

Special Investigative Press™

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Freelands Becomes the Center of an Undead Power Vacuum

**Local News:
Pitohui's Reign of Terror Continues**

Veilwalker Ichor Confirmed Dangerous



Your Insight to the Freelands

Special Investigative Press™ is a division of Steamy Ink Publishing®, proudly supported by the Journalist's Guild of Civen. Our mission is to deliver timely, accurate, and accessible information to the Freelands community, while remaining committed to spreading Civen values of knowledge and integrity.

Our unwavering commitment to journalistic integrity forms the bedrock of our work. We provide in-depth investigations into global events with potential local consequences, specifically designed to empower individuals with knowledge that truly impacts their lives and shapes informed decisions. Through robust community engagement, our aim is to foster a more informed, knowledgeable, and discerning citizenry across the Freelands.

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Shrines to the Entity Begin Appearing Near Epicenter of Veilwalker Infestation

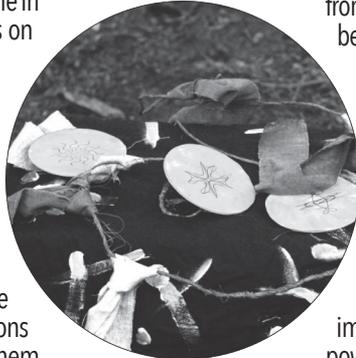
Costly Strikes Against New Shrines Derail Greater Threat to the Freelands

As anticipated from discussions with Maudry, the unsettling presence of Veilwalker shrines has begun around Maplewood. In response to this development, the adventurers who had gathered in the southern hub town wasted no time in initiating direct assaults on these sites.

A few short weeks ago, what appeared to be "every adventurer awake" surged towards the town outskirts no less than four times, leading the assault on the locations and damaging them beyond repair. These were no small skirmishes; Veilwalkers defended their shrines with all their power, injuring many in close-quarters combat as they attempted to fend off the attacks.

The key to disrupting the shrines lay in destroying the

prominent sigils etched on their surfaces. Upon performing a specific ritual provided to them, the ritualist would shatter a sigil, nullifying that shrine's immediate capabilities. Reports confirm that the destruction of specific sigils



last month prevented the Veilwalkers from casting low-level Compulsion spells (which humanoids were especially susceptible to), obtaining primal forms, terrorizing victims, or dominating targets. However, not all sigils could be destroyed. At some point

in the future, Veilwalkers will gain the ability to dominate undead or pin their targets in place.

Analysis of the Veilwalkers' defensive maneuvering indicates they have a strong desire to prevent anything from nearing the shrines before their complete consecration. It appears that if the shrines were allowed to fully consecrate - perhaps through a delay in ritual performance in an attempt to shatter multiple sigils at once - the Veilwalkers would immediately gain the full power of one of their sigils. The urgency was underscored by a particularly exhausted Draconus cultist, who, upon handing over a ritual, firmly stated, "Make sure that you have a competent person do this." Those closest to shattered shrines recall feeling an immense surge

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Fortune Brigade Offers Assistance, Gets Stabbed

Anton, the self-proclaimed proprietor of the "Fortune Brigade," recently reappeared in Maplewood accompanied by a handler assigned to ensure his good behavior. As previously reported, Anton arrived claiming a fresh start but was soon found at the Spinning Jenny boasting about his crew and their plans to dominate the town. It appears his return visit was mandated by his superiors, who ordered him to apologize for the disruptions caused during his previous stay in our quiet town.

Anton appeared more sober upon his return and offered apologies around town, though his sincerity seemed questionable. After apologizing to the Steamy Ink Publishing staff, he and his companion were having a pleasant conversation with Joy when Pitohui stabbed his companion shortly after they identified themselves as a Septon. Anton immediately fled the scene. The Septon was promptly helped and was later seen at the Jenny, receiving many drinks and sympathies from the locals. It remains unclear if Anton sought reinforcements or intended to retaliate; SIP plans to continue watching these unfolding events with great interest.

Despite Anton's initial boasts of their powerful adventuring group, the "Fortune Brigade," concrete evidence of their might remains to be found. The Septon who accompanied Anton did offer assistance to the town, stating, "I see why you guys are so stressed, you're always getting stabbed just for existing." He stated he would return next month with that assistance. This recent encounter with Pitohui—where Anton's companion was stabbed and Anton himself fled—raises serious questions about the Brigade's competence and whether they can truly pose a significant presence in Maplewood. Only time will tell if this motley crew manages to stay out of the obituary section.

- Lorelei Levanestra, SIP Reporter

Ratfolk: Why Trusting Them Will Kill You

Of the dangers present in the Freelands, we would say ratfolk are the most common denizens. These sneaky large rat-like creatures are never to be trusted, there is nothing that will ever guarantee them from killing you. There are many that claim these creatures can be persuaded to not attack with food and they are wrong. These are the people the ratfolk kill from behind after they have taken their food.

Ratfolk quite often attack from ambush and utilize primitive but deadly poisons. It is also very rare to find them alone so if you see one be sure to keep your eyes out for the others creeping onto your flanks.

They are not normally difficult to kill, but they are wily predators that will not hesitate to flee a losing fight only to regroup and attack again later. Be sure that you don't let them get away, kill them all. Alternatively you can spare one and break their legs as warning to the others. The other ratfolk will eat them of course, but they will also stay away for awhile.

While on the subject of ratfolk eating, do NOT just give them food to make them go away. They will come back, and in greater numbers. When they realize you don't have enough food to feed them all they will eat you while you are still alive. And if you happen to just survive, I promise someone will correct that one evening in the very near future.

- Shelaz Snowpike, SIP Reporter



Call for Investigative Journalists

Special Investigative Press™, proudly backed by the Breaking Bulletin Consortium (BBC), **seeks dedicated freelance journalists** committed to journalistic integrity and civic understanding.

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of magic that almost **Shrines, continued** knocked them over upon its completion, driving home the point that this ritual is not for those new to working with magic.

Despite these successes, the cost was not minor. Many who returned from these difficult engagements became infected and are now in the process of mitigating its effects. While these initial strikes have bought some time, the future itself remains uncertain. The strategic decisions on which sigils to prioritize for destruction are sure to become increasingly difficult, and with each confrontation, the toll of the Veilwalker infection will only continue to rise. The fight for Novitas' safety - or maybe even the safety of all Illumina - is far from over.

We're Getting a New Look!

With the continued backing of the Breaking Bulletin Consortium (BBC), Steamy Ink Publishing has been hard at work expanding its journalistic efforts and enhancing its publications. You may notice some exciting changes to your favorite papers to accommodate this, but don't fret! Our promise remains: to keep the Freelands informed, entertained, and a little more scandalized.

Found an interesting plant but don't know what to make of it?

It's possible Kythaela Brownfox can help.

Also willing to process certain plants into useful components for a small fee. Plant identification free of charge, if it is within her ken. (Tips appreciated)

If you cannot find her, messages may be left at the Pheasant Plucker.



Veilwalker Ichor:

A Public Safety Announcement

Through SIP's extensive investigations, we can confirm beyond a doubt that **Veilwalker Ichor is a serious hazard.** This substance, which is thick and a shiny bluish-purple in color, is left behind by Veilwalkers when they are in an area. It infects local flora and wildlife, and we've found that touching this substance leads to immediate infection with the Veilwalker Curse.

This contamination bypasses known forms of immunity or natural resistance. What's more, it's highly corrosive, eating through most protective gloves and resisting containment in any known vessel. **This is a significant threat to public health.** We advise everyone across the Freelands to avoid all contact with any detected Veilwalker Ichor, prioritizing personal safety and collective well-being.

The easiest way to avoid it at this time is to stay away from the two main war fronts of Pinedale Lake and Maplewood. If you do come across any ichor, mark the area if possible and notify your local druids.

If you come into contact with Veilwalker Ichor or otherwise become infected, reach out to a Chosen of Draconus or Septon for instruction.



Freelands Offered Dark Alliance Against Rising Lich Threat

Last month, a mysterious summons reached all known mediums in the region. Despite the inherent risk of a trap, several key mediums, including Daitoro and Sílor, chose to attend. As they entered the designated meeting place the lights abruptly extinguished, and three wraiths materialized before them. What transpired next was entirely unexpected: the wraiths began to speak, identifying themselves as emissaries of Wraith Lord Umbrix. They had been sent to seek alliances within the Freelands to combat a looming threat that promises to transform the region into a dominion of the undead.

According to Umbrix's messengers a power vacuum has been left in the Freelands following the demise of Reggie, a nosferatu of immense strength. This void is now sought by Pandora, reportedly a Lich of Great Power. Her ambition is to seize control of this vacuum and, in doing so, transform the Freelands into a land dominated by the undead. To achieve this, Pandora is reportedly willing to forge alliances with the Entity itself.

Wraith Lord Umbrix also admits seeking to establish his own influence in the region. He purportedly harbors no ill will towards the people of the Freelands, seeking only the power associated with such a dominant position. To that end, Umbrix has extended an offer: for those who will fight alongside him against Pandora, he promises unspecified power and new means to combat their foes. However, this assistance comes only with acceptance of his unstated terms.

An unsettling proposition now faces the Freelands: Do its inhabitants align with a Wraith Lord, accepting an offer of ominous power to combat a potentially greater evil? Or do they attempt to face these escalating threats on their own, risking annihilation from a far more malevolent force?

-Lynn Katullin, SIP Reporter