

Special Investigative Press™

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Southern Gersh: Has the Elemental Forgiven?

Local News: Record Ratfolk Numbers Prompt Public Health Warning

On the Protection of the Free Press



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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The Phylactery, The Crown, and The Power Vacuum:

A Full Account of the War Between Pandora and Umbrex

Freelands- In the months following the conclusion of the conflict between Lord Umbrex and Pandora the Lich Queen, this press has received no shortage of questions regarding the precise sequence of events—among them, "Who won?", "How do you spell Umbrex?", and "Did Lord Umbrex really die?" This correspondent has spent the winter months compiling a thorough account for the benefit of the Freelands readership.

undead roaming its grounds, none were powerful enough to overpower Reggie, but with him gone, the Freelands were ripe for the taking.

Two heavy hitters rose to the challenge. Lord Umbrex, a powerful and ancient Wraithlord who up until recently had been imprisoned inside of a prism—captured by an organization known as the Prismatic Knights.

destined to turn the Freelands into an undead kingdom under her rule. From the information gathered, it seems her transformation took place after the fall of the AI Cairn.

Each opponent vied for the favor of the adventurers, at least for some time. They urged those in Maplewood to take their side and help them to defeat the other, using promises of power or leadership to entice the adventurers.

What follows is a complete record, to the best of our knowledge, of how the undead power vacuum was contested, and where matters currently stand.

A priest of Darkness unleashed him from captivity, and although he was weakened from decades of confinement, Lord Umbrex knew he had to seize this opportunity to control the Freelands.

This conflict first began back when Reggie died, a powerful and ancient Nosferatu, leaving behind a power vacuum. While the Freelands have always had

The other challenger was Pandora, the Lich Queen of the Kingdom of Divine Rot. It is believed she was the child of a charismatic cult leader and was groomed to one day become a lich,

Pandora grew impatient. In the summer of 1603, Pandora launched an attack on the town from multiple sides, her disciples shouting the mantra "Join us in Life or Join us in Death." While this correspondent cannot say for certain where individual loyalties lay, that did appear to be a turning point for the adventurer's attitudes

Opinion:

Terran Thunder Has Lost Its Thunder, and I Can Prove It

This press has become aware of a disruption to the supply chain of Terran Thunder, the beloved fizzy beverage known for its alarming yellow-green coloration and remarkable stimulating properties, which has been a staple of the Spinning Jenny's drink menu for several years.



Sources confirm that import shipments have been irregular since late 1602, forcing local establishments to source alternative batches to meet demand. The Jenny has continued to serve the beverage under its original name, but it is clear to this author that what is currently being served there is a

complete misrepresentation of the product.

This correspondent has conducted extensive firsthand research into the quality of the current batches being served.

- The coloration is slightly off.
- The alertness obtained after drinking it is significantly reduced.
- The sharpness on the back of the palate that distinguishes genuine Terran Thunder from its imitations are absent.

Residents deserve accurate information about what they are consuming. This paper's editor-in-chief deserves a correctly advertised nightcap.

Undead War con't

towards the two opponents. People were more willing to cooperate with Umbrex, as he hadn't sent out an undead army to kill them.

For several months following the attack, adventurers spent their time and resources learning all they could about these two foes and how they could be defeated. Umbrex could be taken care of in two ways. He could be defeated in combat, which would have proven difficult but not impossible, or he could be reimprisoned in the prism once again. In Pandora's case, a lich is virtually indestructible as long as its phylactery is intact. The key to defeating one, is to first destroy its phylactery.

In November of 1603 The Kingdom of the Divine Rot made their move. A horde of undead descended onto Maplewood and

overwhelmed the town's defenses. The adventurers retreated to the safety of the inn, and Pandora reveled in her victory—leaving the adventurers to cower and prolong the inevitable. She left them there, secure in the knowledge that she had all the time in the world to defeat them.

Although all hope seemed lost for Maplewood, there was a glimmer of hope—someone had found and destroyed Pandora's phylactery, leaving her vulnerable. This forced Pandora to go into hiding, attempting to rebuild what was lost. However, her followers did not remain idle. In December of 1603, a disciple of Pandora, a high-ranking lady of the Kingdom of the Divine Rot arrived in Maplewood on behalf of her queen. This disciple made one final bid for the adventurers' favor. She revealed that The Kingdom of the Divine Rot had captured a Prismatic Knight. Pandora's lady offered a truce in exchange for the adventurers help in performing the Great Prism

ritual. Either the adventurers could assist Pandora and she would leave them be, or they could deny her, and she would face Umbrex herself, leaving the adventurers as her final enemy. The adventurers chose the latter, hoping Umbrex and Pandora would destroy one another. Later in the evening, a chest was sent to the inn containing Umbrex's crown.

The crown confirms what Pandora's representative claimed: Umbrex is dead, and the undead power vacuum he sought to claim died with him. What remains is a Lich Queen who is wounded, hunted, and still alive with at least one captive Prismatic Knight, a destroyed phylactery to replace, and the knowledge that the Freelands chose to stand against her.

The war for the undead throne is over. What Pandora does next is the question we should be asking.

-Marcus Thorne, *Siege Analyst*

The Cost of Kindness: Rat Scratch Fever

MAPLEWOOD- Residents of Maplewood and the surrounding areas are advised to exercise caution following a significant increase in ratfolk activity in and around the town. This press has confirmed that the uptick correlates directly with reports of residents providing food to ratfolk encountered near the inn and former bazaar area.

The arithmetic of this situation is straightforward: a ratfolk who has found a reliable food source will inform every associate they have. Those associates will inform theirs. What begins as one or two ratfolk accepting scraps becomes, within a short period, a substantially larger population drawn to the same source. This is not conjecture, this is simply how ratfolk operate.

The economic implications are secondary to the immediate medical concern: direct contact with ratfolk carries a documented risk of Rat Scratch Fever, which presents as severe and persistent itching and does not resolve without intervention. The only known treatment is the Remedy Ritual, which requires ritual components to perform.

Ritual components are a limited resource. The cost of treating a preventable illness is not borne by the patient alone, but by every person who might subsequently require that ritual for a more critical need. In practical terms: a ritual spent on Rat Scratch Fever contracted outside the Jenny is a ritual unavailable for a lycanthropy infection contracted by someone protecting a loved one.

The ratfolk are not in need of charity. They are not hungry. They are, by nature, opportunistic and a resident offering food is, by their assessment, a resource to be cultivated.

Do not cultivate them.

—*Silias Gwilt, Economic Correspondent*

The Elemental's Thaw: Seventeen Years of Change in Southern Gersh

GLACIER'S EDGE- Nobody knows precisely why the permafrost melted in 1587. Some say it was the death of Quv Daizo, while others say the Elemental simply changed her mind. Either way, the town named Glacier's Edge (as best I can translate from Snow Goblin) does not look like a place that was underwater seventeen years ago. The buildings are newer than they appear, the streets were laid by those still living, and if you know where to look you can still find a faint grey stain on the older foundation stones that survived the flood.

I have lived here for eleven of those seventeen years. I did not choose to come, and I did not choose to stay. But I have helped this place rebuild itself from mud and debris, and I find I do not mind being here.

The minor houses moved here first when the farmable land appeared. The great clans were slower to stake their claim, as they had more to lose by acting rashly. The house I serve has claimed a modest parcel to the east of town, but whether they will keep it is another matter. The Bitter Mikado has offered no ruling, which is itself a kind of ruling.

But what I find myself thinking about on the mornings when the work takes me outside is how alive the land is. Things are growing here now. Imperfectly, yes, and in ways that still confuse people learning what to do with the new crops we can grow, but growing all the same. Birds have come, singing their morning songs. New animals have been spotted in their burrows and dens, bringing with them new pelts to wear, meat to eat, and a sense that not all is lost.

I do not know if the Elemental is watching. I do not know if her thaw is forgiveness. But I find myself filled with the hope that something is being given another chance here, in this rebuilt town on ground that used to be glacier.

Whether Gersh deserves it is not my question to answer.
- *R.T., Gershan Correspondent*

On the Matter of Press Neutrality

In December of 1603, a representative of Vlean arrived in Maplewood seeking an audience with this publication. She carried valid documents and, by all available accounts, intended to conduct a conversation with this correspondent directly. She did not survive to have it.

At the request of her family, this press has chosen not to publish her name. We will say only that she came here in good faith, seeking what every citizen of the Freelands is entitled to seek: a journalist willing to listen.

She was killed before that conversation could take place. This press was informed of her death by someone who considered the act a kindness.

It was not.

Special Investigative Press, and all other presses of the Freelands, derive our value from neutrality. We speak to ambassadors and adventurers, to nobles and farmers, to allies and to those whose motivations we do not yet understand. We do not discriminate between sources based on their origins, their politics, who they worship, or the suspicions of those around them.

When a source is killed on their way to speak with us, we lose more than an interview. We lose

the intelligence that conversation might have provided, we lose the trust of every future source who hears about it and decides the risk is not worth it, and we lose the thread of a story that may have had consequences for every resident of the Freelands.

This press does not know what the representative came to say. That ignorance has a cost, and that cost affects everyone who is caught in the ongoing investigation.

We are asking, formally and publicly, that journalists and their sources be afforded safe passage throughout the Freelands. Those who wish to protect this press should do so by supporting its ability to function, and not by making decisions about who we are permitted to speak with.

If you have information regarding the circumstances of this incident, or regarding the Vleanoan delegation's activities in the Freelands, I request that you come forward. You will be heard. You will be protected.

That is a promise this publication intends to keep.

-Poppy Katullin, CEO, Editor-in-Chief

Terran Temperance League Accepting Membership Applications

A properly tempered blade requires patience, skill, and at least three pints. The Terran Temperance League advocates for the responsible and enthusiastic use of alcohol in all metalworking, woodworking, leatherworking, and any other craft that benefits from a steady hand and a relaxed disposition.

Our members report consistently superior results when working with a light ale during the shaping process, a dark stout during the cooling period, and whatever is left during cleanup.

We host regular meetings at any establishment willing to have us, which is most of them.

Membership is open to all crafters, aspiring blacksmiths, and anyone who has ever looked at a sword and thought "I could make that."

The Terran Temperance League is not affiliated with the Elven Temperance League. They know what they did.