies never cared much for paper and books, so if some enterprising adventurers could get into a main harpy nest area, they'd find



a lot of the loot simply lying about the unfortunate souls that the harpies had decided to eat for dinner. I did not have the ability to drag Jaeloreh's body out, but I took everything worthwhile from the body to return to the living.

Once the booksellers were safely on their way to Orsinium, I turned back to that foul cave that the crazy Dunmer, Githrano, dared not go. I wasn't surprised at that since most Dunmer like having someone do their dirty work for them. It didn't mean I had to give him the whistle, however. I went back because it was a new place to explore before I finally reached Orsinium.

The Dunmer was right about it being foul. Most of the durzogs I met I had to kill. I did find a whistle in a pack at what was an abandoned camp. I tested it on a durzog who seemed happy for a very short time. It wanted to gnaw my leg off once the effect wore off. I slammed my swords into it a couple of times each to get the creature off me. So, the whistle only partially worked. I stuffed it in my pack and continued through the cave. The beastmaster herself attacked me near the only route back out. A worthy fight occurred and in the end, I walked off with all of Nikolvare's treasures, including her enchanted whistle and a bunch of durzog pelts I could sell.

Orsinium contains a maze of buildings in various stages of construction. There is no such thing as a straight street anywhere unless it runs along the side of a large building. None of the buildings even line up with each other, and often they're attached at odd angles. Balconies, ramps, and stairs lead to doors on various levels of this jumble. Some of the insides of the buildings made even less sense. I went in one business, down a few stairs and around a curving hallway through what ended up

being a bar to get back onto the streets. It made the disarray of the Imperial City and its sewers seem like a well-organized city. Of course, Imperial City truly was magnificent and well planned before the Daedra were let in. Maybe the Orcs had some smarts. With a maze of a city, who would muster all the manpower needed to control it?

I finally found the Greedy Gut, and the bartender told me how to find smelly Gulag. Actually, the remains of his odor had my nose twitching even as I acquired my information. Worse, I could track the fellow outside in the streets. The bartender mentioned he worked with Khajiit merchants and likely acquired his foul stench by using one of their products.

In short order, I found the Khajiits. Even they agreed Gulag's smell lingered like an unwanted house guest. I thought my eyes would be watering too much to see by the time I got to Ufgel's Bathhouse. Thankfully, the smell had dissipated some since he was downstairs in one of the baths. I confronted him about his betrayal. Sure enough, he had padded his pockets with some gold so that he could sell his elixirs cheaper to help people. It was odd logic since some would have died and others could have starved with that decision. I wanted to stick a blade through his egotistical, noxious hide, but that would ruin the entire bath for everyone. I made sure both he and the proper authorities knew about his letter to Urfon Iceheart. He didn't seem to care, and even told me the supplies went to Frostbreak Fortress. I had no idea what the guard would do to him. Honestly, I did not care.

So, I finally located the place to hand in my invitation letter. In the process, I met the High Priestess Solgra of Trinimac, who welcomed me



to the city. Then as if being sneaky, an older Orc woman came up behind me, supposedly to do the same. She was Forge-Mother Alga. She seemed unimpressed that Solgra took so long inviting the outsider to the city. Orc logic eludes me. Anyway, the high priestess went off to the temple. It seemed the Forge-Mother only wanted her around to revive old traditions.

I made my report about the caravan, the traitor and the supplies that were taken to Frostbreak Fortress. I received an earful from the Forge Mother about how the clans were untrustworthy to deal with the problem. Things had to be fixed so everyone could be united under her son, King Kurog. She babbled on about how everyone should follow Trinimac instead of Malacath. To top it off, there was not a strong standing army due to clan tensions, and a lot of the able-bodied warriors were away from the city helping the alliance. I bit my tongue to keep from telling her that most of them probably got sent to waste time and die uselessly in Cyrodiil for whatever the Daggerfall Covenant expected to

get out of the place. Despite all this craziness, it appeared it could be unraveled unlike the issues of the Imperial City. A group of mages should create some diabolic magic bomb and blow the Imperial City off the face of the planet, not that the Daedra weren't trying to pull it into Oblivion.

With all of this information and the rambling ideas they generated in my head, I rode off to Frostbreak Fortress to find it under siege. It had to be a half-baked setup if the Reachmen could get men out and supplies in. It was yet another reason that explained why the Daggerfall Covenant were the weakest of the three factions on the Cyrodiil front. I managed not to smirk about that when I reported to King Kurog, himself.

My first impression of the king was not good, but it was accurate. I think his mother even had hinted at his lust for food and fighting in her ramblings. He gnawed on a leg of some beast and punctuated his speech with flourishes of the half-eaten bone. I bit my tongue again and let my actions prove a few



points to these half-witted Orcs. I took my meals elsewhere, thank you.

So, the king had even told Urfon Ice-Heart that they were finally coming for him, the last of the Reachmen commanders. Great! Orcs and their desire to beat on their enemies face to face with all their cards showing would make this a lot harder. The harpies were aiding the Reachmen, and there had to be disgusting hagravens around, too.

I wandered the camp a bit and found Chief Urgdosh leading troops catapulting large rocks into the walls. He claimed the Bretons had to have had Orc crafters help build it. After all, the walls had proven solid thus far. To get rid of the harpy nuisance, a group of fighters had been sent into fray with an elf, none other than Eveli, to get her up to a good spot where she could mark the aeries with her arrows so that the trebuchets could take out the harpy nests. Another party included group alchemist who understood Reachmen magic so he could concoct a potion to destroy the briarheart

monstrosities. I learned more than I ever wanted to know about those creatures before the war ended.

I was sent to assist Siege Commander Dulph who was working directly on the harpy issue. The harpies attacked as soon as I approached him. There was a way to sneak around to the left or go through the harpies to the right to join the battle. I fought right through the harpies, which King Kurog relished as much as that leg of whatever he was eating before this bird-brained adventure truly started. At least he slashed the harpies left and right of us. The screeching creatures fell without clutching on to either of us, thankfully.

We discovered Sergeant Rorburz trapped in a tower. He wasn't sure where the group was with Alinon, the alchemist. Eveli was with him. The king and I helped get her up two towers. We lost one of our fighters to a harpy on the second tower, but Eveli marked both aeries. The burst of flames as the trebuchets destroyed the nests was impressive.

After fighting our way through the fort, we found Alinon. He explained just what a briarheart was and how to defeat it. Briarhearts were formed when a seed was implanted into a Winterborn's corpse. The seed would feed on the body and turn it into a zombie. These smaller trees fed a larger, central tree. Inside the fort, we found saplings growing out of dead bodies. The Reachmen magic corrupted nature, and the tree-like creatures were foul-looking. I had to destroy as many saplings as I could to help weaken the main tree. Since briarhearts were made of wood, I hoped the thing would burn as fast as the harpy aeries did. The entire tree and root had to be destroyed or the corruption would invade nature like a plague.

While I was chopping through the saplings, Eveli guarded Alinon while he brewed some alchemical concoction with nothing more than some ingredients found in the area and what was in his pack. I'm pretty good at alchemy, but messing with elixirs on the spot in a hostile fortress could cause a disaster. His potion could kill him rather than the magical corruption of nature for which it was designed.

In the process of burning saplings, I found Vilum, a Reachmen, bound and in a cage. He was ready to become the next briarheart warrior. Being chosen for that was a precious gift and he had lived for the honor. I sure didn't want to be turned into a monstrosity, let alone receive any gift from a hagraven other than her dying at the end of one of my weapons. I asked, "You're kind of angry, aren't you?" He called it righteous rage. I called it insanity. I left him in the cage.

I went back to our party and found Eveli but not Alinon. She went off to harvest some moss he

needed and when she got back, he had disappeared along with his satchel. It didn't take long to find him in a cage suspended over a roaring fire. He said he managed to find some moss himself, and the elixir was in his bag, wherever that was. Wonderful! I let Alinon and Eveli argue how she was going to shoot the cage down to save him. I had an elixir to find. I laughed when she told him he just had to tuck and roll when the cage fell into the fire

Let's not forget I still had King Kurog in tow. Yes, in tow. He was following me, not the other way around. Somehow in our trek to find the main trunk of the briarheart, I learn a great deal about what the king planned for the Orsimer. He wanted them all to worship Trinimac and give up on Malacath. Trinimac believed in honor, truth and unity, while Malacath was definitely a god of war. However, he compared getting the clan chiefs to work together to trying to feed salad to a Bosmer. I think he underestimated the chiefs, and his rough-handed ways certainly didn't help. At some point, I might actually figure out this area and its Orcish politics. It didn't seem any odder than Imperial politics, although there was a bit less sophistication and intellect involved. Wait, scratch that. Imperials decided to side with Daedra.

I can't remember where I found the bag with Alinon's elixir, but I do remember coming upon the tree. It looked leafless and gnarly. I set it on fire and used the elixir on it. The hard part was keeping the Reachmen and their tree healers away. If it weren't for them, the thing would have burned gloriously that much faster. The enemies had found a safe spot to stand out of reach while healing the briarheart through the roots. It turned into a grueling fight that lasted about five times longer than I wanted it to. I felt like I had been rolled down an avalanche in Skyrim by the time



the Reachmen gave up and the tree died.

The fight went on. Urfon Ice-Heart was still alive further in the keep. King Kurog told me rumors about the Reachman. For one, Urfon's veins supposedly flowed with ice, and he could freeze an Orc with the flick of his wrist. I decided the fellow was just really good with ice magicka, but I didn't disabuse Kurog of his notions. Killing Urfon would speak louder than words.

Actually, the fight proved a big letdown. He died faster than that stinking tree, and I didn't even get frostbite. However, I did earn the trust of an Orc king. Kurog claimed he had not fought alongside anyone he trusted since he became king. I wondered how he became king in the first place. I think he just claimed it one day and managed to hold on to the title while the clan chiefs squabbled. His reign looked pretty flimsy and tenuous to me.

I discovered that Alinon and Eveli were alive, and we returned to Orsinium.

It wasn't long before I was summoned back to the throne room. King Kurog was furious when the three chiefs at Court would not give up Malacath worship for him. Chief Targak was killed. Bazrag and Dular walked out alive - for now. The king claimed most of his meetings included dissenters. I kept my mouth shut on my disapproval of his methods.

Shortly thereafter, an attack broke out in the city at the Temple of Tinimac. I was given the honor of saving the people because I was expendable, and the king got blamed if things went wrong. At least, that was what Forge-Mother Alga stated. I saved people because they needed saving, not because the king's egotistical mother said so.

Captain Zugnor was outside the main entrance to the temple and annoyed that a group stormed into the castle before he could stop them. Then, all the civilians in the area stood around gawking and getting in the way. Zugnor's men weren't getting



far banging on the door. With the city being a maze, there was probably some other secret way in, but he had no idea where it was. I was not impressed that a captain of a city guard couldn't even make the effort to know the city he guarded. My opinion of Orcs dropped a notch.

Eveli wanted to hit the two shifty-eyed Orcs hanging out in the back of the onlookers. I told her not to worry about them, but she didn't listen.

I ran off to find the other way into the temple because it sounded like there was serious fighting going on inside. I found it by going all the way around the temple and the mages guild. The mage's guild was built on the top of part of the temple. Even the museum seemed lumped into this building hodge-podge. I avoided some of the enemy Orcs by taking the higher ground. Two of them met a quick demise before I finished climbing the stairs.

I walked down the steps to a back door into the temple. I startled a priest of Trinimac named

Rooghub who was just standing there watching for anyone from the other direction on his level. He would have been dead if I had been the enemy. People so easily forget about all the ways an enemy can approach.

He told me that the Malacath fanatics were using Chief Bazrag's name, but the priest didn't believe this, since he believed Bazrag to be an honorable Orc. He went on to say the other priests were being held in the rectory and that the commander holding the priests had the rectory key. To get there and get the key, I had to avoid the torch bearers. That sounded easy enough. After all, I had just defeated Urfon Ice-Heart and a vile briarheart.

I didn't even break a sweat as I slashed through the incompetent guards on the way to the rectory. Priest Uugas told me High Priestess Solgra had put a sword in one of the guards before running to the back where other priests needed help. I like any person of faith who also knows how to handle a blade.

I found Mazogug the Bold holding the high priestess captive. They had attacked the temple to humiliate the king for being unable to protect his own people. Mazogug soon died at my feet.

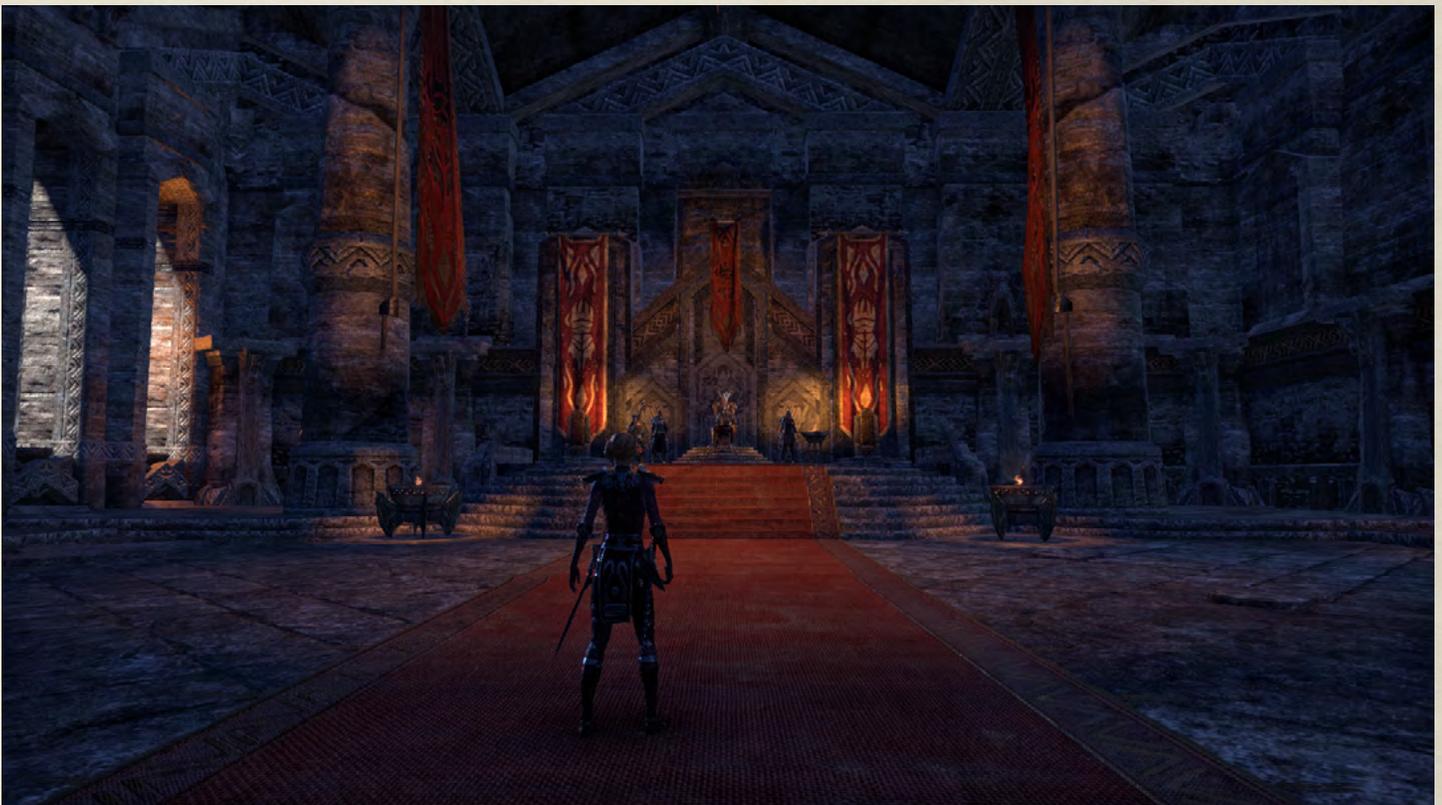
The high priestess also had known Chief Bazrag as an honorable sort. His forts were ravaged, and his traditions had been threatened. She didn't know if that would have changed him enough to be responsible for this fight or not. Either way, the information on the skirmish had to be given to the King and Forge-Mother.

The captain and his guards finally broke through the front door. Together, we cleansed the temple of the remnant of fanatics. Outside, I found the Forge-Mother. She took the information in stride and told me the clans had to unite under her son. She put a military presence in and around the temple to protect it. I did not entirely agree with that, but I was the outsider.

A messenger named Talviah Alioria, complaining about being used only as a messenger despite all his supposed skills, told me the king wanted to see me in the throne room. Since I saved his Temple of Trinimac from an attack, he thought I would be best person to convince the clan chiefs to come to a moot. It had to be the chief, or the king would be insulted. I had to convince three clans to meet: Clan Tumnosh, Clan Morkul, and Clan Shatul. The king had a grievance against all of them since they weren't supporting the city building.

The farther I went in this adventure, the more it resembled a spider web of intrigue. Maybe this mission would prove as futile as trying to save the Imperial City, except for the fact that Orcs don't repopulate endlessly out of dolmens to replace the ones killed.

I headed off to Clan Shatul, the herders of echatere, who were supposed to be supplying the city with the animals to feed the residents. I talk to Glagosh upon arriving and learned Chief Ogzar was on his



deathbed. A giant had bashed his head in.

An Orc named Laurig wanted to take revenge on the giant for the chief's grave injury. I discovered Laurig always wanted to be chief, but he never challenged Ogzar since the chief was a friend. Other Orcs found this a weakness. I stayed out of the political chatter and just helped with the fighting. Maybe killing the giant wasn't the best idea, but it did save the Orcs from having to worry about any other attacks. Laurig was annoying while tracking the giant because he would not shut up. He kept insisting that we were lost and said numerous other inane things. Once we found the giant, I enjoyed an exhilarating fight. Having lived in Skyrim for a long time, I had expert knowledge on how to fight him. I toyed with the giant a bit and even Laurig felt like he had some fun in the battle.

The chief's mother, Yazara, was set to select the candidates (one of which included Laurig) to become chief. Another clan member, Ulghesh,

returned from the city. He claimed he could be a good chief, but Yazara wanted to know if he could put the needs of the clan before himself. Would he have the wits and skills to help the clan with echatere herding? She sent him off with the laziest echatere, Scamper, to find a snow truffle. Yazara planned on putting it in the poison that would kill her son, and snow truffles were his favorite. After all, he was just about dead, and he had to be completely dead so that the next chief could be selected officially.

I helped Ulghesh find the snow truffle. It took two of us to get Scamper to do anything. I found a good truffle spot, whistled, and then Ulghesh gave Scamper a swift kick. The beast laid down every time it checked a truffle spot as if the short run had worn it out. It was, at least, the fifth spot before a truffle was dug up by Scamper.

Ulghesh turned out to be the exiled daughter, Ushruka. She wanted to be the next chief. I really didn't like either her or Laurig due to the one





shirking responsibilities of becoming a wife and the other never having the guts to fight a friend to become clan chief. Yazara had this idea that one should be given a weaker weapon and if they could win that way, then they really would have proved their worth. I hated doing it, but I gave Laurig the weaker weapon hoping his honorable spirit could also win a fight. Ushruka won. Honestly, she would probably lead them better than Laurig anyway.

Then, one of Chief Ozrag's wives decided to blame another wife for his demise. Maybe Galgosh does worship Boethiah, the Daedric prince of murder, as I learned in a book I found in her tent, but things didn't add up entirely. She was out singing in the night per Lugbagg and she claimed she was chanting in hopes of the mammoths near her would think she as a giant and leave her alone. There was an accusation about Galgosh's weapon being found with the chief, but Galgosh said he took it because it was quiet while his makes a lot of noise. Most of Rogzesh's anger had to do with Galgosh not being there when the chief was injured

more than anything else. In the end, I convinced Rogzesh the two should work together and not pass accusations on how their husband really died.

Next, I made the trek to Morkul where I met Chief Alzug. His family issues prevented him from wanting to bother with the king. Actually, I think the chief just wanted his wife to stop yelling at him. I'm not sure about these Orc chiefs with their multiple wives. Most of them seem unable to handle one wife, let alone more.

I found Forge-Wife Lazghal to get more details on the issues at hand. Their older, head-strong daughter had run off to Morkul Descent to search for some relics she'd heard in old tales. I got an earful about how Ashaka was overlooked as Forge-Wife to the king and her younger sister had acquired the honor. Of course, Lazghal punched Forge-Mother Alga and forged the tooth that fell out into Ashaka's first dagger hilt. I nearly smirked since I wanted to punch the Forge-Mother myself. Actually, if she had not been around, Kurog would

never have had a reign lasting for longer than it took him to utter the word “king.”

I found Ashaka, who was looking for the Hand of Morkul. She was quite sure it was through the stone door in front of us that lead into Mokuldin. She found it more amazing I was there because her mother thought she was in danger. I ignored all the comments about how the two seem to have a lack of communication as we entered a chamber with three statues honoring fallen heroes of Morkul. To open the door to Morkuldin itself, the braziers in front of each statue had to be lit in the correct order. I read the plaques on each, but I had no clue which should go first. I’m sure my mentor, Marcus, would have had a comment or two about my lack of intellectual prowess if he were there. I simply guessed and the second try was correct. So much for really knowing what “Burned in ice, and a stone marked thrice” meant.

Then we found Hand of Morkul tightly gripped in some interesting stone work as if on display in a

museum. Ashaka recited yet another piece of old Orc poetry: “Endless breath and untold rage lets purest heart release the hand.” It didn’t take her long to figure out “breath” was probably a bellows and “rage” was the forge itself.

Activating the bellows was the easy part since it was near the hand, and only a couple of the animated statues came to life to stop me. Finding the forge, on the other hand, led me past a lot of statues, and at times two or three of them woke up to attack. They were definitely a strong deterrent to restarting this forge for some reason.

Then I had to face off a gargoyle. These creatures are never fun. I put them a notch above a troll when it comes to battling them. They have very similar fighting tactics, but a gargoyle is made of stone. Trolls at least have the courtesy to bleed. I had a few tender spots by the time I dispatched him and pulled the lever to start the forge. I relish a good fight, and I pondered why I’m so battle prone while the mechanism lowered itself to produce





the contact needed to reignite the forge. All I can attribute it to is having been orphaned young and left to my own devices on hostile city streets. Too bad that the prowess I had gained over a few short years fell far below that which was needed to break the Imperial City from Oblivion's hold.

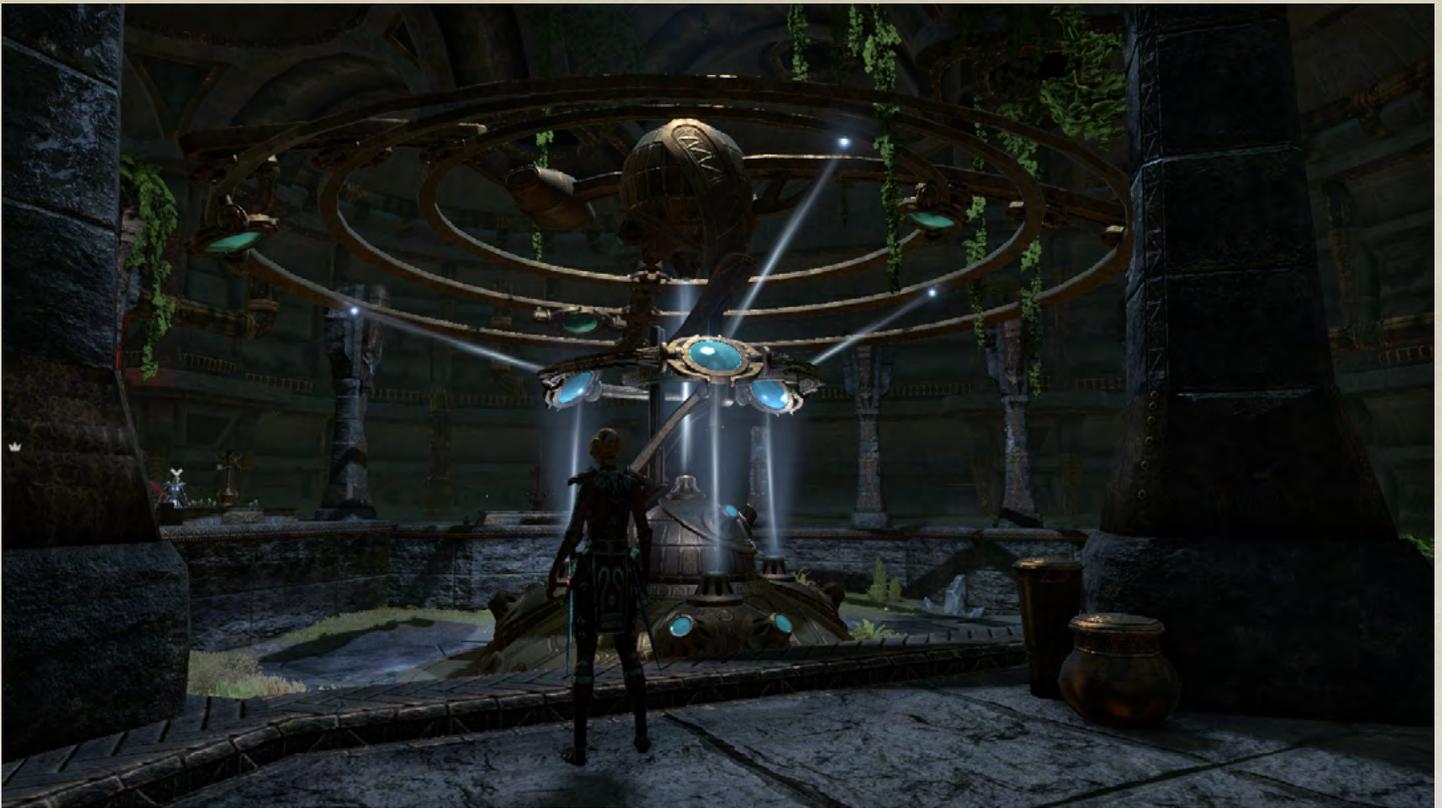
Ashaka had one last thing she had to do to free the Hand of Morkul. It turns out that in the poem, the word "heart" can also mean "blood." Ashaka cut her hand, and as her blood dripped on the mechanism, it began unfolding itself until the hammer was freed. As Ashaka picked it up, she realized something. The old poem was not about honor lost, but honor gained by burying the clan's greatest shame beneath a mountain of ice. It was a warning to stay away from the Hand of Morkul.

I saw how crestfallen she became due to this as if she had found something great only to see how tarnished it had become. I convinced her to embrace the past, and she even suggested a different way to use blood for the working of the

forge. In the past, the blood from the enemies of Morkul had helped fuel the workings of the forge. It was something one would rather not want to keep using considering the cost. Who needs another reason to kill their enemies? Maybe she could figure out another way to make it work, but at least, her clan knew the truth now.

On a more comical note, this whole adventure and returning the Hammer of Morkul to the clan actually solved whatever family issues the chief had. I did not bother to ask what that really meant. I'm sure the women really run that clan, anyway. The chief decided he could go to the moot to see what the King had to say now that he had a lot of his own problems resolved.

I had one more chief to convince, so I went on another trek across Wrothgar to Clan Tumnosh. They were the quarry masters and were supposed to be the main supplier of stone for the rebuilding of Orsinium. When I arrived, no one was working the quarry, and Forge-Wife Kharza was spewing



something about being unable to find a certain tall elf. The elf had claimed he could increase their production tenfold, but now it had stopped completely.

Chief Ramash and his strongest warriors had gone into the strange fog that had occurred in the quarry. They ran out again due to a lot of clawing, slashing and cutting from something they could not clearly see there. Considering how badly they were beaten up, no one else dared venture near the quarry. He knew the elf had unleashed this mess. He would only go to the king's moot if I helped clean up this mess. So be it.

An Orc named Ghorn told me the high elf immediately went into a cavern to check it out as soon as the miners broke through the rock and discovered it. Pipes inside released steam, and that probably caused the fog.

I found Hunt-Wife Bolger there, but her daughter, Shabon, had gone further into the area. She knew

the high elf had some type of rod that could control the constructs, and he had said something about a control machine inside somewhere.

It turns out they had broken into a Dwemer ruin, and I was not surprised to find Neramo inside checking things out. Worse, Neramo had known without telling them the details. He had found what he was looking for: Mzindyne. An orb of illumination would unlock the control center. A good deal of electricity would short everything out, but I did not suggest that. I do know a high elf sorceress that could do it. She may have wandered back to Auridon when things went downhill for a certain group of crusaders, who had spent most of their time in Skyrim.

A lot of constructs found their demise due to my finesse with a blade that got under their armor shells. After some time, I found the room with the crazy looking dwemer machine. I couldn't figure out how it lined up, but after some trial and error, it did what Neramo needed it to. I looked that thing

over for a good fifteen minutes and honestly, it looked like it should not have been working at all.

I went outside before Neramo and talked to Forge-Wife Khara. Neramo showed up shortly thereafter with three dwemer spiders in tow. I knew she already wanted to wring his scrawny neck, but I expected her to leap at him then and there. Don't ask me how, but I convinced her to work with the constructs in the mines until the clan regained its strength due to the losses that opening the ruin had caused. I told her that making Neramo finish his job and the clan keeping control of the ruin could be his blood price for the damage and death he caused. She relented in her decision to kill him for now and agreed to the new plan.

Chief Ramash kept his word to attend the moot and hear the king's fancy words, but he made no promises beyond that. It seems he was not the only chief that thought the king was full of fancy words. King Kurog could claim the title of windbag in my book.

Of course, with that thought in my mind, I was off to Orsinium to see the windbag once again at his private inn. He was glad I convinced all three and went on about how it was of no importance that Chief Bazrag was not going to attend. I found this a bit disconcerting, but then again I was talking to an egotistical lout with a mother who had expectations set too high for a son like him.

I found the overzealous Eveli outside the inn stating that High Priestess Solgra wanted to see me about some rescue mission. It had to be kept secret, and Eveli would be helping me. I like the little wood elf, but some day she's going to step into a hornet's nest and won't escape in time.

Our mission was to save a chief of unknown identity from the Rosh Vakh, a radical group of Trinimac extremists with whom the high priestess didn't agree. If the extremists gained power, it could turn out badly for all Trinimac followers in Wrothgar and ruin the king's chances of unifying



anything. She didn't want the king to find out about our covert operation, or he'd march an army there causing far more bloodshed than necessary. So off to Fharun Stronghold I went, knowing the wood elf would be there already.

Not much was known of the Vosh Rakh other than they were a fairly new organization and wore masks when they met. Their goal was to force Trinimac down everyone's throat and kill those that did not agree. That did not fit in with what I had learned of Trinimac. It contained no honor, for one. Even this group's purpose could depend on which chief they actually held captive.

Eveli left me an arrow path to follow to her hiding spot. She found out about a large prison but had not found the way in. The Orcs were big talkers, so some eavesdropping and snooping around would probably produce the answer. I found a clue in a note about the well leading into the place. After creatively acquiring a rope, Eveli lowered me down into the deep hole. All my skulking about over the

years proved worthwhile and made it all too easy to sneak by Orcs. Now if I just could sneak by Daedra this easily, things would go a little differently in the city.

After I walked through a tunnel, I discovered a dungeon where the inmates were running amok. I dispatched several of them by the time I found Chief Bazrag tied up in one of the cells of his personal fortress. It was a good thing I found him alive, because we weren't going to be able to go back up through the well. Neither Eveli nor the rope were waiting for us when we made it back to the opening. In the process of saving him, I learned he had nothing to do with the attack on the Trinimac temple. He declared that he had his hands full here with the Vosh Rakh.

I could see how two were needed to get out of part of the dungeon. The door to the first room holding some of the worst criminals was locked. To open it, we had to turn levers that actually released both the prisoners and poison gas. I had to kill



the prisoners that escaped their cells in order to stop the gas. That certainly was an interesting strategy to keep people in. I wondered what kind of magic went into the construction to know when the enemies were dead so the jailers could turn off the gas. Maybe the Chief had to do more than one thing with each lever, and he bought time while I killed the inmates.

The next trap system nearly killed me. I should send someone a bill for alchemical components to replace several potions and cover the costs of a ghastly armor repair. I despise floor spikes, and this trap had four levers to manage. Three levers were in the entry room, and one was located in the hall beyond that. To add insult to injury, it had a bloody timer on it. I was never so glad to have learned alchemy and a magical shield spell more than when I ran through that mess. Marcus would be facepalming at my lack of intellect when it came to getting through this puzzle, but sometimes things just don't click fast enough.

Once we escaped that miserable trap, we had access to the main fort and were clear of further danger except for whatever Vosh Rakh remained. Bazrag decided he should kill me now that we escaped, but Eveli showed up. I'm not sure how this plan came about, but Eveli snuck Bazrag into Orsinium while I talked to his wife, Ulsha. Eveli finally had an adventure she did not relish, and I found out that Ulsha's story corroborated Bazrag's claim that he didn't even know about the attack, much less participate in it. Ulsha would contact me in Orsinium when she had news.

I was trying to get my armor repaired when Shield-wife Razbela showed up in a huff summoning me to the king immediately. He was angry, so everyone was on their toes. I decided he could wait long

enough for me to be presentable. If it turned out he had anything to do with the crazy Vosh Rakh, I would rip his head off personally and let the Orcs find a new king.

What I found out was not good at all. The king knew Eveli had returned to the city with Bazrag. He hoped I would not turn traitor, too. I thought to myself that if I ever did turn on him, he'd be dead before he had time to worry about it. I had stopped caring what happened to him at this point since things were getting downright fishy around here.

I had to wonder about people that wind up being messengers in this city. None of them were Orcs, which was odd. This latest one had a letter from Eveli and told me something about the beginning of every thought being the most important or something like that. As soon as I read the note, I laughed. The first letter of each sentence gave me the real message along with the secret words, "Orcs don't smell." At least, Eveli proved clever even if she was rather hyperactive and overly romantic about things. I find Eveli and Bazrag by going through a secret passage broken through a wall in the basement of the inn. The narrow hallway led up to what looked like yet another inn or the dining area of some rich Orc.

High Priestess Solgra knew it was Bazrag we would be saving. If he had died, a civil war would have started. Someone wanted to frame Bazrag and get him off the battlefield. Finally, this crazy adventure made sense. However, things were far from over and definitely not resolved.

The Vosh Rakh had something bigger planned, and I had to go to the old Trinimac temple in the west of Wrothgar to figure it out. I refused to go

alone, but I had to convince Eveli to help me. She didn't know what side she was on in this fight anymore after all the lies she had been told. I honestly didn't blame her. The political intrigue of any race can make a person's head spin. Also, if being a hero was easy, everyone would be one. She agreed with that thought, and I think reality finally sunk into her head about heroes in life verses the ones in the stories she liked so much. Now if life could be as easy as in the stories, I'd be one very bored nightblade. Some of this adventure had already been too easy other than the conflicting information and that spike trap.

Off I went again for another ride across Wrothgar. I know I covered a good deal of the area on this adventure, and I hoped that I could take some time to really check it out further when the political intrigue got sorted out. I found Talviah, Flies-in-Wind and Eveli not far from the entrance, but we needed disguises to get in. Eveli sounded like her old self as she explained some of the Vosh Rakh had traveled by her place but had run into some issues. I managed not to laugh as she explained how they probably stumbled into an echatere mating ritual. The noise had been terrible. I could imagine that, since I've seen two of these beasts head butting each other before. It's not quiet and watching was enough to make my head hurt.

I snuck down and saw that these echatere had indeed killed the Orcs that had blundered into the area. I used a stump one of the Vosh Rakh was sitting up against to block the line of sight to the closest beast. I snagged the amulet I needed and backed out of there without incident. Learning to sneak and skulk about can lead to accomplishing goals safely, although I'll admit that I've assassinated a few Daedra worshipping Imperials. Obviously, we did not kill enough of them before we had to flee

for our lives.

Talviah went with me while Eveli and Flies went as a second group. The place was huge. It turned out the meeting Tal and I would walk into was actually a trial to pick those that would go on some mission. To learn about this mission, we had to go through the trial. Tal was ready for this because he felt the need to prove himself due to who his parents and sister were. They had all done great things in the Somerset Isles. I hoped he was up to it.

Elder Alzag told us about agents lurking about the city. This test would either kill us or allow us to be sent on the mission. The first part of our test included passing through a gauntlet of Vosh Rakh and opening four switches in time. I failed the first time when I miscalculated a sweeping strike from some ferocious Orc wielding a greatsword. I fell off the maze of ramparts during the duel and could not get up to the last switch in time. Thankfully, I got to try again without them replacing the ones I killed. That made me complete it quickly. I killed the Orc that made me fail the first time for good measure, and because he was a fanatic standing in my way.

Once inside, it was Tal and I and no others from the trial. About eight Vosh Rakh stood in two loose lines on either side of me once I walked into the main room. I was ordered to kill Tal to prove myself or fight all of them instead. Well, killing Tal wasn't going to happen. I leaped at the closest enemy as I pulled out my blades. The fight got pretty intense as more and more of them joined in. Two casters made things worse. Somehow, I got out of that fight with less damage to myself and my armor than those stupid spikes. No one lived to tell me what the orders were, but I found a note. There was always a note. One can never expect

underlings to remember everything correctly without writing it down for them. I stuffed the note in my pouch knowing the attack was indeed in the city and probably had to do with the moot.

We all got out alive. Eveli headed into the city ahead of me to meet back up with Bazrag. I wasn't far behind after doing a little further cleanup of some Vosh Rakh. I found some people they had captured and were torturing to convert. There was no way I could leave them in that predicament, so I rescued them. That delay, however, made a huge difference. Bazrag and Eveli had been taken into custody according to Mulzah, who was angry about being kicked out of her own inn by a squad of soldiers. I had the choice of stealing the key from Sergeant Vulmen or investigating a guard meeting down near the stables.

I headed to the meeting hoping to gain some information and snuck by all the outlying guards. I even found another copy of the key in a backpack near the captain. I swiped before they saw me. Unfortunately, I was seen as I tried to sneak away from them. I killed them all on the way to the captain. I bet they didn't expect attacks from the supposedly "safe" side.

I reported to the king again and told him about the Vosh Rakh infiltration. I even asked about Bazrag and Eveli. He said he wanted to talk to me privately in the dining hall. I found his mother there instead. She was the one ordering the Vosh Rakh to do exactly what needed to be done. I knew I didn't like her very much. Worse, she used magic on me to make me stab myself. I passed out wondering if I'll live through this one. Luckily I did.

I regained consciousness with Shield-Wife Razbela watching over me. She had healed the worst of my

injuries and bandaged the rest. She would not let me die after what I had done to help her people, but she definitely agreed with her husband's plans. She told me how to get Bazrag and Eveli out of the dungeon, but after that I had to leave. Somewhere in the mix of getting Bazrag and Eveli out of the dungeon, I ran into both shield-wives again and had to kill both of them or die. At least I found another note proving this whole plot to kill the chiefs was done to clinch Kurog's rule as king. I had to find the secret tunnel from the temple to the palace to stop it.

I had a quick meeting outside with Bazrag and Eveli. They decided they would recruit more help while I went to the temple to help the high priestess. I arrived just after some soldiers had chased the high priestess up the stairs and out of the temple. Priest Uugus had never seen her react in such a way and could not believe the temple had been attacked a second time. This time the attackers only chased after Solgra.

I jogged up the stairs and found her alive but out in the open on the wall's edge. It would have been a great place to contemplate life and enjoy the view if enemies were not lurking about. She told me that the entrance to the tunnel was in the library. Then an arrow flew true and struck her. She ordered me to get the assassin as she collapsed. I had a bit of a run to get up to the area above us and back from the wall's outer edge. When I did, the assassin gave herself up. I'm still not sure why I let the killer go other than I must have wanted King Kurog and his wicked mother to know that I was coming for them.

I went back inside the temple to find Solgra had died from the assassin's arrow. I felt remorse for such a loss but could not dwell on it. I went to



the library where Bazrag and Eveli join me. We searched through books to find any clues about the passage. I found a fiction book called 'The Battle of Orsinium' that contained the riddle needed to open the passage. It used three clans stating which was to each side and above him. I did not bother trying to remember who he was, but there were three cubes that could be spun to show one of four faces to the front set about this huge head at the back of the library. I had to figure out which symbol went with which clan. After some more digging, I found a book about the clans and made note of their symbols.

A few minutes later, we spun the cubes to have the correct emblems showing and the head moved just enough to reveal a hole with a ladder in it. We quickly climbed down and fought our way through the tunnel to the castle. We battled fighters to reach King Kurog and his mother. I manage to kill her first. Kurog called on her magic despite her death to help himself in the fight. His extra strength and abilities on top of my battle fatigue

and injuries nearly killed me. The king was a big cheater. I finally finished him off, but I wanted to keel over myself afterwards.

Bazrag was upset about how Kurog forced this choice on everyone on top of the loss it caused. He wanted to stay for a few moments of quiet time, so Chief Ramnash led me into the palace proper.

Bazrag talked to the other chiefs about how to proceed in a way that would keep the peace between all of them. He also wanted to give Kurog a proper burial to remember him as who he once was and not the tyrant he had turned into. I gathered everyone together, and some of them were people who I had worked with on this adventure. Kurog ordered me to bring out a bottle of his favorite ale along with the heroes. Everyone agreed to come. While I was gathering these people together, an Orc named Bizra quipped that her friend would plop a brick hearing about this. I laughed. That was when Bumnog showed up. I remember helping his friends and him with harpy issues a couple times

in some of my wanderings. I'd gotten around to far more places in Tamriel than I thought.

Finally, we had the funeral where I was the official lighter of the flames used in the ceremony. Bazrag explained later that orcs usually burn the dead and use the ashes to make weapons or armor in remembrance. He told me he was going to redo the throne with Kurog's ashes in it so that he'd remember how much of a pain in the butt the dead king had been. Also, Bazrag would remember

what to do and what not to do as a king. Yes, the chiefs figured Bazrag should be their king as they got back on their feet after this mess, so that they could, at least, show a strong face to the Daggerfall Covenant and anyone else.

I was no longer needed and could go on my way to new adventures helping others. Despite the loss of some good people, this adventure had turned out with an ending that could become a bright beginning for the Orcs of Wrothgar.



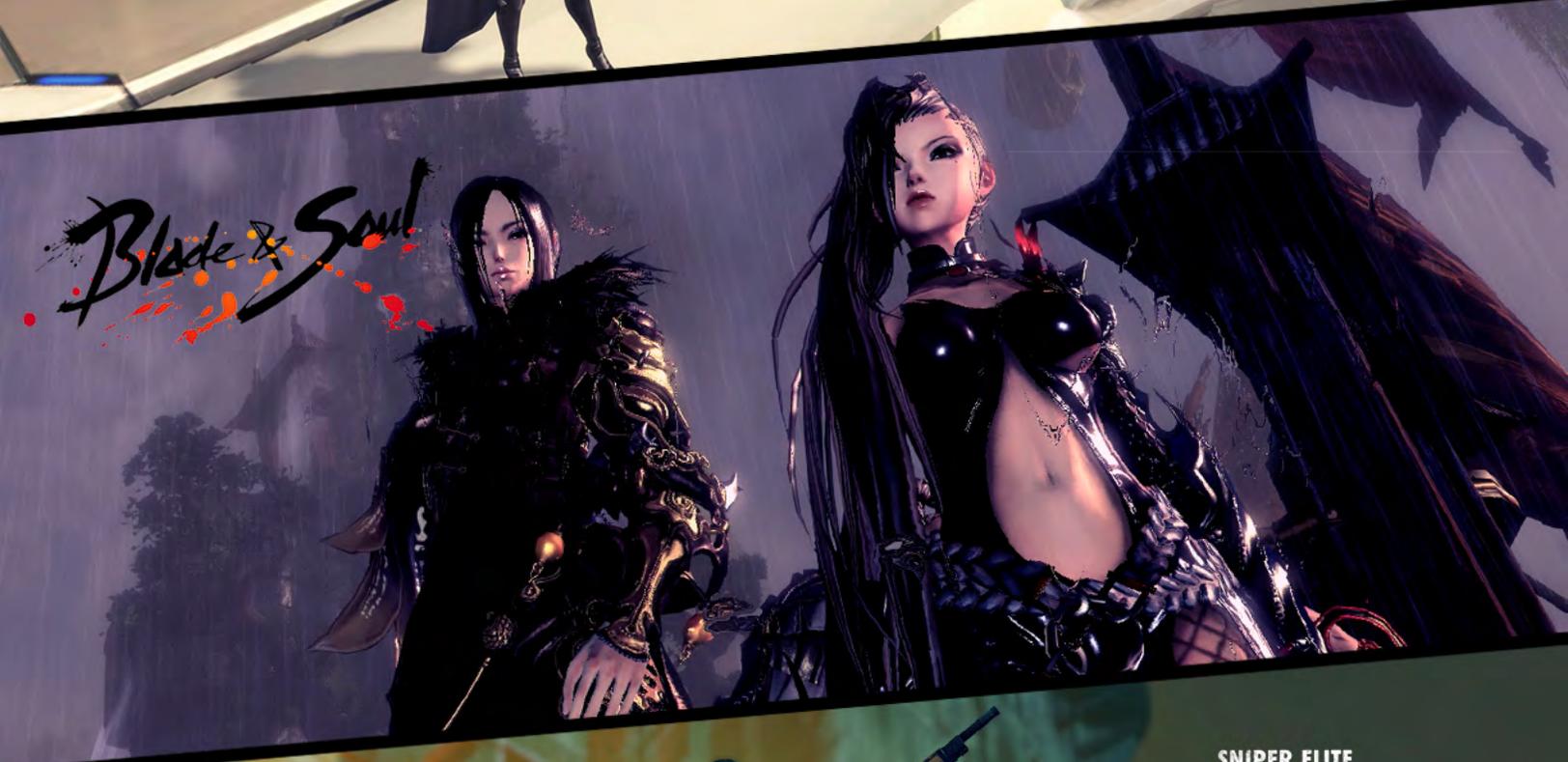


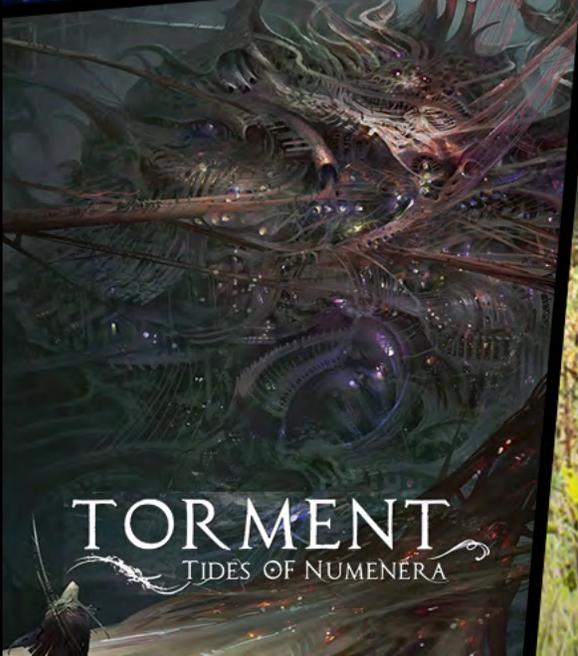
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MASTER X MASTER







HANDS ON PREVIEW

By: Edward "Screenager" Orr

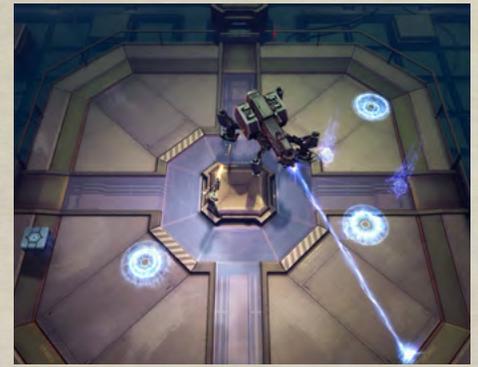
Recent years have seen an almost insatiable appetite for MOBA games. With its already massive player base, Korean publisher NCSoft has now developed their own take on the trend with Master x Master. Developed by team Bloodlust, it brings together elements of various genres and melds them with a host of familiar faces. Already confirmed are Rytlock Brimstone, Mondo Zax, and Jinsoyun. Featuring a full roster of 30 characters on launch, it presents an array of original heroes as well as

other fan favorites from Aion, Wildstar, Blade & Soul, and Guild Wars 2.

Master x Master is currently undergoing open beta testing in Korea and has received generally positive feedback since it was unveiled last year. Although it initially presents itself as a highly polished MOBA, it has far more to offer than just three lanes of stylized destruction. Players can take part in a number of PvP battles and PvE encounters, taking on a massive roster of enemies, some of whom

are familiar adversaries. PvE dungeons include several iconic villains from NCSoft's vast library such as Blade & Soul's Vice Admiral Powaran Boss, who has already been introduced in Korea. Full details of the PvE encounters have not been released, but NCSoft has confirmed that they are working to bring as much of the game to western audiences as possible. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to delve into Master x Master's dungeons or face Powaran when Gaiscioch was invited to take a hands on preview of NCSoft's new MOBA.

Starting out in the game's

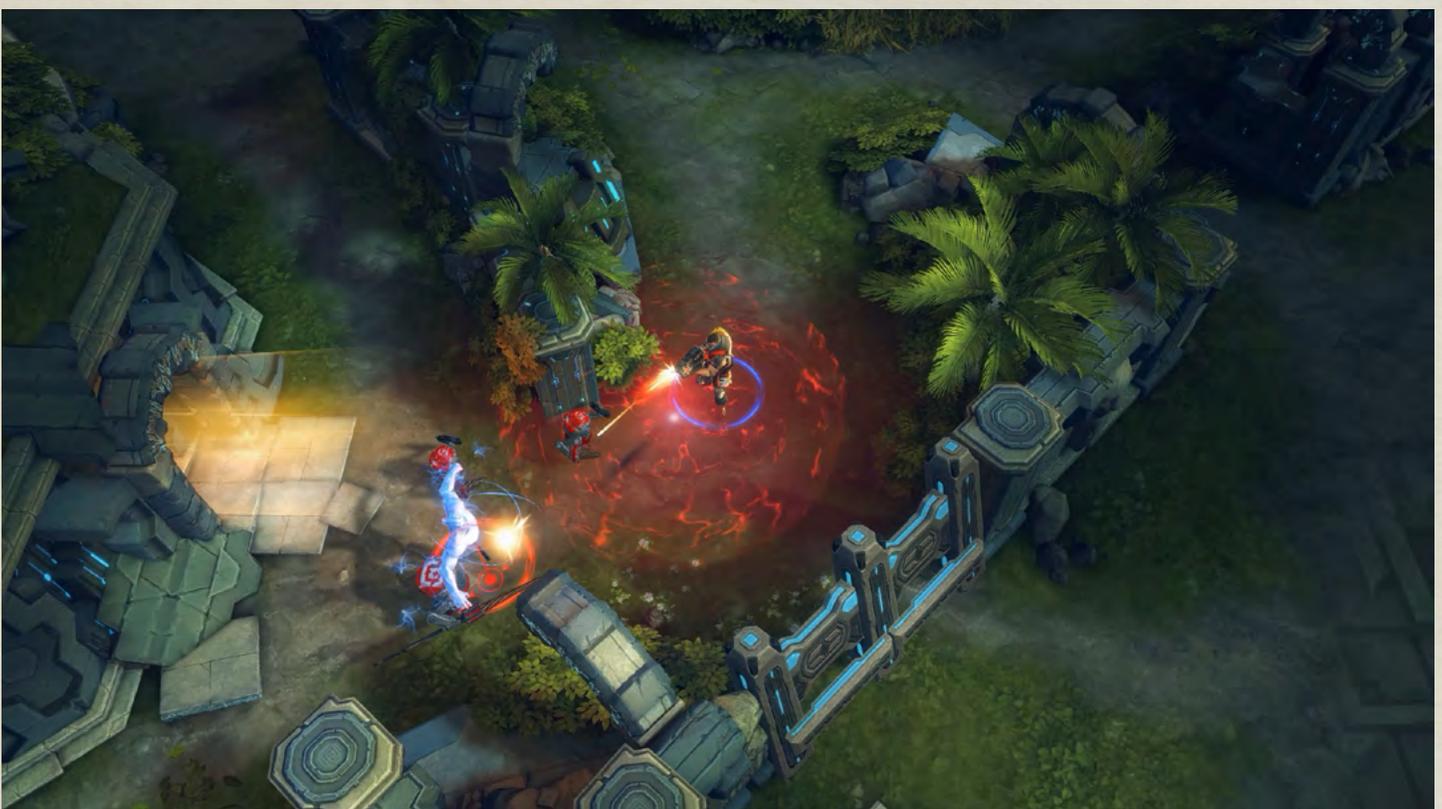


lobby system, it is clear to see that Master x Master draws inspiration from a variety of sources. A top down, isometric view is reminiscent of several ARPG titles and it is heavily influenced by established MOBA trends. Bright modern graphics are predominant that will likely run on a broad variety of systems, while NCSoft has struck a good balance between accessibility and

aesthetics. The user interface is decidedly uncluttered and has numerous visual cues similar to several other NCSoft titles. It is unsurprising to learn that NCSoft has taken this MOBA and added their own expertise to the experience.

Moving on from the lobby, the opening tutorial gives a clear overview of the game's core concepts for players unfamiliar with Master x Master. Both

WASD and click to move are available when navigating the map and combat skills are controlled using a combination of keyboard and mouse triggers. Players can choose to vault obstacles by jumping over them and even dodge serious threats, by dipping into a stamina reserve. This action combat approach to movement will feel familiar to many of NCSoft's existing player





base while adding plenty of emphasis on movement and situational awareness.

Combat skills are limited to a set of three active utilities and an auto attack. These skills can be upgraded and customized as characters gain experience using systems that do seem to allow ongoing character progression. The decision to limit players to three skills actually manages to enhance the whole

experience with their scarcity. Rather than lobotomize gameplay, this limited action set adds significance to some of the game's more unique features and clearly defines the role each hero plays. With a restricted set of combat skills available during any encounter, flexibility comes in the form of additional, hot swappable heroes. Prior to entering any engagement, players can select a secondary character to play and alternate

between these at the click of a button. I found that this allowed me to react to the changing tide of battle and remain effective throughout. Alternate characters provide a second pool of health and even made draft selection feel less constrained by traditional meta than other MOBA games.

After cutting a swathe of destruction in the tutorial and learning to play as part





of a unit, the remainder of my time was spent in one of Master x Master's PvP arenas. Similar to much of Master x Master, PvP encounters initially seem typical of the MOBA genre. Towers, creeps, three lanes, and jungles are all present and functional. Creeps spawn, towers defend, and players clash in a familiar dance across the map. Getting started was easy enough for this newcomer but it didn't take long for the game to spring some surprises. After quickly massing one hundred points, my team spawned a gargantuan, rock titan. These behemoths enter the fray at hundred point increments and carve a path through enemy defenses, wreaking havoc all around them. With a massive

health pool and a tendency to charge straight towards objectives, they present a serious risk to your enemies and can completely sway the tide of battle.

Titans are not a player's only ally in team combat. Smaller, mini titans can also be called to your aid. Interacting with contested monuments, which are dispersed across the map, allows players to spawn smaller doses of destruction. These act in a manner roughly similar to titans, aiding your push towards the enemy's base. Each monument is guarded by NPC characters, providing a ready challenge and an objective that specifically suits players who prefer to roam. The diversity

of roles and subtle depth that PvP entails should only assist the game's longevity.

Unfortunately, time was not on my side and this glimpse ended before my team could claim any real victory. Master x Master is a game that has a low barrier to entry, intuitive systems and subtle depth. Team dynamics can change in an instant, and each of the thirty characters has a definitive role to play. Whether you enjoy competitive play or just want to see Rytlock Brimstone face off against Jinsoyun you will find something in Master x Master.

Keep a close watch for more on Master x Master as 2016 progresses.



FIRST LOOK AT BLADE AND SOUL

By: Edward “Screenager” Orr

In 2012, I saw Blade & Soul for the very first time. A stunning mix of Eastern aesthetics and action combat was unveiled to audiences with a flare that simply blew me away. After the Korean launch, a Chinese beta followed at the end of 2013, and marked my first tentative steps into the Earthen Realm. The end of this beta signaled the start of a prolonged hiatus as I patiently waited for Blade & Soul’s eventual release in the EU.

With over three years elapsed since its original debut, Blade & Soul has expanded into numerous markets but yet,

surprisingly, has not launched in the West. Success in Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan, a mobile game, and even its own anime series did nothing to hasten its transition, until now. On January 19, NCSOFT and Team Bloodlust officially unleashed Blade & Soul on western audiences and I fly kicked right in.

NCSOFT’s wuxia inspired MMORPG is developed by Team Bloodlust and includes a number of themes common to wuxia legends. The initial forty-five levels of furious fists, flying daggers, and frantic combat are a common tale of justice, retribution, and a hero’s journey.

This martial arts title casts the player as a disciple of the Hongmoon School and the only survivor of a merciless attack. With the rest of the Hongmoon students slaughtered, our protagonist sets out on a quest to avenge their fallen comrades and retrieve the legendary Twilight’s Edge.

Blade & Soul is a free to play title and includes two major monetization options. The in-game cash shop encourages players to part with cash for cosmetic outfits and a variety of convenience items, including skins, health potions, food and

unsealing charms. Convenience items can generally be acquired in game and none of these feel particularly egregious. NCSOFT has also done a great job of balancing their operation with a, free, in-game currency called Hongmoon coin, which allows players to obtain cash shop items for free. A premium tier subscription also exists, providing some fairly attractive benefits. Increased gold, boosted XP gain and login queue priority are a tiny sampling of the benefits initially available with more added as subscription periods accumulate.

After logging in and navigating a rather frustrating queuing system, it is hard to miss the striking stylized aesthetic of

Blade & Soul. Oriental themes are present throughout the game and there is a definite nod to anime influences. This is especially true of character design, where a hypersexualized approach to female characters is clearly evident. It would be remiss of me not to mention that this design does not sit well with a number of players though character creation provides a stunning array of other choices. I spent hours of my time during beta testing choosing from seven classes, four races and an innumerable selection of customization attributes. A ridiculous number of personalization options are also available during character creation which amount to millions of possible

permutations.

Character creation is the first indication the game is well serviced by the Unreal 3 engine which powers Blade & Soul. It is also a pleasant surprise that Team Bloodlust's work has aged relatively well during its transition to western audiences. Character models still look fresh and the gorgeous environment that spreads out across the Earthen Realm is also testament to the artistic team behind Blade and Soul.

It is clear that the environment of Blade & Soul has been built, from the ground up, to provide verticality of content. Quests can send players up mountains, across ravines and into the



clouds, taking advantage of the aerobatics you and your enemies can perform. From riding the Dragon Pulses to Windwalking through the air, getting around is a thrilling experience.

Movement in *Blade & Soul* is, however, more than just a nifty way to get around. It is an integral part of the combat system and helps to build one of the best examples of action combat I have seen in any MMO. Players can dodge, parry, block, counter and build combos, using a free form combat system that feels like it has real urgency in the world. Positioning actually matters, attacks can be intercepted, and awareness is key. This is no cast and forget system. *Blade & Soul's* combat even succeeds in elevating

otherwise mediocre encounters into engaging experiences.

Many of those more mediocre encounters can be found in the game's open world. PvE is a mixed affair, consisting of open world, story quests, and dungeons. Side quests and open world missions regularly feel superfluous while leveling, and my heroic endeavors even took me apple picking. NPC dialogue and voice acting is, similarly, an irregular affair. Much of the localization work hits the mark, but all too often attempts at whimsy miss and feel out of place. Just as the game's dialogue cannot completely escape its original script, RNG and the dreaded grind are inherited from its Korean release. While

this does not feel unreasonable for a Korean import, much of the less engaging elements end up relying on the fantastic combat system to elevate it above monotony.

Story missions, however, provide a meaningful counterbalance to the pedestrian nature of the game's side quests. They tell the story of the protagonist's journey from student to hero, with a fair amount of soul-searching along the way. The narrative is solid and while it is not up to the same standards as NCSOFT's *Guild Wars 2*, it is engaging and carries the player forward adequately. The first three chapters of the martial arts saga are included in the western launch of *Blade & Soul*, with the remaining six



acts due to follow swiftly in subsequent updates.

Dungeons are an entirely different experience from open world and story questing. Over twenty challenges are available for four or six-player parties to dive into, ensuring there is plenty of content. A mature, well-designed dungeon finder makes locating friends extremely easy and eliminates any wait for groups. Team Bloodlust's move away from a traditional class trinity also helps in this regard, and even after graduating to hard mode instances, Blade & Soul's dungeons are not hindered by any lack of healers. Dungeons could legitimately be labeled as easy at first glance. On early instances, mobs are

simply overwhelmed by a furious deluge of fists as players burn through low level content. This all changes, very quickly, during high level encounters as the concluding dungeons provide an adequate challenge. Telegraphs are removed, player roles become critical, and players that are unaccustomed to action combat are regularly left decimated.

PvE in Blade & Soul may be a mixed bag, but competitive play stands out as the game's premier feature. Arena battles are a furious rush of activity and reminiscent of games like Street Fighter, Tekken, or anything from Platinum Games. Players build a flurry of combos, grapple, counter, dodge, block, and perform amazing aerial attacks,

as they go 1v1 or 3v3. A reactive UI modifies the active skill set based on any given situation, allowing for swift, decisive reactions that keep combat careening along at a satisfying pace. Each of the seven classes also has its own idiosyncrasies and strengths. Even the benign looking Summoners and their cute pet cats are a surprisingly capable foe in these instanced encounters.

Although ranked PvP competition is not quite in full flow yet, February's Rising Waters update marks the start of preseason and the introduction of PvP specific currencies. Future content drops will kick off live competitive play and eventually see the top Western players



competing against a mature e-sport scene at regular world championship events. After a recent invitational tournament, NCSoft has expressed hope that this might happen as early as 2016, when western players were surprisingly adept at mastering PvP combat.

Open world PvP also benefits from Blade & Soul's intense combat regime. Players engaging in factional combat can gain points for kills, which they turn in for various rewards. Open world PvP is both deeply satisfying and hugely frustrating in equal measure. The factional system allows players to flag themselves for combat using their wardrobe costume. Just equip a Cerulean Order or Crimson Legion outfit and find an opposing player to get started. This is an inspired choice that allows players to flag for PvP as appropriate and

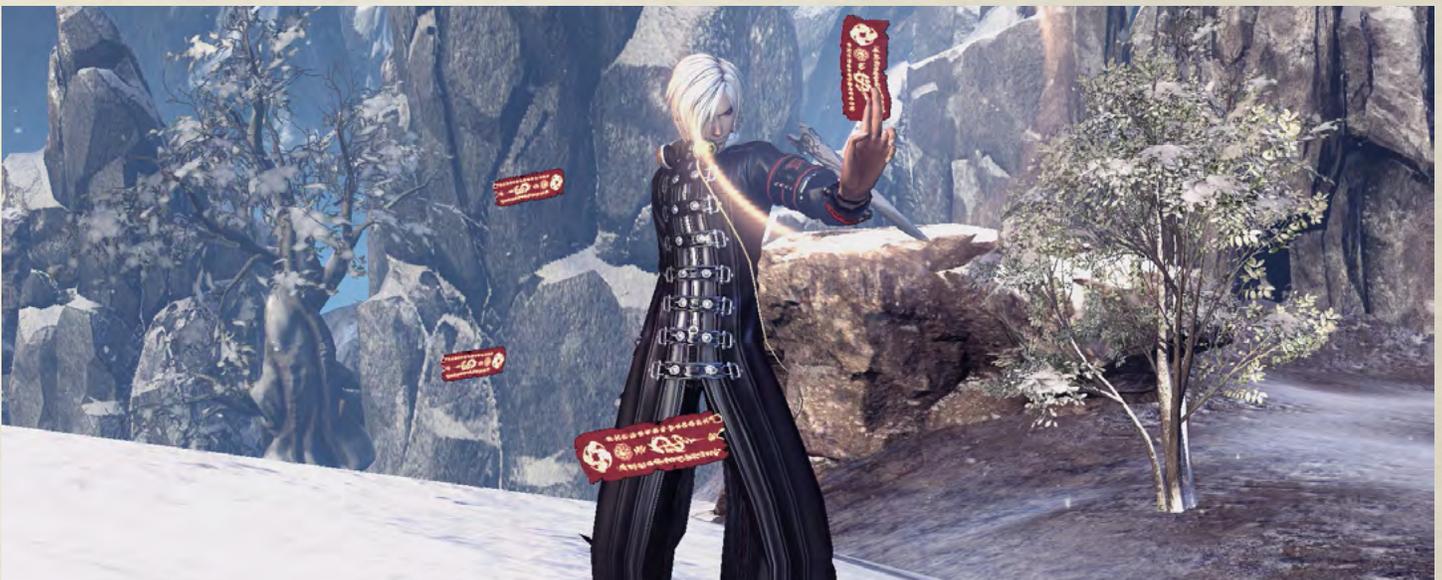
leverages a fundamental part of the game to do so. Reward systems also appear to be well thought out and are almost as satisfying as watching your opponents crumble. However, the wealth of over-powered, over-levelled players, cutting a swathe of destruction in low level areas is an issue that I don't expect to see resolved soon.

This contradiction is atypical of Blade & Soul. It is an exciting, inspired and deeply satisfying experience when it excels. I've had great fun running dungeons with friends, improving my skills, and experiencing the combat in PvP. Classes are also distinctly unique with something new to each of them. Very few MMORPGs reach this level of quality although a few systems do undermine the overall experience. Archaic queuing systems, some less than stellar

side quests, shaky dialogue, and a reliance on RNG manage to tarnish the shine from a fantastic game.

Despite these drawbacks, Blade & Soul is still a lot of fun and I find myself looking forward to logging in. It has entertained me, provided a great range of content, and still has more to come. Future updates are due to bring new multi-player dungeons, level increases, clan expansions, new costumes, extra classes, improved game systems, story expansions, and the massively popular Mushin's Tower.

This might not be the bleeding edge of MMORPGs, but Blade & Soul strikes true with a package that provides much and still has a lot more to give. Rise, Strike, and avenge now and for free, at <http://www.bladeandsoul.com>



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FACING OFF AGAINST NAZI ZOMBIE ARMY 2

by Amanda "Soren" Carr

Sniper Elite: Nazi Zombie Army is everything and more you could want from a tactical zombie shooter and more. As a stand alone entry into the fantastic Sniper Elite series by Rebellion, players find themselves in the shoes of a WW2 sniper in

Nazi controlled Germany. The premise behind the game is simple: Hitler is facing the end as his forces crumble and in a last ditch effort to keep himself in power, he unleashes a horde of undead super soldiers to turn the tide to his favor. Now

soldiers from all over the world have been forced to unite to put an end to the zombie nightmare and eventually Hitler himself. Sounds simple right?

While the idea of a zombie shooter isn't new, Rebellion



found a way to make it a nonstop action packed thrill ride. While there are still plenty of mindless degenerates, this zombie army isn't just slow lumbering corpses. Players are also treated to fast zombies, huge zombies with machine guns that take multiple head-shots to kill, suicide zombies that have no qualms about running at you and exploding you into tiny bits, and sniper zombies that will pick you off from the rooftops. Players will have to stay on their toes and watch their six accordingly or find themselves victims to a horrible death.

Gameplay is very similar to Sniper Elite V2 crossed with Left for Dead though it doesn't take long to realize that this isn't



your normal zombie apocalypse. In single player campaigns players will have to use their environment to their advantage and keep a sharp eye on the bullets they spend. Every shot counts when the horde is hot on your tail. Whether it's setting up shots from a second story window, setting devastating traps, or bunkering down behind

a pile of debris before charging headlong into the fray, players will be challenged as they make their way across a desolate Berlin landscape. Likewise in 4 player co-op, players are encouraged to talk to one another and work together as a team to survive. In both settings players are encouraged to use their sniper rifles but if they'd rather get





more up close and personal there are plenty of handguns, shotguns, and other rifles to mess with. Levels are tiered and have a straightforward design: get from point A to point B while surviving, and as mentioned before, heavily encourage teamwork.

Along with the wonderful reappearance of the X-Ray 'kill cam' that allows you to see everything from lung bursts, to bones shattering, players also get the added fun of playing with top of the line sniping ballistics. Gravity, wind, velocity, and stability will all play a factor in lining up that perfect shot.

Mechanic's wise the game is sound, and has held up

remarkably well over the years. Key layout is easy to master and if you are a controller fan like me, controller setup is a breeze and natural feeling, which makes cycling weapons, targeting, and aiming feel like you aren't fighting the system to get shots off. Customizable loadouts give players access to start the game with a preferred weapon set and equipment, meaning you don't have to spend time finding a decent weapon once you enter a level. The only downside that is noticeable is the non scaling zombie hordes and the fact the game doesn't take into account how many people are currently playing, so if you are in with a 4-man team and someone drops out, you'll be in for a world of hurt.

Overall it was a pleasant surprise in an overly saturated zombie genre, but one I'm glad the Epic Adventure team had a chance to play through. Considering I've been a long time fan of zombie shooters, I'm surprised I didn't have this already in my Steam library. For anyone who is a fan of zombie shooters, Sniper Elite, or finds themselves wanting to give it a go, Sniper Elite: Nazi Zombie Army 2 can be picked up off Steam as a standalone option or in the Nazi Zombie Trilogy: Remastered edition.



Experience Warhammer Fantasy like never before in this
first person 4 player co-op action adventure

A dramatic promotional image for the game Warhammer Fantasy: Vermintide 2. The scene is set at night under a large, full moon. In the center, a group of five diverse characters is ready for battle. From left to right: a Dwarf warrior in ornate armor holding a sword; a Wood Elf archer in a green hood aiming a bow; a Wizard in a tall, pointed hat holding a staff; a Dwarf warrior with a large beard and horned helmet holding a mace; and a Sorceress with glowing yellow energy around her head. The background is filled with fire, smoke, and the silhouettes of a castle and flying creatures. In the foreground, the dark, spiky forms of rat-like creatures (vermin) are visible. The overall atmosphere is dark and intense.

WARHAMMER
THE END TIMES

VERMINTIDE

Buy Now on Steam!



Breathtaking Platformer Provides True Cooperative Experience

by Michael "Smitty" Smith

INTRO

The Streams of Epic Adventure team recently delved into this gem of a game, and I have decided to provide a little recap for anyone who may be interested in looking into Trine 3.

I am fresh to the Trine series, and do not have the benefit of knowing the backstory of our main characters. That being said, it in no way made the gameplay any less enjoyable. It is a very stylized, fun game that will offer a LOT of opportunities for replay.

OVERVIEW

We were introduced to our three intrepid, common heroes through the first three missions. Those familiar with the Trine series will immediately recognize Pontius the Knight, Amadeus the Wizard and Zoya the Thief. Each of these heroes has their own class-specific skills, and seemingly innumerable ways for them to interact with each other to accomplish the missions. They are commoners who happen to acquire their powers from Trine and one of the Artifacts. But there must be a tragedy to

further the story, and there is one that forces our players to band together to defeat the forces of evil! Huzzah!

For your consideration, I introduce our adventurers. Pontius is your classic hack-and-slash knight with a sword and shield to slice, dice, smash, and bash your way through the level with brute force. Amadeus is the wizard who can conjure boxes, and manipulate objects in the environment. But don't let the innocuous boxes fool you; they are very useful as we discovered in our play through.

And then there is the thief, Zoya. Arrows-a-plenty and a hook shot comprise her arsenal as her ranged fire, and rope skills come in extremely handy to manipulate the environment and solve a puzzle. The three of them together are extremely powerful, and work well in a balanced manner, but separately they are individual forces to be reckoned with.

The level structure is straightforward. With a 3D feel to a 2D platformer, you have a lot of mobility to take down the bad guys and work your environment to your advantage. The puzzles are simplistic, but take an occasional bit of skill to execute. All the puzzles have methods

that can be solved by any of the main characters, so be on the lookout for new and innovative ways to get through the level.

The graphical style of the game won't blow you away with realism, but you will be impressed with the areas you are presented with. As an example, your heroes are sucked into a book and the entire level consists of elements you will find in a book. Art moves in the background, words form your platforms, and the puzzle elements look as if they were painted right onto the page.

The over-world, where you move from mission to mission, looks like a game board, complete with oversized dice you can

kick around the board, or small tokens you can smash and dash all over the place.

THE HEROES

Each hero has their own style of gameplay, and you are given three missions off the bat to get you familiar with each. The learning curve is quite low and eases you into the mechanics.

Pontius, the Knight – Your typical armor-bound, sword-and-shield swinging, bash-it-all-up tank. Your main focus is to ground pound enemies, swing your sword, and leap from objective to objective. You are also capable of deflecting fireballs back to the source, and can also deflect major environmental elements



to your advantage. If you like a style that lacks finesse, this is for you!

Amadeus, the Wizard – Here is a wizard that can't wizard much, except the boxes he can conjure that he can wizard the heck out of! You are all about subtle environmental manipulation. The boxes you conjure are heavy, and can be lifted in the air and smashed down to bust up the environment, or any unfortunate baddies that happen to be underneath them. You can have one conjured box on screen at a time, but the game lovingly provides others that you can use to build stairs. Also, you can move elements that exist in the environment, such as bridges that might be slotted into wrong

places. This is quite handy if you like to look at your world, and make it work for you.

Zoya, the Thief – Now here is a hero who can move through the air with the greatest of ease. Arrows and a hookshot are your primary weapons, and you will use them to the fullest. Buttons can be activated with your arrows and your hook shot can land anywhere you see a ring. This comes in handy if you want to pull objects in your direction, link two objects together, or even hold doors open that have doorknobs on both sides of the door. Zoya is all about finesse, and will please anyone who may have come from an "Assassin's Creed" background.

GAMEPLAY/ CONTROLS

This game lends itself extremely well to both keyboard/mouse and gamepad playability. The 3D/2D keeps you on your toes, keeping you mindful of your depth in the screen for accuracy of some puzzles, but you eventually get used to it.

The environmental elements are well designed, but have their moments of glitching. These can be exploited to get you places, or could be abused to break the game forcing you to reset. One example that the Stream Team encountered consisted of two vertically moving platforms on either side of a springboard in the middle. The idea is you raise



the first platform, jump onto the spring, raise the second platform, and spring up to it to continue to a bridge. In our game play with the three heroes, we caused the second platform to glitch with a combination of ground slams and boxes. We eventually were able to figure out a way across, but it took much longer than the designers imagined, I am sure of it.

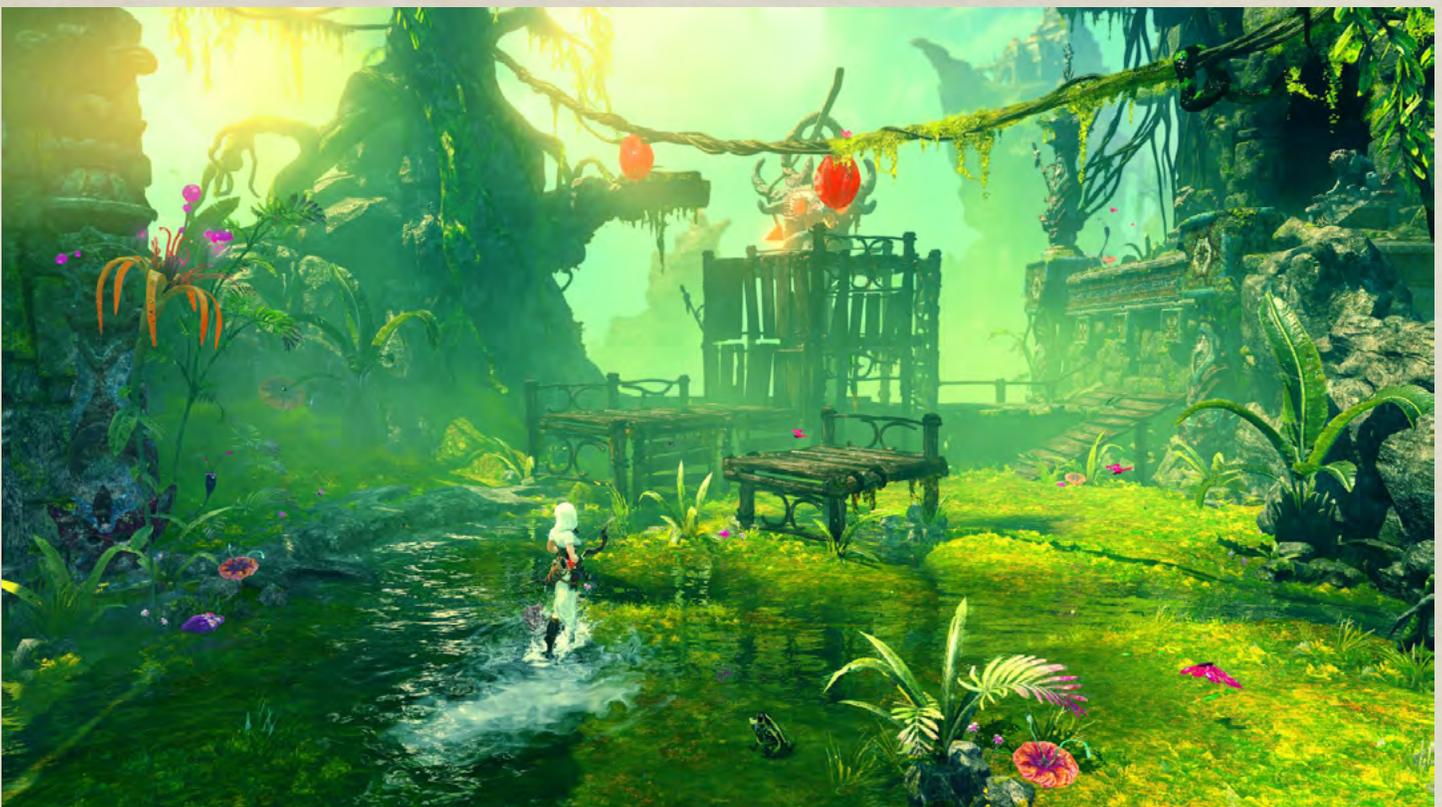
Even though this game is designed so a single person can play through it, it really shines when you have all three players on the field at the same time. The difficulty of the enemies scales to how many heroes you have on screen. The puzzles are well designed, allowing multiple solutions to be executed. Some

solutions use two or three abilities from different characters for execution, allowing for greater diversity if grouped.

A large part of the game revolves around collecting triangles that are scattered throughout the level. And you can't progress to the next level until you have collected enough of these triangles. What gives this game good replay ability is that some of the triangles can only be collected by certain heroes. You might have to swing up to a ledge with Zoya, or smash a certain heavy box with Pontius, or manipulate the environment with Amadeus. It is well thought out, and I have had a good time trying to figure out how to 100% the game.

CLOSING

All-in-all, the Stream Team had a blast playing this game. It is funny, clever, and plays well. I highly recommend you pick it up and let us know what YOU think!





Take A Journey Into Thea: The Awakening

By Robert J. 'Jairone' Mann

Thea is an interesting game. I picked it up on the Steam Winter Sale, and have thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It has a complexity that the initial style does little to reveal, and offers something missing in some many games... options.

When you start a game, you select a deity out of their pantheon, getting bonuses for your game. These deities level up as you play them, up to level five, and each level gives you another bonus toward your next game. You unlock more deities by reaching level three on the one you already have.

It is based around Slavic mythology, which is somewhat refreshing. The mythology is charmingly old school, with a very medieval feeling compared to modern fantasy. Much of the dialogue is voice

acted, and all the sounds and voices fit well. The game works wonderfully when you need something quiet to play, and nothing really needs sound to make it shine. The weakness of the game may be that it is always the same game mode. No multiplayer options or alternatives to the approach are currently offered. I do think there is room to make them, and that if done as well as the rest of the game they would be worthwhile.

At the start of a new game with your deity chosen, you look at a short dialogue. This is the basic tutorial, and skipping the first few steps is nothing that makes or breaks a game. Unless, maybe, you started on a very high difficulty. After that, there is a screen that appears to be from a turn based strategy game. It is, and it isn't. There are a few notable differences, and one of those is that your



Each map is procedurally generated, and will look something like this

village is your village, period. It never moves, you can't make more, and it must survive or it's game over.

Your first order of business is to get your characters to work for you. You'll have some in the village, and some nearby called 'Expedition 1.' You can create as many expeditions as you like, shifting resources between them and the village via the inventory screen, which I will talk about later. However, if the village or expedition is too weak, they will fail challenges. When you fail challenges, people die. You don't want your people to die, they are a precious and somewhat scarce resource. If you click on the village or expedition, you get a pop-up selection system. This allows you to interact with each group. It also allows expeditions to camp or explore ruins and important locations.

You can see resources there, and there's a button to view them on the world map. This is important

because your people can gather these resources when they camp nearby. Your village never moves or grows to more tiles, so only the resources within 1 hex, or those that spawn there when unlocking new resources in the research window, can be harvested by the village. Your expeditions must do the rest! To do that, you must have them camp on a tile next to or on the tile with the resource you want.

Everything your group has is in the inventory: characters, items, resources, food. You can destroy items if your expedition has too much weight and deconstruct items you no longer need. There's also a convenient deconstruction system with looting items so you don't have to visit the inventory for that constantly. Your equipment is also shown, including which character is using it. I have an axe that nobody is using in the picture, along with a number of items people are using. This also carries over to the equipment window.



Your village or camp will look roughly like this

There are seven types of equipment in the game: Weapons, Armor, Shields, Tools, Artifacts, Jewelry, and Ranged. When starting a game you won't have every piece filled in on your characters, much like you can see in the picture. Each character can equip items based on their class. The picture shows a warrior, who can equip everything except jewelry.

You can also see that Czeslava, the character, has a weight limit that is nearly met. A character can't wear more than their weight limit. There are

some situations where they can have too much on, and they will be considered completely unable to move, halting any expedition movement. Should it happen at the village it doesn't seem to matter, unless you were hoping to send that character on an expedition. That weight limit is based on Strength, which also affects the total expedition weight limits. Those aren't quite as strict, only reducing movement by half if overweight.

You also see your character's stats in the equipment screen. They are at the bottom of the screen and



tell you what they do when you mouse over them. The stats are important in different challenges, and building a group that can take on at least a couple of different situations is important. Most important is direct combat, which I will cover with the other challenges. These stats grow over the course of the game, as well as, with new equipment. The advancements are random, and can make a very one dimensional character into a great multitasker later on.

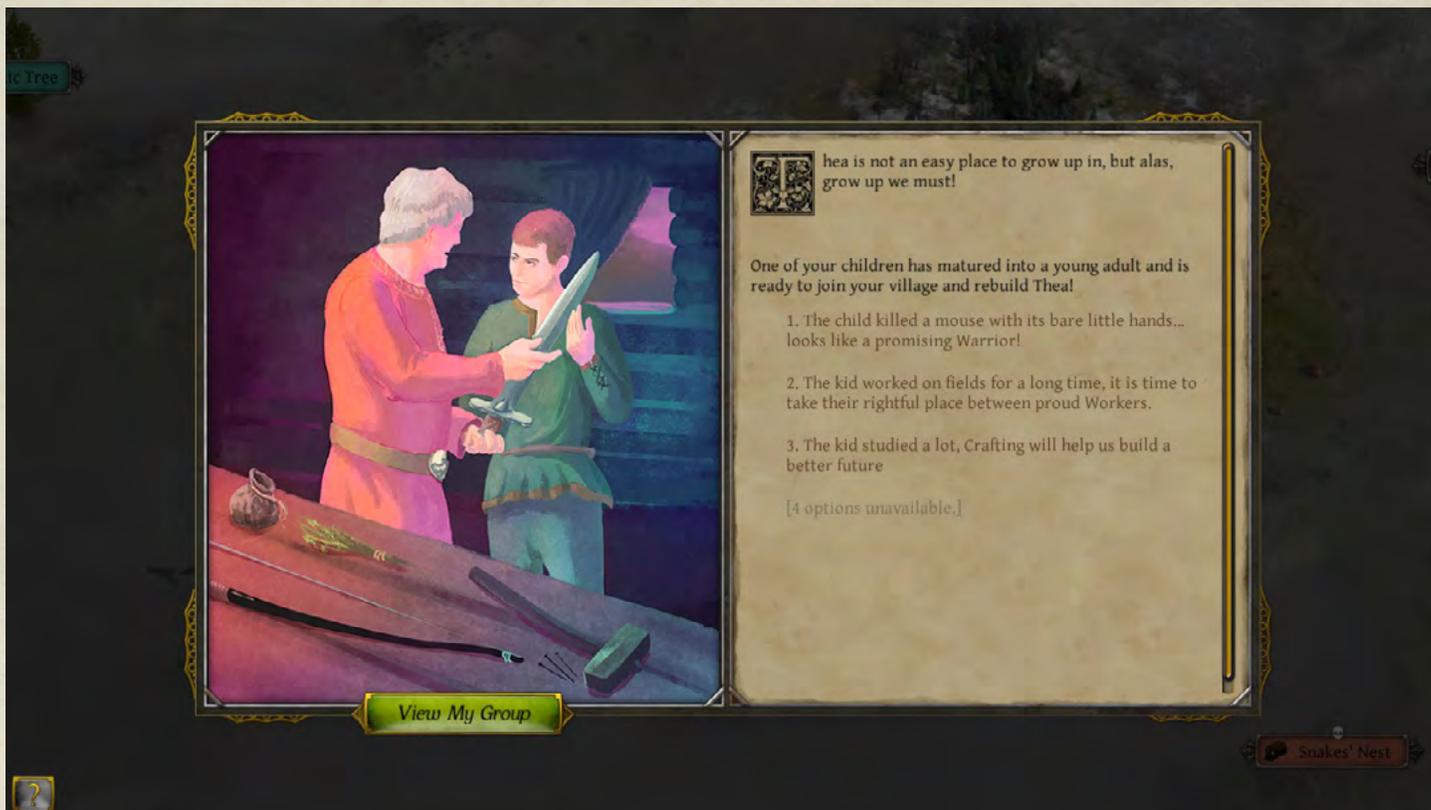
Food is very important in Thea. It offers multiple benefits based on the number of types you have. Fuel for fire is also important, although only one type of fuel is of benefit at any given time. Having no food causes damage to your people. Having many kinds gives stacking buffs, up to ten kinds of food. Having no fuel causes gathering to take twice as long, and also doesn't allow wounds to heal as quickly when camped or in the village. You can manage the resources you wish to consume, saving rare food for when you really need the benefits of many food types and saving the rarer fuels for crafting.

CRAFTING

Why should you care about crafting? Simply put, you don't have to. You can play and succeed at Thea without crafting on lower difficulties. However, crafting offers a lot to improve your village and equip your people. Additionally it boosts your research points to help unlock more crafts, materials, and buildings. Buildings in turn can draw new villagers to settle, depending on the building and materials used.

The crafting system is interesting, allowing for a type of material in each slot. There are always three materials required, although sometimes you have options for different material types. For example, when building a well you can use stone or wood. Additionally, this is the only viable means of getting tools, which speed up crafting and gathering and makes some challenges easier. Once you decide on the materials, you must assign crafters to do the work.





CHILDREN

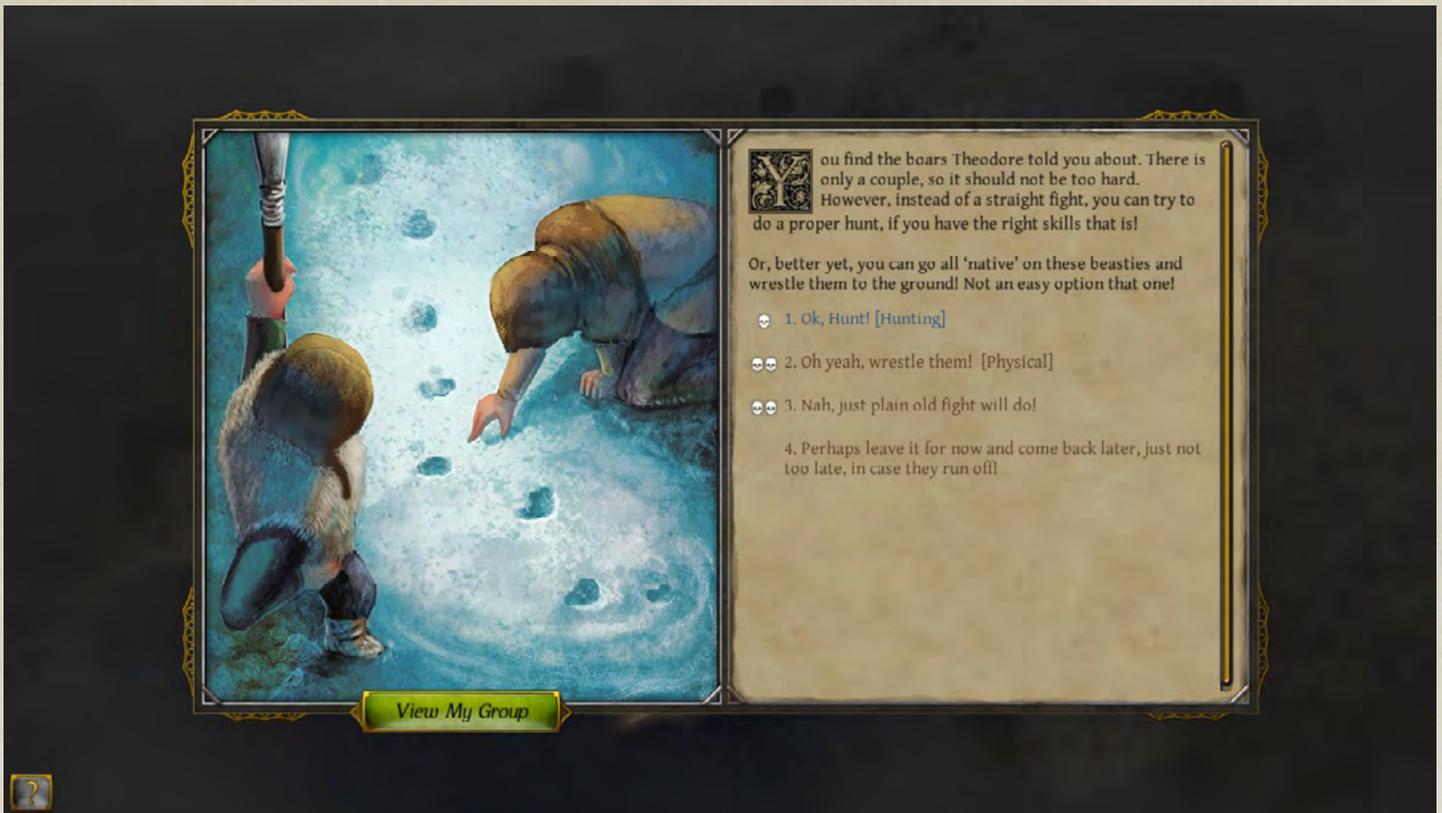
You will also find children in the game. Children are as valuable as people, except they can't do anything until they grow up. Someday, though, they will grow up and be approximately as strong as your other people. This is one of many things Thea does very well. The game keeps a record of how many levels you have gained. It then adjusts new

members to be strong enough to survive the more difficult challenges that have come up. Children are offered one of a number of classes, some rare and some common. In the shot below, you can see a child who was only offered the common classes upon growing up. The rarer classes offer different benefits and skills, but each of the core classes can grow to be effective in those skills too.

GROWTH

Whenever you have an encounter, you have some dialogue show up. It describes the situation, and offers choices based on what your group can do. One of the neatest aspects of the game is the idea that any encounter can be resolved multiple ways. It is almost a shame that most enemies will stick to a good old fashioned





fight, but I can understand why they would avoid the other options from a gameplay perspective.

Whenever you have the dialogue options, you get to decide how you wish to approach the event. There are a very few early encounters that only have one option. These exist solely to direct you to useful features or quests toward game goals. Once you have selected the type of challenge you wish to engage in, you will see another screen detailing the stats used in the challenge and how many foes there are. Each of the icons for the stats relates to the same icon for stats in the equipment screen.

Knowing your abilities is key to winning.

You may auto resolve if you are sure of the results. I would only suggest doing so if you are far more powerful, as auto resolve will not play as well as you, and will lose some challenges you should win. However, it is useful for dealing with minor challenges as you move on.

COMBAT

Instead select Begin Combat to move on to the card game. Your characters will be shuffled into offensive and tactical roles, and depending on



setting you may have a chance to reshuffle. At some difficulties there is a cost associated with reshuffling, and it is entirely random. Thus, it should only be used when you really need it, or if you are feeling impish!

Once you accept the shuffle, you begin the tactical phase. This involves taking turns laying out your cards. Mastering this card game will help you in the various challenges ahead, and taking a little time to learn all the intricate details is important. Combat will occur with a tactical phase, then two combat phases before reshuffling.

As you can see, the two hunting challenges are now cards in the AI's hand. It got the first turn, which is random, and played an offensive card to the field. Offensive cards can attack both rounds of the upcoming combat phase. Offensive cards are in the left half of the screen, tactical are on the right. Their defenses at the top are health + shielding over max health. Therefore the card in play currently can take nine damage, with a

maximum health of six. This illustrates shielding perfectly. It is disposable protection which allows you to take hits without wearing on your health. It lasts through a full two combat round shuffle.

The damage the character deals is below that, in this case four damage. There are a number of damage types, and they all have their own benefits. In this case, it is all normal damage. My offensive cards also have only normal damage. The fourth card has no normal damage, but three green damage. Green indicates poison, and has the special effect of hitting twice if you have damaged the health of a card and no shielding is in the way. My fifth card has a ton of tactical options on it and a two with a shield icon hidden under them. This means it has two shielding.

Tactical cards have many possible effects, and can use them to either benefit your cards or disrupt your opponent. In this case, I am going to take that fifth card and confuse my opponent's offensive card. Any tactical card will affect the rightmost



card on the field it can. After this, I will play one of my offensive cards.

The AI played the tactical card with 'Get Closer.' It isn't an option for my tactical cards as it requires either piercing, normal, or blunt damage. All tactical side cards played with this start confused, so they won't attack the first round. Piercing damage plays the card ahead of the last card if it was an enemy, and deals half damage to that card. Blunt damage can deal any remaining damage to a second card if it finishes the first card. I'll play my other offensive card with damage at this point, and end my turn. This means I'll have two turns of attacks with each card, and the AI will only get to attack on the second round.

The combat will then start. The rule here is that combat starts as soon as neither side plays a card, or when a single side cannot play a card and the other side ends their tactical turn. Since the AI was out of cards, I could play as many as I wanted. There was no benefit to playing other cards though. So I ended the tactical phase and moved to combat.

Combat works by having each character card attack in order from the left to the right side of the screen. If confused on round one, the card will become unconfused and ready to attack for round two. Each card randomly selects left or right and attacks that direction. However, if there is nothing to attack that direction, it tries the other direction. If there are no cards in either direction, it attacks cards left in the offense or tactical areas, and then discarded cards. Therefore if you know you will lose your played cards in a round, you can protect your discarded ones by leaving others in the offense or tactical slots.

There is a wealth of options to make the system work for you. Combat is not just all about numbers. It also requires mastering the tactical phase. A well laid plan can be wonderful to behold, or terrifying when the AI surprises you.

Needless to say, I won the challenge in the screenshots. Not only did I have six cards to work with against two, but I was able to use the tactical phase to foil the AI's plans with confusion. It did take me to another reshuffle though, before I could finish off the challenge entirely. I only had normal damage, so even though I could do sixteen points I had to hit one enemy with five health twice, and the other with six health and three shielding was able to survive two hits of four.

The game world produces more difficult challenges as you survive longer, and defending the lands around your village is important to prevent a number of enemies from attacking on the same turn, resulting in multiple challenges, which slowly kill your characters.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thea has been a wonderful addition to my library. It offers an engaging mythology, a solid need for thought and strategy, and a wealth of options to dealing with the random events that pop up. It won't do much for those looking for fast action and flashy graphics. For those looking for a solid, thoughtful game with some interesting mechanics it has a lot to offer. It is to them that I heartily recommend Thea: The Awakening!

BUILD, CONQUER, DEFEND. FORGE YOUR FATE.



CAMELOT UNCHAINED

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Winter 2016 Best of Crowdfunding

By: Benjamin “Foghladha” Foley

Each issue we hand select some of the shiny new concepts coming out of Kickstarter, Indiegogo, Patreon, and other crowdfunding websites. Our goal is to provide some exposure for these projects and give our readers a look at some title they otherwise might have missed.

Each of these titles has gained the support of their fans and met their crowdfunding goals. This is quite a task as Entrepreneur Magazine notes that less than 19% of all crowdfunding campaigns actually succeed.

These picks are the cream of the crop and shine as an example for future campaigns.

KICKSTARTER





This classic style role playing game is based on the world of Monte Cook's new tabletop RPG setting, Numenera. Built in the same vein of the 1999 hit classic Planescape: Torment. It continues the tradition of delivering a hallmark storytelling experience with a rich player driven storyline.

On March 6th 2013, inXile launched the Torment: Tides of Numenera Kickstarter campaign to drive its initial funding of \$900,000. By the end of its 30-day campaign it had raised \$4,188,927 more

than four times the requested amount. Torment: Tides of Numenera is currently available on Steam for Early Access.

This is a classic roleplaying game, so remember to save often! Back in our day, games didn't save for us! Prepare to enjoy a true story telling experience.

Learn More at:

<http://tormentrpg.com/>







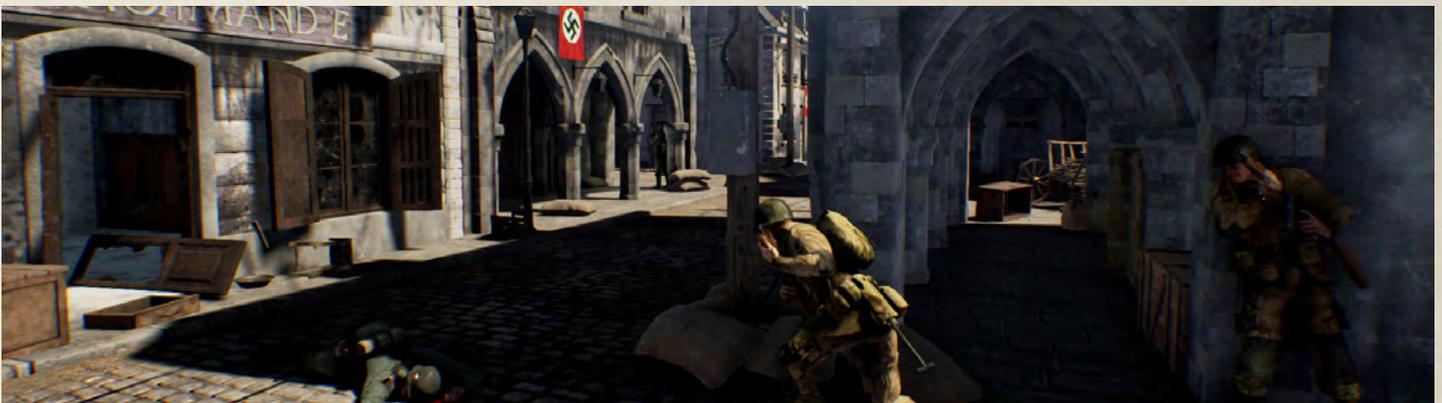
BATTALION 1944

In years past, the Medal of Honor, Call of Duty, and dozens of other games beat the WWII scene to death in the gaming industry. Players became tired of the constant retelling of essentially the same story. Then game developers moved on. Games in the WWII settings are few and far between and gamers have actually been craving a good romp in a WWII scenario.

The ring of the Browning M2, the clank of the M1 Garand, and the ever so unforgettable sound of a M24 stick grenade bouncing into your room.

WWII games have a certain feel about them. In a day in age when modern and futuristic has been hammered to the same levels as the historical games of the past, one developer has decided to go back and perfect the historical warfront in their new title Battalion 1944.

This action first person shooter (FPS) is being developed for PC, XBOX1, and PS4 by Bulkhead Interactive and aims to recapture the core classic experiences blended with new technology and techniques.





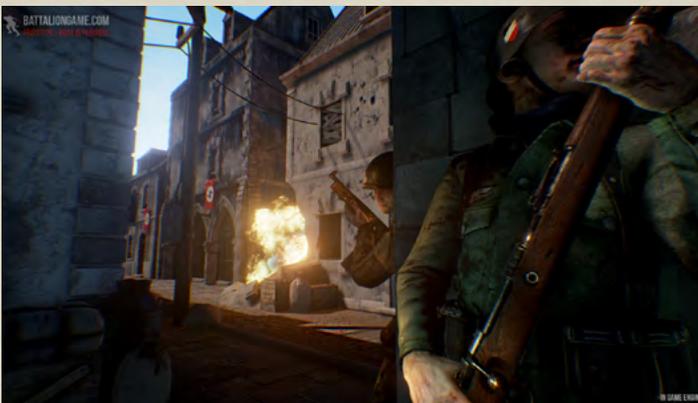
They launched their campaign on February 2nd 2016 with a target goal of \$142,577. In their first 15 days they raised \$333,806. It is obvious that the gaming world is ready to revisit the WWII scene.

Battalion 1944 aims to reinvent the WWII multiplayer scene with a core focus on skill over grind. They will have a “BattleRank” system that allows players to compete globally against other players. All unlocks are purely cosmetic so that all players start the game on the same playing field. You can even join a Platoon and compete as a

team. This game is being set up with eSports in mind and as of right now this game will be focused on becoming a multiplayer experience. They have however announced a stretch goal to incorporate a full single player campaign.

Learn more about Battalion 1944 at:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/bulkheadinteractive/battalion-1944-pc-xb1-ps4>







In a surprise campaign that seemed to come out of nowhere I ran across a sci-fi adventure sandbox that has procedurally generated planets. This Kickstarter campaign from Craneballs set out to raise \$99,007 on January 24th and had a slow start. But by February 12th it had hit it's mark and became fully funded with 6 days left on the campaign. With just 27 hours to go, Planet Nomads had 3,837 backers with a total \$132,463 raised giving this game the green light to go into production.

Planet Nomads sets you in the shoes of a lone scientist who finds themselves among the wreckage of a spaceship on an unknown alien planet full of dangers and secrets. You must salvage the

wreckage to build survival tools using your wit and hi-tech tools. Over the course of the game you will face off against alien species, wild animals, and eventually begin exploring distant planets.

The game world is fully destroyable and procedurally generated making use of voxel-based graphics. This means you can dig, chop down trees, terraform, mine craters, create quarries, and do just about anything you could imagine. Some long term goals include multiplayer with hostile/friendly player interactions, space flight, modding, and trading.

Get behind this game by visiting:

<https://www.planet-nomads.com/>



JOIN THE ADVENTURE



LEARN MORE AT:
GSCH.INFO/LIVESTREAMS

Gaíscíoch

Livestreams

Over the years Gaíscíoch has taken on many “projects”. First, our community events brought entertainment to the masses of an entire server. Then we thought what fun it would be to make videos of our events and create trailers for our upcoming events. These were widely popular among the community audience. Then we took on creating and supporting charity events giving children a friend in their darkest hour.

As we grew and more talented people joined our community the idea of creating something bigger kept recurring. A way for us to share our activities, discoveries, and hobbies. We created the first Gaíscíoch Magazine to share our adventures with others. Once we had a magazine, the next logical step was interactive video in the form of Livestreams. A few of us video savvy folk took on the project of creating a livestream presence and filled our video library with interesting games and concepts. Today we have a full 6-show weekly calendar of streams filled with action packed content.

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

- Monday @ 6PM PT: Streams of Epic Adventure
- Tuesday @ 6PM PT: The Siege War
- Thursday @ 6PM PT: Social Adventures
- Friday @ 7PM PT: Smitty Streams
- Saturday @ 11PM PT: ClubGaíscíoch
- Weekdays @ 3PM PT: Side Quests

GET YOUR GAME ON THE AIR

If you think your game would be good for one of our shows, please feel free to contact us at streamteam@gaiscioch.com for us to review your game for airing. If we air your title, we will provide you some space in our magazine to promote your title.

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THE STREAMS OF EPIC ADVENTURE

EXPLORING THE FAR REACHES OF THE GAMING UNIVERSE

Taking place every Monday at 6-8PM Pacific, the Streams of Epic Adventure (SOEA) highlights the latest cooperative and massively multiplayer games with our core crew consisting of a large scale raid leader, a singing pvp commander, and a fall damage prone siege warfare mastermind. This team of unlikely heroes ventures through every type of game known to man. With the occasional

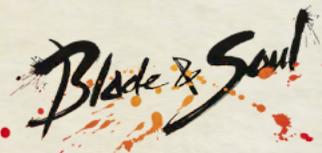
special guest joining the team and even developer cameos, the Streams of Epic Adventure provides weekly entertainment with new adventures every week.

Follow the Streams of Epic Adventure at:
<http://gsch.info/soea>

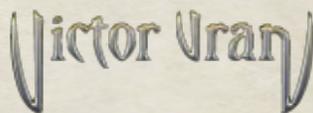
RECENT EPISODES



GUARDIANS OF ORION



STAR WARS
THE OLD REPUBLIC





Airing Tuesday Nights at 6-8PM Pacific, this weekly stream focuses on finding the most glorious battles in siege warfare. Rotating across many siege warfare games we seek out the most epic sieges in games both new and old.

Follow the Siege War at:
<http://gsch.info/sw>



SOCIAL ADVENTURES

JOIN THE FUN!
GSCH.INFO/GETSOCIAL

Kicking off every Thursday at 6-8PM Pacific, the Social Adventures crew welcomes everyone to join them in various games. Viewers are encouraged to join in the fun as we explore what has caught the eye of the GSCH Social Adventures community.

Follow the Social Adventures at:
<http://gsch.info/sa>

RECENT EPISODES

BLACK DESERT
ONLINE

The Elder Scrolls
ONLINE
→ TAMRIEL UNLIMITED ←

WARHAMMER ONLINE
AGE OF RECKONING

DEVILIAN

COMING SOON

CROWFALL

CHRONICLES of
Elyria

BLESS

CAMELOT UNCHAINED

Smitty Streams

A New Weekly Gaming Video

Invading Indie Games every Friday at 7-9PM Pacific, the singing commander, Smitty, entertains the masses with his comedic personality and the strangest, most entertaining, absolutely hilarious games he can find. Each week Smitty brings special guests, including Gaiscioch personalities and developers onto the show.

Follow Smitty Streams at:
<http://gsch.info/ss>

RECENT EPISODES





This story based adventure takes place every weekday at 3-4PM Pacific and is designed to take viewers on an adventure through various Playstation 4 titles. These complete playthroughs are focused on plotlines and completing the games as fast as possible. In addition there are special weekend and nightly editions that take a look into the PC gaming world. Both scheduled

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THE ADVENTURES OF JOLEE BINDO

By Beth “Jae Onasi” Carlock

Fan-fiction based on the character, Jolee Bindo, from the Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic game

Islene sensed the jagged tendrils of Dark Side energy creeping nearby as she boarded the large transport ship. She frowned, glanced around, and continued to follow Master Jolee Bindo onto the vessel headed to Coruscant. In low tones, she said,

“Master Jolee, there’s a dark presence somewhere around here, but I can’t locate it.”

“Did you sleep through the youngling classes on locating the Dark side energy, Islene?” Jolee asked. The older man secured his gear bag under his seat. His lightsaber stayed clipped to his belt, covered discreetly by folds of his simple brown robe. He scanned the large passenger

cabin.

“Very funny. I went to school or worked as a servant in the Onderon court while other younglings were studying all that,” Islene said as she set her bag down. “I learned a lot from Master Vandar, but there’s still plenty to work on.”

Jolee snorted as he sat down in his seat. “All you really missed

was the indoctrination. ‘Don’t stray to the dark side. It’ll suck you in and then the monsters will come out and eat you.’ Really, if they’d let the little ones play outside sometimes instead of pounding lessons into their heads from the day they’re weaned, the Jedi would be a lot more normal.”

“You’re one of them, you know.” Islene smiled as she took the seat next to him.

“I spent a few decades recovering on Kashyyyk. I’m all better now. Good thing I rescued you from the Jedi Council and took you as a Padawan last month.” He leaned over and whispered, “Keep focused, use your senses, and feel the Force currents. You’ll find the culprits soon.”

She nodded and reached out mentally to trace the wisps of dark energy back to the source. “I wasn’t expecting problems before I’ve gone on a single mission.”

“Welcome to life.” Jolee stroked his hand over his dark graying beard. “While we’re waiting for the problem to show itself, I’ll tell you the story about my first mission.”

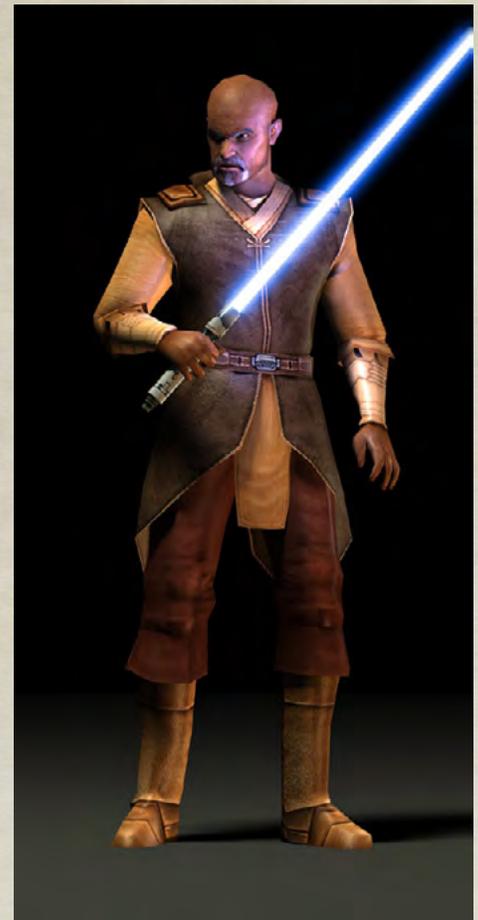
“Is it a long or short story?”

“Of course it’s a long story. I’m old and entitled to ramble on now and then. When I was a Padawan myself, I was assigned to work with a Jedi named Elorri’ani. The Sith War had just started, and we were sent to the moon above Yavin IV to look for Exar Kun’s temples. The Sith used the Dark side to keep the buildings hidden from Republic equipment. So the Council sent us in to find the temples and mark them for the Republic.”

“Then the Republic fleet targeted the beacons you placed to destroy the temples, I take it,” Islene said. She felt the darkness strengthening and looked again at the fellow passengers.

Jolee scanned the cabin as well. “Yes, but that wasn’t how we took out the Sith Lord. Elorri’ani had the most amazing skill at stealth against anything sentient. I lost him a few times on that moon myself. However, he had the worst luck with any of the animals. I don’t know if they thought he smelled like a gourmet meal or what, but the poor man got attacked by creatures about every other minute.”

“What do animal attacks have to do with the temples?” She tilted her head toward one side of the transport and reached for



her lightsaber. Her heart raced, and she took a few calming breaths to suppress her jitters.

Jolee glanced in the same direction. He looked back at her and gave a subtle hand signal for her to stay put. “I haven’t gotten to that point yet, so hush.”

“We snuck past the temple guards easily. They were convinced the buildings couldn’t be found by the Republic, so they weren’t too observant. We made it all the way to the center of the temple before we were spotted by this Sith, who just oozed Dark side power.”

Islene sensed the apprehension

and excitement rise in several people. "They're getting ready to attack," she murmured.

"We'll let them show their hands first," he said quietly.

"So, this Sith sauntered towards us, looked us up and down like we were sand fleas, and said 'Today is a good day to die for you' or something equally inane. I'll never understand why the Sith can't get more creative with their threats. Anyway, he attacked and we battled him for several minutes, lightsabers flashing around furiously. He was strong, and Elorri'ani and I had trouble holding our own. The best we could do was wear him down and hope to get an opening in his defenses. Then he decided to try his Force lightning power. These huge arcs of electricity started flying all over the place."

"That skill can kill in an instant."

"Yes, it can. I had my shield up, and that absorbed most of the energy. It still threw me back about 10 feet. Fortunately for Elorri'ani, he bounced the lightning straight up off his lightsaber in this magnificent display of light and power. Unfortunately, the lightning bounced off a large hive of Yavin

bees attached to one of the eaves of the temple roof. Did you know Yavin bees make some of the finest honey in the galaxy? We should pick up some the next time we're out that way."

"He hit bees?"

He nodded. "Let's just say that bees, in general, don't take kindly to having their home fried. They flew out in this huge, angry cloud. Elorri'ani looked up briefly, saw the swarm coming, got this 'oh no, not again' look on his face and went back to fighting. That Sith was so arrogant that he didn't bother to glance up. Elorri'ani and I shielded ourselves as the bees dove down and started stinging everything in sight—the guards, the Sith, maybe a droid or two. When the rest of the hive fell on top of the Sith's head, the bees really got unhappy. It would have been hilarious if we weren't worried about dying. There that Sith was, covered in honey and dancing around trying to get the bees out from under his robes."

"Did you attack him then?"

"No."

"You let him get away?" Islene's eyes widened with surprise.

"We didn't have to. He started

wheezing and choking, then dropped dead right in front of us. Turns out the mighty Sith Lord wannabe was horribly allergic to bees. He never even had time to heal himself."

Islene rubbed her forehead in disbelief. "You're telling me he died of anaphylaxis?"

"That's what I said, isn't it?" One section of the passenger cabin caught his attention.

Islene followed his gaze. The dark energy was strengthening. She sensed the heightened tension in two passengers. Her palms became sweaty as she fingered her lightsaber button. She rolled her shoulders to loosen the tightening muscles.

Jolee laid a calming hand on her forearm. "We set the last beacon and dashed past all the guards while they were busy swatting bees. The Republic hit the temple in a pinpoint strike and obliterated it. They gave us medals for 'maximum utilization of available resources'. If you ask me, the bees should have gotten a medal. That earned us the attention of General Motani, but I'll save that story for another day.

"Those two men over there are about to attack. I smell their adrenaline rush all the way over

here.”

Islene nodded. “Do you have anything specific you want me to do?”

He stood up and made sure nothing was in the way of his weapon. “Play along. I’m going forward. We might be able to stop whatever they have planned before it starts. And don’t die.”

Jolee hunched his shoulders and shuffled up the aisle toward the two heavily muscled men as they left their seats. He looked up at one of the battle-hardened men. “Hey, Sonny, can you tell me where the refresher is on this boat? A man my age can’t wait too long, you know. Are you two going to go talk to the pilots? I might do that, too. Was a pilot myself back in the war.”

Islene took that as her cue. She strode to the front of the plane. “Jolee? Where did you go?” She felt the curious stares from everyone on the transport, except the thugs and a small family. She took a surreptitious look at them. There were two Bothan guards, parents, and a small child. The guards’ attention were on the men and Jolee. The father tensed up while the mother put an arm around her daughter and whispered into her ear.

“Eh? What did you say, lass?”

Jolee asked, cupping a hand to his ear.

“Come back to your seat. We don’t want to disturb any of the nice beings here.” Islene put herself between the thugs and the family.

One of the men slipped his hand under his jacket to make sure the butt of his blaster could be seen by Jolee and Islene. “You both ought to go back to your seats. Now.”

Jolee looked up at the man as if oblivious to the blaster. The Jedi’s slap on the man’s back made him cough. “I came to see if one of these fine pilots flew in the same squadron I did.”

The other thug finished unlocking the cockpit door and looked at Jolee with dead eyes. He pressed the button and the door slid open. “Old man, I think you better listen to my friend before I decide to shoot you. These flyboys already decided not to let me in here, and I really didn’t like that.” He held up his blaster and shot the pilots. The captain slumped and the transport lurched out of control. The twi’lek co-pilot doubled over, gasping as his hands reached frantically for the instrument board. Passengers screamed and howled.

Islene sensed the overwhelming fear of death smothering her power. She blocked out the shouts and focused on the two men. The waves of fear receded.

The assassin with the empty eyes took a few steps aft toward the passengers and snarled. “The second pilot will die if anyone stops us. The ‘nice beings’ will be next.”

One of the Bothans by the family jumped to his feet with his blaster in hand. “Everyone down!” He trained his sight on the killer. Screams erupted as some of the beings dove to the floor. Others sat paralyzed in their seats, eyes wide with terror.

The shooter looked at his partner. “The family’s not coming quietly. Kill them.”

Both of the family guards squeezed off shots from their blasters. The larger thug ducked for cover in the cockpit while the shorter one dodged the blaster fire.

Jolee and Islene ignited their lightsabers. He said to her, “Deflect those blaster bolts into the floor so they don’t hit anyone. I’ve got Ugly up front. Get the other one.” He jumped towards the cockpit.

The gunman shot at Jolee, and the Jedi deflected the bolt with an effortless flick of the blade.

Islene caught the storm of emotions in the smaller hijacker as he lifted his blaster towards the family with the little girl. She made a tiny hand motion and said to him. "Stop. You don't want to hurt the youngling."

His hands shook, and he began to sweat. "I don't want to hurt the youngling."

One of the Bothans shot at him. The bolt of light energy smashed into the man's shield. The thug blinked, grimaced, and returned fire. The mother screamed and tried to shield the girl with her body.

Islene leaped into the air to deflect the blaster fire away from the girl. The glowing red bolts ricocheted off her lightsaber and slammed against the floor and ceiling. She flipped and landed on the other side of the shooter. She parried another flurry of bolts flying through the cabin. The fighter turned his blaster to fire on Islene. She brought her blade down and sliced through the man's wrist.

His hand and blaster fell to the floor as he howled in agony. He collapsed at her feet. His weapon fired as it hit the ground, and the

blaster bolt struck Islene in the leg. She cried out as the energy crackled past her shield and seared her thigh.

Jolee pressed in on the taller killer, deflecting sizzling streams of blaster bolts off of the glowing lightsaber. He drove the assassin back down the aisle.

The man ducked and rolled to evade the deadly blade. He grinned up at Jolee and then pointed his blaster at the family. He squeezed the trigger. Jolee brought his lightsaber down on the killer's arm and swept the blade back up, slicing through his chest. The man fell to the ground in three pieces. Jolee kicked the gun away from his hand.

Jolee kept his lightsaber in the guard position and roared, "Hold fire!"

The blaster fire stopped. The guards held their blasters in the ready position, looked around for other threats a moment, then nodded at the Jedi and holstered them. They both moved to help the family. The frightened screeches died out as the other passengers recovered from their panic. The older Jedi took one more look around the passenger area for any other dangers and then extinguished his lightsaber.

Islene followed Jolee's lead

and deactivated her blade. She looked down at her enemy. He was pale and motionless, but he was breathing. She reached out with her Force-enhanced senses, but found no other dangers around her.

"Are you hurt bad?" Jolee asked as he jogged up to her.

Islene grit her teeth as the pain broke through the mind barrier she had set up. "I got hit when his blaster discharged after it hit the ground. I wasn't expecting it."

He pulled some burned pieces of cloth away from her leg and assessed the wound quickly. "No Padawans ever expect it. That's why they're Padawans. Looks like it'll stay sealed long enough to get to the medical droids on Coruscant. Get a medpac and check on the others. I'm going to the cockpit to get the ship under control and send for help. If I'm lucky, I might just be able to save the twi'lek that schutta shot."

She found a medpac in the tiny alcove set aside for the flight crew and checked on the other passengers. The passengers' fear washed over her in huge waves, but she sensed no other serious injuries except the man she'd fought.

Islene looked down at the man

and saw his face was turning blue. He choked and gasped. Blood frothed in his mouth. She kneeled next to him, grunting when another sharp pain knifed through her wounded leg. She logrolled the man and found the large hole in his back from the blaster fire. She pulled the stims out of the medpac and injected him to stabilize his breathing. His choking eased for a few minutes, but then his breathing worsened. He started convulsing. Islene put her hand on the man's forehead and reached out with her Force energy to treat the worst of his injuries. She found the internal bleeding inside his chest and fought through the haze of her own pain to seal the large vein by his lung. It burst as soon as she released her hold, and she applied her energy to close it again.

Something trickled down the side of her injured leg. She looked down and saw her own injury had broken open. Blood was running down in thin red streams. All of the stims in the medpac were used up, so she pulled out the field dressing and quickly tied it in place around her leg, clenching her teeth together as she tightened it. The man hemorrhaged again and she fought with the rest of her Force powers to close off the

blood vessel. Islene breathed in and out deeply to relax, slowing down the metabolism of both the man and her. She hoped a stasis field might keep him alive long enough to make it to Coruscant. She closed her eyes and let herself sink deeply into the Force surrounding her.

The sounds around her softened to faint whispers. Her vision dimmed, the images and colors clouding into vague shadows. Years passed between her heartbeats as she sat on her knees in the warm tranquility. Millennia lapsed before she felt the subtle vibrations of something docking with the transport. Two voices broke through the barrier and interrupted the calm.

"There's a lot of blood on the floor, Jolee. It's not all his, either. Islene, come back out of stasis to us." His voice seemed like it was echoing through a long tunnel.

"I saw that, Talin. I'm not blind, you know. Islene, let go of the man. The medics need to move him," Jolee said.

She released the stasis field. Loud sounds crashed through the room and the bright lights blinded her. Islene sensed the strong Force signature surrounding the man who had spoken to her.

The tall, dark-haired Jedi helped Jolee lift the wounded man onto a floating gurney. The medics rapidly applied stims and monitors to the man before they rushed him off the ship.

"The vein to his lung ripped open. The surgeons have to close it," Islene told Jolee as she wiped sweat away from her eyes.

The old man laid a hand on her shoulder. "The medics know that. You did some fine work there. Talin here only had to put a tiny patch on what you'd done to keep him alive."

She managed a wan smile up at her mentor. "There's a flicker of good in him. Not much, but it's there. I couldn't let him go. We also need to know why he attacked--" Her world swirled into a blur. The two Jedi grabbed her as she slumped forward.



Your Dreams Better Scare You

By Althea “Briseadh” Damgaard

We all have dreams, but what is a worthwhile dream? One you know you can do someday. That’s right, someday. However, it is also one you can start working on right now. It is one that fits with your personality, your natural abilities, and a mix of things that downright scare you. Your dream will make you work for it. You will mess things up learning how to do it. People will tell you how crazy you are and criticize you.

Are you ready to get out of your comfort zone and realize your

dream knowing all that? Are you scared? You better be.

So what goes into realizing a dream?

- A strong desire to accomplish the dream
- The willingness to get training and have mentors
- The ability to take criticism and failure in stride
- Enjoying the journey on the way to completion

A STRONG DESIRE

Every dream needs enough desire within you to reach the

final goal. If the desire is not strong enough, your dream will flounder when you hit any hard point.

The desire needs to be defined. Write out what your dream is. It may be even a few paragraphs long on the first draft as you let your mind go with it. Now, take that and refine it until you can state in a sentence or two what exactly it is you want to accomplish. There is no need for how or why or when or where at this point. You just want WHAT the dream is, its ultimate goal.

Once it is in fine detail, you know where to aim everything you do and figure out how to fit it into your life.

For example, I love writing. One of my goals is to write and publish a book. I actually do have book length stories already written, but nothing anywhere near ready for publishing. Just like a book, your dream is going to need an outline of what will be accomplished along the way. The difference is the dream outline will be a list of things you need to do or acquire to reach the final desire.

This list will look daunting. It will scare you. It will test whether your desire is strong enough.

TRAINING AND MENTORS

Do not expect to reach your dream without help. You will need honest people not only to teach you skills you need, but also to hone other skills. Your mentors should also tell you when you messed up. You better learn how to have thick skin from the start, because a good mentor will make sure you are not expecting an easy dream. You will need to be able to bend

and flex to make your dream possible, otherwise what a good mentor is telling you could wind up breaking you.

In the process of becoming a writer, I took English classes I thoroughly hated in order to improve my writing. Taking a grammar class was worth it, but it wasn't a class I'd write home about. Watching a teacher rip apart my writing at a creative writing club meeting because he just did not understand what I wrote was not fun. I learned that what I wrote and what the reader took from it could be very different. You'll have to work hard to master the hard lessons. Learn from the attempts that don't make the cut.

The good things about training and mentors is you will find the ones that will tear your work apart, but then they will explain in detail why they did. This will lead you on the journey of fine tuning your skills. Not long ago, I put up a very rough, not so great, three-paragraph start of a novel as an example of character and conflict in an inspirational writing class. Several students noted it could use some cleaning up, but did not go into detail about it. However, the creator of the class took my junky writing and so thoroughly dissected it

that it became three sentences. He explained where I had the writer invading, too much repetition and useless fluff. I took this editing overhaul and ran with it. I had just gotten my money's worth already out of the course by having Jerry Jenkins give me a free edit, much like the first page edits he does in his "thick skin" seminars.

I could have chosen to get upset with the teachers telling me where I had messed up. I could have let it be a negative thing. If I had done that, however, it would have deflated the tires in my dream mobile. I would have wound up going nowhere.

I've been writing for years, but if it was not for continued training, truthful criticism, and worthwhile editors, I'd have great stories without the needed polish. You have to be willing to strive for your goals and complete plenty of rework as you learn. If your dream is worth it, you will keep on buffing until it shines.

CRITICISM AND FAILURE

I touched on this with the trainers and mentors. They will be your biggest critics. However, there are plenty of other critics out there.

The ones that can deflate a dream in a heartbeat are usually our closest family and friends. They will think you are crazy. They will bring up every other failure you had. Most of them probably do this to save you from another failure. However, fear of failure will get you nowhere. We learn from our mistakes. Do not let well-meaning people you really love hold you back.

Now, the critic to utterly avoid is the one that would rather not see you succeed at anything. That person doesn't have the guts to go for their dream, so they don't feel anyone else should, either. Misery loves company, so run when it comes around. Go find

the critics that push you to do better and figure out your dream.

What would have happened if Thomas Edison had given up on try 999 of making a light bulb? Someone else may have invented it, and Edison would be unknown to most. I'm not sure how many tries it took, but it was a lot. When asked, "Isn't it a shame that with the tremendous amount of work you have done you haven't been able to get any results?" His response held a positive note. "Results! Why, man, I have gotten lots of results! I know several thousand things that won't work!" (see <http://edison.rutgers.edu/newsletter9.html#4>)

Your dream has to be bigger than all this scary criticism and failure. Let your dream scare you into accomplishing it and showing the naysayers what real dreamers can do.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY

The journey to the dream will have many bumps and even some detours on the way. It will also be fun when it truly clicks with your personality and natural abilities. Those will tie in with all the talents and tools you will have to learn how to use.

I can spin a great story, but can I write it so it sucks you into the story? Do I know how to make



you forget a writer had to spend hours or longer to produce what you are reading? Can I skillfully use the tool of the written language to portray what I want you to see?

It's been a long journey, but a worthwhile one. The end has not been reached, but many goals to get me to the end have occurred. Every one of them has brought inspiring people into my life to help with the season I was in. All of them have taught me something about myself, how strong my desire really is, and how to gain and hone skills I needed.

Many times I've wanted to give up due to various life obstacles. In the end, I keep writing. It happens in journals, blogs, social media, expanding ideas out of study notes, in stories, and articles, like this one. The more I write, the more I want to keep going, and the more I want to reach the final dream of publishing a book. I bet when I hit that dream, it will grow into, "Let's write another one!" I am sure your dreams will do the same.

HOLD ON TO YOUR DREAM

Never let go of the big, scary dream, even if some days you feel

like it is dragging you through the mud of life. Let it inspire you when you aren't feeling so great on the inside and people are commenting about the outside being lackluster. Let all the hard times really count. Let them make the dream be all the more worthwhile to achieve.

Never give up. Never surrender. It is your dream and it is very much a part of who you are. Go for it!

Nothing is
"impossible"
the word itself says
"impossible"



A Blast From the Past

Compiled by Althea “Briseadh” Damgaard

I decided it would be fun for members of Gaiscioch to pull out some past memories to share with our readers. For this issue, these are mostly from older games, but Guild Wars 2 has been going long enough that there are now some “ole time” memories, even as we continue making new ones. The contributor will be noted with each story.

WARHAMMER ONLINE: SAVE THE ALE!

Briseadh

Clanorton and I have been friends since this game, starting out in a roleplay guild that I put in the Tuatha to work with Gaiscioch when I became

the leader. I remained a Tuatha guild leader the entire time I was in Warhammer in more than one guild, but when this roleplay guild dissolved as we moved to Badlands server, he put all his characters into Gaiscioch.





On a day, not much different than any other, Briseadh found herself out on the battlefield with her friend Clanorton and another member of the family. In the lull of battle, while waiting for the keep to be fully captured and the gates closable once more, the two elves were standing on a low wall outside the inner gate watching the road up from the outer gate. Clanorton, a dwarf, walks up behind them saying something like, “Sure, make the short guy feel even shorter.”

A stream of bad short jokes and jibes amongst the three ensued causing other fighters at the keep to join in. There were still several minutes left before the work would be complete at the keep when a report came in that Bugman’s Brewery was under attack.

Briseadh said, “Let’s save the ale or Clanorton will be even more upset.”

In true dwarf fashion Clanorton roars something about the ale and goes charging out of the keep with his elf friends in tow laughing as they went. They got laughing all the more realizing most of the forces had just ditched the keep to follow them. Thankfully the keep did become secure despite

this impromptu change of tactics and ale was had by all at Bugman’s after a fine fight.

NOTE: We never did crazy stuff like this when Foghladha was leading. This is where my Gaiscioch handle came from as she was my first character to ever be in the family and I have used it as my handle with the family ever since.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: THE GREAT CHICKEN TROPHY

Nona

Back in DAoC, Fog wanted me to help him kill a chicken to have a trophy for our new guild house. I thought, “How bad can killing a chicken be?” After dying several times with Fog saying, “Don’t worry, I will heal you,” we killed the chicken.

He took it to the taxidermist to get it stuffed and mounted. With much anticipation we went to set up the trophy, only to find it took up two floors of the guild house!



GUILD WARS 2 FOUR-MANNING A GARRISON

Kitty

I remember Kaytlin, Falstaf, someone else, and I taking one enemy garrison. The garrison was almost fully upgraded, with waypoint, reinforced walls, but for some reason paper gates. With a golem and our plucky sense of adventure, we attacked. We were certain we were going to get wiped when the enemy showed up.

We got through the outer wall and onto the inner door and killed the siege and the guards. We were almost there! Keeping an eye behind us, we made haste in destroying that inner gate which was paper, not upgraded.

As it fell, we rushed to the Lord's Room, where we fought like lions! The circle was up, it was ticking our color. And then... SUCCESS! We took their garrison! The four of us acquired some great points for our daring adventure.

WARHAMMER ONLINE: BEATING THE ODDS

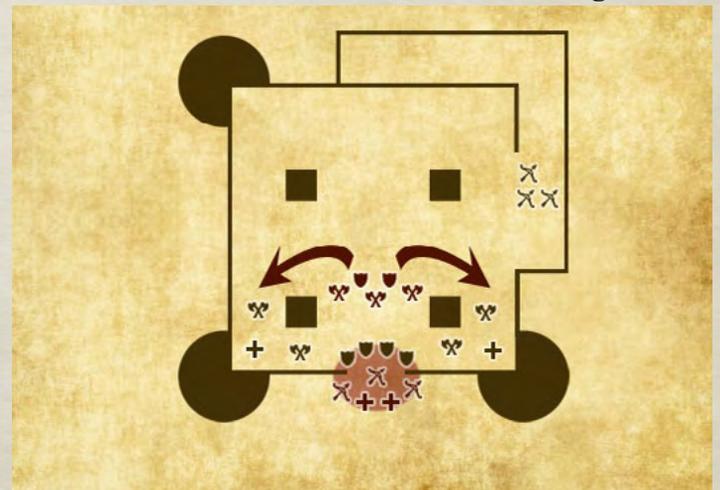
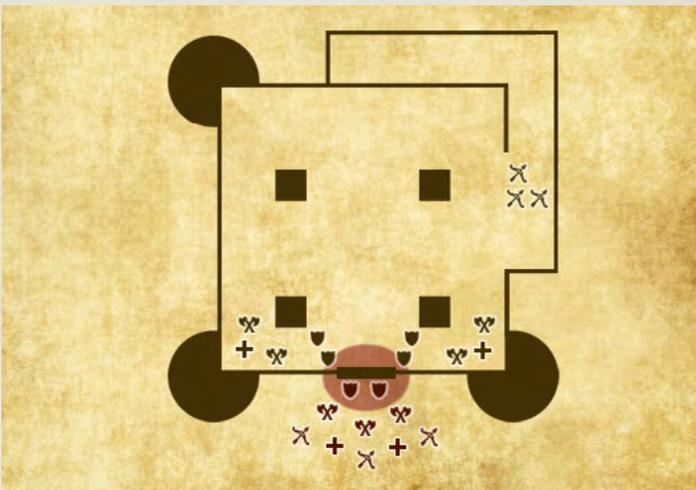
Dargron

It was a dark time for troop morale. Mythic had recently made large changes to the design of

Keeps, adding a second access ramp to the keep lord above. Players screamed that keeps could no longer be defended against a larger force. A rare few commanders, however, refused to yield and developed new tactics. One such commander was Foghladha.

Troll Country (Tier 2 Empire vs Chaos). Our foes outnumbered us 3-1. The situation seemed hopeless, and map chat was filled with the cries of defeat. We paid them no heed and remained undaunted. It was inside the walls of Stonetroll Keep that we decided to finally cease our evasive raids and make our stand. As the unending swarm of the enemy massed at the gate, Foghladha spelled out the details of the "Pandora's Box" defense. The tactic had been proven effective, but it was still new and had yet to see proper testing against such overwhelming odds. As the gates fell, we readied ourselves to sell our lives as dearly as possible before the end.

But the end did not come. Our defenses held strong against wave after wave of foes. Their ranks quickly replenished from a nearby camp, confident that so small a force as ours had never before repelled a force of such size. As best I recall, we held for two hours that night before our foes continual failure to take the keep had finally dwindled their numbers and morale enough for us



to push out and finish them off. Pandora's Box had stood strong beyond our greatest expectations.

Many were the cries of hopelessness directed at Foghladha at the beginning of that evening... by the end of that siege Foghladha had recruited six more members to the Gaiscioch ranks.

NOTE: I have many fond memories of the Pandora Box defense and I am glad Dargron was able to share one such test of it for us to read.



ACHIEVEMENTS THAT NEVER EXISTED

In Warhammer Online in one of the Tier 2 areas for RvR, there was a stable that was a tactical capture point. While waiting for the capture timer to complete, Foghladha would state that there was a needle in the haystack for the achievement, The Gullible. Some of us would even run over to look knowing the gag. The best ever was a guy that the next day, maybe even two, was STILL trying to find that thing even after we said we were joshing. Even with how often we pulled that joke, people fell for it. The fun part is that it doesn't mean the crew reviving this game won't put something like this in there. You never know.

In Rift, there is a very high bridge with a very tiny stream running under it, far below. There are some achievements for jumping off things and living throughout the world. One of them was

actually not far from this bridge, but Foghladha, who loves cliff diving in games, stated they had put an achievement in the game for this bridge. Some people would jump to die just to help make others do it, though the first time he told people, he got a good deal of the family suckered in.

TRIBUTE TO GAISCIOCH CREATED WORDS OLD AND NEW!

Crifiting - in the days of Rift they created a special type of Rift dedicated to crafters. In the process of trying to get people to come to an event our main leader for crafting rifts sent out a message that said Crifiting instead of Crafting. After a slew of friendly joshing, it was agreed these events would forevermore be called Crifiting.

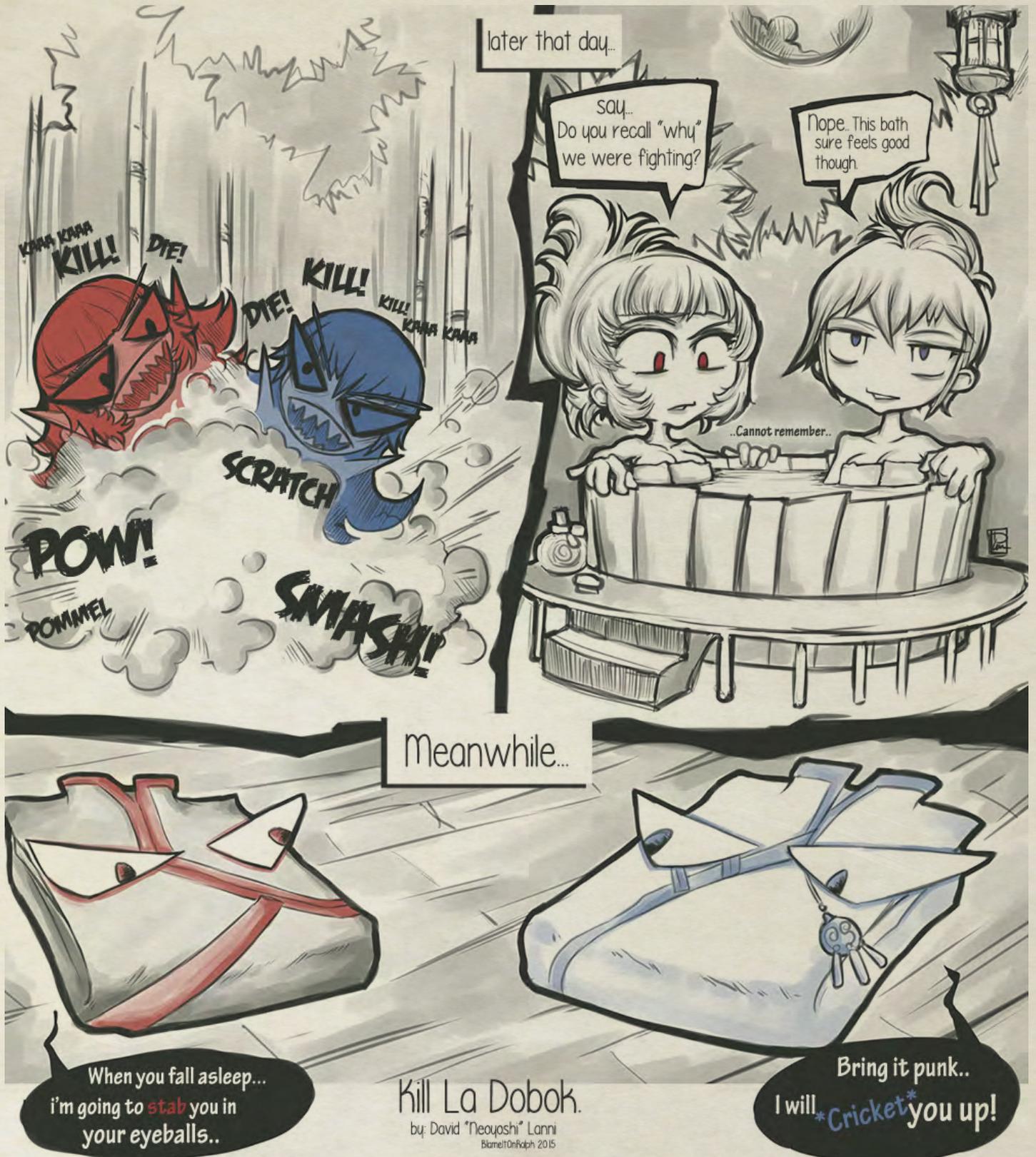
Weast - This one is my fault and a recent one from last year doing my weekly Vet Map Clear events, which entails us going to one of the veteran level maps for the Ebonhart Pact in ESO. So we are at the most western point of the map and I state we are going West. Wait, we can't go west! Make that Weast! Weast is starting to turn into the word to mean - "I meant the opposite direction than I said."

CONCLUSION

You never know what this fun family will come up with in a game, sometimes going beyond our own crew and out into the community. I am hoping to share more stories in future issues as the family members remember old ones or create new ones to share. Thank you to everyone that has helped make this a wonderful gaming community to be a part of.

Of Blade and Soul

By: David "Neoyoshi" Lanni





My **BLADE & SOUL** Character gives me energy and **NOSE BLEEDS!**



Deeper Thinking: Dreams and Us

By Robert J. 'Jairone' Mann

It should be no secret that each of us has our own perspectives. This is the short reason why dreams are hard to reach. Then, one might ask, why do so many things appeal to people en masse? In looking at this episode's theme, I started thinking about why this is, and this article is the result of that process. As always when I am thinking deeply on a topic, I rely upon the wisdom of others. I hope you enjoy the results of my thoughts, their wisdom, and how the results build upon different views.

To start, think of the top two answers for each of the following questions as they apply to you. First, who do you care about or who would you like to care about? Second, what do you care about or what would you like to do? I consider these the two main branches of dreams, the social and the personal achievement. Quite frequently they mingle together. Personal achievement is an odd category because it also can be something that a person simply enjoys doing, rather than a goal to reach. Social is all about relationships. Relationships vary greatly, much like the personal category. It is the broad and general nature of these categories that allows us to enjoy things together.

The general overcomes our differences. *"All human beings are also dream beings. Dreaming ties all mankind together."* -Jack Kerouac

When considering your answers, think about how they relate to others. We can all relate to the value of having friends and family around who help us aspire to greater things. The relationships you value are something most people value, or at least can agree are valuable. The general idea of enjoying an activity or achieving a goal resonates widely. In short we all agree to some extent on the big picture. We tend to agree on the bigger picture. *"Strangers used to gather together at the cinema and sit together in the dark, like Ancient Greeks participating in the mysteries, dreaming the same dream in unison."* -Angela Carter

This is why reaching dreams and building something for multiple people works. There's a general synergy between people, and by hitting the right themes, the result is people enjoying your creation. *"When we dream alone it is only a dream, but when many dream together it is the beginning of a new reality."* -Friedensreich Hundertwasser

This is true for all creative fields, from music and movies to writing and games. *“The uniform makes for brotherhood, since when universally adopted it covers up all differences of class and country.”*
-Robert Baden-Powell

So then, why do some things we like start feeling hollow and less fulfilling? Think of your top 15 for each category now. Make them as specific as possible. Add details. I’m sure you’ve already realized that the overlap suddenly got much smaller. It is those details that show how we are all different. Our dreams follow what we value. *“Great authors are admirable in this respect: in every generation they make for disagreement. Through them we become aware of our differences.”* -Andre Gide

Even more, some of the larger points don’t hit our desires. Not everyone’s top few points are the same. Somebody may be focused on romance, and somebody else on their friends. The same story won’t prioritize those two points appropriately for both people, and if one is left as a minor point the person who values that won’t enjoy the story. *“It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else.”* -Erma Bombeck

Additionally, once our dreams are fulfilled we find ourselves looking for the next dream. *“Yesterday is but today’s memory, and tomorrow is today’s dream.”* -Khalil Gibran

We move on as we grow. The focus of our lives change, and our dreams move with us. *“That’s what keeps me going: dreaming, inventing, then hoping and dreaming some more in order to keep dreaming.”* -Joseph Barbera

We are our dreams. Our dreams are us. Neither is the whole, but without either we are no longer the same being. We don’t have to be lost in them. Sometimes they come to a sad end, such as the more realistic world that Blockscape was building. Sometimes those ends lead to new beginnings.

We should embrace our dreams as part of what moves us forward. We should acknowledge them, let them drive us to be better, and still keep our focus on our goals. Most of all, we should never be ashamed to say ‘This is my dream.’

Keep dreaming great dreams!





HOW STAR WARS CHANGED MY LIFE

by Shea Fort

It's been almost 39 years since the release of the original Star Wars. I'll let that sink in for a second.

It was 1996, and I was six years old. I was hooked on cartoons and Power Rangers. Especially Power Rangers, so much so that I wanted nothing more than to be one when I grew up. I even started taking martial arts classes because of it. However, never in my entire life have I been affected so deeply as I was about to be.

My dad loved showing me his old movie collections. Indiana Jones, Star Trek, so on. But because my dad was primarily a Star Trek fan, I'd never heard of the movie we were about to watch. All I remember is that my dad wanted me to see "the giant slug", and that to do so, I would be watching "Star Wars".

I remember trying to figure out what it meant. I spent entirely too much time as a kid trying to pick apart words and names to decipher meanings. Large wars being fought in the darkness of space, among millions of stars. Those very stars I'd look up and stare at for hours. My little mind couldn't comprehend it. And above all, it sounded stupid.

Boring, even, like planets were going to be shooting at each other. But, hey, I was gonna see a giant slug! Yay! If only I could keep my mind from telling me how stupid it sounded. I didn't wanna watch stars pew pewing each other. I wanted to go outside and make my own adventures... or, at least, watch more Power Rangers. That Pink Ranger, am I right?

But, by George, I wanted to see that slug. So, Star

Wars, it was. When it started, and I heard the music, it hit me hard. That was the moment the gravitas of the situation dawned on me. The very moment I realized that... *sigh*... I've got to read. I *hated* reading. I was most displeased.

Slowly, however, the pieces started to fall together. A boy, a girl, and the endless expanse of a galaxy I'd never even imagined possible. Not just one galaxy, mind you... an entire plethora of galaxies began to open in my mind. This was my first true foray into science fiction. I was never at all a Star Trek fan and no matter how hard my daddy tried, I couldn't get into it and I never paid attention. But Star Wars... Star Wars changed my life forever. My eyes began to open, not only to see the world in a new light, but in the coming years, I'd be exposed to more movies, comics, TV shows, and even video games. Yes, Star Wars made the gamer I am today.

I lived and breathed Star Wars, and I still do to this very day. Hand me pretty much any book, and chances are I'll never finish it. Give me one that says Star Wars and I can almost guarantee I'll do it -- and I used to *hate* reading. My first full length novel (fine, fan fiction, whatever) was Star Wars -- and I used to *hate* writing.

The adventures I've gone on in my mind and in games have taught me many valuable lessons. I could do anything I wanted, all I'd need was a lightsaber. And I had plenty. As time went on, Star

Wars stayed front and center in my mind. I was at that perfect age where, when the prequel trilogy released, I could enjoy it for exactly what it was because I wasn't picky. I learned to love the twists, love the epic power of Star Wars' narratives, and love the implications these characters, good and evil, had on me.

For the first time in my life, I realized I could truly be anything.

I was blessed with the greatest parents a child could have ever hoped for. When I got in trouble (which was luckily not often, I was too busy watching/playing Star Wars), they rushed to my side. When my heart was broken the first time, they were there. When I got married, they were ecstatic. When I got divorced, they were with me every step of the way. When I came out as transgender, their first thought was how they could help and support me. They wanted to know more. They wanted to learn.

Yet, the single most powerful thing my parents gave me... was my love for Star Wars, which taught me everything they couldn't.

My dad wanted to show me a slug. Instead, he opened my world to an entire universe I'd eventually base my life on. Thanks so much for showing me that slug, Dad. If only Jabba weren't such a friggin' jerk.





CHICKEN À LA KING

By Robert J. 'Jairone' Mann

Making dinner is an old tradition. Almost as old as wondering what might be for dinner. Which is almost as old as the traditional response of 'I don't know' when asking somebody what they would like for dinner. Sometimes it is good to break tradition. Next time somebody asks what you want for dinner, have an answer ready!

I'll admit, this was my first time making Chicken Ala King. I've made plenty of chicken dishes

before, but for some reason Ala King was never on the menu. Thus I decided to make a recipe which I can easily alter to suit the taste of anyone I happen to be cooking for! I seasoned my own version with a hint of Tarragon and Garlic, leaving it with just a little flavor and not overwhelming the delicate flavor of the mushroom. However, any seasonings that work well with creamy foods would fit the dish nicely.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup butter
- 1.25 cups flour
- 4 cups milk
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 4 chicken breast fillets (or roughly 35-40 ounces of chicken meat)
- ½ cup olive oil
- 6 cups rice
- The remaining items may be adjusted based on your tastes:
 - 2 cups green pepper
 - 12-16 oz sliced mushrooms
 - 1.5 cups onion
 - 1 cup celery cut into small chunks
 - 3 cups peas
 - 2 cups sliced carrot rounds
 - 2 teaspoons salt
 - 1 teaspoon black pepper
 - 2 small jars of Diced Pimentos
 - A pinch of Tarragon
 - A pinch or ½ teaspoon of garlic
 - Anything else you want to add!

You may also adjust the milk, flour, and rice amounts depending upon the texture and amount of fluid you like best.

DIRECTIONS:

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Saute the green pepper, mushrooms, and 1 cup of the onion in the butter, until the green pepper is starting to get tender.

Cook the chicken with the olive oil and some water. Boiling it will get the chicken done quickly, keep the chicken moist, and also helps give you a nice base for your broth. Once the chicken is done use a slotted spoon to remove the meat while keeping

everything else. Set the chicken aside for now.

Cook the peas and carrots while everything else is going on. I like them to have some firmness left, and so simmer them until heated through on the stove.

Add more water to the broth, along with the rest of the onion and the celery. Simmer on low heat while dealing with the butter sautéed veggies.

Once the butter sautéed veggies are ready, stir in the flour, salt, pepper, and milk. It should still be a little on the thick side.

Next, stir in the broth. You may elect to remove the onion and celery from the broth, or keep them for extra veggies. Personally, I like them, so I keep them. Heat the mixture while stirring on high heat. Once it is boiling or near boiling, turn the heat down to medium-low.

Add the drained peas, carrots, chicken, and pimentos. Then add the Tarragon and Garlic. Stir and heat on medium-low until everything is nice and warm.

Finally, add the rice, or keep it separate and serve over the rice.

I hope you enjoy!



Captain Fall Damage:

THE ORIGINS STORY

by Esther “Gma Fog” Foley

Through Captain Fall Damage’s (Foghladha) adventures in his life, he has learned his limits, except in game, where it hurts a little less. My first experience in World vs. World with Fog confirmed it. He said, “Just follow me, Ma.” Yeah, that really worked. Fog and his followers rescued and revived me numerous times. As the terrain became more

familiar, I learned to look before I leaped. I loved following Fog and enjoyed his strategy and antics. This actually brings back many memories of when he was young.

Where did “Captain Fall Damage” come from? What caused him to leap from great heights and



send his followers to their deaths? In game, this is so fun, but for his parents, in real life, it was a trial. Despite that, it was entertaining to see him grow into a great person.

I'll reveal, chronologically, what I remember of Fog's childhood antics and where he developed his desire for thrills. Admittedly, when looking through my childhood pictures, there were a few of me on top of ladders holding my cat, Tommy. More pictures revealed Ma Fog on hoods of cars, in trees, on top of rocks, mountains and anywhere else high that I could reach. Do you think this type of stuff is genetic? I'm sure it is.... These are stories I still remember and, hopefully, I remember them correctly.



INFANT CLIMBER

It started early for Fog. The little guy never crawled. He went from rolling to pulling himself up, then walking and finally climbing onto things. The first incident I still recollect was when Fog was about six or seven months old. As a busy mom of two children under two years old, there were times that I would leave them alone for just a few minutes. You know, to get something I forgot in the other room. This one time, just leaving to retrieve something, little Fog was sitting on the floor playing drums with the

pots, pans, and wooden spoons. Fog's big sister decided to be helpful and pushed a chair over next to the counter. When I came back into the room, Fog was standing on the counter playing with the glasses on the shelf. At that moment, I knew raising him was going to be a challenge. He smiled and jumped into my arms. He definitely thought it was fun! Fog loved to climb and got his thrills at a very young age by being as high up as possible.

From that time until he began walking, I found him pulling himself up on coffee tables or sofas and climbing out of his crib. I would hear many "thuds" in the middle of the night as he came crawling to our room. He always had this cute, devious smile. It was as if he was saying, "Are you ready for this? Watch out, here I come!" or, "You won't see this coming, Ma!" He became very proficient at running. Fog was fearless as a child. Ladders, slides, car hoods, trees had no boundaries. It was a 24/7 job keeping him reined in.

BANE OF BABYSITTERS

One of the funniest memories I was told by family entailed a sleepover with extended family for Fog and his sister. I think he was about four years old. One weekend, his Dad and I had a conference to attend. His aunt and uncle took Fog and his sister to the park. Low and behold - Fog went missing! I did leave instructions: "If you lose sight of him, look up!" His aunt did just that, and there the little stinker was, watching some mean-looking adults playing basketball from the backstop. I'm sure the players wanted their basket back and were quite upset at this little boy. Yup - he had climbed up the poles and was standing at the top of the backstop. His aunt, not wanting to claim she was the one taking care of him, yelled, "Little boy, you better get down from there!" We laugh about it now, but I'm sure it was very scary for her then.



FEARLESS

Fog's fearlessness was very frustrating and funny at the same time. Grandpa "Gpa" Fog and I decided to take an annual winter vacation with the kids. Fog was about five when Gpa started the tradition. Every winter, we would take the kids out of school and go skiing at Lake Tahoe. We put Fog and his sister in a class since Gpa Fog and I were also taking a class. We were going to learn this skiing thing together. As I got older, I developed a fear of speed and heights, so I stayed on the bunny slopes. Fog, on the other hand, was doing so well

that the instructor bumped him up to the higher level class. The teacher took him up the bigger slope and told his students to zig and zag down the slope to stay in control. Fog asked, "Why?" He bent his knees, squatted, and went flying down the hill. As he passed us, we yelled at him to slow down. He did a fast stop and started skiing backwards slowly and again asked, "Why do I have to go slow? I know how to stop." This went on for years, and as I was still skiing the bunny slopes, Fog would go up and down the hill and pass me six times before I reached the bottom.





CHILDHOOD NINJA

By the age of six years, Fog tried the impossible and made it possible. He and his sister scared the babysitter to death. We got a call from her saying, “I can’t find them anywhere!” Being a young teen, the sitter was in tears and figured we would never hire her again. By this time, I asked my usual question, “Did you look up?” Yup there the two kids were: they shimmied up the hallway walls and were up on the ceiling, giggling away. Now I had two daredevils in the family. Thanks, Fog. I still don’t know how they figured these ideas out, but the two of them learned quickly how to scare the spit out of the sitters.

ON A CRASH COURSE

Through the next two years, everything seemed exciting with this adventurer of mine. I remember a little overpass walkway to the park. It was by our house, and Fog would ride his big-wheel down

the ramp and fly off the end, usually running into the sand at the park. I think he did the same with our wagon and his old Schwinn bicycle, too. At this time in Fog’s life, he went down an excessive number of slides, ramps, and anything else that would launch him into the air. I patched him up with an abundance of Band-Aids and gauze. Fog’s Dad and I made jokes about wanting to buy stock in the first aid companies to get rich quick. These daring feats of craziness became more and more advanced as he grew.

DEFYING GRAVITY

Another time, I went to visit someone and left Fog and his sister at home. I get a call from my daughter, who cried, “Mom, he’s gonna jump! He’s really going to jump!!!” Yup, Fog had found the roof of the house. He figured out how to climb up there and then would jump and roll off onto the concrete. I do think his mastery of this was a result of his Aikido training a few years earlier. His



teacher showed the class how to jump and roll--on a padded mat, of course. Fog figured it could also work off the mat and tested it from our rooftop. Around this time, the name "Captain Fall Damage" was coined. Fog didn't defy gravity, he simply ignored it. The funny thing is, in fourth grade, Fog won an award for being the "Most likely to fall out of his chair."

Our neighborhood was full of characters who would cheer Fog on and give him bigger and even more insane ideas. A few of the fellows living in our neighborhood were Tony Hawk and the Bones Brigade. He gave Captain Fall Damage ideas on how to skateboard. There were many times I ended up picking gravel out of his face, arms and knees when he tried to become another "Tony Hawk".



TRYING THE “RIGHT” WAY

Around this same time, Fog became a Boy Scout. It was a “High Adventure Troop,” with climbs to The Pinnacles and hikes each month. One thing that was relayed to both Gpa Fog and I was his first experience with rappelling. The troop went to the Pinnacles National Park to learn this skill. It was Captain Fall Damage’s turn to rappel, and the Scoutmaster kept yelling, “Lean back, lean back!” He leaned back all right - until the point he smacked his head on a rock and had to sit out. I think this was the first time Captain Fall Damage got a fear of very, very high heights.

FINDING THE “RIGHT” WAY

It wasn’t until Christian camp where he actually learned how to rappel the correct way. Fog never gave up. He always took the opportunity to try again. In fact, later down his road to adventure, Fog went to church camp at Hume Lake. This particular day, they had a climbing wall event, racing the instructor up and down the wall. Fog’s

Dad was told later that Fog had just beaten the instructor on the climbing wall during a race. The instructor said that he had never seen anyone go so fast up and down a wall before. Speed was always in Fog’s favor. He was the little guy that got picked on, so running fast was imperative.

NEW FOUND ADRENALINE

When Fog was in junior high, we had an exchange student from Germany who wanted to come here to play “American Football.” This junior in high school came to stay with us for a year and gave Fog the football bug. Once Fog started playing football, he loved jumping over his teammates and averting tackles. This became his adrenaline rush sport. Fog loved challenges and tried many different kinds of sports and challenging activities. Anything that included running, jumping, or being crazy, Fog did it. Besides football, I remember pulley jumps into the lake, bungee jumping, and climbing walls. And yes, rooftops were still very popular.





football, climbing, skateboarding, rollerblading, bicycling and swimming. His antics in the pool were the funniest. One time, there was a belly flop contest from the high dive. Guess who won? Of course, it was Fog. I remember cringing just thinking about it. He came home with a red belly that day and, at first, I thought it was a sunburn. “No Ma, I won the belly flop contest,” he grinned.

The key here is if someone told Captain Fall Damage it couldn't be done, he would try until he found a way just to prove that person wrong. This wasn't just in sports. It was also in his job, as a dad and husband. When life was against him, he never gave up. As a child, it took encouragement, but his grandma would tell him, “Anything you put your mind to, you can do!” Little did she know how vivid his imagination was!

Now, Captain Fall Damage is our leader in many events and games. We even hold some events just to watch Fog get led off cliffs. At one point, he made a video of his jumping and dedicated it to me, Gma Fog, or Ma, as he calls me. Even through all the hard times in our family's lives, I wouldn't trade it for anything. It is what made us all what we are today.

Fog wasn't one to stay still, especially if we had to wait for a seat at one of our favorite restaurants, Baker's Square. The building had rock walls. Yes, he climbed them while waiting for a seat. That never got old either. All the way through life, if there has been a way to climb, he's done it.

As he got into high school, the craziness continued. There was always something fun to do at school, youth group, and friend parties. He kept up with



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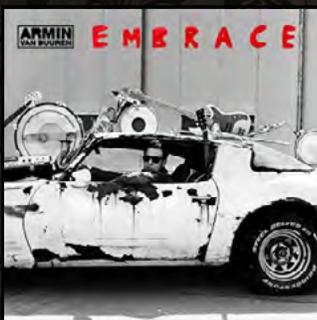
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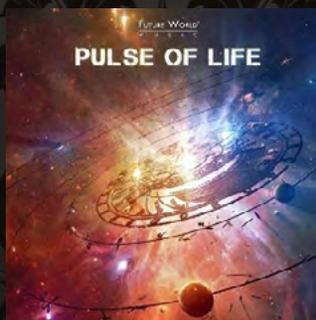
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We are very proud of our diverse community and support our members in all of their real life accomplishments.

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