

## **The Guide**

By Dizzy J

When I first came to Thain, I was not just new to Thain, but new to all kinds of online gaming. It took a bit of adjustment for me to settle in and be able to enjoy Thain to its fullest. Hopefully, by letting you know what I didn't know or did wrong, you'll be able to enjoy Thain more.

The first thing you'll notice once your character leaves Webster's Landing (where new characters arrive) and start encountering other characters is that the people on Thain tend to be very helpful and accommodating. I haven't played on other servers, but I've heard that Thain is especially good in this regard. If you have questions or need help--either In-Character (IC) or Out-of-Character (OOC)--ask and people will respond.

Another thing you'll most likely notice very early is that role-playing (RP) is highly valued on Thain. This may mean if you happen to encounter another character, they might not be IC helpful, as it wouldn't fit their character's personality. Most likely, however, a tell sent will be answered OOC with helpful information. (You can send tells by typing "/t charname ...", clicking on their name in the player list and then hitting the "tell" button at the upper right hand of the list, right-clicking on someone's portrait in your party or by clicking on their portrait in the dialogue list.)

The final thing you're likely to notice early on, if you've come from just playing the original campaigns or other solo NWN modules, is that you are not the focus of Thain. This, more than anything, is probably the hardest part to get used to for newbies (or was for me, at least).

### **Creating a Character**

While this isn't a how-to guide for things like character creation, quests, et cetera, there are a few points I think it is worth knowing before creating your character. The first is that the DMs and most players greatly value RPing. In fact, I would say (although others would disagree) that if role-playing isn't your thing, Thain isn't your server. What does RP mean for character creation? In terms of what you should not do, not a lot. If you have a story in your head about a gnomish Paladin/Sorcerer who dual-wields whips, go ahead and make that character--um, but give it some hard thought first. If you have a solid story worked out and can really make the character feel real and nuanced, there's pretty much nothing that you can't do. However,

starting with a good idea of who your character is will make it a lot easier to RP.

When I made my main character, I didn't have a real feel for him. I had an interesting back-story and a pretty good idea of what he would look like, from a game mechanics point of view (I even had a level map taking him to 20th level). However, when I actually started playing, I discovered that his main function is being a court jester: he flirts incessantly, tells jokes constantly, and gets more out of insulting other players than defeating them (which is good because there aren't many he could defeat). However, he has a 10 CHA. I adjusted for this by making him socially clueless (he'll keep jabbering on when his audience's eyes have glazed over or are on the verge of attacking him). If I had a better conception of him when I had started, his abilities would have better reflected his true character. Now, to fix this, I'm taking CHA when I level up, even though it won't do me much good, from a game-mechanics point of view.

Even more than creating your character, playing your character is where the fun and the RP comes. So take a point in a score that doesn't make your character stronger, but more real and three-dimensional. The DMs often reward players who make decisions on the basis of RP, rather than power. I've gotten multiple xp bonuses for sitting around and talking--just being my character. I've also gotten bonuses for giving rousing speeches during an adventure. That's one of the things that makes a DM'd world different--and better--than a static one like the original campaigns.

If you've just come from one of the original campaigns, where RP is a joke, you might think it silly to take points on CHA when you have no game-mechanics (as opposed to IC) reason for it. But, hopefully, what you'll discover while on Thain is that RP is more of a reward than merely being powerful. If I could bring in my HotU character, he'd kick ass on anyone on Thain. But, despite being completely devastating even within the realm of the Underdark, I never play my HotU campaign. My weak little jester is much more fun. Power, grasshopper, is in the imagination.

A couple of warnings

If you want to play a tiefling, drow or any other kind of non-standard character, I would highly recommend you talk to a DM first (you can send a PM to one of them here). They'll be able to tell you what's necessary for that sort of thing, explain the challenges, and basically give an idea of what the server's like. If someone makes a tiefling without DM permission they're not gonna get zotted, but they're gonna

run into a lot of surprises and difficulty that most players aren't expecting. As well, certain non-standard characters do require DM permission, so it's safer to check first.

Think twice about playing a Red Dragon Disciple. Thain is glutted with them and to play one well (as opposed to just get a bunch of bonuses) it takes a lot of work. Plus, if your character is obviously monstrous in any way (say, sprouting RDD wings), you'll get attacked on sight by the guards. I'm not saying don't play a bard or sorcerer who intends to become an RDD, but be cautious about it and be sure you can handle the RP requirements. Morphed players (like shifters) will also be attacked by guards. And if you're attacked by guards, you most likely won't be able to shop at most places.

Try to match your character to your playing proclivities. If you don't like typing (and chatting), you'd be better off not playing a bard. If you don't like following the dictates of a holy order, stay away from clerics and paladins. And for the love of all things (un)holy, if you deeply love diabolical intrigues, give your character the mental stats (INT and CHA) to pull them off, even if he's a fighter.

Thain is a low-magic world. This means you won't ever have a keen, true-sight-giving +8 longsword to whack people with. You won't have boots of striding to give you a huge CON boost. Anything over +3 enhancement is likely to be a DM-given reward for a player who has demonstrated outstanding RP. Often these take the form of relics, which PCs have to be extra-careful about carrying, since they can drop on death! If you need a bunch of powerful magic items to realize your character, it won't happen.

### **Getting Used to a Multiplayer World**

The strength of the Bioware campaigns is that you can start the game, generate a character and immediately be told what you need to do to find adventure. Thain doesn't work that way. When you arrive, you will find some simple quests if you ask around in Webster's Landing or at the Trade and Tackle at the Crossroads (just up the road from Webster's Landing). These little quests can provide you some background into the world of Thain and lead you to further adventures. But the best way to use them is as a means of getting to know other characters. Ask other players for help, information or anything else, and suddenly, you're world has expanded dramatically.

What makes Thain addictive (and there are quite a few people who spend 20+ hours a week on Thain; probably a dozen or more who close in of 40) is the interaction with other people. scripted NPCs can't

deliver the richness and variety you get in playing with others, who have complex motivations and different means of expressing themselves. With a script, you have maybe five answers. With a person, you have any answer that suits your character.

With this richness comes the need to find people you like hanging out with. Generally, it is easier to find a group of characters about your own level, at least once you've gotten a few levels under your belt. You'll be more likely to be involved in adventures--rather than someone tagging along without being able to contribute much--if you develop a group of fellow adventurers who will find it rewarding to do level-appropriate adventures for your character. This doesn't mean that you'll necessarily spend all of your time with people your level, just that if you spend all your time as a 3rd level trying to tag along with 15-20th level characters, you probably won't enjoy yourself as much. This isn't to say you should stay away from adventures with "impossible"-rated characters, only that you need to find people who will allow you to be involved in the action.

It is likewise important to find a group of people who like to play as you do. This is probably the single biggest difficulty I faced coming to Thain. There are a tremendous variety of playing styles on the server, from people who are very goal-oriented (often called power-gamers), who are concerned primarily with gaining levels and power to role-players who are just as happy to hang out around the crossroads fire (the main meeting point on Thain) and chat as they are adventuring. If you discover you fall near either end of the spectrum (for example, I much prefer to spend a longer time, chatting away on an adventure than charging in), you'll most likely find that going out with people who are on the other end disappointing.

Fortunately, while finding a group of people to regularly adventure with who are both level-appropriate and a style-of-play match may sound intimidating, there are enough people playing on Thain at most times (usually from 20-30 people on) that you should be able to find a good group quickly.

Once you find people you like to play with, hooking up can be difficult if you're shy about it. They might be on when you first log-on, but not at the crossroads (or wherever you are). There are two good methods for dealing with this, both involve sending a player a tell (you can use the player menu to do this). The first, IC-way is to send a tell saying something like "Potatoes Smallblade asks the crossroads guard if they've seen Telis Relinkaris." The OOC-way is to send a tell like, "Dude, where's my buds?" or "Hi, Honey, I'm home." I also tend to exchange tells with people I play with regularly letting them know

when I'll be on next.

The key here is to engage with other players. If a party is forming up around crossroads (and it's made up of people you might have IC reasons to go with-if RP is important to you), ask if you can join them, even if they're higher in level than you. If you've gone on an adventure with someone and had a great time, send them a tell letting them know, and try hooking up with them next time you're both on. I was much too shy initially and had a lot less fun than I have now that I'm more assertive.

One thing that will help ease your introduction is a guild that's dedicated to helping newcomers. If any of them spot you, they'll almost surely come, talk to you and help you navigate through your early encounters on Thain. They're a player group, though, so they may not be around the first time you come to Thain, but you should bump into one or more of them fairly soon.

### **Thain's Golden Rule**

Respect other players and DMs. A lot of this is in the FAQs, so I won't cover it here. But it is always a good idea to be nice to other people, even if IC you're being a raging jerk. If you want to do something that's going to really hurt another character, send the player a tell and ask if it's okay. It's better to have to awkwardly come up with an IC reason that your character didn't crispy fry another character than ruin someone else's gaming experience. PvP is allowed, but always tread lightly. Also, no matter how much you've been screwed by another player, it is almost always IC, so don't send them mean OOC tells. Finally, if you feel someone is abusing the golden rule, send a tell to the DM ("/dm ...") and the DM will try to resolve the problem.

As well, respect the authority of the DMs. This doesn't mean you can't disagree with their decisions, but that you should respect that they've been playing for a long time and aren't being cavalier. Separate a decision you dislike from the person. If you need to work something out, do either via the DM channel or by sending them a PM at Webster's Cafe.

The most important resource Thain has is the players and DMs. Do everything you can to ensure everyone is having fun and that resource will grow.

### **Other Resources**

Webster's Cafe (where you're at right now, newbie!) has a lot of

threads discussing everything from good RP practices to how HiPS (hide in plain sight) works. Not to mention Caitlif's recommendation of the fine band, the Dresden Dolls (although, for epic fantasy gaming, I recommend Mogwai).