



Season 5

Patch 5.0

Adventurers of Ishar, a new season is upon us as we unveil the first phase of the Challenge Rework, alongside numerous quality of life improvements, new abilities, refined mechanics and revitalized lore. Your voices have been heard, and through collaboration and extensive testing, we've tackled long-standing issues to bring a more balanced, immersive, and rewarding experience. This update marks a significant step in our journey, as we aim to continue to grow the world of Ishar and enhance the game's overall depth. Dive in, explore the changes, and as always, your feedback is appreciated.

Challenge Rework Phase 1

Overview

Challenges have been in a rough spot for a while. There've been a myriad of issues with them - from poor balance, to a mixture of issues with the reward structure, to (most importantly) a myriad of mechanical problems.

I've discussed these problems at length with several people and have come up with a multi-phase rework - and phase 1 is going to be released this season and is aimed at address the core of these issues. Phase 2 will be focused on making iterative improvements, UI and flavor.

As a reminder - here is how challenges currently work. Every cycle 15 challenges are selected from the master list of, currently, 113. Each challenge had a base min level, max group size and difficulty tier associated with it. The difficulty tiers ranged from F - SS, with F being the easiest and SS being considered very difficult. When a challenge was selected, it's difficulty tier was randomly adjusted up or down, and the people / level were adjusted to match.

To complete a challenge, you had to "challenge start", which would strip away all stats gained from remorting and set you to a set of "challenge stats".

When a challenge was completed, the MUD was granted between 10 and 40 minutes of bonus XP, based on the difficulty tier. Additionally, tiers B-SS were granted a chest/sack/crate that materialized in the room with rewards that scaled with the level range of the completion and the difficulty tier.

Once completed, a challenge's parameters were set to whatever the group was completed it and the tier was adjusted up by 1.

If all 15 challenges were completed, the list would cycle and there would be a MUD-wide 24 hours of bonus experience.

New State

1) Difficulty tiers are being removed. Balance is hard enough, and while dynamic tiers are interesting, I need to be able to focus on the baseline balance before throwing in the added complexity of dynamic tiers. Additionally, they generated some confusion as they were not very clearly communicated and the features that were supposed to elucidate them, did not always work.

Instead all challenges are going to be standardized around the S tier, and future adjustments will cascade from that.

2) Challenge stats are being removed. Instead when you "challenge start", you will lose all *renown upgrades*. It was pointed out to me that at higher remorts especially, renown upgrades were a bigger source of power. Additionally the added layer of needing to move around a separate set of stats, kit for a set of stats, etc, caused a lot of issues. For one, there was a lot of room for gaming the system, by maxing out stats for debuffing and then changing stats for combat. Or just doing dumb stat combinations that were optimized for the challenge. It also had a few bugs associated with it, and I think this makes for a cleaner experience.

3) Challenge end has been readded. Currently there is a 5 minute cooldown after starting a challenge that you can voluntarily end. Additionally, group members aside from the leader can choose to end a challenge for themselves.

4) A weekly automatic cycle has been added - if all 15 challenges cannot be completed within 7 days of the cycle, then the challenges will automatically refresh. This does not gain the 24 hours of XP, only completing all 15 challenges does.

5) Soul Drain now persists through death - this is mostly to fix bugs, as soul drain clearing after dying caused a lot of issues with challenge validity.

6) The reward structure has been overhauled.

- Baseline xp for clearing a challenge has been reduced to 15 minutes.

- Chests / crates / sacks have been removed. Instead everyone associated with the challenge will be granted a "spectral orb", that will grant them 2 items. The drop rates are fairly similar, but I also completely rewrote how the loot tables work to make them infinitely more maintainable and flexible. Orbs are bound to whom they are granted to, and only the owner can open them.

7) Added discreet mob spawning on challenge cycle. As I've alluded to a lot, there are a lot of issues with how Ishar handles zones and reloading, which makes the process of knowing when a zone is going to reload very difficult. I am working to address that in various ways, see below on scry and zone reload timers. But for challenges sake, I have added the ability for a zone to reload a specific mob when challenges are cycled and that mob is selected as active. I.e. If Green Knight is a new challenge mob, all of his zone block

(69) won't reload, only he will.

On top of these changes, various bugs and inconsistencies / improvements have also been made.

1) I fixed a bunch of issues with how memory (buff and heal) specifically effect challenges. When starting a challenge, you will lose all previous buffs, aside from XP.

2) I fixed a bunch of issues with kill validity checks, meaning that if you see the red aura on a mob and kill it, it should respect it. Obviously there may still be niche cases that I will depend on feedback to find and address.

3) I have reflavored a bunch of how challenges work to tie it more firmly into the world's lore and make it feel more natural and less "meta" or out of character. This includes a bunch of new echos.

4) There is a new helpfile that lays it out more.

5) The weekly cycle timer shows in the challenge list.

6) Challenges can no longer be completed multiple times - they are now purely a community driven event where the community works together to complete all of Varenya's challenges. They no longer increase in difficulty, and when they are completed they are simply completed.

Quality of Life: Seasons

In the interest of continuing to flesh out and improve the core mechanics of the game, I have added various quality of life improvements for understanding seasons.

1) The season helpfile has been rewritten

2) There is a new in game command - season - that shows various information on the current season. This includes what season it is, when it started, when it ends, information on your essence, and your current "best" character.

i.e.

Current Season: 3

Start Date: 2023-03-18

End Date: 2023-08-16 13:08:00

Current Essence: 53

Lifetime Earned Essence: 115

Essence This Season: 5

Character Earning Essence: Dresden

3) As the season approaches its end, I have added some thematic "in game" echos. Starting 4

weeks out from the end, there will be a message on login that counts down the weeks. Starting 7 days out from the end, the world itself begins to unravel - every “day break” you will see a unique echo that replaces the typical one that counts down the days.

4) Seasons are going to continue to become more and more integrated into the world - keep an eye out for any other unique echos or strange portents as the season progresses.

Quality of Life: Verbose

There has been feedback that as the “verbose” option grows, it’s become slightly unwieldy and often times you may not care about everything being verbose. This season I have broken “verbose” into granular options, where you can fine tune what verbose information you see. If you want everything to be verbose you can still “display verbose all” to automatically toggle them all on.

```
18:39 | 16:07 W[N][D][E]S> disp verb levelup  
You will now see verbose LevelUp information.
```

```
18:39 | 16:12 W[N][D][E]S> disp verb
```

Verbose options:

```
[ ] Combat  
[ ] Healing  
[ ] Alignment  
[ ] Karma  
[x] Experience  
[x] LevelUp  
[x] Effects  
[ ] SkillLevels
```

Areas and Scry

As many of you have heard me discuss, one of the biggest problems Ishar has is in its zone structure. The result of its current structure is that it's very difficult to understand a zone's reload state - is a zone occupied, when will it next reload, is there something blocking it from reloading?

One mechanic that has existed for a long time now to “solve” this problem is forgive. As many know, forgive is a command whose purpose is to “forgive” someone who has been aggressive towards you. When you do so, an echo will display to let you know that the target was forgiven. It was discovered a long time ago, however, that forgive was not limited to players only, nor was it limited to only entities who had been aggressive towards you. This created an unclear mechanic that required insider knowledge to exploit, allowing players to count instances of mobs, especially aggressive ones, and gain more information about an area than intended. As Ishar has moved further and further away from its PK roots, forgive has been used almost entirely for the latter purpose.

Outside of the over-abundance of information, there is nothing wrong with this, and my goal is not to obfuscate zone reload information. However, this is a bastardization of the mechanic, and it solves the problem in a very imperfect way. To polish Ishar and solve the problem in a more holistic way, I have done the following:

1. Forgive no longer works on mobs. Separately, it now has a different echo when used on someone who has not been aggressive towards you.

2. I have further built out the "areas" command that I introduced years ago. You will now see a timer for when a zone will next reload, when the zone last reloaded, and a color key to show if a zone is valid for reloading. Red means its next reload will currently be skipped, green means it is valid for reloading.
3. There is a new spell - Scry, which allows clerics to reach out and see afar, revealing the location and condition of a targeted player or mob. Feel a chill? Someone might be watching! See the "New Skills" section for full details on Scry.

These solutions are still imperfect, and I will continue to gather feedback. One of my goals for the future is to restructure zones entirely to untangle this issue at its base.

New Modifiers

Several new modifiers have been added as potential spell / skill / gear bonuses.

Resistance: Gain resistance to a damage type.

Susceptibility: Gain susceptibility to a damage type.

Healing Power: Add x to your heals.

Spell Damage: Add x damage to your spells.

To slowly begin exploring these new mods the following updates have been made:

- Runed Wristguard has been changed from +1 expertise to +5 spell damage
- Ethereal Substance has been changed from +4 attack to +3 spell damage
- Rumpled Grey Cloak has been changed from +1 Heal Hit to +3 Healing Power
- Bracelet of Mangled Crucifixes has been changed from +4 Fortitude to +8 Healing Power

New Skills

Necromancer

Raise Dead:

Topic : Spell Raise Dead
Syntax : cast 'raise dead' <target>
Class : Necromancer
Component : Treasure worth 1,000 gold
Level : 8

The spell 'Raise Dead' allows Necromancers to manipulate the thin line separating life and death. Through their power, they can call upon the soul of a deceased comrade, and compel it back to its mortal shell. The caster needs to offer a tribute of valuable treasure to strengthen the spell.

The Necromancer must focus all their energy on the ritual and can't cast it during combat. Moreover, the spell only works if the target is still shuffled off the mortal coil and part of the Necromancer's group. If the target has already rejoined the realm of the living, the spell will fail

The raised comrade will come back to life but at the brink of death (1 health, 1 mana, 1 movement). Their sudden return to life also incurs a debuff on them.

Cleric

Topic : Spell Resurrection
Syntax : cast resurrect <target>
Class : Cleric
Component : Treasure worth 5,000 gold
Level : 16

The spell 'Resurrection' embodies the divine favor granted to Clerics by their deities. Unlike Necromancers who force souls back to life, Clerics invite their deities to breathe life back into their comrades.

This ritual requires focus and cannot be performed during combat. The spell also demands a generous offering of valuable treasure. It can only be successfully performed if the Cleric possesses the favor of their deity.

Only group members still shuffled off the mortal coil can be the target of Resurrection. If successful, the target is returned to life in fair condition. Resurrection is indeed a testament of divine favor in its purest form.

Topic : Spell Scry
Syntax : cast scry <victim>
Class : Cleric
Component : Treasure worth 1,000 gold
Level : 10
Save : against resilience for no effect

By invoking the divine assistance of their deity, clerics can reach out and see afar. When casting Scry, the cleric's vision is drawn towards a targeted player or mob, revealing their location and their condition.

Scry can be viewed as a non-aggressive action and not provoke hostility, but the target may feel a slight chill upon a failed scrying attempt, alerting them of the cleric's gaze. Be warned - some entities may not view this kindly. It's a valuable tool for clerics who wish to keep a watchful eye on allies or gather intelligence on potential threats.

Renown Adjustments

In a continued effort to improve the gameplay / balance, renown is being adjusted.

The main adjustment is renown inflation - as a baseline, all renown has been increased by a factor of 10. This means renown costs that used to cost 2 now cost 20, renown rewards that used to reward 2, now reward 20.

The secondary part and the reason for this change was that it offers a finer control over the balance of the various sources and costs of renown. This will become especially apparent as the quest system continues to expand and more renown opportunities are available.

Immediately, you will notice that the opportunity was taken to adjust various costs / gains to reflect this philosophy - especially in light of last seasons renown increases and the impact of relics.

Balance Adjustments

Mechanical

- Healing or buffing a target who is currently in combat will draw you into combat. This is fairly logical - healing or buffing is pretty clearly "assisting" in combat.

Abilities

- Tempest has been made consistent with other sustained spells - instead of having a 25% chance to proc every melee round, it instead procs every 1d6 rounds*
- Word of Grace procs every 1d4 rounds*
- Sustained Spells no longer function in anti-cast rooms
- Retribution has been moved to level 13 from level 16

* For the sake of clarity - a round is defined as ~3 seconds. Previously Tempest has a 25% chance on each of *your* melee rounds, which was modified by speed. This change decouples it from speed.

Gear

- Valorous Heart now has a 33% proc rate instead of a 100%

Misc Adjustments

- Vitality upgrades (HP / SP / MP) no longer show as a bonus on the character, instead they are baked into your characters stats. I.e. If you have 5 Vitality in Health, you will no longer see 105HP. Instead your character will simply have 5% more hp then their class / level / stats would normally grant them. This is a little bit cleaner, in my opinion, but was mostly necessary for some other mechanics.
- Healing echos have been adjusted to be consistent across the game, using the cleric heal echos. However, instead of Heal Minor saying, "You feel slightly better.", it instead uses the percentage of how much you were healed to choose what echo to display. This also was done mostly for mechanical reasons, as I've unified most healing logic into one place for ease of manipulation, handling, etc.
- Spell Effects now occur *after* the spell instead of before. As part of getting this to work, spell effects now also require a separate saving throw. I.e. Frostbite will roll 1 fortitude save for the damage and 1 fortitude save for the slow effect. As part of this, lightning bolt has been approved to make the chain effect much more clear.
- You can login to a character with an abbreviation of their name (i.e. t will find Tyler, if Tyler is the first T name)

Bug Fixes

- Fixed a bug with "Cursing of Kulani" not properly awarding for completion.

Coming Soon

Life took its toll lately with the birth of my second child, and I had less time for Ishar then anticipated. However, while not ready for release with season 5, significant progress was made on the completion of Orcan Clans, my zone that unveils the saga of the orcs in their splintered journey. Here's a little sneak preview.

New Mob Class - Shaman

Venturing into the towering peaks and vast pinewoods of the northern mountains, you will encounter the Skarag Clan, orcs who have embraced the strength and majesty of their highland home. Drawing upon the ancient knowledge of primal runes and the raw elemental forces of nature, the Skarag Shamans are spiritual leaders and guides, equipped to support and sustain their allies through the toughest of battles.

Guided by the wisdom of the great winged eagles, Shamans of the Skarag Clan channel and shape the elements to serve their will, casting spells of healing, protection, and even harnessing the destructive potential of nature to fend off their foes.

A Shaman's strength lies not in physical might, but in their spiritual connection to the world around them. With spells that provide utility, healing, crowd control, and a handful of damaging

options, a Shaman's presence on the battlefield can turn the tide of any encounter. Despite their lack of physical toughness, their ability to manipulate the elements and create tactical advantages make them a valuable ally.

Shaman as a mob class will release with the completion of the Orcan Clans (hopefully in the coming weeks - Shaman was one of the last big ticket items), delving into the shamanistic mountain clan, the Skarag, and Shaman planned to be released as a playable class in season 6.

Additionally, the enchant's rework is still in progress and is slated as a priority for season 6 now that the meat of the challenge rework is out of the way.