

Columbina's identity – expanding on the Seelie theory

With the release of the Finale of the Deep Galleries artifact set, we now know more about the origin of the Seelie, and may have more leads regarding Columbina's identity. This prompted me to search further than before, and I was surprised by the amount of information we have, which I will be detailing in this article. Summaries, quotes and sources will be included.

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Preface – terminology

In case you are not well acquainted with the lore of pre-Khraun-Aryan times, here are some terms and names that will be used and are important for the understanding of the theory presented here:

Heavenly Principles: designates both the Primordial One and the set of rules they established with their Shades when they modelled Teyvat. These rules are the absolute boundaries of the world and command fate.

The Primordial One: the first Descender, the one who created the Fake Sky and the rules for Teyvat, including those for the Seelie. They were the one who cast down the celestial nails on Teyvat and are the masters of Celestia.

The Four Shades (life, death, time, [unknown]): entities summoned by the Primordial One to help make Teyvat and uphold the Heavenly Principles. We already met Ronova, the shade of death. It is also suspected the Unknown God is the last shade.

Angels aka Envoys of the Heavens: as the name suggests, guides sent by the Gods of Celestia to help humanity in the early days of Teyvat. They later were transformed into Seelie due to one of them breaking the rules of Celestia and falling in love with a human.

Seelie: devolved ethereal form of Angels which we can see in-game, having lost their bodies and minds because of the curse the Heavenly Principles cast upon them. This term is occasionally used in-game to describe Angels, but for simplicity's sake, I will differentiate both as separate concepts.

Nabu Malikata: Goddess of Flowers, Angel who died by giving Deshret Forbidden Knowledge

Sybilla: Angel who was allied to King Remus, and died shortly before the fall of Remuria

Yohualtecuhtin: Lord of the Night, the Angel we meet in the Natlan Archon Quest.

Note 1: While Seelie and Angels are not inherently the same, the two are tightly linked with one another and the term "Seelie" was used to describe Angels on several occasions as well (for simplicity's sake, I will only use the term "Seelie" to describe the husks). One should also note that even if an Angel does not become a Seelie, they seem to have lost what differentiated them from humans (the maiden in A Drunkard's Tale is described as having the attributes of a human and not of an Envoy).

1) Symbolism and hints at Columbina's angelic nature

Magnificent, noble creations descended from the light itself, and the mortals — unable to look upon their true visages — called them angels.

Their pale silver wings shimmered like moonlit flames; their heads were adorned with crowns of sevenfold radiance, wrought of the bones of the earth and the stars of the sky.

The name upon those crowns was the love promised unto all creatures by the heavenly god, or perhaps a mandate to rule over the nations of the earth.

Though we have no official information of what she is exactly, we can surmise from the existing lore that she is an Angel. The clues pointing towards it are quite numerous, so I will only name a few:

- The six wings on her head ornament reference the seraphs – biblical angels at the top of the Christian angelic hierarchy (and also of significant importance in Judaism and Islam).
- In biblical numerology, the number 3 notably refers to the Holy Trinity, whose key characteristics include love, redemption and guidance, the former and the latter being the most relevant but the second also fitting her being an Envoy of the Heavens.
- Her most probable constellation from the [Fatui Harbinger Wheel](#), the heart-shaped Crying Dove, is another biblical symbol related to the Holy Spirit, whose role is to serve as a guide for humans. Additionally, the teardrop could be a reference to the fact that Seelies and fallen Angels mourn the fate that was assigned to them by the Heavenly Principles – more on this later on.
- The term “Seelie” comes from Scottish folklore, referencing fairies described as happy and pleasant. They are a benevolent bunch that helps humanity in general, but are also characterised as being mischievous – which is in line with Arlecchino's description of Columbina. Additionally, they are prone to carry out devastating vengeance when wronged, [a characteristic found in Nabu Malikata](#). Being Celestial in nature, they possessed considerable power – as such, one might speculate that Columbina may resent the Heavenly Principles for the curse brought upon her kind.
- Her description fits that of the Angel (who refers to the Seelie kind as “we”) in [A Drunkard's Tale](#), though it may have been someone else. Regardless, Seelie are described as “the last singers”, which fits her role in the [Winter Night Lazzo](#), and they mourn the fate that was assigned to them – a trait found in Yohualtecuhtin, Sybilla and Nabu Malikata.
- The base of Seelie courts resemble the pattern of the net Columbina wears on her eyes.

etc.

There are other hints in the lore and surely more symbolism that I missed, but this is not intended to be an extensive list, only a reminder. All of these hints point towards her being an Angel, which fits narratively with the subsequent theories detailed below.

Note 2: One point I'd also like to mention is the fact that "the traitorous envoy was stripped of both name and form." This differs from the curse cast upon the other Seelie, in which they would lose their *minds* in addition to their body. As such, the first angel likely lost her *angelic* form (i.e. her wings), but may have retained her human appearance. In relation to this, we know each of the Fatui Harbingers has (at least) three "names": their true name (e.g. Ajax, Rosalyne, Thrain, etc.), their codename (Childe, the Fair Lady, the Captain respectively) and their title (Tartaglia, Signora, Capitano). While we do not know the real names of several – Pierro, Pantalone, Pulcinella, Sandrone and Columbina – Pierro, Pantalone and Pulcinella are humans born within a society and thus are guaranteed to have one, and Sandrone is very likely modelled after [Mary-Ann Guillotin](#). Columbina is the only one whose true identity (i.e. name) we have no idea of – which may well be due to her being the first Angel in question, and thus lacking a name. Take this with a grain of salt however, since this is mere conjecture with unstable evidence.

Note 3: While I have some theories about her being one of the Moon sisters, I found that the recent lore we got from the [Song of the Welkin Moon](#) only pointed towards one possible outcome; the Frost Moon is still being worshipped and supposed dead, the Crimson Moon is related to Khaenri'ah and as such the Iridescent Moon is as well, leaving only the Eternal Moon as a potential option. I'll probably write a more in-depth article about this, but to keep it short, my theory is that this last Moon sister is Aria, which describes a song sung by a single voice. While it could fit Columbina, the implications behind this are very complex, and I found not much else to go on. As such, I only explored the possibility of her being an Angel (which is the most likely) and not of a Moon sister in this article, though I may analyse this other possibility in a future post.

2) Takeaways from The Finale of the Deep Galleries

Corrected timeline of the artifact set: Feather-> Goblet-> Flower-> Circlet-> Sands

The artifact set contains two separate narratives: Skirk's search of the trail of the Voyager, which will not be expanded upon in this post, and the story of the Voyager's arrival and the defiance of the Seelie against the Heavenly Principles.

If you have already read and understood the lore of the artifact set, feel free to skip this section, as it is mostly a recap of the lore told by these items.

The Voyager and the Seelie – Summary of the story

Not much is known about the voyager aside from them being an immortal being roaming the cosmos before their descent upon Teyvat. They likely were a star, similar to the Traveler and their twin, and were particularly intrigued by the then ruling dragonlord [Nibelung](#), as his will "shone more brilliantly than all the civilizations the voyager had ever seen" (Note: this likely refers to the fact that he is a descender – a being whose power or will rivals that of an entire world, cf. René de Petrarch's [notes](#)).

Seeing that his civilisation was destined for ruin, they invited Nibelung to join them in their exploration of the universe, but he declined, wanting to keep protecting his people, to the voyager's great sorrow.

They would later come back to pay him a visit, only to find him defeated and [the world shackled by the Primordial One and their Four Shades](#). Seeking answers, they descended upon the Golden City in the frozen wastelands of the North to take on the form of a young man and inquire about the truth of this world to the First Angel (who was the guardian of the Irminsul Tree of the Golden City at the time). In response to her reluctance, the voyager would tell her all about life and the worlds beyond the Fake Sky, showing her truths and beauty previously unimaginable to her. Her celestial shackles would break and she would fall in love with them, revealing them the secrets of this world – also known as forbidden knowledge.

She then decided to reject the Heavenly Principles' rule and unite with the voyager to rebel against the heavens, for she wished for humanity to be free of Celestia's shackles and in charge of their own destiny:

"I see a time when the earthly nations will yearn no longer for heavenly mercy."

"The cities they build will rise up to the clouds, higher even than the throne and the stars."

"I see humans sharing the vast sky with the gods they once revered."

"There will be no more tears, sorrow, or death, for all will be complete."

This event would however have dire consequences – the following quote's interpretation is not set in stone, but I saw it as the Moon Goddesses also wanting to break free from the Fake Sky's limitations, thus triggering the wrath of the Heavenly Principles:

Yet this moment of betrayal did not go unwitnessed, for at that very moment, the heavenly moons peered down through the cloak of clouds, a longing still more audacious arising within them...

Therefore, the rebellion did not last long, as the Heavenly Principles cast down the first celestial nail a mere month after these events, wiping out the Golden City and cursing the Angel people as follows:

The traitorous envoy was stripped of both name and form, and from that moment onward, a curse fell upon her kin: If they dared gaze into another's eyes, and to one alone offer the love that was meant for all, then not only would their divine beauty crumble into the wind, but their minds would fall to dust, until from the fallen one's remains a Seelie would rise, forever drifting in search of fading memories to consume.

This story does give us a significant amount of lore related to the Seelie, and most importantly strengthens some theories about Columbina's identity, as explained in the following points.

3) The curse of the Seelie & why Columbina keeps her eyes closed

Previously, we knew from [the Aranyaka questline](#) that falling in love amounted to losing one's form and mind for Angels, thus becoming a Seelie.

"Seelies are just empty husks that race left behind. This is because they were born with a curse: If they fall in love with Nara, they shall lose their intelligence and strength, and their bodies will regress."

The [Records of Jueyun](#) gave a slightly different version of the tale, but mostly amounted to the same curse:

At a far-flung moment in the distant past, the ancestor of the seelie met a traveler from afar, with whom they swore an oath of union witnessed by the three sisters of the Lunar Palace. Just thirty days later, a sudden disaster struck. The seelie and their lover fled into exile as the world collapsed around them, fleeing until the terrible calamity caught up with and seized them. Their cruel punishment was to be separated from each other for eternity and to have their memories wiped without a trace.

The graceful but heartbroken seelie and the sisters grew more sullen and withdrawn with each passing day, to the point where their wondrous forms withered away, leaving fragments of their former selves scattered in the mountains and ruins, where they turned into tiny little life forms. They had forgotten so much, lost so much, and been stripped of their voices and wisdom, yet they continued to sing the same songs of grief.

Now, as stated before, Nabu Malikata was also an Angel – one of the few surviving ones. And, most importantly, though [it was never confirmed](#) if she reciprocated the Red King's feelings, she did love King Deshret and [REDACTED] dearly, even considering Deshret her "dearest friend" and valued his ideals and his love over the lives of the People of the Sands who would perish due to his schemes – something that should have triggered the curse of the Heavenly Principles. So, if this theory were to stand, how did she not turn into a Seelie?

One major change of perspective we got from the Finale of the Deep Galleries' lore is that it did not, in fact, happen because of their love for another; instead, a very specific condition had to be met:

If they dared gaze into another's eyes, and to one alone offer the love that was meant for all [...]

This means that in order for an Angel to devolve to a Seelie, they had to look upon a human they loved (or die and lose their form, which happened to many during the war with the Second Who Came). In relation to his, in the [Dirge of Bilqis questline](#), we have the chance to see the Goddess of Flowers through Liloupar's eyes in one of her memories:

You see her reach out and behold her skin gleaming with lunar sheen. You gaze upon her mien and witness ineffable beauty. Her appearance is like the totality of her Jinn, their wondrous aspects only mere petals to her complete flower, her being the quintessence to every last scent in existence...

And then, you meet her gaze—And face nothingness.

You greet the endless void, falling into its embrace, mind afire with constant terror...

We never got an explanation for this specific quote, but if we were to take it literally, a void instead of a gaze... probably means that she gouged out her eyes. And so, the condition for the rule to be enforced by the Heavenly Principles (“If they dared gaze into another's eyes”) could physically never be met, thus allowing her to be exempt from the curse upon the Angels.

Additionally, the Deep Galleries confirm that eye contact was to be avoided, which means that the previous explanation is very likely – wording has always been of great importance when it comes to the fate of those in Teyvat, as Nicole (implicitly) explained in the [Fontaine Archon Quest](#).

Magnificent, noble creations descended from the light itself, and the mortals — unable to look upon their true visages — called them angels.

While this theory relies on the assertion that Columbina is in fact an Angel, it fits almost perfectly with her symbolism and the lore of the Seelie race. As such, I would argue this is the reason Columbina never became a Seelie – she avoided the risk altogether.

4) Columbina's powers and why she is ranked third

Nahida stated in the [Sumeru Archon Quest](#) that the three highest ranked Harbingers had power rivalling that of the gods. As such, I wondered about the reason behind her being the third. In the end, the answer was actually rather simple, and we've had it since Sumeru, surprisingly (at least for me). Envoys of the Heavens possess some non-negligible powers and have always been referred to as "gods" – Nabu Malikata was the Goddess of Flowers, and in more recent lore drops, Yohualtecuhitin is labelled as the "god of the night realm" in the [Obsidian Codex artifact set's](#) lore. It is important to remember that gods include a wide range of entities, from Morax to very feeble beings such as [Havria](#) or [Bifrons](#); not all of them have power comparable to that of the Archons.

This being said, we all know she is described as dangerous by [REDACTED], and seems to be the only being that Tartaglia is truly wary of:

The Fatui Harbingers are ranked by strength, and I have no idea why that girl is No. 3. I'd test my skills with every Harbinger who ranks above me if I had the chance, but when it comes to her... something just doesn't feel right. Anyway, you should be careful around her.

This is where the Deep Galleries' lore comes in:

Having angered the divine envoys by questioning the progress of knowledge, the people of the Golden City now argued endlessly amongst themselves as for how to quell their wrath. [...] They were the most loyal servants in the heavenly court, flawless arbiters of justice. [...]

The youth who had ventured deep into the earth's bowels met the first angel, inquiring about the most forbidden origins of the world. The dawn-daughter trembled at these profane words, not knowing how this mortal had uncovered such a closely-kept secret

Asking for divine knowledge had always been looked down on, as the Angels were terrified by the Heavenly Principles' potential retribution for committing such a sin, and thus strictly enforced this rule: the term "arbiter" implies the passing of judgement – and likely applying the sentences all the same, since they were the Envoys of the Heavens to the mortal realm. As such, it would only be logical for the Angels to possess sufficient power in order to enforce the ban of such requests and strike fear in the hearts of those who would dare to.

I daresay it would even be mandatory, as the two known transgressions of such a rule by angels, specifically Nabu Malikata and the first Angel, resulted in the [nailing of the Desert of Hadramaveth](#) and the Golden City respectively. The only transgression that did not end up in the nailing of a region was the case of [Orobashi](#), but it is a special case since the Serpent God made a deal with the Heavenly Principles, in which he would suicide in order to avoid any harm to his people. Because of this, any potential threat had to have been dealt with – otherwise, the amount of destroyed civilisations should have been much greater.

I'd also like to address the Angels' capacity to tell the future – while we have conflicting records of them keeping their power or not after the curse was cast upon them (notably [Sybilla keeping her power](#) of foresight while Nabu Malikata and Yohualtecuhitin lost theirs), they all were said to possess them before the events that transpired in the story told here. As such, Columbina might still be able to tell the future

(to an extent, as we saw with Sybilla's understanding of the future being limited to major events), which would make her a very powerful individual.

Of course, all of this does not fully justify her being over Arlecchino in terms of ranking – while the Goddess of Flowers and the Lord of the Night both possessed considerable power, the Golden Bee's was all but spent when she was found by Remus, in spite of never having been subject to the Heavenly Principles' curse. There is, however not much else we can say about this as of today due to the lack of relevant clues.

5) Columbina's personality

The following points are more speculative than the previous ones and not based on hard evidence, but rather takeaways from the behaviour of the (so far) three known surviving Seelie: Nabu Malikata, Sybilla and Yohualtecuhtin.

A common trait found in all Angels, including the one in [A Drunkard's Tale](#), is their regret and longing towards the bygone days of harmony with humans. This melancholy has taken multiple forms, from fear and wariness on both Sybilla and Nabu Malikata, to general longing and sorrow from the singing maiden or regret from Yohualtecuhtin. It has, however, also sparked a deep resentment towards the heavens in the Goddess of Flowers – which leads me to my next (and most important) point regarding Columbina's personality: selflessness?

One of the main characteristics of the Envoys of Heavens is the unconditional love they must have towards humanity as a whole:

The name upon those crowns was the love promised unto all creatures by the heavenly god, or perhaps a mandate to rule over the nations of the earth.

"With all your heart, soul, and might, you shall love all the beings of this earth. You shall love as morning dew longs for the dawn, as seeds long for the tradewinds."

They were the most loyal servants in the heavenly court, flawless arbiters of justice. They wove a veil for the great ruler of the firmament, delivering sacred revelations to all realms.

This trait was found in two of the Envoys previously mentioned: Sybilla gave her life for the creation of [Phobos](#) by King Remus, and Yohualtecuhtin was ready to give up her life in order to allow the Captain to reweave the Ley Lines. Other angels and Seelie previously present in Natlan [all gave their life force](#) to Yohualtecuhtin in order to maintain the stability of the Ley Lines as well.

This is something that is still noticeable to this day with the Seelie we encounter in-game, who not only guide humans towards pieces of treasure to reward them for accompanying them to their courts, but also adapt themselves in order to better help humans in a manifestation of their most profound goodwill, despite having lost their minds, as seen in the [loading screens](#).

Aside from this, as stated in the Deep Galleries, as long as Angels were shackled by the elemental crown the Heavenly Principles had given them, they could not feel anything else than what they had been assigned to feel by the masters of Celestia:

As her heart fluttered for reasons she could not know, the eternal star-crown forged in love's name suddenly fractured; [...] In an instant, the fetters laid upon her by the enthroned ruler broke apart like a spider's web; for the first time, she discovered what it meant to serve herself.

Now, said crown was shattered when the first Seelie fell in love, which happened to neither Sybilla nor Yohualtecuhtin. It did, however, (possibly) happen to Nabu Malikata – either way, she did lose the crown in question, which is confirmed by her representation in Nilou's outfit, as it does not possess a crown. The Goddess of Flowers was quite different than her two fellow Angels, as shown in the [Oasis Garden's Truth](#):

It is said that flowers blossom so that they may enjoy a spectacular death, and that death was precisely the wholehearted pursuit of the Lord of Flowers — for death adds bitterness to lost joy, and intensifies with time across endless memories.

The ignorant Lord of Deserts was never aware of her reasoning. He only reveled in her immense charm and grace — and as misguided as such fervent affections might be, they were well within the calculations of the Lord of Flowers.

Willing to manipulate her partner and use her own sacrifice as fuel for his burning resentment of the Heavenly Principles, she was selfless in a very unconventional sense of the word — towards her cause, but certainly not towards her own desires, willing to sacrifice everything — including the humans that would perish due to the introduction of Forbidden Knowledge — in order to take revenge upon those who sealed the fate of her kin.

Since Columbina no longer has such a crown, we can expect her to act more like Nabu Malikata did than the other two — generally helpful and without ill intentions towards humans, but with a strong desire for revenge against the Heavens, and likely willing to sacrifice quite a lot in order to achieve it. This would explain her joining the Harbingers, as it logically serving her personal thirst for retribution more than it serves humanity as a whole would likely turn her away from such a decision, had she still been shackled by the Heavenly Principles.

6) The setting of the story & why we might meet Columbina in 6.X

Lastly, I would like to address the potential presence of Columbina in Nod Krai based on a few hints we got throughout the years, and in particular with the Deep Galleries' lore.

Back in Fontaine, we got [lore](#) from the Narzissenkreuz Ordo questline regarding the cyclical nature of this world, then called "[Root Cycle](#)" by René de Petrichor in his research. In particular, Hyperborea was the first era after the establishment of the new world order by the [Primordial One](#), and before the arrival of the Second Who Came: according to the [Flower of Paradise Lost artifact set](#), the Angels had not yet turned into Seelie when the Second Who Came initiated a war against the Primordial One:

"It was a faraway time of calm and peace. Divine envoys spoke openly with the people then, bringing them the word from the heavens..."

"But, in time, invaders descended from beyond the firmament, bringing with them destruction, overturning rivers, spreading plagues..."

On one hand, the [Root Cycle](#) refers to Hyperborea as "the age when the world was frozen and the lost paradise," describing the state of the Unified Civilisation before the war for the Throne in the Heavens, the war with Nibelung, and the fall of the Moon Goddesses. On the other hand, the Finale of the Deep Galleries lore states:

"That was when the silver moonlight had yet to be shattered in the fires of war, when the divine prophecies of the heavens still extended over the land."

We can thus conclude these refer to the same time and space. Incidentally, the [Ballad of the Fjords'](#) lore suggests that the Golden City of Hyperborea, where the story takes place, was located near Nod Krai, which means we likely will have more information regarding the Seelie in version 6.X. – consequently, Columbina lore, if not Columbina herself, which may have been teased in the [song of the Welkin Moon](#) with the description of the Head of the Voynich Guild.

Additionally and from the same source, all Fatui were apparently tasked to go to Nod Krai – meaning we may well meet her during the main storyline:

The "Palestar Edict," that highest of commands, has gone out. With it, the Fatui have been summoned back to Snezhnaya and dispatched to Nod-Krai. The people stare and wonder: for what purpose does this army, bearing the banner of the Pale Star, come to their city? Or perhaps the question should be, "For whom?"

Note 4: This might suggest the Fatui emblem is the Pale star and not, as previously theorised, Solomon's Knot or the Star of Ishtar (which was recently proven to be always related to Khaenri'ah as of version 5.1, with Capitano's identity having been revealed), thus referencing the Belyi Tsar, who was the probable previous Cryo Archon and the Tsaritsa's husband (as suggested by "Tsaritsa" translating to "the wife of the Tsar" in Russian). We do know, however, that the Fatui were created [after the Cataclysm](#), and as such [after the death of the previous Cryo Archon](#), which likely happened [during said Cataclysm](#). Though this will need an article of its own, it is likely the death of the one she loved was what prompted the Tsaritsa to launch her war against Fate, in the same way [Rosalyne](#) did.

Returning to the main focus of this section, in an outdated article, I had theorised Columbina would be present in Natlan, based on hints found within the [Fatui Wheel](#) – theory which was later proven to be erroneous, possibly due to the rewriting of Chapter V (cf. Neuvillette's [parting conversation](#)) and extension of the story to include Nod Krai, though this remains personal conjecture. There is, however, one thing worth noting: the order in which the Harbingers fight the Traveler remains the same, and my theory of Arlecchino fighting against them in the later stages of Fontaine was confirmed in the end. This means that, unless Capitano is revived and fights the Traveler in the Interlude Quest – which is unlikely due to it probably focusing mainly on Dainslief and the Traveler's quest to find their sibling – or in a potential second Story Quest featuring the Pyro Archon – also unlikely as it would take the spotlight away from her – it is plausible that the next Harbinger the Traveler fights is in Nod Krai. Therefore, it is still possible for Columbina to be the next main Harbinger antagonist and perpetuate the Fatui Wheel theory.

Finally, though on a more speculative note, Nabu Malikata, also known as the Goddess of Flowers and one of the few surviving Angels at the time, stated that she was ineluctably drawn to her homeland (Celestia not being the one she refers to, as the description she gives corresponds more to the Golden City than the Island in the Sky).

"But my home calls to me nigh-constantly, even as a disaster between the stars and the abyss grows ever emergent on the surface of the crystals."

Should Columbina be in the same situation, she may have returned to the Northlands in spite of her exile (mentioned in the Deep Galleries), which could also fit with the maiden from a Drunkard's Tale.

In any case, I am very much looking forward to getting to know more about Angels and Columbina, and hope we will get more lore about them in the upcoming months.

Afterword

Thank you for reading through this article, which I hope will have been somewhat informative to you.

Please do correct me if I have made any mistakes or forgotten some things, as I have not been keeping up with lore-related discussions for quite some time and may have missed important information.

I will likely publish a follow-up on this theory once we get more lore about Nod Krai and the Seelie – which will likely come sooner rather than later, as the Deep Galleries state that Skirk was on the trail of the Voyager – and will also be including corrections and appendages to this article if needed.