

Steamy Ink Press™

Maplewood's Whispers, from Ear to Ink

October 1603

Entity Continues with vague Threats

Eoin's Extreme Lengths to Avoid Arc's Heartbreak

Enzo Succumbs to Bardic Plague



Steamy Ink Press™ is a division of Steamy Ink Publishing®. Now, with the proud sponsorship of the esteemed Breaking Bulletin Consortium, and in support of its vital work across the Freeland, our commitment to chronicling the captivating lives of the People of Interest who pass through our bustling town is stronger than ever as we enter our third year in publication.

We are dedicated to delivering unparalleled, in-depth revelations to the people of Maplewood about those people. What are their dealings? Their true motives? Their romantic entanglements? It remains our mission to provide the perfect conversation starter for lively conversation over tea with friends.

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Harbingers State He's Just 'On an Extended,

unscheduled Magical Detour'

In what was supposed to be a groundbreaking magical triumph, Maplewood's adventurer-in-chiefs managed to turn a victory into a missing person's report. Last month's ambitious "Mass Mass Leylines" ritual, a plan to weaponize the very magic of the world against the Veilwalker threat, was a complete success - at least for everyone who wasn't Janos.

According to sources who actually understand these things, a group of powerful ritualists decided to do the equivalent of poking a sleeping yeti with a very large, very pointy stick. The plan was to overload the Veilwalkers' "Aberrant Shrines" with a massive influx of power, effectively short-circuiting them. While the ritual did indeed eradicate the Veilwalkers in the area, it seems the magical travel lines got a

bit backed up.

Eyewitnesses report that as the ritual concluded the world warped, and with a sound described by one onlooker as a "loud magical yoink," Janos was



unceremoniously sucked into the leylines. One moment he was there, presumably looking very serious and important; the next, he was gone, leaving behind only a stunned silence and a few very confused Harbingers.

"Gone but not forgotten,"

one of his fellow Harbingers claimed, looking anywhere but at the Janos-shaped hole in reality. "It's a planned sabbatical. Mostly."

Townsfolk reactions have been mixed. "Oh, that's terrible," said local seamstress Elara. "Does this mean he won't be around to test the structural integrity of the inn's benches anymore?"

Others are less concerned. "Sucked into the leylines, you say?" grumbled one farmer. "Good for him. Bet the rent is cheaper in there." While some are calling it a magical tragedy, others whisper that his disappearance was a calculated escape.

"He obviously just cast leylines on himself to get away from people constantly asking for favors," can't page 2

The Most Serious Threat Our Land Has Ever Seen (And No, It's Not Veilwalkers)

First there was the Mindshatter plague, a horrible curse inflicted upon us by the Dark Three. Then came the Veilwalker infection, a dangerous threat to our lives and liberty courtesy of the Entity. Now, we face the most serious threat our land has ever seen. I'm referring, of course, to the recent plague of Bards that has infected our town.

Maplewood has grown lax in its vigilance against the danger they present. Bards are responsible for most noise pollution in the environment.

They absorb attention that could be used towards doing something worthwhile, like not listening to Bards. In fact, some scholars believe the failing helix had nothing to do with the attack by the Avatar of Grak, but rather that the Helix is overtaxed in its efforts to keep the bards from harming citizens with their terrible music.

So, how do you protect yourself from Bards? Firstly, and most importantly, don't feed them. If you give them food, they will come back for more. When forced to get real jobs, many learn the error of their ways and realize just how useless they really are. Secondly, don't feed them compliments. Over time, bards become very similar to vampires who draw sustenance from your attention.

Complimenting them will only make them grow stronger. Thirdly, keep them separated. Too many bards in one location attracts more bards. Eventually, when they reach a critical mass, they will begin the dreaded "jam session". These horrific moments are when they try to suck all energy out of the room, feeding on the misery of those stuck watching the performance.

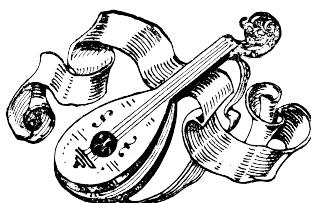
Many bards use these "jam sessions" as part of a ritual to transform themselves into something far more sinister than

any undead army... the dreaded "jam band". These bards can be heard imitating music all hours of the day or night. They don't care if anyone else is watching them; they feed on each other. Once this stage is reached, the bards reach their most dangerous state, capable of consuming entire inns.

So, as you tuck your children in tonight, warn them of the dangers of growing up to be Bards. If they really want to pursue music, find an orchestra in Evenandra or Civen. Only you can prevent Bards.

Sorry, I have to cut this short. There are some children playing on my lawn, and I need to run them off.

-Enzo



Ley'd, con't

Harold, a local fisherman, nodded sagely while closing his stall. "Everyone is always, 'Janos, I need this,' 'Janos, I need that,' 'Janos, my second cousin twice removed fell in a puddle and there's now a waspoid laying eggs in them.' I'd want a break too."

Whatever the case, the Harbingers are now down one member, and Maplewood has a brand new, terrifyingly abstract travel destination. If anyone receives a magically-charged postcard from the leylines, do send it our way. Inquiring minds—and paying subscribers—want to know!

Eoin's Fae Retreat

The Lightsworn are down one member as Eoin has abruptly departed for a new life among the fae. While many are wishing her well on her journey, keen-eyed observers in town couldn't help but notice the convenient timing of the exit that came just as her fellow Lightsworn, Arcturus, began his town-wide tour of mourning for his lost love, Pitohui.

One can only speculate, of course: Did Eoin receive a calling from the mystical realm, or did she foresee the wave of Septon-sized depression and make a tactical retreat?

"One has to admire the foresight," whispered one Jenny patron. "Some people fight Veilwalkers; others know when to run from a breakup monologue."

Whatever the reason, we wish Eoin a peaceful, monologue-free existence. Sorrows and prayers to the remaining Lightsworn, who weren't quite so quick on their feet.

Dearest Reader,

As the summer's heat gives way to the crisp whisper of autumn, so too does the social season of Maplewood turn its page. While some nurse the sunburns of festivals past, others, it seems, are busy nursing new flames... or letting old ones fizzle out.

One must begin with the question on everyone's mind: what is to become of the contract between our dear Consul Titus and our own editor-in-chief, Poppy? After our report last month that they seemed to be on the outs, Titus has been conspicuously absent from town. Poppy, for her part, seems to have abandoned the publishing house entirely. She has apparently been finding the company of a certain drake far more compelling than running her business.

Speaking of lessons in love, the aftershocks of last year's most talked-about divorce are still being felt. One hears that while Arbor is thriving in her newfound independence, her former husband, Micah, has been seen looking rather lost. Perhaps a clean break is not always as clean as one hopes. And he is not the only one nursing a heartache; poor Makhno can still be seen near the archery range, his aim as true as ever, but his heart apparently missing its target since Catori's departure.

Of course, not all of Maplewood's drama stems from romance. This author hears a certain faekin delivered a rather sharp lesson in etiquette to a gentleman whose admiration for her kind proved... overly enthusiastic and unwelcome. It seems some men must learn the hard way that "admiration" and "obsession" are two very different things.

While some learn hard lessons, others seem to be embarking on entirely new, and rather baffling, ventures. Gharr, for instance, was recently seen in what appeared to be a heated, one-sided debate with a particularly stubborn sheep over zoning regulations. Witnesses say the sheep remained unmoved by his impassioned rhetoric.

But while some ventures are in flux, other matters remain refreshingly stable. This author is pleased to report that the Bank of Abacus continues to be a pillar of our community, its coffers secure. With the... recent departure... of one of her more volatile associates, it seems our dear Abacus is proving as prudent in her friendships as she is with her coin. A lesson some would do well to learn.

Finally, a Vleanoan official named Andrea has been seen about town, counting heads and taking notes. Apparently Vlean, not to be outdone by Civen, has also appointed their own representative to the Freeland. One can only assume they are too important to be disposed of quietly back home.

So many secrets simmering just beneath the surface. Rest assured, dear readers, this author will be watching.

*Yours truly,
Madam Mapleleaf*

Lorelei and Shelaz Leave Maplewood in Search of Shaman

Just as the town settles into its flux of newcomers, two familiar faces have vanished. Lorelei Levanestra and her fiancé, Shelaz Snowpike, have abruptly departed Maplewood for an indefinite period, leaving a trail of whispers in their wake from "the Elves are hunting them down" to "Lorelei is with child".

While the official reason remains under wraps, sources close to the couple suggest this is not a mere holiday. The journey is said to be for Shelaz's benefit, as he reportedly seeks out a reclusive and powerful shaman deep in the Dell to find a cure for a... longstanding affliction of the mind.

One can only imagine the lengths a devoted fiancée like Lorelei would go to in order to help her beloved find peace. Their departure leaves a noticeable void and, in the case of our own publishing house, a temporary vacancy in the CFO's office. We wish them a safe journey and a successful consultation. We hope the shaman offers a payment plan.

The Entity is Big Mad

The Entity, as it does, came to visit the infected in their dreams several times over the last few weeks. It has been giving the same looped, angry speech about how our resistance is futile, it's acclimating to the magic of Novitas, and we'll all join it in time. Standard villain monologue, 2/10 for originality.

We asked four locals what they thought of the latest threatening dream-speech. Here's what they said:

"Honestly, it's getting repetitive. At least when Grak's Avatar was threatening us, he had some variety. This is just lazy. If you're going to be a hivemind of cosmic horror, at least workshop your material." - Gregor Stonehand, Cobbler



"I wish it would give a clearer timeline on when it is ending the world. I have a batch of pickles that will be ready in six weeks, and I need to know if I should use the good spices or not." - Tilly Puddleworth, Puddle Surveyor

"I must have heard a different part of the dream. Everyone else heard threats, but I heard a bunch of overlapping voices all screaming, 'Our creator will join us, his suffering will end as all suffering must end.' Honestly, it sounds like they're planning a really intense surprise party for their boss." - Rowan Whisperwind, Dew Collector



"There's a market here. I'm developing a new line of extra-stretchy, ichor-resistant trousers. You have to be prepared to pivot in this economy." - Silas Threadbare,

Wig Merchant



Town's Foremost Bard-Hater Succumbs to "Bardic Plague"

In a twist of fate so deliciously ironic it could only happen in Maplewood, Enzo- the very man who just this month penned a scathing op-ed declaring bards "the most serious threat our land has ever seen"- has been diagnosed with a terminal case of... being a bard. That's right, readers, the "Bardic Plague" has claimed its most vocal critic.

Sources report the "infection" took hold late last month. While details are scarce, witnesses claim Enzo was last seen in the vicinity of a particularly jaunty tune before he began exhibiting the classic symptoms: humming uncontrollably, tapping in rhythm on the water barrel in the Jenny, and a sudden increase in dramatic hand gestures.

The news has sent shockwaves of unrestrained glee throughout the community. "Serves him right," grumbled Trinity, a local nanny. "Maybe now he'll stop yelling at children on his lawn." Meanwhile, the town's actual bards are reportedly planning a 'Welcome to the Fold' concert. "We always knew he had a song in his heart," one lute-player was heard saying, narrowly dodging a boot thrown from Enzo's window.

Enzo himself appears to be taking the news poorly. He was spotted attempting to coach some mediums through how to deal with a banshee while asking Poppy to "Please silence me." Poppy looked equal parts horrified and delighted by the development. "We're looking into treatment options," she said, failing to suppress a grin. "But for now, we're just advising everyone to stay clear of his impromptu hand drumming."

The man who once warned, "Only you can prevent Bards," has become the very thing he sought to destroy. Will he learn to live with his newfound artistic soul? Will he form the dreaded "jam band" he so feared? One thing is certain: the noise pollution in Maplewood is about to get a lot more free verse.