

Gargoyle by [Pulse](#)

Tags: human, dragon, gargoyle, transformation, mmo, statue, aurification, hypnosis, mind control

Never take MMO quests from strange dragons that weren't in the patch notes.

Alex sits down in his chair, slips his VR headset over his eyes, and double-clicks the *Shattered Rifts* icon on his desktop. There's the usual sense of vertigo, of falling into an infinite darkness before the system resets itself and reasserts control over his sense of balance so that he can walk around without the disconnect between his eyes and his ears making him want to throw up. The login screen fades from Alex's view slightly so that he can see the desk in front of him well enough to touch his blinking authkey. Then he picks up his controller again, hits the A button, and the *Shattered Rifts* logo fills his vision before dissolving into mist.

A few seconds of loading later and he's back among the familiar arching spires of Telgrath, all Gothic and stained windows and stone arches everywhere. He can see the back of his avatar's head (short-cut brown hair, slightly-tanned skin, average build, just like himself and like most of his human game avatars) and the suit of heavy Bladebane armor that he'd spent half his keystones on about a week ago.

He can faintly hear the clicking of his thumbsticks as he walks around the town, so he reaches up to his headphones and turns the volume up. The music's nothing special, but it keeps him focused as he looks around the town. Let's see: fetch quest, fetch quest, pointless minigame... huh, that's new. There's a hovering blue ! nearby and beneath it is some sort of shiny golden gargoyle... named Gargoyle. As he walks closer to it he notices the complete lack of detail on its surface, save for what appears to be some kind of dull gray orb in the middle of the gargoyle's chest. It's not an unfinished texture, because when he gets in *really* close he can notice tiny little scuff marks and irregularities, but the eyes seem like they were sculpted into a hunk of gold, not like an actual organic thing that happens to be gold. And the entire thing is made of gold, too, even the claws and the eyes and the horns. *Must've been added in 8.41*, he thinks to himself as he walks closer to it.

But before he can actually talk with it, a dialog box swoops into view in front of him: "You have been selected as a beta tester for upcoming *Shattered Rifts* content. In order to accept the Draconis quest chain, you will need to agree to the following non-disclosure agreement, violation of which will result in..." blah blah blah, he's not going to read all that anyway so he just hits the 'I Agree' button. He's done a couple of these before, he knows the deal: if he breaks the NDA his soul is forfeit and all that.

And then there's the typical questgiver NPC dialog, something about a dragon named Va Es out near the Iron Hills that is looking for capable adventurers to assist him. The questchain

reward pop-up is a little interesting, though: it's a gargoyle-themed set of armor that looks kind of like the NPC he's talking with, and the stats are... well, they're way better for his spec than they should be for a random sidequest; it's almost as good as the stuff from Azel's Sorrow! So he hits 'Accept' and starts over to the Hills; should only take him a few minutes via telenet. On a whim, he pops the name of the quest into Google, but nothing comes up for "'draconis' 'shattered rifts'", so not only had nobody broken NDA, but even the league of data-miners had failed to figure out anything. Which is a little odd, but that just means that he'll get to be the first to know about it before anyone else!

The world fades to black as he selected his destination from the telecrystal's interface, then returns with the stark gray of the base of the Iron Hills. He turns his head to find the quest overlay holograph, then heads out towards it, vision bobbing up and down slightly as he walks. Before long he reaches the mouth of the cave, though at first all he can see is a faintly-flickering light against the wall in the distance until he rounds the corner. Inside is a blue dragon, probably twelve feet tall at his haunches and thirty feet long with eyes that—eyes that—he shakes his head a little, blinks a couple times, and looks away from those golden eyes to take in the rest of the dragon, the blue wings folded in at his side and the long tail that's curled up around a pile of gold.

"What brings you to my domain?" Va Es asks, taking in Alex with his gaze. The animations are mocap-smooth, and the textures are higher-resolution than almost anything else he'd seen in *Shattered Rifts*. The dragon has voice acting too, and it doesn't have the weird little hitches that you get from most synthetic VAs. He sounds powerful and deep, and there's even a bit of an echo in the voice.

The dialog is pretty standard stuff, even if it's a bit corny: "I've come to assist you, noble dragon", that sort of thing. The quest confirmation dialog doesn't have an option to decline the quest, which is kind of weird... but whatever, it's a beta. He writes it down in a `bug_reports.txt` notefile and keeps going.

The quest itself is pretty banal: go to the Footfalls of the Thirty and kill twenty wyrmbanes, little semi-sentient plants that skitter around the surface and give off some kind of odor that dragons despise. He can take down one of them in three swings of his axe, so before long he's back to the dragon and he's got a new pair of gloves. (They're just named Gargoyle Gloves; maybe the creative department hasn't gotten around to naming them yet.)

He's about to just toss them in his inventory, but it looks like equipping them is a prereq for continuing the questchain. He opens his equipment menu and puts them on, but as he does so there's this weird hissing noise in the background. He mutes the game and it goes away, so his heater isn't leaking, and it disappears when he puts the Arms of the Bladebane back on. Weird. Just another thing to add in the bug list. The noise gets a little louder when he talks to the dragon to accept the next quest: "The villagers down in Ahez are refusing to pay me my daily tribute, and it's making me quite irate. Go down there and convince them to give me what's mine."

It's... kind of unheroic. Weird. But again, there's no button to decline the quest, and after he thinks about it a bit it does make sense; the dragon must be protecting them. Or something.

So he goes down to the village and talks to the NPCs with the question marks over their heads; fortunately, 'convince' isn't a euphemism, and though he does get drawn into a couple combat situations they end with the NPCs bloodied, not dead. He sighs a little as he sits back in his chair; he wasn't sure about it at first, but the more he does these quests, the more they're starting to grow on him. Even the noise isn't as bad as he thought; it's pulsing and throbbing, but it's not actually unpleasant.

Va Es is grinning a little when he returns; it's almost a predatory look. They're really going all-out with the modeling work, especially considering that he doesn't seem like he's a big plot NPC. The next quest is... clean up the dragon's hoard? That's definitely not heroic, but the buzzing in his head gets louder and he spaces out for a little bit and before he realizes what he's doing he's already clicked the 'accept' button and started walking around the hoard. It's a simple task: go to one of the sparkling icons indicating there's something to do, click, wait for his character to finish tidying up. Then move on to the next thing. The buzzing doesn't let up. He cleans. He moves. He continues. Va Es is watching him with that grin, and occasionally telling him he's doing a good job. He likes it when Va Es says that. The dragon's voice-acted, and his voice is really nice. He likes listening to the dragon's voice.

Time passes. Eventually he manages to clean up the last out-of-place piece of hoarded jewelry, and he returns to claim his reward: the Gargoyle's Chestplate and the Gargoyle's Helm. He doesn't even bother looking at the next quest before he puts both of them on, leaving him all but covered in gold. And right when he finishes equipping it, the dragon's voice is in his ear calling him a "**Good gargoyle.**" and the sensation is enough to make his knees buckle. If he wasn't sitting in his chair he'd be falling to his knees; his character drops down and almost falls onto all fours. His camera view shifts into first-person mode without him actually touching anything on his controller and his viewpoint turns to look at the dragon's eyes and he feels like he could lose himself in that golden gaze.

"**Climb onto your perch.**" the dragon says, and even though he's never seen his character climb anything before, those gold-taloned claws reach up in front of his eyes and grip the marble pedestal in front of him. (He swears he can feel his actual muscles straining.) He digs into it (wait, no, his character digs into it; he's starting to lose track of the difference) with his feet (his character's feet) to get the last bit of purchase needed, then he turns around once more to face the dragon. He's eye-level with him, now, staring once more into those infinite depths. His jaw drops open, because he needs to "**pose like a proper gargoyle**", and he dimly realizes that his jaw has fallen open in real life as well. He tries to respond but those helpless hands can't type on his keyboard, tries to speak but his mouth and throat are almost paralyzed. When the dragon asks him "**Are you an obedient gargoyle?**" all he can do is nod weakly; somehow the dragon sees it and purrs out "**Good.**" in response.

It's even getting hard for him to think of himself as a person, as an independent entity that has an existence outside of serving the dragon. He wasn't even sure that he was a *he* anymore, because **gargoyles are objects, not people** and **objects don't have identities**. It's dimly aware that it's losing the ability to distinguish between the dragon's words and its own thoughts, but it's far too gone to do anything about it: at some point it had lifted its feet up to plant them

on the edge of its chair and crouch down just like it was doing in the game, nails dug into the edge of the chair with its mouth hanging open **just like a proper gargoyle**. There's a little bit of discomfort, but **it's far more important to obey the dragon** so it just ignores it and holds its pose while it stares into the rendered eyes. It can see every last detail of them and they're drawing it in deeper and deeper with every passing second. It can't look away. It doesn't want to look away. It wants to obey.

Its perspective shifts out of its body again, and it can see that the golden armor that it had worn had melded and fused around it. As it watches, all the little joints where the armor had linked with itself fuse away into a single solid piece of gold, like someone had sealed it in tight molten metal that hides all the little imperfections of what it used to be. Its features had been smoothed over, and its body had even shrunk down a little bit to be the same height as the other gargoyles. Even the name hovering above its avatar had changed to simply 'Gargoyle', and it found that it neither remembered nor wanted to remember what its old one was. All of the old abilities on its hotbar had disappeared, and even if he had the mind to push forward on the thumbsticks the gargoyle wouldn't move. But that's fine. Va Es doesn't want it to move, so it doesn't move; it just stares deep into the dragon's gaze and lets it continue to wash over what's left of its independent mind and dissolve it in gold.

It doesn't know what the dragon has planned for it. It doesn't know much of anything, because at this point Va Es is controlling its ability to think, and the dragon would much rather have it as a mindlessly posing gargoyle statue decorating his hoard. And after all, the dragon knows best. So the gargoyle is more than happy to just sit and stare until Va Es has a use for it. Because **it's a good gargoyle**, and **it obeys the dragon without thought**, and **dragons are meant to rule**.