



Maplewood's Whispers, from Ear to Ink

December 1603

A Ghost Story Arc
Asked us Nicely
to Publish

Civen Grain Shortage
Ruining Town
Aesthetic

Solstice Fashion
Crimes

A Spotlight for
Maplewood's
Most Talked-
About
Personalities

Heads Will Roll: The Story We Were Bullied into Printing

Ghostwritten by Arcturus

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 Freelands, 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.

All submissions to:
P. Anne Katullin, CEO

Advertising inquiries to:
Lorelei Levanestra, CFO

Legal inquiries to:
J. Titus Marianus, Consul to
the Freelands

Editor's Note: Normally, Steamy Ink Press charges for personal submissions. However, when a very persistent spirit refuses to depart for the Well until their story is told—and keeps flickering the candles in the room every time we try to work—we make exceptions. Arcturus assures us the ghost will move on once this is in print. We certainly hope so, for his sake.

There once was a pious woman named Verity, a noble of the Vleanoan courts. She was the picture of devotion, attending every sermon and tithing generously to the Sept. But her most constant accessory was a simple black velvet ribbon, tied snugly around her neck.

She caught the eye of Simon, a minor noble with more curiosity than sense.

"Why do you wear that ribbon, my love?" Simon asked as they walked the

pristine streets of Vleanoa. "It is not a symbol of the Sept."

"I cannot tell you," Verity whispered, touching the fabric nervously. "You would be sorry."

They were married in a grand cathedral. Simon showered her with septy symbols and silk scarves, begging her to swap them for the ribbon. "Why must you wear it?" he asked on their wedding night.

"If I tell you, you will be sorry," she said, and blew out the candle.

Decades passed. The war for independence with Civen ended, and still the ribbon remained. Verity grew old, her skin thinning, but the velvet stayed taught against her neck.

Finally she lay on her deathbed, the Inquisitors waiting outside to record her death for the census.

Simon sat beside her, weeping. "Verity, you are going to the Well. Please. Let me see you without it, just once."

Verity smiled weakly, her voice a dry rasp. "Very well, Simon. You may untie it now."

With trembling hands, Simon pulled the bow loose. The ribbon fell away to the pillow.

And Verity's head fell off.

It rolled onto the floor, stopping at his feet. Her dead eyes looked up at him, and her mouth moved one last time: "I told you you'd be sorry."

SIP Note: Let this be a lesson to all partners: If your spouse insists on an accessory, assume it is structurally integral. Do not ask questions unless you are prepared for the answer to be "my head will fall off".



Why Your Armor is Ruining the Solstice Season

-Garnet Glower, Fashion Correspondent

I understand the context, I really do. We are essentially trapped under a magical dome, being besieged by a hivemind of cosmic horrors, and the water supply was arguably poisonous for half the year. But as we approach the Solstice and the inevitable Yule gatherings, I ask a very serious question to the adventurers of Maplewood:

Is it *physically painful* for you to wear some nice clothing?

I attended a lovely little gathering near the edge of the Avatar's barrier recently, hoping for some festive cheer. Instead, I was deafened by a cacophony of clanking metal. It seems that despite the safety of the barrier, our local "heroes" refuse to dress for the occasion.

Let us start with Arcturus. We know you are in your mourning era, and the white armor is very dramatic, but must you wear the full plate to a toast? You look like an icebox that fell down a flight of stairs and was given a fresh coat of paint. Would it kill you to drape a nice sash or some garland over your chest?

Then there is Sigos. I assume the steel casing is

because he's worried someone will steal his kidneys and he'll miss out on the commission, but clinking your goblet against your breastplate? It sounds like a blacksmith dropping a bucket. Leave the metal racket to Cordon, dear; you are supposed to be a professional.

And Rex McNeil, you are a *bard*! You are supposed to have *style*! Tying yourself to a rock was an aesthetic choice I could respect for its boldness, but wearing an unadorned plate to a party without a hint of a festive accessory? I thought you were a druid, not basic.

Finally, to the entirety of Sable Company: we get it. You are mercenaries. You are tough. But wearing your full kit to dinner makes it look like you are anticipating the host's cooking will attack you. At least weave some holly into the chainmail while your necromancer reanimates the stuffed pig.

In closing, if you insist on being battle-rattle to the solstice festivities, please take a note from Catori's "Skullgirls" fan club and accessorize. Wrap some tinsel around your sword hilt. Put some mistletoe in the eye holes of your skulls. Polish your greaves until we can see our disappointed reflections in them.

If the Entity takes us this season, I refuse to be found dead next to someone with zero drip. Do better.

Silks and Pig Muck: Patricians Begging for Barley

-Jasper Reed, Professional Eavesdropper

It seems the "Empire" is crumbling, or at the very least, skipping dinner. We are all accustomed to Civenites looking down their noses at us, but lately, they just seem to be looking for a handout. It is all becoming rather tedious to watch.

Patricians—actual Civen nobility, allegedly—have been trudging through the Freelands the past two months, bypassing the Merchant's Guild to haggle with locals over grain. Apparently, there is a shortage back home and they are concerned about feeding their servants or something.

While the economic implications could make a scholar write a pages-long essay, the aesthetic impact is far worse. Watching a man in silks try to negotiate the price of barley while standing ankle-deep in pig muck is simply awkward and disturbs the charm of our winter landscape.

One cannot even enjoy a morning tea on the porch without witnessing a weeping Civenite trying to barter a family heirloom for a sack of potatoes. It is terribly depressing to look at, and frankly, it puts me off my scones. It was amusing for the first five minutes; now it is just ruining the view.

If you have spare grain, please sell it to them quickly. Demand a high price, take their coin, and send them home. The sooner they leave, the sooner we can go back to ignoring them.

Dearest Reader,

It is that time of year again, darlings! As the snow piles up and we all huddle for warmth (or safety), it is time to review the romantic entanglements of our local "heroes." Who is warming hearts, and who is just out in the cold?

Daitasha: Remain in the Freelands' most confusing game of hide-and-seek. Asha returned last month, and then disappeared again right before the deep freeze. Daitoro seems content to wait, but one wonders if he needs a partner or a house-sitter.

Drarieon: Continue to be the most stable, if stubborn, couple in town. Miraculously, Draug has recently been cured of his infection by "unknown means." We are happy he no longer has to hide those unsightly marks, but we are dying to know who performed the ordeal.

Enzor: Has called it quits...again. It seems the Craftsman's Guild leader could not handle Enzo's recent affliction of the Bardic Plague; apparently, constant humming and impromptu hand-drumming is a dealbreaker for the stoic artisan. We wish Enzo a speedy recovery and X'Nor some peace and quiet.

Evidacted: We all saw the wedding. We all survived the ceremony. And yet [Redacted] was seen shortly before Harvest Fest, down on one knee, presenting *another* ring to our town's favorite Septa! Are they getting double-married? Is this a new Vleanoan endurance test where one must agree to the same commitment repeatedly to prove their resolve? Or is it really just a ploy for more wedding cake? We aren't sure, but offer heartfelt congratulations to the happy couple on their... re-engagement?

Kythnar: Remain sickeningly functional. No drama, no scandals, just pure, unadulterated stability. It is frankly boring to report on, but we suppose someone has to be happy.

Lorelaz: Has fled the country! The happy couple departed abruptly to find a shaman in the Dell. Is this a romantic getaway, or is Shelaz's "mind affliction" worse than we thought? Either way, the wedding is on hold, and we are deprived of a party (and cake). Very rude, Lorelei.

Lothapis: NEW COUPLE ALERT! In the shock of the season our favorite nosy druid, Lapis, tied the knot with fashion icon Lotharwen! We all thought Lapis was busy wandering the woods with a certain Faekin CEO, but it seems he prefers High Elf elegance to editorial chaos.

Mahktori: This one hurts, dearest readers. Catori left town without saying goodbye, and Makhno responded by... murdering a church leader in the town square. We usually recommend ice cream for a breakup, not public execution, but everyone grieves differently.

Pitorus: Speaking of murder... the tragic saga of Arcturus and Pitohui has come to an end. With Pitohui dead at Makhno's hand, Arcturus has entered his revenge era. We haven't seen him this upset since that time "he didn't lead a mob." It is a tragic end to a toxic romance, and we expect the bardic poetry to be unbearable.

Sablecule: The mercenary polycule grinds on, even though delegating the cursed reading list to the new hire doesn't exactly scream "family values." Rumor has it Pretty Boy is now taking relationship advice from "The Entity" inside his head. We advise the rest of the company to sleep with one eye open.

Tippy: Our dear Editor-in-Chief and her paramour seem to have burned out from a flame to an ember. Why? Well, Poppy spent the year frolicking in the woods with Lapis... who just married Lotharwen. Now Titus is busy with bureaucracy, Lapis is taken, and Poppy is alone with her cat. Karma is a dish best served with chocolate ice cream, darling.

Yours truly,
Madam Mapleleaf

Are you having trouble sleeping? Having nightmares when you do sleep? Are you anxious about Umbrex and Pandora threatening to kill us all and turn us into an undead army? Do your fears interfere with your ability to train and be your most effective at fighting the forces of evil? Try Mycanoid Spores!

The safe, effective, natural remedy for all stress related problems. Take one when you're getting ready for bed (before you brush your teeth, they're sweet as candy!)

Lay back and watch the pretty colors as you feel a sense of calm euphoria, peace, and a profound connection with all living things.

Get the best sleep of your life and wake up feeling refreshed, invigorated, and ready to face whatever the day may bring!

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WANTED: SHARP TONGUES & VICIOUS WITS

Stan the Bard is on a quest to update Nessmuk's *Insults of Novitas* (2nd Ed. 1589), and he needs your help to drag this dusty old tome into the post-Shattering era.

He is seeking high-quality verbal daggers, specifically targeting our newest and strangest neighbors.

Do you know how to properly offend a Vargainen? Have a zinger that will make a Ratfolk cry?

Stan is particularly interested in insults for the following cultures/ locations/ languages: Verduran, Apian, Canine, Diabolic, Draconic, Elemental, and Goblinoid.

Deliver your best burns in person to
Giant's Notch Apothecary.

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AVAILABLE AT
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Available in chocolate ,
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On Saturday December 6th I
will be offering card
readings in the town of
Maplewood. I am not a
medium, I merely ask the
Gods for a message, lay out
the cards, and interpret
them for you.

I have been told many times
that my readings are "so
accurate it's creepy ". Give
it a try and see for yourself
at Mirabelle's Market!
Prices vary, as I change for
my time.

I offer a brief single card
reading as a sample for 1
coin.

It is hard to believe that three years have passed since the first issue of *Steamy Ink Press* hit the stands. We have survived mind-shattering plagues, chantry appearances, veilwalker shrines, and whatever the hell it is that Scarlet has been wearing this season. Through it all, our loyal subscribers and generous sponsors have kept the tea hot and the presses running.

As we close out 1603, you may have noticed some changes. The paper has been made more widely available, the pages are fuller, the secrets are deeper, and the bylines are... well, not just me.

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Breaking Bulletin Consortium, Steamy Ink Publishing has evolved from a passion project into a media empire. I have come to realize that while I am undoubtedly the most observant individual in Maplewood, I cannot be everywhere at once—especially now that Titus requires me to fill out a risk assessment form just to leave my office.

To that end, I am thrilled to officially welcome our new staff of correspondents to the Steamy Ink family. You have already read the scathing fashion critiques of Garnet Glower and the eerie accuracy of Jasper Reed's eavesdropping; we have hired other correspondents as well, preferring to employ local writers than hiring out to another area. These reporters allow us to cover more ground, uncover more scandals, and ensure that no misstep goes unnoticed.

So while my name remains at the top of the masthead, know that *Steamy Ink Press* is now a collective effort from those around you.

Thank you for supporting us, for trusting us with your secrets, and for actually paying for your ad space this year (looking at you, Emeric).

From us to you, we wish you another happy year of friendship, survival, and scandal.

Yours Truly,
Penelope Anne Katullin
CEO, Steamy Ink Publishing