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Lake Pinedale Under Siege

Bog Lurker Mating Season Begins: How to Avoid These Predators

LOCAL: Where Can I Find Assistance in Maplewood?

The Freeland News You Care About

Special Investigative Press™ is a division of Steamy Ink Publishing® dedicated to delivering timely, accurate, and accessible information to the Freeland community. We strive to empower individuals with knowledge that can impact their lives, by providing in-depth investigations into global events with potential local consequences. Through our commitment to journalistic integrity and community engagement, we aim to foster a more informed and knowledgeable citizenry in the Freelands.

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Hollow Words, Idle Hands:

The Faithful's Failure to Stand Against Evil in the Freelands

The Sept, revered for their benevolence and the feat of imprisoning the Dark Three, are pillars of faith. Everyone knows the stories: the near-cataclysm unleashed by the Three's release, the gods' desperate relocation of mortals to Novitas, and their solemn vow to never again walk the earth. We're all familiar with the loopholes- Avatars, the Hollowed Chantry, the Sacred Tabernacle, and other workarounds that would impress any lawyer. We've seen that Varganen flourished without the gods' direct influence or access to higher magics. But this article isn't about any of that.

This article is about the Sept's *followers*, those who uphold the faith while standing by as atrocities unfold. It examines how good people can remain devout and yet still fail their gods. This is a story of complicity, of clinging to a belief system even in the face of the evil it keeps allowing to happen. In short, it's an article about cowardice.

Something has shifted in the Freelands over the past three years. While followers of the Dark Three have always sought refuge here, they were never so brazen. Those who openly confessed to committing atrocities in the name of their dark deities were hunted down. Septons simply didn't tolerate overt

worship of the Three. A follower of Nox sending out fliers inviting the entire town to their dark church would be run out of town.

Now they proclaim their devotion loudly, committing public vivisections, torture, and other horrors, all while claiming persecution for their beliefs. The Varganen's arrival and their "Decade" proclamation, coupled with pleas from the Illuminated within the Chantry to collaborate with Dark Three followers against the Veilwalker incursion, have only exacerbated this problem. Septons and the Sept-devout, who would have once put an end to these atrocities, now stand by and do nothing about them.

For an example we turn to Maplewood, a town to the south. Their Church of Occulatora advertises its location and gathering times. Many in Maplewood claim the Sept encouraged cooperation with these dark worshipers, urging tolerance until the Veilwalkers are defeated. This has in turn caused Maplewood to become a new haven for followers of the Three. But how did we get there?

For months Pitohui Von'Ironsbane, a self-proclaimed Chosen of Darkness, terrorized the people of Maplewood.

Local News

Where is all the Help?

OOG Shift Key:
 Late Night = 1st
 Morning = 2nd
 Afternoon = 3rd
 Evening = 4th

A recent independent survey of Maplewood residents, conducted by SIP, has identified key individuals who are most helpful for those seeking assistance. The survey also gathered data on these individuals' sleep schedules, making it easier for those in need to know the best times to contact them.

Most Likely — Still Likely

	Joy	Lightsworn Order	The Harbingers	The Chainbreakers	Moonlight Sentinels
Notable Members	Anyone who said "someone else" when polled admitted that they meant Joy.	Arcturus, Eoin, Eldin, Ym'Gol, Jaroth, Kato	Lucky, Zenif, Janos, Arbor, Cor	Makhno, Cordon, Sigos, Vald, Kyth, Thorivar	Rhanzo, Scythe, Finn, Mox, Moira
Times Awake	Late Night, Afternoon	Late Night, Evening	Late Night, Morning	Late Night, Morning	Afternoon, Evening

The survey also revealed a list of individuals deemed least helpful, who likely will not do things out of the goodness of their hearts and likely will require something in return for their assistance.

Definitely Not — Probably Not

	Sable Company	Watchers of the Grove	The Whispering Shadows	The Paragons	Tinnudel
Notable Members	Captain, Dante, Tiny, Coinpurse, Whisper, Mammoth	Vengar, Barnaby, Valda, Albite	Gharr, Audra, Pitohui, Micah, Abacus	Twigg, Aisling, Lucius, Ozur	Draug, Thaerion, Ithilfirth, Samjoko
Times Awake	Afternoon, Evening	Late Night, Morning	Afternoon, Evening	Late Night, Afternoon	Late Night, Morning

Founder's Feast Menu

40 Clove Chicken
 Mashed Potatoes
 Eggplant Parmesan
 Escarole w/ Cherry Peppers
 Dressed Salad

Lake Water Determined to be Drinkable Beginning in May

The Maplewood Alchemist Guild (MAG) has been performing regular testing of Bull's Head Lake water following its intentional pollution last fall to drive out Veilwalkers. After extensive research and monitoring, it has been determined that the lake water will naturally return to being drinkable in May. The water has been diluted to the point that if a Cleansing ritual is performed, it can be drinkable at the beginning of April. However, no one is currently able to reach the lake to perform the ritual due to the extensive snowy season and unchecked water elementals, potentially resulting from the death of an Archon earlier last year.

Standing Against Evil con't

assaults in the name of his dark god, and the desecration of the local temple. Finally, the local Sept followers, having endured enough, brought him down and prepared him for Final Rest. Pitohui was then rescued by an undead force and returned the following month, arguing that he couldn't be killed because he could access the Tabernacle and obtain crucial Blight information from Nox to fight the Veilwalkers. The citizens in town declined to fight him despite his many crimes and allowed him to live.

Pitohui now struts through Maplewood, preaching Darkness's doctrines and running his own church, spitting in the face of the very Sept followers who spared him and continuing to harass citizens. However instead of seeking another, perhaps less compromised, Chosen of Darkness, the citizens have deemed him indispensable. He thrives in his negativity, preaching at his Church and continuing to sow discord wherever he goes, a testament to the unsettling complicity that festers in Maplewood.

Some people choose to remain neutral in the conflict between the Sept and the Three, claiming that it doesn't concern them and that the Chosen of the gods should settle the problem. These people, perhaps, are more to blame than their Septly counterparts. They see shades of gray, that no one side is better than the other, but refuse to acknowledge the extreme ends of the spectrum that exist and need to be culled. There is a difference between someone venerating Darkness in the privacy of their own home or out

of the public eye, and then someone who openly attacks citizens of a town that don't agree with him in the name of Darkness. Allowing the first to exist is excusable; allowing the second to continue is immoral.

And yet the Sept faithful, who should renounce this behavior and put an end to it, remain inactive in their homes, voicing complaints about the state of the world but taking no action to resolve it. The Soldier's Chosen believe the battle is futile as they have no support, while the Knight's Chosen argue that it serves a larger purpose and the Stranger's chosen remain as silent as ever. There are countless excuses for allowing these events to occur, and as more excuses are used the more the behavior continues to unfold. The decay within their own community is being ignored. They deflect attention by pointing to the Veilwalkers, claiming that that situation is worse and must be addressed first.

But when all is said and done and Veilwalkers are gone, what exactly will the Frelands be? Will the Three followers like Pitohui be content with the truce that they have gotten? Or will they exploit the unwillingness of moral individuals to act, spreading more instability until there's nothing left for those same people to depend on?

Only one thing is for certain, and that is that the apathy displayed by those faithful to the Sept has already begun to erode the foundation of the beliefs they claim to uphold. Their inaction has emboldened the forces they once swore to eliminate and if this continues, the Frelands will become a breeding ground for the very darkness the Sept sought to contain. The new stories we tell will not be of good overcoming evil, but of how good men and women stood idly by and watched evil win. It is time for the faithful to choose: complicity or courage.

-The Heretic Herald

Pinedale Lake Under Siege



Tensions have escalated at Lake Pinedale, with forces aligned with Draconus reportedly laying siege to the area directly around the lake. This action effectively prevents Pisces supporters from leaving the vicinity. Sources suggest the siege is intended to contain the spread of Veilwalker Ichor, though a definitive motive has not yet been confirmed. The rapid establishment of the siege is attributed to a sudden supply of weaponry originating from the southern region near Maplewood, indicating Draconus' forces have secured allies in that area. SIP will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as they become available.

Ambush predators are among the most dangerous of the creatures a traveler can encounter in the Freeland. A bog lurker is the epitome of such. They are reptilian creatures with shaggy vegetation that grows from their bodies that allows them to blend well in forested areas. They are tough, solitary creatures that try to move in fast and quiet to quickly bring down food and drag it away to where it can be safely consumed.

Bog lurkers are hardy creatures. If one is to stand and fight against them a heavy two-handed weapon is recommended to tear through their tough hides. Their short claws are quick to tear up prey so the longer they can be kept at a distance, the better. They are smart, and if they think they are over matched they will often flee. A strongly presenting warrior or a large group of foes will often send them slinking back into the foliage from whence they came.

An interesting ability of the bog lurker is its ability to forcibly shoot streams of acid that can destroy shields and cause terrible burns to the unarmored traveler, be wary if you have to get in close with them. If they look like they are about to spit acid, move in quickly and strike them with your two-handed weapon.

The cold doesn't bother bog lurkers like it does many other reptilians. They might move a little slower and be less likely to chase their prey down in fall and spring months but they remain some of the first to get up in spring and the last to lay down near winter. It is when you are most likely to encounter a pair of them hunting together. It is said that spring is their mating season and their hunger is most voracious.

Speaking of hunger, these creatures are often very food motivated and they can sometimes be dissuaded from attacking by an offering of food... anything from sausages to annoying bards. I have to emphasize that this is not a

reliable strategy, even if you know Draconic... which apparently they can speak. I have seen many young druids killed and dragged off into the woods, never to be seen again.



In conclusion, it always pays to keep your attention on the well grown hedges near the trails, as sometimes they will drag bodies to be left to draw in more prey. Good listening can help just as well as good eyes, they often rise out from the ground behind their prey as they pass by. Be sure to let your louder companions go first and let them draw the attention of the lurker, you might be able to turn the tables on this clever creature.

BINGO!

Have you ever thought "Wow, that wasn't on my Bingo Card this year"?

Well, now it might be! See Poppy at Founder's Feast to purchase the first Steamy Ink Publishing Bingo Board for 10 coin. Limit one per person.

The first participant to submit a fully completed game board to Steamy Ink Publishing will be awarded a prize of fifty (50) coins. All participants submitting fully completed game boards thereafter will receive a coupon redeemable for one (1) complimentary "fancy coffee" at The Pheasant Plucker.

A completed game board constitutes a "Bingo," which is defined as five (5) marked squares in a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line. To complete a game board and achieve "Bingo," participants must mark the appropriate squares and, on the reverse side of the game board, legibly record the month in which each marked event occurred and a brief, descriptive sentence summarizing each marked event. Each square must be individually documented. Submissions that do not adhere to these completion requirements, including incomplete documentation of each marked square, will be deemed incomplete and will not be accepted.

Bog Lurkers:

A Traveler's Guide to Avoiding Ambush in the Freeland

Written by Shelaz Snowpike