

# Special Investigative Press™

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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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## Sacred Tabernacle Appears in Kash'Allum

Recent reports originating from Vargainen indicate an alarming event in Kash'Allum, the twin city dedicated to the Seven. While the challenges of verifying information from this distant region are difficult, consistent accounts confirm one fact: the Sacred Tabernacle recently materialized within the city.



Following the Tabernacle's sudden appearance, several Sky Beasts emerged and initiated an assault on Kash'Allum. Unseen in Vargainen history and unknown to the Al'Kash, these creatures began to wreak havoc on the city. Initial reports describe significant structural damage to several buildings, alongside an unknown number of civilian casualties before organized resistance could form. Thankfully, Alder, an Avatar of the Elemental, had recently arrived and

was able to mitigate further severe damage.

The most profound finding was that, unlike the transient forms of Sky Beasts previously encountered in Novitas, which typically dissolve into nothing within minutes of being defeated, these particular creatures left behind tangible, physical bodies. These remains were subsequently transported to Munta'saf, Kash'Allum's sister city dedicated to the three, for analysis. Pox, the Vargainen High Priest of Nox and the sole individual capable of

making Blight, indicates that the corpses are expected to significantly enhance Blightfyre production. A reduction in commissary costs is now anticipated in the near future.

Special Investigative Press continues to work towards independent verification of these claims. It is unprecedented for corporeal Sky Beasts to have emerged from a known communication vector to the Dark Three on a continent where they have not been seen in recorded history. This, coupled with the sheer convenience of an Avatar being precisely where and when such an event occurred, raises many questions regarding the Gods' involvement in the fight against the Entity. Further updates will be provided as more conclusive information becomes available.

# Mysterious Abductions Plague Maplewood: Authorities Baffled as Victims Vanish Without a Trace

A series of nightly abductions have recently been brought to the attention of authorities in the environs of Maplewood. Concern amongst many locals has been growing, now extending directly into the town itself. What is particularly baffling is that constables have uncovered a group of trusted adventurers who had been patrolling the very same area each evening, yet witnessed nothing. This reporter has confirmed they were questioned with truth serum.

Interviews with neighboring townsfolk have yielded wildly varying accounts. Reported first-hand accounts no longer follow any discernible pattern and are becoming increasingly difficult to verify. Earlier rumors of these kidnappings were originally dismissed as the work of a sect of Darkness cultists known to operate in the area. These "first-hand" accounts, based on the word of a fallen septon and a group of individuals who were, by their own admission, "completely inebriated," spoke of dark-robed figures passing through the woods, allegedly carrying bodies. These reports, however, did not match the locations where the initial kidnappings began on the outskirts of town, nor would the informants answer any questions under truth serum. Following this, the reported sightings have grown even more convoluted.

One terrified individual reported seeing a lone man watching the crossroads down by Mercy House, not more than a hundred paces from where one of the kidnappings occurred. The abduction involved a single woman traveling back home to Civen; she had left her bodyguards for a moment to relieve herself and simply vanished in the few moments they were separated. Constables were unable to confirm the individual's story before they, too, were kidnapped that same evening. The family he was sheltering with stated the individual had just stepped outside to calm himself for a moment.

The traveling performer from Willowhook, kidnapped after that, had no eyewitness accounts. The merchant who had been traveling behind him reported to the Elders that he heard howling in the woods as he passed by cart through Northtown. He heard screams and attempted to flee through town. The merchant was detained by the constables and questioned thoroughly. His story was confirmed with the use of both compulsion magic and a corroborating account from the constable who detained him. The Bloodmuzzle Pack had been suspected at the time. The merchant is still being held on suspicion.

In another instance, a local man had literally just stepped outside of the establishment known as the Spinning Jenny, with his wife and daughter right behind him. They opened the door moments later to find the empty night, with no sight or sound of their beloved husband and father. The constable present at the scene was absolutely baffled, claiming the man had simply vanished.

The latest kidnapping involved a young woman who had just given birth to her first child mere months ago. Neighbors all claim to have heard nor seen anything suspicious that night. The group of adventurers patrolling the area at the time also reported nothing out of the ordinary, save for another young child who had lost his parents on the way to town (which was confirmed to be entirely unrelated). The escalating unease after this latest abduction has the populace very much on edge, and it seems we are no closer to an answer than when the kidnappings began.

My name is Revan Dumarque, reporter for the Special Investigative Press, and I urge you: if you have ANY verifiable proof, please send word to me via Crimson Courier at the absolute earliest.

# Wraith Lord Umbrix: A Guide to Surviving the Coming Darkness

The people of the Freelands should be warned: the Wraith Lord Umbrix and his minions are coming. They seek nothing less than total domination over all creatures, both undead and living. Be wary as evening approaches; do not stay in any building that has not been hallowed. These creatures will pass right through walls and slay everything trapped inside.

One of the more dangerous undead to encounter alone in the night, wraiths are never to be underestimated. They are often just inky blackness floating silently in the dark, awaiting their prey. These intangible spirits can ONLY be harmed by elven steel. If you do not possess elven steel, do NOT fight them. They will kill you quickly, and they will reap your spark.

The most important thing when traveling alone at night is to be QUIET. The darkness can actually keep you alive if you use both your ears and your eyes. If you are lucky, you might hear the branches sigh in the wind as a wraith advances from your flank. Every moment before the fight is vital. Have a dissipate potion at the ready, just

in case. They will often strike you before you can complete an incant, but incant if you must and retreat quickly so that you can live to fight again.

Do not rely on heavy armor against these foes. Their intangible nature applies to their supernaturally sharp weapons as well; they slide through even the heaviest armor with great ease. Even magic armor will not avail you against them. You want to be light and able to maneuver quickly and easily to get away. An undamaged shield can sometimes buy you a few extra moments before their piercing weapons snake around the edges, but shields are not to be relied upon.

If you manage to down one of these monstrosities, you MUST cast the spell 'reap spirit' upon it as quickly as you can. It will rise again if you fail, completely unharmed and with a mind for vengeance.

A final word of warning: you will know a Wraith Lord by the crown of bone or black iron upon its head. These creatures are capable of casting a great deal of magic in addition to their already formidable abilities. To those with the power to hear spirits, if you hear a wraith casting spells, warn others of the danger before you fall.

## Which God Would be the Worst to be Chosen By?

Nox		180
Grak	30	The results are in for our Freelands-wide poll on divine preference, and the findings are... illuminating. When asked "Which God Would Be the Worst to be Chosen By?", the verdict is clear: Nox, the deity of sickness and disease, overwhelmingly claimed the top spot.  Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, The Mother, revered for her caring nature, and The Craftsman, embodying community spirit, garnered notably few votes. It seems the Freelands has a clear preference for benevolence over blight. These results offer a fascinating glimpse into the collective spiritual anxieties and comforts of our population.
Darkness	23	
The Scholar	21	
The Knight	20	
The Soldier	20	
The Elemental	12	
The Stranger	10	
The Craftsman	7	
The Mother	5	
Draconus	0	

Since we last brought you news of Anton, the self-proclaimed proprietor of the "Fortune Brigade," we have come to know a little more about this group. They have indeed come to Maplewood with good intentions, from what it seems; one member stated they are here to help Maplewood, believing there is a gap in the town's defenses.

The septon who escorted Anton to town a couple months ago, only to be stabbed by Pitohui, recently spoke with this writer over a cup of Terran Thunder. From what he had to say, the entirety of the crew lost their homes, many due to the Avatar of Grak incident a few years ago. "We heard about Maplewood and thought it might work for us," he said, sipping his drink. "So far it has."

Upon questioning what he thinks is wrong with the town's defenses, this septon had quite a bit to say. "Monsters, worshipers of the Three, hell, I got stabbed by a random lunatic

## The Fortune Brigade: Maplewood's New Defenders?

the other month." He grew more agitated while speaking, continuing on to say that "The Constables can't handle all of it and most of the adventurers in this town don't seem to care." He then grew more solemn, lowering his voice as he said, "We want to help. Simple as that."

Perhaps it is a good thing that this crew has come to live in Maplewood, and we should be thankful that the random lunatics haven't scared them away. After all, one can never be too careful in these trying times. So far, the Fortune Brigade seems to be doing well enough in making a name for themselves around town. We do hope their reputation continues to grow positively, and that we are still able to bring the Freelands news of their endeavors. And also, that they stay out of the obituary section.

## Zylrie Willowsark Spring 1580 - June 1603

Zylrie Willowsark, of the Willowsark clan, born early Spring of 1580, tragically passed away during one of the many key searches that occurred approximately a month ago. She fought bravely with the Guardians Of The Sacred Truths, and was able to sacrifice herself to save all of them at the end. Zylrie was considered the Light of the Grove, and proved just how brightly that light could shine when she selflessly let the others escape, holding back the hoard they had just fought their way through. Zylrie is terribly missed by the Night Shepherds, specifically Draug who she apprenticed under, Clan Willowsark, and most of all by her twin brother Rhys and her other 6 siblings.

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