

# Recent Ashbury History

by Cedric Fruvous, Ashbury Sage's Guild

The very capable sage Genna Disarion Sint has researched and penned an excellent history of Ashbury, particularly upon its magical transportation onto Amora Fortannis, and includes the awakening of King Gareth ap Moire.

It is my intent to continue the work beginning with King Gareth's attempts to rebuild Icenia.

## Icenia's Rebirth

In the Dawn of the year 600 the newly awakened King Gareth ap Moire held series of councils of Icenian nobility. His position as king of Icenia was established in the ritual of the Mons Regalis, and the Ashban Duke Aramis Llyrr had agreed to swear fealty to him since Ashbury could not be returned to her home world of Tyrra.

The first council took place in Greenstone, Blythedale and the second in the Royal Castle of Cil-Cilurion. During the first, King Gareth met with each of his vassals in private. The next day he emerged in public with Aramis Llyrr to announce his decisions.

The first announcement was that Duke Aramis would remain the lord of the duchy of Ashbury, and that his vassals too would retain their lands. Any royal estates within Ashbury would be distributed to Icenian nobles who had previously held land where Ashbury now was.

King Gareth's second decree was to give Requin Dragor and his Blackbourne Compact three months to evacuate Trelheim or be forced out militarily. For his part, Requin ignored this order, and refused to acknowledge King Gareth's authority.

Additionally, Broomis Bouchard retained his position as the Duke of Brittington, and Colin Hendry as Duke of Falkirk. Both of these lords had their work cut out for them as much of their lands were inhabited by the Freejyn Horde, and had been for many years.

Gareth also decreed a council of Regents to oversee Icenia's rebuilding. The council was appointed by His Majesty and consisted of regents of Nobility, Finance, Defense, Trade and Commerce, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Royal Affairs and Commons. Additionally, each duchy would have a regent that reported directly to this council.

Not only was the process of rebuilding Icenia underway, but also the joining of Ashbury with Icenia. This trend would be continued in the month of Swan in 601 when Duke Aramis would pledge the Order of the Unlidded Eye to King Gareth.

The Unlidded Eye was an information network set up under the King of Evendarr and answered to him, but the members in Ashbury had sworn fealty to Duke Aramis when Ashbury was transported to Fortannis. With Ashbury now a duchy within Icenia, Aramis felt that the Eye should return to being a Royal Order.

Unfortunately there were two extremely dark occurrences during this time of hope and unity. The first arose when Duchess Lilyth Avacar failed to arrive at Castle Cil-Cilurion for the second of Gareth's councils. Early reconnaissance by Squire Patrick Delair determined that Requin Dragor had kidnapped her.

The second, but certainly no less important, dark event was King Gareth's collapse during one of his speeches at Cil-Cilurion. An Icenian

healer quickly determined that His Majesty was suffering from the Monarch Malady.

The Monarch Malady was a strange curse that was placed upon Icenian Royalty by the corrupt King Melagar. This disease did not affect all royal families, and not every member. Nevertheless it was this fatal disease that had claimed King Thrombolis Avacar.

It was revealed by the Etherians, a race of good creatures that served Amora Fortannis, that in order to cure King Gareth, a counterpart was needed. The chosen one was Queen Sidraste Deeannan, one of Icenia's most powerful and celebrated rulers. Sidraste was said to be trapped in the depths of Amora Dun.

## The Iniquitous and the Virtuar

The mortals of Fortannis would soon be the champions (some would say pawns) of the Iniquitous and the Virtuar. In order to fully comprehend this relationship, the history of these two powerful races of creatures must be understood.

Countless millennia ago, two races of very powerful elementals existed: One of extreme benevolence and creativity called the Virtuar, and one of extreme evil and destruction called the Iniquitous.

For years these two forces raged for control, but their power was too much for the world to handle. The friction of the two sides warring created a third race of powerful balance elementals called the Impartians, who saw the need for balance in the world.

They created an army called the Temperate Sodality to weaken and bind both the Iniquitous and the Virtuar so their influence would be filtered into the world at a level that the world could handle. Each race was imprisoned beneath Tar'Navaria in separate enchanted lands.

The Virtuar were held within Amora Fortannis (which means "Heart of Fate") and the Iniquitous were held within Amora Dun (which means "Heart of the Dark.") The races still had creatures that served them on Tar'Navaria though, the Visitants were the soldiers for Iniquitous and the Etherians were the army for the Virtuar. From then on, every act of evil

made the seals of Amora Dun weaker, and every act of good made the seals of Amora Fortannis weaker. With the seals weaker, the forces in question could influence the world more. Ancient Icenian and Cuulanni scholars theorized that if either side grew too strong, the barrier holding them would crack.

For millions of years the situation remained thus, but the time came when a sacrifice was needed to keep the filters in place. To that end the Impartians decreed that a person of the purest good must be sacrificed to Amora Dun, while a person of the foulest evil must be imprisoned within Amora Fortannis.

To accomplish this the bloodthirsty and insane warrior Freejyn (founder of the Freejyn Horde) was imprisoned within Amora Fortannis while Queen Sidraste Deeannan was imprisoned within Amora Dun.

However, by the year 600 the seals holding Freejyn were cracking and he had nearly escaped from the confines of Amora Fortannis. According to the research of Shya Corak and myself, the best way to create balance was to free Queen Sidraste from Amora Dun. We also learned that the ancient and mystical blade Validus was the key to freeing her.



*A warrior from the Order of the Unlidded Eye*

## Validus and The Battle Queen

The sword Validus was created by the Lady of the Mists working with the Temperate Sodality and the Order of the Wyrms. This weapon was imbued with mystical energy as well as part of the essence of Queen Aramantha Deeannan, the founder and first ruler of Icenia. This sword came to be wielded by all the queens of Icenia up to the disappearance of Queen Sidraste in the Icenian year 470. The sword was requested after by many Icenian monarchs but was never found.

Queen Sidraste Deeannan, the descendant of the founder of Icenia, came to the throne after the Era of Sun and Wine. The Harratarran Empire quickly forced her into the military actions that began the Second Brigand War. Sidraste had a knack for tactics and often led her forces personally. Together with the Cuulanni, Icenian forces conducted a year-long siege on the Harratarran capital until Empress Dikana surrendered. The war was ended and Queen Sidraste was forever more called “The Lady of Swords.”

The peace was short lived however, and within four years Sidraste was forced to defend Icenia from both the hordes of a necromancer who was the champion of the Mal Draco, and a concerted attack by the barbarians of the West. In the midst of all this Queen Sidraste vanished from her bedchambers, and the Deeannan dynasty ended.

As stated earlier, the biata historian Shya Corak and myself determined that Queen Sidraste allowed the Virtuar to imprison her in Amora Dun on that fateful night. Just before they departed however, the Lady of the Mists reclaimed the mystical blade Validus. The key now was to get the blade from the Lady of the Mists.

## The Battle at Dar Revere

The Iniquitous’ plan to completely destroy the bonds of the Impartians involved 600 of their champions, called Avaricions, led by a chief Avaricion called the Dark Countenance. The intended Dark Countenance was, of course, Freejyn. The final step for this dark deed was to send the Avaricions to the settlement of Dar Revere to retrieve a magical artifact that would release Freejyn. Necessary here is some history of the settlement where this epic struggle would take place.

Long ago, two brothers, Dar and Morg Revere, lead a huge band of their fellow slaves in an escape from Dur Namarie and fled out onto the Plains of Rage. They established a free settlement and named it after Dar Revere, the more popular of the two brothers. Dar was also chosen as “Captain” of the settlement, which is to say he was the ruler. Morg Revere did not possess as much benevolence as his brother Dar, and so he quickly grew jealous and resentful of him.

The settlement’s population grew both from its own internal reproduction as well from drifters, wanderers and escaped slaves who sought a home. As the population grew, the Dar Revere became a small city, and Captain Dar’s popularity increased.

The Iniquitous were drawn to Dar Revere, sensing that at some point in the far future, it would play an important part in their grand scheme. The growing hate seething in the corrupt heart of Morg Revere made him quite a target for the Visitants. Nightly they appeared to him, whispering, making offers of power. Morg always refused them, still clinging to the last dregs of his goodness.

But an epic turning point occurred in the story of Dar Revere; on an overcast autumn morning, the Freejyn Horde appeared on the horizon. The citizens of Dar Revere all had heard of the Freejyn Horde and so they knew what the immense dust cloud that bore down upon their city was.

Some called for flight but then realized there was nowhere to run. So the citizens turned to Captain Dar for guidance. The Captain asked for one hour in solitude so that he may ponder. During his hour of solitude, an Etherean appeared to Captain Dar. The Virtuar were aware of the Iniquitous’ intentions here at the city and they too knew that Dar Revere would someday be an important place in the battle between Amora Fortannis and Amora Dun. The Etherean offered hope to the Captain in

the form of a stone tablet. It was an ancient artifact of unknown origin, called the “Key To Fate.” It was said that the artifact might have belonged to Black Annis, the Queen of the Dark Fey. The stone tablet held the power to open a portal to the core of Amora Fortannis. The Etherean then told the Captain that the stone tablet required a small offering of blood pumped through a heart of goodness. The Captain was to set the stone tablet just outside Dar Revere’s gates and then make a small cut on his hand or arm to drop blood on the tablet.

Meanwhile, Morg knew that this was a moment of destiny where he could undertake a course of action that would sway things to his favor, where he would turn out the hero. But how? That’s when he again heard the hissing Visitants and this time, he turned to them to accept their offer for power. Morg was created as an Avaricion.

As the Captain prepared the stone table at the gates, Morg, as an Avaricion, attacked and the two brothers fought. In a freak mishap, the two slew each other and both of their bloods spattered the Key To Fate.

At that, there came a thunder from the stone and then both brothers vanished in an explosion of light. All traces of the Virtuar and the Iniquitous also vanished. Then a strange magical side-affect affected the people of Dar Revere. The citizens became linked to the stone tablet. It anchored them to the city of Dar Revere, though they could carry it about with them if they chose, neither the citizens nor the Key To Fate could leave the city. Another side effect was that the citizens possessed the ability to rift anywhere within their city.

When the thunder sounded and the explosion of light lit the area, The Freejyn Horde knew some weird magic was afoot and, being highly superstitious, decided to avoid the city of Dar Revere.

The citizens and their descendents were trapped in Dar Revere and linked to the Key To Fate. Their seers then had a prophetic dream telling them that strangers would always come seeking the stone tablet and that they must not get it; For if strangers removed the Key To Fate, the permanent doom of the citizens of Dar Revere would be sealed. However, the prophecy said that in order to be freed of the link to the stone tablet and its effects, the Key To Fate must be given away, but only to one whom the citizens find trustworthy.

Thus, the Freejyn Horde needed the Key To Fate to open a portal to the Amora Fortannis’ core and free their founder and namesake, and the only way they could do that was if the citizens of Dar Revere freely gave it to them.

The Ethereans came to Ashbury to counter the plans of the Freejyn and the Iniquitous. They would accept volunteers to become, temporary Benevolences — the positive counterpart of the Avaricions. It was the hope of the Virtuar that these Benevolences would prevent the Avaricions from obtaining their objective.

With the sides being drawn up for this battle, all that remained was a site for the conflict. Citizens of Ashbury reported dozens of adventurers disappearing during a gathering in the month of Dragon, 600.

Dar Revere suddenly appeared on the Plains of Rage, and dozens of refugees appeared within the Duchy’s borders in flight from the Freejyn horde. Their story was remarkable, telling how a battle was fought across their city between what could only be, by description, Avaricions and Benevolences. The citizens of Dar Revere reported that the tower that has long served as the resting place for the stone tablet was heavily guarded. The shade like forms of two armed forces moved into the city and eventually arrived close to the same time at the tablet tower. Warned away from the tower by the Captain of the Tower Guard, the volunteer citizens guarding the tablet screamed in rage when they saw elven shades, convinced they were in fact the Dur Namarie masters they had fled so many years before. Elves were ordered away from the building and threatened if they came close to the tower.

The Benevolences are told to have taken a position before the gate of the tower and immediately began a series of negotiations with the captain for access into the tower to speak with the elders of the city. The Avaricions immediately began their attack on the Benevolences, but several attacks were beaten back — and the forms of the Avaricions winked out when overcome by the Benevolences. Despite their power and stealth,

the Benevolences apparently held back the Avaricions with few losses, but the real tide turned against the Avaricions when they struck the citizens of Dar Revere. The citizens apparently attacked the Avaricions after several skirmishes passed from their first assault against the guards at the tower.

Later the Avaricions apparently convinced the citizens to allow them to add themselves into the negotiations. Two Benevolences conducted a massive discussion over the fate of the tablet they were apparently supposed to retrieve for the Ethereans with the city elders. Various elders held a variety of viewpoints, but the source of discussion may have surrounded the prophecy of the tablet. The citizens eventually asked the Benevolences for a sign of good faith, and the Benevolences demonstrated their good intentions by asking the elven Benevolences to step forward and sacrifice themselves for the greater cause. Without hesitation, the elves knelt to be struck down, proving they were in fact not Dur Namarie as the citizens thought — and the tablet was given to the Benevolences to be spirited back to the Ethereans who had called them forth.

Soon after the conflict was complete, many adventurers awoke across the capital with little or no memory of the night's events. The fate of the tablet remained unknown — was this a battle between good and evil for the boon or ill of Amora Fortannis? Was this but the first skirmish in an epic struggle? Little was known at the time, and it was only a fortuitous set of circumstances that allowed scholars to piece together this story.

## Changes in the Mage's Guild

The Ashbury Mage's Guild had undergone just as much growth, change, and difficulty as the rest of Ashbury in the merge with Icenia. The first, and most dispiriting, was in the spring of 600. During regular business hours, an evil liche named Nimaptan lead a small force of undead upon the guild. Nimaptan had an intense hatred of the Mage's Guild and the former guildmistress, Shalizar, in particular. Nimaptan's hatred for the Guild outlasted Shalizar's tenure, for as he attacked he introduced his newest servant, an undead form of Guildmistress Kismet Bandar. The foul liche and the unfortunate Kismet were defeated, but remained at large.

Senior Guildsman Saja carried on the duties of running the guild until Ducal Guildmaster Tiriflorn MacMannon could appoint a new head. In the summer of 601, Tiriflorn appointed Saja to the position of Assistant Guildmaster of the Ashbury Mage's Guild, in recognition for all the work he had done to keep the guild running in the interim period. Saja vowed that he would not rest until Kismet could be cured of her undead curse.

## Calis Surrenders

As was chronicled by Genna Disarion Sint in 599, the adventurer Calis Blackheart attempted to steal the Vessel of Vapors and turn it over to Requin Dragor. The Vessel was recovered, however, and Calis went into hiding. From his hidden position he wrote public letters in which he claimed to speak what all in Ashbury felt. In Hawk of 600, Calis returned to the capital and turned himself over to authorities. Sir Eros sentenced him to obliteration and would surely have banished him as well, but Duke Aramis decreed that he could remain in Ashbury. His Grace was quick to explain that Calis had shown a desire to redeem himself by surrendering and that he should be given a chance to do so, and that had Calis been arrested instead of surrendering he would have upheld banishment. Calis was obliterated, publicly by his own request, and did not permanently die as he had a ritual of regeneration upon his spirit.

## Death of Lilyth Avacar

It was a sad day in Ashbury indeed when one dark eve the fate of Lilyth Avacar, wife of Duke Aramis Llyrr, was finally learned. Requin

Dragor had executed Lilyth, and she died permanently. In order to further dispirit both the Ashbans and Duke Aramis, Requin had her severed head delivered to Ashbury. It was some months before word could reach Aramis, as he was on the front lines fighting Requin's forces and no messenger could reach him. When he finally did learn of his beloved's death, a loss that would cripple many men, Duke Aramis bravely continued on. Requin's desires to crush his spirit only served to strengthen his resolve. He publicly issued this letter, addressed to the deceased Lilyth, to show his newly reinforced determination.

*My Dearest Love,*

*From the first moment I saw you, that wondrous warm, nurturing fire called love flared for the first time in my heart. I knew that you had felt it as well, but we were still getting to know each other and there was so much conflict surrounding us, involving us ... so much traumatic change for you that you had such a difficult time adjusting and were thus distant as a result. We never had an opportunity to see that love fully realized ... and now we never shall. There are things I will never get to say to you, so I shall speak them here in this letter, before the good hearts of the people of Icenia, where I believe you now live.*

*My Lady, What is a flower and all its colorful revels when compared to the beauty of your essence? All the roses of the world seem as wilted husks compared to the wonder of your lips blossoming in a smile.*

*And what need have I for the sun and all its golden glory when I have the brilliance of your eyes? What need for its heat when I have the fire of your touch to consume my body?*

*Let the sun, the stars and the moon burn out of existence and we shall not notice, for our passion shall set the whole of existence aflame till our love becomes the very stars present and future lovers shall wish upon...*

*Yes, Dear Lilyth, such I would have said to you if not for the foulest of actions made by the mad, rabid wolf, Count Requin Dragor. My love, Count Requin, in his madness, believes that your death and the horrible means of its announcement would break my spirit and make me weak, thus cause me to be derelict in my duties as knight and duke.*

*Oh, My Love, how very, very wrong Requin is in this belief.*

*For such a man as Requin is empty shell, forged without the temperament of compassion and without the strength of love.*

*Therefore he does not know love's great, inspiring power. He does not know that, though you are dead, My Dear Lilyth, I still carry you in my heart and I can still see that wondrous, royal steel in your spirit.*

*I can hear how you would never allow me to give up and grow weak. My Lady, from beyond the threshold of death, I hear the song of your love and it has sparked such a conflagration of courage and determination in my spirit.*

*In fact, My Love, by making it so personal, Requin has made my determination now a two-edged sword; upon that love to you, Lilyth, that I hold sacred, I, Aramis Llyrr, man and husband vow to fulfill the permanent death of Requin Dragor. Upon my sense of duty, my dedication to the cause of justice and my love of the people, I, Aramis Llyrr, knight and duke, do vow to see my people safe and the machinations of Requin defeated.*

*My Lady, Requin can call upon and command all the powers of Amora Dun if he wishes. He will see the futility of such corruption before the utter and insurmountable determination of a good heart.*

*My Dear Lilyth, I am sorry for the time never granted us that would have seen our love truly blossom, but I am immensely grateful for whatever time the fates have allowed me to spend with you.*

*Lilyth, lovely lady of Icenia, how your absence fills the empty halls of my manor house. I love you, My Lady.*

*In Truth, In Honor, In Love,*

*Duke Aramis Llyrr*

## Liberation of Deenanburg

As the summer of 600 approached, Icenia was attempting to re-

build her duchies, but there was much work to be done, and Ashbury was the only fully functioning duchy. With that, King Gareth asked the Ashbans to send a force to assist the duchy of Falkirk.

Ever since Icenia was freed of the Curse of Glantri, Duke Colin Hendry and Baroness Bonnie Bannock had been bravely fighting to purge Falkirk of the Freejyn Horde. Often their forces were without basic necessities such as food, proper clothing and even weapons, yet they were still able to hold off the bloodthirsty Freejyns.

To add even more confusion to the situation, an army of ogres had taken the Keep of Deeananburg and were attempting to restore a creature known as Macasek who was believed to have the power of a giant. Some scholars have compared Macasek to the troll general Fangthorn in Ashbury's history.

By Ferret of 600, the Ashbans were finally able to send a force to Falkirk to aid Duke Colin. They arrived and were briefed by the Blades of Dawn, an elite unit of the Falkirk army. The fighting was fierce, and the Ashbans were faced not only with the Freejyn Horde and ogres, but also with goblins and hordes of undead. In spite of the challenges, the Ashbans took several villages.

In the climactic battle of the siege, Duke Colin led the Ashbans against the city of Deeananburg. Advanced scouts had discovered the ogre's plan to summon Macasek. The main force against the keep was led by Dame Azura, and once inside Duke Colin and Baron Agnar Antitiburon led an elite group to the central tower, found those performing the ritual and slew them. Once inside the magical keep, Duke Colin began to bond with the land while Baron Agnar led a defense of the area until the bonding was complete.

At that moment, Freejyn Warchief Betanoyhoo stormed the gates in an attempt to take Deeananburg, particularly the central tower. The battle had evolved into three distinct armies, each fighting one another. The Ashbans and Blades of Dawn rallied around Dame Azura and Lady Azrael in what appeared to be a lost cause. Baron Agnar left the central tower in order to hold the line until Duke Colin had finished bonding with the land. Once this task was done, Duke Colin charged into the fray and using the power of the land bond, pushed the Freejyn back.

Ultimately, both the ogre army and the Freejyn Horde were defeated and Deeananburg was liberated. Within days, the mighty keep was reinforced, and was pivotal in securing Falkirk's borders against the Freejyn Horde.

## The Great Sacrifice

By end of 600, the Ashbury Sage's Guild had gathered sufficient information to determine precisely when Queen Sidraste undertook the Great Sacrifice, allowing herself to be imprisoned within Amora Dun. During the late spring of that year, Shya Corak had been able to travel to the realm of the Lady of the Mists and bond with the sentient blade Validus.

One eve in the month of Gryphon, an Etherian appeared in Ashbury and presented the sword to Shya, who humbly accepted it. Given her knowledge of Icenian history, she was surely aware that she was the first person in history to wield the sword that was not a queen of Icenia.

However, by this point the power of Amora Dun had grown so strong that even with the sword, there was no way to pierce the heart of Amora Dun and rescue Queen Sidraste. The Etherian was able to send the Ashbans back in time before Sidraste made the Great Sacrifice, and replace her with someone else. If this were to happen, Sidraste would be put into a sleep, as King Gareth had been, and could be awakened with a Fairy Rade, also as Gareth had. Duke Aramis wished to lead the mission personally, but as a land bonded duke he could not travel in time. Disappointed, His Grace placed Ashbury's Warlord, Baron Agnar, in command of the expedition. The Etherian sent the Ashbans to the Icenian Year 470 in the guise of human soldiers in the Icenian Army.

The forces of Amora Dun, however, were not ignorant of the Ashbans actions. Queen Sidraste was the target of several constructs that rose from the ground and attacked her. Once destroyed, the crests of the

Blackbourne Compact were discovered.

While in the past, the adventurers fought the barbarians and Damon Thule, the Dark Countenance of the time. Thule was a terrifying figure literally crackling with the energy of Amora Dun, and he led hordes of undead against Icenia. Many adventurers aided the wizard Penthantos in the creation of a magical mirror that would ultimately destroy Thule and end the Necromancer War.

Unfortunately, while the Ashbans were distracted Queen Sidraste had vanished from her bedchambers, just as she had in the original history. Fortunately, the Ashbans were able to use the sword Validus to travel into the heart of Amora Dun in this time and stop Sidraste before she made the Great Sacrifice.

Using the sword, the Ashbans rifted to Amora Dun and fought their way to Queen Sidraste. The entire way, the heroes were harried by the foul monstrosities of Amora Dun, but the Ashbans were successful and found themselves before Queen Sidraste just as she was about to sacrifice herself.

The Ashbans begged her to wait and hear them out. She selected Shya, Healer's Guildmistress Natasha Roskaya, and myself, as well as the three Barons — Agnar, Jonathan Dragonhart, and Olin Redbeard — to speak for the Ashbans. The Battle Queen was skeptical, thinking the Ashbans were agents of Amora Dun sent to stop her. Ultimately, it was Baron Jonathan's declaration that he was a Mason of the Lightstone (proven with Squire Rasq Darkmoon's stone) that convinced Sidraste that the Ashbans were telling the truth.

Since Sidraste was not going to sacrifice herself, someone else pure of heart would have to take her place immediately. When Sidraste asked who was willing to do that, Shya immediately stated that if she weren't needed to use Validus to take the Ashbans back she would. Before anyone else could speak, Guildmistress Natasha volunteered.

After tear-filled farewells, Natasha was swallowed by the darkness of Amora Dun, and Queen Sidraste lay down and vanished, to be awakened in the future.

Upon return to Ashbury, Baron Olin discovered this letter of farewell from Natasha, which stated in part:

*Baron Olin,*

*We're going to leave in a few hours. I have a feeling that I'll be gone for a while. Please send this letter to the newspaper. Thank you for everything, dear friend.*

*Hello everyone. I just wanted to write a few words to you. Please be good to each other and don't be angry about stupid things. Shya, looks like you'll be taking my place sooner than I thought. Take care of everyone and be vigilant. I thank you for taking over on such short notice.*

*To all of my friends, whose numbers I believe to be one I could not count on any number of hands and feet. I have gone (or will go, but if not I'll sure feel silly when Olin finds this letter, ha!) so that everyone may live and be happy. Please live and be happy together — all of you.*

*I'll fight the good fight as best I can with Amora Dun — if you see any of those dark creatures or a big, evil dragon with bunny ears, flapping its arms and braying like an ass, that would be me.*

*May your hand be steady and guided by Fate, your hearth be warm and your love be boundless. Until next we meet.*

*Katrin Natasha Stepausk Roijo Roskaya*

After returning to the year 600, a small ceremony in honor of Natasha was performed before the Healer's Guild. Present were His Grace and many of his nobles. Tears were shed and words were exchanged but emotion carried the silences that were present.

His Grace announced that Natasha was scheduled soon to be lorded by the Paladins, and then he posthumously knighted her, bestowing upon her the title of "Dame Natasha." A tree was planted in her honor before the Guild.

After the winter of 600/601, a fairy rade to awaken Sidraste was

undertaken, led by Shya, myself, and with Sareth “The Verse” El’ Noray serving as the bard for the rade. The expedition was executed magnificently and Queen Sidraste was awakened successfully.

As the triumphant Ashbans were leaving, however, a malevolent black mist appeared and seemed to chase the Ashbans out. At exactly the same moment, King Gareth, who had been weakened by the Monarch Malady so much that he was completely bedridden, was instantly cured of the disease.

## The Surrender of Requin

As the year 600 drew to a close, Icenia was on the slow path to rebuilding and many of the new kingdom’s enemies had been pushed back, but Requin Dragor still attacked from within. On the sixth day of the Fire Ant, the dragon Ingegavor rifted into Ashbury and used the foul powers of Amora Dun to immobilize the citizens. After taunting them, the evil dragon was about to kill Baron Agnar, when suddenly the jester Dimsdale interposed himself between the two and revealed himself to be the ancient dragon Terseraz. The two fought and Terseraz defeated Ingegavor. Just two days later, Terseraz rifted as many of Ashbury’s adventurers that could be found into the heart of Requin’s camp in Queensboro to destroy Ingegavor’s bottle and deal a crippling blow to Requin’s forces.

Upon arriving, Terseraz lead the Ashbans to Requin’s command building, catching the traitor’s forces by surprise. Inside they found Requin and Ingegavor, as well as a large contingent of soldiers. Terseraz informed Ingegavor that he had his Spirit Bottle. Terseraz then ordered Ingegavor to abandon his dragonheart, and to everyone’s surprise, the evil dragon agreed and rifted away. In spite of this morale crippling defeat, Requin ordered his forces to attack the small forces of Ashbury. Ultimately, with most of Requin’s best troops on the front lines, he was quickly defeated, captured, and forced to order a surrender.

Terseraz was able to determine that the traitorous count’s sudden powers came about because Ingegavor allowed him to drink the blood of a dragon, and act forbidden by the Order of the Wyrms. Requin’s punishment was decided on the field. It was determined that he be imprisoned within Amora Fortannis since Freejyn had escaped and someone needed to be placed there to keep the balance.

Once Requin’s defeat became known, many of his generals tried to lay claim to the Requin’s empire, but wound up fighting one another. Additionally, with this opportunity, the troll commander Bonescythe and his troops conquered large sections near the Tower Hills and attacked Trollgate, and the vampire Morganna still controlled much of western Trelheim. Baron Agnar attempted to bring some peace to the war-ravaged region by publicly offering asylum to Requin’s followers and mercy to his officers, but none took Agnar up on his offer.

Shortly after this crippling defeat to the forces of Amora Dun, messengers from Duke Aramis’ army reported that the Freejyn horde, as well as Freejyn himself, sunk into the ground and simply vanished during a vast combat and had not been seen or heard from since. Though no one knows exactly what happened, no one was sorry to be rid of such a foul and bloodthirsty group.

## The Halloween of 600

With the upcoming All Hallow’s Eve, all feared what the Lords of the Abysmal Gorge would choose to terrorize Ashbury with, but what came was wholly unexpected. A figure who identified himself as Harry (and was later dubbed Halloween Harry) appeared in Ashbury and explained that somehow the Lords of Halloween were trapped in his head.

Apparently they could only communicate through him, and they assured Harry that they could only be released if he would “run” Halloween for him. Harry himself claimed to be a carriage driver who had fallen unconscious that day and awoke with the Lords in his head.

Apparently the Lords, via Harry, were able to send forth various forms of mayhem against the people of Ashbury. During one such at-

tack, the entirety of Ashbury were forced behind their circles and wards, and even Baron Agnar was struck down.

Ultimately Harry approached the Ashbury Sage’s Guild and explained that he would be stuck in his current condition unless a lord of Halloween was selected. Unwilling to let an unfortunate citizen be cursed to such a fate, they reluctantly selected Jack O’ Lantern as the Lord of Halloween, feeling that he was the least dangerous. Upon announcing the choice, Harry rifted away and neither he nor the Lords of Halloween were heard from again.

## Noble Changes

By the early spring of 601 both Baron Olin Redbeard and Baron Jonathan Dragonhart had stepped down from their positions. Both retired for personal reasons, and vowed to continue to walk the path of the Code of Chivalry.

Indeed, soon after retiring as baron, Olin would be granted a royal knighthood by Queen Sidraste, and Jonathan continued his career as a self-styled “wandering lord,” continuing to aid the citizens of Ashbury wherever he went.

In need of replacements for Olin and Jonathan, Duke Aramis appointed Dame Azura Ravenhawke as Baroness of Nordenn. For Blythedale, he appointed Dame Talin Gildenlily, who had been lorded by the paladins just the previous day. As with any appointment, neither of these were without controversy.

Azura came under some attack because she had quit the Court of Nordenn just months before her appointment to serve on the Court of the Ash Forest. Dame Talin came under attack because of her previous pro-elf sentiments.

Additionally, pro human groups complained because the appointment placed Duke Aramis as the only active human noble in Ashbury.

In spite of the critics, both Azura and Talin humbly accepted their appointment and went about their duties.

## Relations with Galanthia

Relations between Icenia and Galanthia have been strained, at best, throughout history. It was Glantri, then Emperor of Galanthia, who cursed Icenia into its state of destruction that the Ashbans found when they arrived.

When Ashbury arrived, the Galanthians believed that Icenia had returned, and attacked without delay, seizing large portions of southwestern Trelheim and took those captured as slaves (as is the Galanthian custom.)

Many historians agree that one of Ashbury’s saving graces in this dark time was that the Galanthians became more focused fighting the evil elves of Dur Namarie who were invading from the northwest than stabilizing their hold of Ashbans territory. However, the Galanthians split focus did not prevent them from attempting to conquer Ashbury as a colony in the scheme with Requin Dragor.

In the Serpent of 599, before the curse of Glantri was broken by the Ashbans (but after Requin’s schemes were revealed), Galanthia attempted to achieve an armistice with Ashbury. Led by Emperor Galanthys IV and four High Prophets. Duke Aramis had two terms, release the enslaved Ashbans and withdraw from Ashban territory. The Galanthians attempted to save face by claiming that they believed Ashbury was their ancient enemy Icenia (in spite of the fact that they had been allied with Requin, who was never quiet about his origins.)

They attempted to work around Duke Aramis’ demands, but His Grace refused to discuss anything until Ashbury’s citizens were returned and Galanthian forces were removed from Trelheim. Ultimately all that was agreed to was that Galanthia would return the citizens and within a week eight hundred of the captured were returned.

Unfortunately, this did not end the hostile relations with Galanthia, but for a time things seemed promising. In 601 Galanthys IV returned to Ashbury. Baron Agnar acted as ambassador between the two nations,



*Baroness Talin Gildenlily*

and informed the Galanthian emperor that no treaty would exist as long as Galanthia allowed slavery and necromancy.

Galanthys immediately decreed that both were now abolished in all of his lands, and attempted to open talks for Galanthia controlling Trelheim. Ultimately, Galanthy was informed that Icenia's leaders would see how he handled enforcing the new laws he enacted before any formal agreement was made.

Galanthian newspapers reported that Imperial forces were driving necromancers and undead creatures out of Galanthia, but that several were fleeing to Trelheim. Additionally, many freed slaves were also moving to Trelheim to begin new and better lives. According to Galanthian papers, freed slaves that opted to stay in Galanthia were given new homes paid for by the Emperor himself.

Adding to the promise of peace with Galanthia, a small party traveled to Galanthia. Lady Azreal, Shya and the expatriate Galanthian Yelanus Veler made up this party, and they were received quite well in Galanthia.

## Galanthys Falls

As the spring of 601 approached, Emperor Galanthy returned to Ashbury for peace overtures. He met with Duke Aramis and explained the progress his government has made. Aramis was still distrustful, but talks proceeded civilly. However, during the talks, the emperor and his entourage collapsed to the ground, writhing in pain. The mage Star attempted to aid Galanthy, when suddenly the emperor vanished. Apparently his spirit was now linked with Star's and only the mage and few others could see or converse with Galanthy.

Without the emperor, two distinct factions seemed to emerge within Galanthia. The first supported Galanthy and desired to keep Star safe

until a cure could be found for the unfortunate emperor. The second seemed to desire a return to the "old ways" and sought Star's death, figuring that without Star, Emperor Galanthy would be destroyed.

One such assassin had nearly convinced Star to allow himself to be slain and it was only the intervention of Glorianna Wyndancer and a key to the Graveyards that put this off. An attempt was made to cure both Star and Galanthy involving a song by a water nymph, but there was one verse missing after an attempt to acquire it. The nymph never returned, and slowly the Emperor appeared to Star and the others less and less until eventually Galanthy was never seen again.

## The Death of Aramis Llyrr and The Rebirth of Glantri

Early in Gryphon of 601 there had been a strange magical explosion in eastern Trelheim, only miles from Ashbury City. Ever since, many strange and dark creatures began plaguing the land, including a strange black figure that claimed to be Glantri reborn. Duke Aramis went to investigate the attacks, accompanied by Sir Frost, Sir Morgasander, Sir Eros and a contingent of the Phoenix Guard.

Strange black creatures ambushed the party. As the battle began to go badly, Duke Aramis ordered Sir Morgasander to return to Ashbury and warn them of the creatures. Under protest, Morgasander obeyed. The party was destroyed, and resurrected nearly to a man.

Conspicuously absent in the resurrections was Aramis himself. Glantri arrived in town with his creatures, proudly brandishing Duke Aramis' tabard and claiming to have permanently slain him. He eventually left, but scouts were dispatched to see if there was any truth to the creature's claims. The scouts were able to visually confirm the duke's death but were unable to retrieve his body. A small service was held, and His Grace's tabard was burned while some of the adventurers of Ashbury spoke words of remembrance for their fallen leader.

Seemingly from beyond the grave, Duke Aramis was able to deliver a message on a mysterious stone to his people. Using it, they were led to where a strange tear in space stood in mid air. It was suspected that Glantri was powered through this tear.

Glantri however, had learned of the Ashban's approach and was ready. As the Ashbans engaged Glantri, Sir Eros managed to sneak behind enemy lines and erect a Circle of Power around the rift. Once blocked off, the rift began to close. Bereft of his external powers, Glantri quickly fell before the blades and spells of the Ashbans.

Upon return to the center of the city, however, a large symbol of Glantri was found in the center of town. It was indeed magical, but resisted any further attempts to identify it.

The next day a force of Galanthyans attacked the city in an attempt to slay Sir Eros (for his part in closing the rift) and the wizard Star (for housing the spirit of Galanthy IV.) The Galanthyans were fought off and after the battle a strange figure appeared on the symbol of Glantri. He appeared to have no memory of who he was, and left town unmolested. Some suspected he was Glantri reborn without the dark influence of Black Annis that corrupted him. Others felt he could not be the same person as the foul creature that had slain Ashbury's duke, and they dubbed the man Galen.

## Halloween of 601

There were many events surrounding all hallows eve of 601. Primary among them was the return of the Boogeyman who in the past had kidnapped all of Ashbury's children and forced the citizens to suffer a team of his booglings in the annual tournament. Ultimately, the Boogeyman's team was defeated, and the children were returned. After the incident with the Boogeyman and the Ashbans in 598, Queen Mythlandria had ordered the Baron of Nightmares to never interfere with Ashbury again. For disobeying his liege, the Boogeyman was destroyed permanently. The Candyman replaced the Boogeyman as the Lord of Nightmares.

When questions of the Lords of Halloween began to surface, a herald of the Abysmal Gorge soon arrived to provide information. The Lords of Halloween had vanished, and without a new lord of Halloween, the rift between the Gorge and Fortannis would be open forever.

The Candyman, meantime, began to be corrupted by the land. Calling himself Sugarcane, the previously benevolent fey returned to Ashbury bringing havoc with him. Prince Correldrian of Mythlandria was in Ashbury at the time as well, and hypothesized that if the Candyman were made the lord of Halloween, it may well cure him.

To that end many of the adventurers of Ashbury traveled to the Abysmal Gorge to retrieve the Crown of Halloween. They found themselves in a land of blackness with hordes of undead milling about. They entered a nearby cave and engaged the undead.

During the fighting Gabriel Bruce realized that none of the undead were channeling magical ability and cast a *Sanctuary* spell on Scarn Whiteleaf. As the fighting raged, Scarn strolled past enemy lines, seized the Crown and made for friendly lines immediately. The adventurers returned to Ashbury and presented the crown to the Candyman, who was indeed cured by it.

## The Return of Panselore

Also around the time of Halloween of 601, the foul genhorde Panselore returned to Ashbury to claim the ducal throne, much as he had after Duke Bryan had perished. This time, a small army of darklings accompanied Panselore, allowing him to lay waste to many of Ashbury's adventurers. It had been a long time since Panselore or the darklings had troubled Ashbury, and the books of the Sage's Guild had to be referenced for information on both.

Intelligence came about that there was a gateway near the city where the darklings were coming from, and where a great deal of Panselore's new abilities were coming from. In order to close this gateway an object known only as the Key of Shadows was needed. Throughout the day this artifact came to be in the possession of the Amani Ranger Scarn. With the Key of Shadows in hand, the Ashbans marched towards the gateway and were met by a force of Darklings. While the battle raged, Scarn slipped behind enemy lines and used the key to close the rift. With the rift closed, the Darklings could not reenter our world, and Panselore's powers were diminished.

Unsurprisingly, Panselore returned to the city, prepared to enact vengeance on those who had closed his rift. There were some brave attempts to fight back, in one such attack the man known as both Glantri and Galen destroyed one of Panselore's chief minions.

It appeared that the attacks would never end, but within weeks, groups led by Sir Frost and Sir Morgasander were able to drive Panselore and his minions out of Ashbury.

## The Rhi-Artan Stones and the Planar Carnival

Information on these mystical stones throughout history is scant, but it is said that when these seven stones are combined they have great power. The last person to wield the seven combined stones was the mad prophet Glantri when he cursed Icenia, Lempur and Varcarra. These stones could not be stolen by mortals, but could be given away freely. It was suspected that the Galanthian archeological dig in Trelheim that resulted in the explosion was an attempt to uncover one of these stones.

Luck was with the Ashbans however, and a carnival traveling through the city had the most powerful of the Rhi-Artan stones called the Prime Stone. The Ringmaster had agreed to surrender the stone to a random patron who had bought a ticket. Needless to say, many Ashbans bought tickets.

Unfortunately, before the Prime Stone could be given to anyone, an adventurer named Cormack of the Order of the Black Unicorns took it

upon himself to punish a carnival worker he felt was cheating by killing the man. Not surprisingly, the Ringmaster refused to aid Ashbury after this, and made preparations to leave town. Before he was able to however, the fey Silva, a servant of Black Annis, was able to slay the Ringmaster and steal the Prime Stone for his mistress.

Ultimately, Cormack's culpability was discovered when the dwarf Gilwing, of the Court of the Ash Forest, was arrested for his part in the murder. Gilwing produced a letter from Cormack in which the adventurer confessed.

Sir Eros found Gilwing guilty of Conspiracy and ordered that the dwarf was to remove his baronial tabard and have nothing more to do with a noble court of Ashbury. Gilwing, being a noble from Trollsgate, was deported to his liege for punishment.

In response to Sir Eros' judgement, Baron Agnar angrily resigned his title. Sir Morgasander, acting as regent until a new duke was appointed, attempted to convince Agnar not to, but once Agnar stated that he did not intend to follow the Code of Chivalry, Morgasander accepted Agnar's resignation, and removed his right to be known as a lord.

Not long after this, a meteor landed in the woods near Ashbury City. Suspecting a Galanthian trick, many of Ashbury's adventurers who were in the city at the time went to investigate. A strange black mist enveloped the party and spread to other parts of Tar'Navaria, grabbing other adventurers as well.

The group from the capital city found themselves in the realm of Black Annis, the queen of the dark fey. There she proudly displayed the pieces of the Rhi-Artan stones that she had recovered. She also caused the few pieces recovered by Ashbans to fly into her hand from the pockets and pouches of Ashbans. That done, she taunted the adventurers by opening a passage back to Ashbury, and ordered her minions to attack.

The Ashbans began a fighting retreat to the rift. Once through they found themselves just outside Ashbury City — but ten years in the future, late in the year 611.

## Ashbury's Future

When the adventurers of Ashbury returned from the mists, they were hailed as the "Returning Heroes of Ashbury." Much had happened in the ten years that Black Annis had robbed from them, and much of it was very surprising. Here is what the adventurers learned had occurred in their absence:

### 1. The Defection of the Biata

Shortly after Ashbury's adventurers disappeared, the biata pulled all their support from Ashbury over the incident involving the magical sword Slavetamer. Many years ago, before Ashbury had been transported to Tar'Navaria, the nobles of Ashbury had promised to turn the sword over to the biata people. The blade was covered with runes that advocated the enslavement and destruction of the biata race. Understandably the sword was an affront to these proud people.

When Ashbury had been pulled to Tar'Navaria, the biata were told that the sword was left behind. However, after more than four years, the sword surfaced in the hands of the Court of the Ash Forest. When this happened, the biata sent an emissary to retrieve the blade, but Baron Agnar's court refused. The biata felt that if the nobles of Ashbury could not keep their word, then they were not worthy of a biata alliance and pulled their support.

In a last ditch effort to save the relations between Ashbury and the biata, Council Leader Xapano Corak approached the nobles of Ashbury who had not vanished into the black mists about the return of the sword. He was told that the sword had vanished with the adventurers, but only responded that he had heard that story before.

The biata removed all support from Ashbury, and with the exception of Sir Frost, Lady Dara, and Zatarina Norik, nearly all biata were recalled to their freehold estates, and had nothing more to do with Ashbury.



*Duchess Dara and Duke Frost*

## 2. The New Duke

Mere weeks after The Disappearance, King Gareth appointed a new duke of Ashbury. His selection was Sir Frost Vardik. Frost had been a royal knight under His Majesty for a few years, and had proved his bravery.

Also thought to be strong factors in King Gareth's appointment was the fact that many Ashbans were concerned about the future with all of Ashbury's adventurers gone, and Frost was from Ashbury's original home of Tyrra. Thought to be another factor was the fact that Frost was a biata, and it was hoped that the appointment would placate the biata councils into reopening relations with Icenia. Unfortunately, there was no such reaction.

## 3. Frost's Appointments

Duke Frost appointed Dame Glenduria "Goodberry" Manyave as the Baroness of the Ash Forest. Glenduria had served on the Amani council for many years, and was a Paladin under Duke Aramis for two years. For Blythedale, Duke Frost appointed Sir Emery Memminger. Sir Emery was a royal knight who had been granted the estate of Oldtown, so he was familiar with Ashbury and her people. Duke Frost's appointment for Nordenn was Sir Morgasander, the former High Sheriff, and Ashbury's regent in the interim period between dukes.

With the disappearance of Head Guildsman Saja, Ducal Guildmaster Tiriflorn Macmannon was forced to again take up the mantle of leadership for the Mage's Guild. Without any invested members of the Healer's Guild, the circle was destroyed and a new one erected. Sage's Guildmistress Zatarina Norik was appointed to be the head of the Healer's Guild as well.

Unfortunately, none of the new nobles were able to bond with the land, in spite of several attempts.

## 4. The Crix

A strange black cloud known as the Crix had begun attacking the people of Ashbury a few weeks before The Disappearance, and its attacks continued after it as well. In 602 Duke Frost appointed Baron Morgasander to find a way to stop the creature. Morgasander realized that the only thing that had any real effect on it was the man known both as Galen and Glantri. Together the two organized a group of soldiers called the Windwalkers who were dedicated to stopping the Crix. After a few battles which showed promise came the Battle of Dockside in 603. Apparently the Crix found some counterbalance, because the Windwalkers could not affect it. In spite of this disappointment, the Windwalkers fought on.

In Fire Ant of 603, the Crix absorbed Baron Morgasander and he was never seen again. Glantri assumed leadership of the Windwalkers and led them in victory after victory over the Crix. In 604 he was made Baron of Nordenn and in a grand battle seemed to destroy the Crix.

## 5. The First Goblin War (602-604)

Over the last few years it was obvious that the green goblins were becoming something altogether different from the simple minded green creatures that they were. Within a few years they had all become the smarter, more powerful gray goblins.

After a few power struggles, the gray goblins united under a powerful gray goblin necromancer called The Mastermind.

The Mastermind gathered an army of goblins and undead and attacked the lands of Ashbury. Much of the fighting took place around the Tower Hills.

There were many casualties of both Ashbans and trolls. In 603 the dwarves of Trollsgate sealed their borders and made no further contact with Icenia.

Baron Glantri obtained permission from Duke Frost to use the ducal army to attack the goblins. Using his connections with the Swords of Lore from Galanthia, he arranged a two front attack. The combined might of these two forces destroyed the goblins, although the Mastermind was never found.

Duke Frost proved to be one of the biggest heroes of the war, fighting the Mastermind himself in a battle known as "The Battle of Frost's Rage."

## 6. Treaty with Galanthia

At the urging of Baron Glantri, King Gareth and the Devorra of Galanthia signed a treaty of alliance. Trelheim was returned in full to Icenia, slavery and necromancy were outlawed in Galanthia, and the two nations would open trade relations and share knowledge.

Meanwhile, the Crix had appeared in Galanthia. Duke Frost gave Glantri permission to go to Galanthia to fight the Crix. The Baron was able to defeat the Crix there as he had in Ashbury, and the Devorra had a sudden vision of Glantri leading them to a glorious future.

In 605, Glantri resigned his position as Baron of Nordenn and was crowned the Emperor of Galanthia. Glantri was replaced by his top knight, Graham Nolin, as the new Baron of Nordenn.

## 7. Return of the Crix

The Crix appeared in Icenia again soon after Glantri gained the crown in Galanthia. Faced with widespread casualties in Icenia, King Gareth asked Glantri for aid, and the Emperor returned to Icenia.

In the battles that followed, Glantri tried many different attacks against it, but none seemed to be working this time. Glantri's wisest scholars and seers determined that if he were to be able to battle the Crix, Glantri would have to bond with the land.

King Gareth was understandably reluctant to allow this, but his people were being slaughtered and the demand was strong. In 606 Glantri was land-bonded and proclaimed co-ruler of Icenia. He began a series of epic battles against the Crix, finally imprisoning it in a cave.

## 8. The Gnolls and the Sarr

The five sarr kingdoms to the south had never been on good terms and often warred. In 600, King Zutclag had regained his land of Junjeq, but was losing the power struggle against his son Utclag. In 603, Utclag married Queen Nikwik of neighboring Bobthitet.

With Bobthitet's army now under Utclag's control, King Zutclag found himself fighting a two front war. Even worse, the other sarr countries got into the fighting, figuring that if power were to be grabbed, they should be the one grabbing it.

In 607, the beleaguered King Zutclag sent an emissary to Icenia to ask for aid. As one of the only sarr nations that did not practice slavery

or allow necromancy, Zutclag was sure he would receive a good welcome. However, a strong argument for neutrality came from Lord Roldo Rounders, the Home ambassador to Icenia. Lord Roldo argued that Ashbury's treaty with Home required them to remain neutral in a dispute that was up to Home to decide. Emperor Glantri took a personal interest in the argument and agreed with Roldo's interpretation of the treaty.

King Zutclag declared that Home was only interested in profit and since it was supplying weapons to both sides of the war, was not able to make decisions having to do with morality. Zutclag then launched an attack upon the shipping lines of Home. Lord Roldo called on Ashbury to abide by the terms of its treaty and obtain their help in pushing back Zutclag's army.

The aid from Ashbury turned out to be the nail in Zutclag's coffin. He soon fell in battle permanently, killed by his son. Within a year Junjeq and Bobthitet had turned on Darclag and obtained their surrender.

The new nation was called Jun. The remaining sarr nations formed an uneasy alliance with Jun, but none viewed Icenia with any favor after siding with Home.

As is their usual custom, they sent petty assassins against Icenian nobles and otherwise attempt to incite insurrection among the sarr in Icenia.

Meanwhile, while the sarr were distracted, an ancient gnoll prophecy was being played out and a gnoll named Gnasetooth had gathered the pieces of a magical weapon. Gnasetooth was able to gain a very loyal following among the gnolls, most of whom were slaves to the sarr.

With his weapon and following, Gnasetooth was able to strike the sarr when they were most vulnerable and nearly destroy them. Jun's neighbors were quickly conquered and large parts of Jun itself were also taken by the gnolls.

## 9. The Return of the Mastermind

In 607, striking from the Bile Dens, the Mastermind surfaced again, this time in the form of a powerful liche. He swept south in an attempt to retake Trelheim.

Weakened militarily by the Crix, Icenia was in dire straits, and began to fight a losing battle against the goblins. Salvation came with the gnolls who, seeking relations with Icenia, offered to help. The beleaguered Icenia accepted their aid, and the gnolls were able to defeat the goblins. The Mastermind was slain, but his bottle was never found.

## 10. The Trial of Gareth and Sidraste

In Gryphon of 608, the Order of the Unlidded Eye revealed a huge conspiracy when they discovered the King and Queen were attempting to free the Crix from its imprisonment. A huge public trial was held with Glantri acting as judge. Evidence showed that Gareth and Sidraste had wanted to release the Crix in order to increase their financial holdings and encourage the breaking of certain treaties. They were found guilty of treason against their own people and sentenced to death, but in his mercy, Glantri instead imprisoned them in his palace.

## 11. Emperor Glantri's Changes

Glantri proclaimed himself sole ruler of Icenia, and ordered Duke Frost to attempt again to bond with the land. This time it was successful. Emperor Glantri's first act was to dissolve the Order of the Unlidded Eye because it was full of traitorous supporters of Gareth and Sidraste. It was replaced by an organization led by Glantri himself called the Order of the Mark.

He then removed Baron Emery citing evidence that he was hiding traitors who were plotting to overthrow Emperor Glantri. Emery was obliterated and did not resurrect. On Glantri's advice, Duke Frost appointed Bik Cobblestone to replace Emery.

Next, due to their combative nature and acts of insurrection against Icenia, Glantri declared sarr to be a monster race. Gnoll parties immedi-

ately formed to wipe out the sarr.

In order to further reward the brave gnolls who helped against the goblins, His Radiance Emperor Glantri granted the lands of Trelheim to the gnoll hero Gravish-tar and made all gnolls into citizens. He renamed the land Gravishtam, and began a war against the trolls. In Ashbury, Emperor Glantri advised Sir Eros to take on a gnoll sheriff, Harkan Irontail.

Emperor Glantri also established debtor's prisons to punish those who owed money and could not or would not repay their debts. In order to avoid breaking up families, the spouses and children of the prisoners were sent to jail with them. Alternatively, the family was allowed to work off their debts.

## 12. Enemies of the Emperor

Many people sided against Emperor Glantri. Primary among them are the elves of the Wold. Upon the guilty verdict of Gareth and Sidraste, the borders of the Ash Forest were closed and Baroness Glenduria went into hiding in the Forest.

Emperor Glantri sent troops to reclaim the Forest, but the woods themselves fought against the Imperial troops which were forced to retreat.

The Ash Forest was declared a military district and the former Sword of Lore Loren Tor was named the Warlord of the Ash Forest.

Morgasander was also proven to be alive when he led a force of trolls and sarr in an attack against His Radiance. The attack was easily defeated however.

Meanwhile, the troll war in Gravishtam was heating up, and the trolls were pushing back the gnolls and royal armies with the assistance of Morgasander and his sarr army.

One troll assassin actually succeeded in slaying His Radiance.

Upon his resurrection, Emperor Glantri placed a 200 Gold Piece reward on Morgasander's head and used the powerful Rhi-Artan stones to curse the trolls. Forever more, sunlight and light spells acted as death spells against the foul creatures and the trolls immediately retreated underground.

## 13. The Merging of Galanthia and Icenia

The two nations of Galanthia and Icenia were being merged together by His Radiance. All ducal armies were merged with the Royal army to form a policing force in Icenia, and every able bodied Icenian was required to serve two years in the army, with some adventurers being conscripted for even longer.

In order to combat the traitors in Icenia, Emperor Glantri gave the Order of the Mark the power to investigate and hold trials that have to do with treason. Many citizens were rewarded for reporting those who spoke harshly of the Empire. A children's brigade known as "the Markies" was formed to teach others in the way of good citizenship.

With the help of the Order of the Mark, many traitorous books were found in sage's guilds across Icenia which claimed to be unbiased histories and attempted to turn Icenians against their rightful leaders. These books were confiscated and burned.

Further, Eric Woolcott, the editor of the *Ashbury Times*, was found and obliterated for his many editorials which supported the attacks of Morgasander.

In response to this, His Radiance established the Truth Committee in order to oversee what is taught in schools and sage's guilds. All writings and lectures had to be pre-approved by the Truth Committee before dissemination.

## The Truth of the Future

The truth of what had happened in Ashbury was much more devious than the Returned Heroes had been led to believe, and Glantri was not as free of Black Annis' control as the Ashbans had originally thought.



*Glantri*

Glantri was her servant and pawn as much as when he was the black monster that had slain Duke Aramis.

The history that the Empire told to the so-called Returned Heroes of Ashbury was full of lies and half-truths. The withdrawal of the biata and Frost's appointment as Duke (as well as the appointments of Ashbury's barons) were accurate, but after that the history is twisted and contorted into Galanthian propaganda:

### 1. The Crix

The Crix is a strange creature of fey origin. This monster is feared all throughout the fey regions by seelie and unseelie fey alike. It is likened to their version of the Boogeyman. The creature has never shown any form of intelligence, allegiance, or the ability or will to communicate.

Somehow Black Annis was able to gain some form of control over this creature and open a doorway to our world and allow the Crix to wonder through to cause havoc. Whenever Glantri needed to increase his standing she would cause it to appear. As a fey, Glantri would affect the creature somewhat, and Annis would open the gateway and return it to the fey realms again.

Morgasander's absorption into the Crix had been at the behest of Glantri, who was furious that Morgasander still possessed Land Bond powers, and cursed Morgasander to be imprisoned in the Crix.

### 2. The First Goblin War

The evolution of the goblins to the gray goblins is certainly the work of Black Annis, given the creatures' fey-like powers. Whether it is some form of alliance between the two, or simply Annis using the dim-witted creatures as pawns was never certain. The latter is more likely.

Glantri's involvement of the Swords of Lore in this war was an obvious long-term plan of Black Annis' to create better relations between Icenia and Galanthia to pave the way for the ascension of her minions.

### 3. Treaty with Galanthia

Even the Galanthian propaganda acknowledges that King Gareth signed the treaty of alliance with Galanthia at Glantri's urging. The appearance of the Crix in Galanthia was another masterfully crafted move by Annis to give Glantri the control of that nation.

### 4. Return of the Crix

Once Glantri had control of Galanthia, it was time for him to turn his attention again on Icenia, hence the Crix needed to surface there to allow Glantri's power to continue to grow.

According to people who were around at the time, Glantri had no wise men or scholars attempting to unlock the secret of the Crix. Once he had secured co-rulership and a land bond from King Gareth, the Crix was returned to the fey realms, and Glantri claimed victory over it, telling everyone that it was imprisoned with magical runes.

### 5. The Gnolls and the Sarr

The warring of the sarr existed well before Glantri came along. The greed of the nation of Home too was nothing new. The key factor in this situation was that Glantri took a personal interest in the case and decided that Icenia would remain neutral in the conflict. Without Glantri's influence, surely Icenia would have either aided King Zutclag or forced some sort of peace in the region.

Certainly Glantri's involvement in keeping out of the sarr matter had to do with his pact with the gnolls. Letters surfaced that indicated that the gnoll leader Gnasetooth and Glantri had made a secret alliance.

The terms were as follows: Gnasetooth would agree to support Glantri's advancement. In return, Glantri would remove the citizen status of sarr and grant the gnolls citizenship and the lands of Trelheim. In order to make the change acceptable to Icenia's people, Glantri and the gnolls would arrange a series of terrorist attacks and blame the sarr. With this plan, Glantri gained the loyalty and army of an entire race.

### 6. The Return of the Mastermind

The Mastermind's return was certainly convenient for Glantri and his minions, as it allowed them to bring in the gnolls as public allies, and further the will of Annis. Though proof is lacking as to whether the Mastermind decided to attack on his own, or with a little push from Annis' minions, it seems unlikely that the Dark Queen would leave such a thing to chance.

### 7. The Trial of Gareth and Sidraste

The arrest and trial of King Gareth and Queen Sidraste was little more than an ambush and a farce. The aging Guildmaster Tiriflorn had made a deal with Black Annis. She would grant him eternal life if he would lead Gareth and Sidraste to the ambush and provide testimony against them during their "trial."

Tiriflorn told the King and Queen that something was wrong with the runes that were holding the Crix in its prison, and they went to investigate.

While there, Glantri sprung his trap and "arrested" the two, and created the charges that they were trying to release the Crix.

Many members of the Order of the Unlidded Eye were apparently bought off or bullied into offering false testimony. Those that were not cajoled by Glantri and his minions mysteriously vanished within months.

Glantri chose to imprison the King and Queen rather than kill them so that they would not become martyrs or resurrect elsewhere and lead a rebellion.

The Raven and the White Rose many attempts to rescue the King and Queen, but the rescue parties were unsuccessful.

### 8. Emperor Glantri's Changes

Originally, it was unknown why the Land Bond would not work for

Duke Frost, but Baron Morgasander was certainly able to bond with the land, and Queen Sidraste maintained hers. Eventually, Annis and her son Glantri were able to force the Land into bonding with the new nobles.

The dissolution of the Order of the Unlidded Eye was clearly because many of the Order were still loyal to Gareth and Sidraste, and Glantri could not have that.

The Order of the Mark was little more than a group of thugs who were loyal to Glantri, and willing to commit atrocities to support him and destroy dissenters.

Baron Emery was loyal to King Gareth, and he was meeting with some of his friends and nobles over dinner to discuss growing concerns over Glantri's actions. The dinner was poisoned, and Emery died permanently. Emery's death was given a spin so that people would not question it. Bik Cobblestone, a Galanthian wholly loyal to Glantri, was given his position.

With full control over Icenia, Glantri had a free hand to reward his gnoll allies with the lands of Trelheim, remove the citizenship of the sarr, and force Sir Eros to take on a gnoll sheriff.

Glantri's creation of the debtor's prison was a step in the direction of creating slavery within Ashbury. Clearly the people of Icenia would not accept outright slavery right away, but Glantri had set in motion a plan for its return.

## 9. Enemies of the Emperor

The Amani Council, seeing what had happened after Gareth and Sidraste were convicted, realized that Glantri had conquered Icenia without even drawing a blade, and closed off their borders, just as they had when Duke Alaric Dragonhart resorted to the use of necromancy in Ashbury. Glantri tried to conquer the Forest militarily, but he had bitten off more than he could chew with that attack and his forces were defeated. The few Galanthian troops that actually made it into the Forest either resurrected or were never seen again.

Morgasander had spent the last several years trapped in a fey prison. When Annis and Glantri corrupted the Land Bond, he was able to escape and take refuge in the Ash Forest.

From his position Morgasander raised a force of sarr, biata, elves and loyal Ashbans to attack Glantri. Using the minions of his mother, Glantri defeated Morgasander.

In order to vilify Morgasander, Glantri created stories of him leading trolls along with the sarr, but the fact was that Morgasander never worked with trolls.

## 10. The Merging of Galanthia and Icenia

Glantri put all armies under the Imperial banner in order to have direct control over the forces of Icenia. In this way, his nobles could not use their troops to defy him.

Using the Order of the Mark and giving them the power to be judge and executioner in cases of treason allowed Glantri to not only rule Icenia all but unchallenged, but also to get otherwise good Icenians to spy on their neighbors for him.

He was even able to use the "Markie" schools to brainwash and convince children to spy on their own parents.

After obliterating Eric Woolcott and burning all the real histories in the libraries and sage's guilds across Icenia, Glantri was free to re-write history to his liking and use his Truth Committee to execute those who attempted to teach the real history of Icenia.

## 11. Patriots of the Future

As noted above, Morgasander and the Ash Forest never gave up their attempts at freeing Icenia from Galanthian control.

The groups known as the Raven and the White Rose actually formed an uneasy alliance with one another to try to bring down Emperor Glantri. Though the groups had vast differences in thought and policy, they tolerated each other to see their common goal met.

Sir Eros, the Magistrate of Ashbury, kept his position in order to do what good he could to help those that would otherwise be oppressed and harmed by the Empire, including other patriots. Perhaps if Glantri's regime were not so fond of burning history books, they would have realized that Eros had done the same thing to aid those that fought slavery when he was stationed in Niman.

Healer's Guildmistress Zatarina Norik, always one to ignore the law when it would do harm to the greater good, was quick to use her position to aid the Raven as well as Morgasander's troops. Mostly she helped with information and intelligence, but occasionally by resurrecting outlaws and slipping them out the back before Imperial forces could arrive. The ducal jester, Sassafur, too did his best to help Morgasander and his cause from his position on the ducal court, in spite of the danger he faced if he was caught.

The Order of the Unlidded Eye, though all but destroyed by Glantri and his Order of the Mark, pressed on. The few remaining members who were still loyal to the rightful King and Queen of Icenia continued their work to gather intelligence. They gathered the true histories and hid them away for those who wished to learn the truth of Glantri's treachery and Icenia's conquest.

All of these heroes risked their very lives to fight for right against Glantri's evil regime, and are certainly worthy of recognition for their heroic deeds.

## The Return of the Adventurers of Ashbury

It was into this world where the nobles were oppressive tyrants and patriots were required to sneak around in back allies that Ashbury's adventurers now found themselves. As would be expected, they quickly began to fight for what was good and just, and merely gave lip service to Glantri's propaganda.

Immediately realizing that support must be gathered from the populace and the novice adventurers who had also been pulled in time, several Ashbans began spreading true histories and messages of rebellion and urging for the populace to think for themselves instead of blindly accepting what Glantri told them. Adventurers using pseudonyms such as Tacitus Rex, Keddarik the Dwarven Fist, Darksun, Grak Tul, A Watchful Eye, and The Black Lotus Society all surfaced to spread these ideas.

Arguably the most effective of these individuals were Gabriel Bruce (a/k/a "Tacitus") and Ieukamariyn ibn Saleh (a/k/a "Keddarik"), both of whom were very persuasive at pointing out the corruption and evils of Glantri's Icenia.

The Black Lotus Society was a collection of Returned adventurers who were dedicated to informing the populace of the true history of Glantri's machinations. In an effort to draw out these patriots, the Order of the Mark rounded up random innocent citizens and executed them publicly for being these pseudonyms. The ruse did not work.

## A Way to Destroy Vampires

In order to further rid himself of those Ashbans that have always stood for good and justice, Glantri began sending them on dangerous missions which he hoped they would fail and be killed. The first of these missions was to be sent to the barony of Gravishtam, formerly called Trelheim. A Galanthian vampire by the name of Matros Feratu Lochaber, once a Galanthian general, was chief among the vampires plaguing the barony.

In response to Glantri's summons, a large group of Ashbury's adventurers gathered in the estate of Targan's Paw (formerly Descante and Rodyn.) While there, the Ashbans began to hear rumor of the Book of the Dawn. According to the rumors, the Book of the Dawn contained information on how to destroy the vampires of Tar'Navaria, a feat that had eluded sages ever since Ashbury's transportation to this continent.

Lochaber, also hearing these rumors and seeing such an influx of

Ashbans into the area, must have surmised what the Ashbans were intending. In response, he led a force of vampires against the Ashbans demanding the Book of the Dawn. He was fought off, but had placed other plans in motion in order to ensure his possession of the book.

The Ashbans were able to locate the Academy of the Dawn with the help of a local dwarven mining company. There they found a troop of vampires attacking the spectral guardians of the Book of the Dawn. The adventurers immediately aided the guardians in dispatching the vampires and then began to parlay with the guardians. After showing their goodwill by removing the curse that bound the guardians, the Ashbans were given the Book of the Dawn.

It was not long after the Ashbans returned from the ruins of the Academy of the Dawn that Lochaber's alternate plan was enacted. Lochaber had somehow enslaved Ator Thunderbringer and the healer Vashti who, under the vampire's control, assaulted the healers and sages studying the book and made off with it. Ator and Vashti were liberated just before they met up with Lochaber. The book was secured, but the vampire was furious and led an assault upon the Ashbans, demanding the Book of the Dawn and capturing several citizens. Shya Corak had taken the book behind a Ward and refused to surrender the book, even after Lochaber threatened to slay those he had captured. Shya's resolve retained the Book of the Dawn for Ashbury, but Lochaber did slaughter several citizens before the Black Forest Mercenary Company (the combination of the Black Unicorns and the former Ash Forest barony) and Lord Jonathan led an attack to drive Lochaber off.

## The Awakening of Glantrin

The second of Glantri's missions was to send Ashbury's less experienced adventurers to the Isle of Synvia, home to the various scavenger races, to fight the Vacarran Corsairs. Though part of the Ash Forest, Synvia had remained with the Empire when the Ash Forest seceded. Apparently the Vacarrans had conquered the island, and all contact was severed.

The flagship of Fardaniel, the leader of the Vacarrans, captured the Ashban ship, but took the adventurers to Synvia and freed them. While there, the Ashbans once again faced the might of the Zombie Master. This foul woman found a way to raise even more zombies than normal magic allowed. The Ashbans made a valiant effort to defeat her, but soundly failed.

Meantime, the adventurers learned that a sleeping fey named Glantrin would have control over the Vacarrans. Apparently figuring that if they could convince Glantrin of their cause, the Ashbans could get the Vacarrans off of Synvia.

After completing a series of very fey-like tests, the Ashbans were able to awaken Glantrin. He agreed to take the Vacarrans and leave Synvia forever. This was not the last that the Ashbans would see of Glantrin, however.

## Fighting the Mastermind

Arguably one of the most dangerous of Emperor Glantri's missions for the Returned Heroes was the assault on the Bile Dens. The goblin liche known as the Mastermind and his forces were there, and the Emperor declared that they should be assaulted. A force of soldiers had already attacked the Bile Dens, but had vanished without word. Duke Frost commanded the assault, aided by General Rig Vilmund and Sergeant Tyse Allen, two officers who had been commanding forces against the Mastermind for years.

The adventurers of Ashbury arrived at an abandoned military camp, and were forced to clear the area out of undead and goblins before it could be fortified. Some of the missing ducal soldiers returned to the camp with odd scars on their heads, and they seemed to be in great pain. Before anything could be done for them, foul necromantic creatures burst forth from their heads.

Soon afterwards, a group of lizardmen entered the camp and de-

manded that the Ashbans leave because they were too close to their nesting grounds. Lord Jonathan attempted to parlay with the creatures and explain that the Ashbans had no interest in the lizardmen nesting grounds, and would be along once the Mastermind was dealt with, but the lizardmen were unresponsive and attacked. The initial attack was defeated, as were subsequent attacks by the lizard men, and in one instance a basilisk.

That night, Sergeant Tyse informed the assembled adventurers that the lizardman nests had been found, and ordered them to destroy the threat. Given that the lizardmen had shown only hostile intentions, the Ashbans obeyed the Sergeant. Led by Lord Jonathan and the wizard known as Star, the Ashbans traveled to the lizardmen nests and soundly defeated all of them.

Inside a thatched hut, the adventurers found the permanently dead bodies of several ducal soldiers with their heads destroyed and a note written by the lizardmen leader. The note stated that the Mastermind had given the lizardmen the seeds that were put into the heads of the ducal soldiers. Apparently, the seeds needed to be in a humanoid being to incubate, and would burst from the humanoid head at maturity, permanently killing the host.

The following day, Duke Frost arrived to personally lead the Ashbans against the Mastermind's headquarters. The assault would consist of two strike teams. The first, led by Duke Frost himself, would be the main attack force which would lead the Mastermind away from his headquarters (and his bottle.) The second force would penetrate the Mastermind's building and obliterate his bottle.

The smaller group consisted of Glorianna Wyndancer, Lord Du'Gual Darkfire McEwen, Gabriel Bruce, Draeth, Ator, Redcloud, Louric Harrington, and myself. We were forced to fight past a death elemental in order to reach the Mastermind's bottle, hidden in an array of other bottles. After much debate, a bottle was finally selected, though Glorianna felt it was the incorrect bottle, and began the ritual on the bottle she felt was the correct one. The bottle shattered, releasing an effreet. Fortunately, the ritual scroll and components were not consumed and Glorianna began the ritual on the correct bottle next.

Unfortunately, on the field of battle, the Mastermind had struck down Alyssa Darksnow, sister of Scarn Whiteleaf. Seeing his sister attacked, Scarn, aided by a flurry of healing magics from Lhasa Skamar, slew the Mastermind. The liche resurrected inside the circle of power. Gabriel, Lord Du'Gual, and Ator had bravely stayed inside the circle to defend Glorianna in case of just such a situation. They were able to slay the Mastermind again.

Upon his third resurrection, however, the liche was able to paralyze the defenders and strike Glorianna, backlashing the ritual. The result of the backlash caused those within the circle to become green goblins, though thankfully still retaining their own intellect. In a rage, Glorianna gypsy cursed the Mastermind to forevermore wear pink polka dots.

Duke Frost ordered a fighting retreat, during which the Mastermind was slain yet again. This time, however, the bottle had been secured inside His Grace's circle of power. The Mastermind was imprisoned.

Frost ordered the adventurers to return to Icenia, and assured them that another obliteration scroll would be sent for and applied to the Mastermind. The adventurers left, but before another scroll could arrive, the Mastermind's minions slew the ducal forces guarding the liche and destroyed the circle to free their master.

The backlash effects were temporary, and within the week the unfortunate heroes reverted to normal.

## The Defeat of the Undoer

The Undoer, the powerful elemental being that has been the bane of Ashbury for years, was still around in the future. As is well known, the actual spirit of the Undoer is contained in the mallet that the being carries, when the Undoer is killed, the hammer is all that is left. The next unfortunate to pick up the hammer becomes the new Undoer. His most recent form was that of a powerful troll.

Not long after the adventurers of Ashbury returned from the Bile



The "Mastermind"

Dens, the Undoer reappeared in Ashbury leading his force of trolls. Precluding his attack was visions of a dwarf warrior slaying a group of trolls. The visions could not be affected or communicated with, and vanished soon after the trolls were struck down.

That night, the Undoer attacked the city. The adventurers of Ashbury were able to slay the creature, the hammer falling to the ground. Using the dwarven artifact the Ring of Palin, Gilwing was able to fashion a large chunk of stone around the hammer without actually touching it. Even in the stone, the adventurers were reluctant to move the hammer.

Later in the night a small group of adventurers were able to destroy a group of spectral skeletons that were haunting a local wine cellar. When they were destroyed, the dwarf from the earlier visions appeared. He was still spectral, but was able to communicate. He identified himself as Kendrick Ironsides of the Shield of Vendamor. He said that he had been trapped in the Undoer's hammer since 596. Kendrick explained that inside the Undoer's hammer it was like a vast void. He claimed that he and the others trapped inside were forced to relive a particular moment of their lives over and over again. He also recounted that some sort of black figure guarded the way out of the hammer and that another different black figure had freed him. He did not know any more than that. At a loss of what to do in his spectral form, Kendrick agreed to guard the hammer and alert the adventurers if someone picked it up.

The next day, Kendrick returned to town and told the Ashbans that when he went to find the hammer it was gone and that he had tracked those responsible to a cave on the outskirts of town. The Ashbans followed Kendrick to the cave and found many trolls there, but not the Undoer.

Later the same night the Ashbans, along with King Kelanor IV of Trollsgate, were able to determine a way to travel into the Undoer's hammer in order to free the unfortunate dwarves that were trapped there.

First the Undoer would have to be defeated in order to travel into the hammer. Once Ator delivered the final blow, the Undoer retreated into its hammer again. Kendrick helped the Ashbans follow the Undoer.

Once there they found what appeared to be the Undoer himself as the barrier, as well as several of his hammer wights attempting to stop

them. The battle was fierce, and it was a most random set of circumstances that led to the defeat of the hammer guardian. King Kelanor, Shya Corak and Saja were all struck dizzy by the hammer wights and had been pulled away from the combat. One of the wights managed to penetrate the lines and strike Saja dead before moving on. Kelanor began to yell for a *Life* spell for Saja. Shya was unable to cast due to the dizziness but had a *Life* item and activated it on Saja. The sarr, now alive and free of the dizziness, charged back into combat and cast his final spell upon the Undoer/Guardian, slaying it. The creature dropped a key, allowing the adventurers to leave the hammer.

Once out, the Ashbans were again faced with the Undoer and his hammer wights. Though severely weakened by the previous two fights, the adventurers steeled themselves for another. Several townsfolk were beginning to fall, and Kendrick asked how the Undoer was defeated earlier. He was told that Disarm spells immobilized his hammer, and then he was beaten down. "Then throw Disarm spells at him!" was the spectral dwarf's response. Unfortunately, after so much fierce fighting, no one had any such spells left in memory. It looked bleak until Saja drew forth a Disarm scroll from his pouch. Once hit with the spell, all of the trapped dwarves within the hammer spewed forth and immediately attacked the Undoer. Under such a fierce attack, the Undoer was quickly overwhelmed and defeated.

When the Hammer fell to the ground, Kendrick picked it up, thanked the Ashbans, and he and the other dwarves vanished.

It is my personal speculation that the "other dark figure" that freed Kendrick and thus set the above chain of events in motion was Black Annis and her minions. Though the specifics of their plot is unknown, it most likely involved the hope that the Returned Heroes would get themselves killed while fighting one of the most feared and powerful of Ashbury's villains, or would simply be stuck inside the Undoer's hammer forever.

## The Vacarran Pirates are Cured

The Vacarran Pirates, led by the rouge dark fey Glantrin, posed quite the treat to Emperor Glantri. Apparently, in Glantri's previous incarnation he had a deal with Glantrin. Glantri now claimed to know nothing about a deal, causing Glantrin to angrily attack the Emperor and his court. Glantrin was killed, but in response to the attack the Emperor made a public entreaty to the adventurers of Ashbury to find a way to cure the Vacarran pirates, thus ending Glantrin's control over them.

The Vacarrans were cursed by Glantri's previous incarnation to die if they ever again went upon the water. The curse backfired, however, and they were merely turned to undead when they were on water, but reverted back to living beings on land.

The dark fey Ixil, brother of Silva, appeared in town and offered a song/list of clues of actions to undertake in order to break the curse. The mute wild elf Ciarrah took charge of this quest, aided ably by the sarr Lhasa Skamar and Kuwo Mushtee.

The first step was to sing the song near a lake to summon a water nymph. Accompanied by Kheritanna, the group made their way to a nearby lake to summon the nymph. The nymph gave the group the next clue, the need to free a unicorn and feed a dryad's children. This time accompanied by Athgar the high orc, Glorianna Wyndancer and myself, Ciaarah, Kuwo and Lhasa headed towards a dryad tree that had been discovered earlier.

The dryad's children were indeed hungry, but refused the food offered. It was quickly determined that perhaps the unicorn that needed to be freed would have some insight. With that, they headed towards where the poem indicted the unicorn was being held. The group found a group of gray goblins guarding a small stable. They tried to parlay with the goblins, but the creatures were not interested and attacked. Inside the stable a unicorn was found stuck inside a *Prison* spell. Once freed, the unicorn assisted in the fight and agreed to give the next piece of the riddle to the adventurers.

The song freed a nearby magical mushroom which was taken back

to the dryad babies. Once they were fed, the dryad mother emerged from the tree and gave the group the next riddle. It indicated that the group would need to travel to a burning pit outside of town and defeat a group of undead hounds.

Knowing that this part of the journey would be particularly dangerous, Ciaarah gathered several warriors for the fight. They came upon a large pile of bones guarded by several undead hounds. The fight was fierce, and many times it looked like Ciarah's group would be killed (indeed, Kuwo was forced to resurrect).

Fortunately, with the quick thinking of Dominic the gypsy and the help of the Black Forest Mercenary Company, the hounds were defeated, and the riddle was acquired from the spirits released from the pile of bones.

The spirit told the group that a Vacarran ship was in the port of Dockside, and that the final song would need to be sung on the deck of that ship. The next day every available adventurer traveled to Dockside to perform the song. The hundreds of pirates on the ship, led by Glantrin, attempted to stop them. After a long and difficult fight, the Ashbans fought their way onto the ship and performed the song. The ship immediately began to shudder and quickly began to sink. Ixil assured the Ashbans that Glantrin would resurrect in the dark fey realm and would be dealt with there. The curse of the Vacarran pirates was broken.

## Storyweavers in the Future

During one of the book burnings that was so common during Glantri's reign, a Storyweaver appeared to the adventurers of Ashbury. Apparently, only those who were pulled forward in time could see him, and when the Galanthians left, the spinner informed the Ashbans that they were in the wrong time.

During the next few days the spinners supposedly showed the true events of what had happened during the ten years the adventurers of Ashbury were missing.

The first was a trial of Zatarina Norik by the Order of the Mark. Apparently, Zatarina had aided the Raven in freeing a large group of sarr who had been imprisoned for no reason other than their race.

Though the evidence was flimsy, and the witnesses were clearly bullied into giving testimony, Zatarina was found guilty and executed.

The second story showed Baron Emery being summoned by Emperor Glantri and ambushed and permanently killed by Imperial soldiers on the way.

The third story claimed that Morgasander made an attempt to ally with the trolls, but could not come to terms with them when they insisted on continuing to use necromancy.

The fourth story showed the battle against the Crix where Glantri cursed Morgasander to be imprisoned within the Crix.

Another story showed how Guildmaster Tiriflon was tempted by Black Annis' offer of immortality if he would betray King Gareth and Queen Sidraste.

And yet another story showed how the hobblings of Home were simply playing the sarr off of one another and hiding behind their treaty with Icenia in order to increase their profit.

The final story told the adventurers of how the time elementals appeared in Black Annis' realm and ordered her to return the Ashbans to their proper time.

In response the Dark Queen imprisoned the elementals in her realm.

Somehow, two of the stories began to go out of control, something the spinners lamented had been happening lately.

There has been a great deal of conjecture as to the authenticity of the spinner stories. While it is true that the spinners often embellish their stories to a great degree in order to make them more interesting, there appears to be little of this in these stories.

There was never any confirmation of how Zatarina's trial was conducted, but given the trials that were personally witnessed by the Order of the Mark, the tale is consistent. On the other hand, the tale of Baron Emery was completely embellished.

As stated earlier, credible evidence surfaced that Glantri poisoned Baron Emery and his nobles. The spinners clearly embellished this tale in order to make it more interesting.

Morgasander's attempts to ally with the trolls was never confirmed or denied, but it seems inconsistent with his personality.

The Morgasander of the future, conversely, confirmed the battle against the Crix where Glantri imprisoned him as wholly accurate.

Papers uncovered, as well as the Guildmaster himself, later confirmed the tale of Guildmaster Tiriflon's betrayal. The greed of Home was never confirmed or denied, but is also wholly consistent with what is known of them.

Last, but certainly not least, was the tale of the time elementals. Indeed, that story was accurate, and in order to set things right, the adventurers of Ashbury would have to free the time elementals from their imprisonment in Annis' realm.

## Death of Zatarina and the Response of the Biata Councils

As was mentioned before, Zatarina Norik, the Guildmistress of the Ashbury Healer's Guild, often aided both the Raven and Morgasander's resistance fighters. During the month of Hawk, the Raven had freed several individuals from debtor's prison, mostly mystic wood elves whose offer to repay debts in goods and services instead of money had been rejected.

Shortly after this prison break, the Order of the Mark arrested Zatarina for being involved in the prison break. It was never confirmed whether Zatarina was actually involved in the prison break, but given her unrelenting dedication to fighting the Empire, it is not unlikely. Conversely, if the Order of the Mark could not solve a crime, it was not uncommon for them to round up and execute someone who had nothing to do with the crime in question as an example.

Regardless of whether Zatarina had a hand in the prison break or not, she was executed and died her permanent death. It should be noted that during the ten years the adventurers of Ashbury were absent, Zatarina had been made an elder of her people and served on the Bloodstone council. In response to the execution of one of their elders by the Empire, the Biata Councils organized an attack of Emperor Glantri.

The following month, while the Emperor was in the capital city, nearly a dozen gryphons and their riders landed in the center of town and attacked Glantri immediately. Duke Frost and Duchess Dara immediately came to Glantri's defense. During the fight, the gryphons called Frost and Dara traitors.

The vast majority of adventurers refused to fight the gryphons and even surreptitiously healed them, hoping that they would actually slay Glantri. Ultimately, the gryphons were defeated, and Duke Frost harshly chastised the adventurers for not aiding him.

## Trip to the Afterlife

During the seventh day of Serpent, the so-called Returned Heroes of Ashbury vanished one by one over the course of a few minutes. They found themselves faced by the Registrar, who explained to them that they had all died in the Fire Ant of 601 and were in Limbo until they could be placed in their proper Graveyard.

The Ashbans protested that they were not dead, but had in fact traveled in time, but the Registrar was reluctant to believe them.

At that moment, it was discovered that the troll Fangthorn had stolen the Book of the Graveyards and used it to escape from the Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits. The book of the Graveyard is, arguably, the most powerful artifact in all of the Graveyards, and with it Fangthorn could not only travel at will between the Graveyards but also control the minions of the Graveyards.

The Ashbans offered to retrieve the book from Fangthorn if the Registrar would return them to life. The Registrar said that if they re-

tried the book, he would speed up the paperwork to see if they were, in fact, not supposed to be dead, and the Ashbans agreed.

Without the Book of the Graveyard, the Registrar could only send the Ashbans to one Graveyard, and they would have to get the Guardian of that Graveyard to return them to Limbo.

It was then discovered that a vansir who had long ago died and been placed in the Stone Halls appeared in Limbo. With the Book of the Graveyards in the hands of someone who did not know how to use it, spirits were being displaced from their rightful graveyards. The Ashbans agreed to begin their search for Fangthorn in the Stone Halls and escort the wayward vansir home. With that, the Registrar rifted them there.

The Ashbans found themselves in a vast long house with a roaring fire pit. It was presided over by the guardian of the Stone Halls, the Colossus. He appeared as a large vansir with long, wild hair. He welcomed the adventurers to the Stone Halls, and "initiated" them by causing each of them to fall upon one another in a berserk rage.

After all were laying bleeding upon the ground, save for Ragnar, the Colossus caused them all to be returned to full health, and declared the revelries to begin as several dwarves and vansir arrived.

Once the situation was explained to the Colossus, the Guardian responded that he had not seen Fangthorn, but that he would return the misplaced spirits to Limbo if they bested his champions in the best out of five contests.

As the misplaced Ashbans were preparing for the contests, they came across another wayward spirit, that of Duke Bryan Nordenn. Apparently, Duke Bryan had spent much of his death in the Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits, and it affected his mind. When presented with adventurers he had never met, he began to call them by the name of long dead or retired adventurers.

The contests began with bear wrestling, in which the Kiergani Fishercat Warbird defeated the bear. The second contest was archery. Not surprisingly, two elves were selected to represent the Ashbans, Lady Talin Gildenlily and Drakonis Darktalon, both of whom soundly defeated their opponents. The third contest was an eating contest. Redcloud and the adventurer known as Flatdog represented the Ashbans, and defeated the Colossus' champions. With three of the five contests won by the Ashbans, the Colossus declared them the winner and agreed to send them (as well as Duke Bryan) back to Limbo.

Once in Limbo, the Ashbans presented the Registrar with Duke Bryan. They were told that he should be in the Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits. Some of the adventurers protested that Bryan had died a hero protecting his people and thus should be in the Hero's Graveyard. The Registrar responded that when Jamar consumed the Duke's spirit, he also shattered it, destroying Bryan's sanity. The Ashbans reluctantly agreed to continue their search for Fangthorn in the Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits, and escort their unfortunate duke back there.

The Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits was a place where insanity seemed to run rampant. The insanity of the realm even affected the adventurers who were there temporarily. Fortunately, those who were stricken by the insanity of the realm were able to be cured by Lord Jonathan's mental powers.

In addition, another misplaced spirit was discovered: The Kiergani Eloquois, first known wielder of the Dire Bow. Clearly this historical elf belonged in the Elder Wood.

In order to escape the Graveyard, the adventurers would have to find a series of pieces of a map that a crazed mage had created while in the Shattered Spirits. Other spirits had apparently ripped up the map each taken a piece. Throughout the course of a few hours, the misplaced Ashbans were able to gather all of the pieces, save one.

The final piece came after much bloodshed. The spirits of members of the Freejyn Horde who had permanently died attacked the Ashbans. After the leader of this group was slain, the final piece of the map was discovered on his body.

The Ashbans returned to Limbo, whereupon the Registrar sent them to the Elder Wood to return Eloquois. As expected, the Elder Wood was a huge, majestic forest that made even the Ash Forest appear to be but a

small patch of woods. Lorin Alfenwen, the first baron of the Ash Forest, accosted the Ashbans, demanding to know why they were there. Once the situation had been explained, Baron Lorin explained that parts of the forest were becoming corrupted and they did not know why. The presiding theory among the Ashbans was that Fangthorn was present and using the Book of the Graveyards to corrupt the forest.

Three particular areas of corruption were most prevalent, and Baron Lorin agreed to explain where they were if the Ashbans wished to help. The first area was being corrupted by darkness from a corrupted stone. After fighting an endless amount of skeletons, *Liquid Lights* were used to cure the stone.

The second area was a lake that had been tainted, causing many plants in the area to animate and attack anyone nearby. The Ashbans were able to fight their way to the lake and cast many *Purify* spells upon the water until the waters were still and clear once again.

The third area was a tree that had been corrupted. The area was guarded by several howlbears, which were surely under the control of Fangthorn. Ultimately the tree was cured through the use of *Restore Limb* spells. In spite of this progress, however, Fangthorn was still able to use the Book of the Graveyards to force many of the elves of the forest to attack the Adventurers.

Eventually the Great Stag, the Guardian of the Elder Wood, was located. Unfortunately, Fangthorn had used the Book of the Graveyard to control and taint the great beast. The Ashbans immediately marched towards the Great Stag, finding Fangthorn in a circle of power holding the Book of the Graveyards to control the Stag and the minions of the forest.

What followed was a grand battle against not only the corrupted Guardian of the Elder Wood, but also many dryads, elves, and animals of



*Duke Bryan*

the forest. During the fight Fangthorn continued to study the book and determine why he could not use it to control the adventurers of Ashbury.

After a grueling battle, the Great Stag was brought down and purified with a *Life* spell. Free of Fangthorn's taint, the Great Stag again took control of the minions of the forest and advanced on the troll. Defeated for the moment, Fangthorn used the Book to rift away.

As expected, another wayward spirit was found misplaced in the Elder Wood. This time it was Vladimir Da Silva Donato, also known as "Vlad the Gypsy King."

The Great Stag thanked the Ashbans for curing him, wished them luck in defeating Fangthorn, and returned them to Limbo. From there, the Registrar sent the adventurers to the return "King Vlad" to the Listing Fields, and continue their search there.

By far, the visit to the Listing Fields was the most pleasant and relaxing. Given the danger and horror thus far, many were anxious to partake of the legendary pleasures of the Listing Fields known for. The Guardian of the Listing Fields, the Red Knight, agreed to return the Ashbans to Limbo, if they were entertaining. While there it was discovered that the Ringmaster of the Planar Carnival (the same one slain by the dark fey Silva in 601) had enslaved a sarr for entertainment.

The sarr in question was King Zutclag of Junjeq. Clearly King Zutclag was misplaced from his rightful graveyard. After a restful interlude, which included a storytelling game and an impromptu play, the Red Knight agreed to return the Ashbans to Limbo to continue their search.

The next destination was the Endless Hunt. Though they did not find Fangthorn in the Endless Hunt, they did find Sir Polycarus Imago, one of the Paladins under Duke Aramis. He explained that he had been in the Hero's Graveyard until recently. Sir Polycarus explained that he had died late in 601 after returning from a long-term reconnaissance mission on the Dur Namarie. After checking in with Duke Frost, he was assassinated in the night by figures with glowing sigils on their faces. It should be noted that many Galanthians, including the Swords of Lore, have such sigils.

The Ashbans soon met the Huntsman and explained the situation to him. The Huntsman said that he would return the adventurers if they could win a hunt. He explained that a unicorn had recently appeared in the hunting grounds, and that he would have a hunting contest between the Ashbans and his minions. A major difference in this hunt, however, was that the hunting parties were allowed to hunt one another as well as the prey. The Ashbans were reluctant to kill a unicorn, but the Huntsman explained that it could be given a *Life* spell immediately afterwards. They were still reluctant, but were faced with no other choice, so they agreed.

The hunt was intense, with the Ashbans not only attempting to capture the majestic and elusive unicorn, but also fend off attacks from the Huntsman's minions. Ultimately, however, they were successful and they returned to the Huntsman with the unicorn. It was killed, and immediately brought back to life. With that the Huntsman rifted the Ashbans to Limbo in order to continue their hunt of Fangthorn, from which they were sent to the Hero's Graveyard.

The Hero's Graveyard was a pleasant place populated with not only the best known heroes such as Gunther Nordenn (of Gunther's Knee fame), Emery Memminger, and Conner Arawyn, but also less celebrated heroes. One of the latter was a cabinetmaker that died once saving a drowning child, and died permanently attempting to fend off attacking trolls so that other townsfolk could escape.

The Maiden of the Swan, one of the Guardians of the Hero's Graveyard, explained that Conner Arawyn was trapped in a nightmare of his own guilt. Apparently his seneschal, Cerik Capulus, had been *Enslaved* by the trolls who attacked his home. Under such control, Cerik cast necromancy, and Conner felt that he had chosen his seneschal and successor poorly. The Ashbans attempted to convince the tortured hero of the truth, but were unsuccessful.

As expected there was a misplaced spirit in the Hero's Graveyard. In this instance it was the Emperor of Thessi, Bernd Thrommel. Bernd tried to convince the Ashbans that in the ten years they were gone that he

had fought Emperor Glantri and had become a good man and rightfully belonged in the Hero's Graveyard. Needless to say, the adventurers did not believe him.

The Maiden of the Swan thanked the Ashbans and returned them to Limbo so that they could escort Bernd to the Graveyard of the Four Winds. The Registrar warned the adventurers that once they were in the Graveyard of the Four Winds, they would have to retrieve the book to leave since the Four Winds never let any spirit leave.

The Graveyard of the Four Winds is arguably the most horrific and terrible place in existence. Foul winds blew throughout the place, and a depressing grayness filled the horizon. Once there, Emperor Bernd began berating the Ashbans who did not believe in his "reform" and attacked them. He especially focused on Lord Jonathan, who had been particularly critical of the evil emperor's claims.

Though the Ashbans attacked Thrommel in turn, most could not affect him. Before long, however, skeletal hands shot up from the ground and pulled the evil biata, kicking and screaming, into the depths the Graveyard.

Before long, waves of trolls led by Fangthorn began to attack the Ashbans, while Fangthorn erected a Circle of Power to use the Book of the Graveyards. The trolls were quickly defeated, and several warriors gathered around Fangthorn's circle, waiting for the opportunity to attack. At that point, the troll announced that he had mastered the Book and had full control of all the spirits in the Graveyards.

With that, he summoned Oliver Songbringer, the hero who had first defeated Fangthorn. Since the vast powers of Oliver Songbringer were well known, the Ashbans were quite wary, and began to back away.

Supremely confident, Fangthorn ordered his old adversary to destroy the Ashbans. Oliver approached them, as though in a trance. At the last minute, he gave a wink to the assembled Ashbans and destroyed Fangthorn's Circle.

The Ashbans immediately attacked the troll dragonmage, led by Oliver. The powerful wizards cast the most powerful of magics at one another, including obliterations and race changes. At one point, Oliver turned Fangthorn into a gypsy. As a gypsy, he cursed Oliver to hop on one leg forever. Oliver then turned himself into a gypsy to remove the curse. By that time, Fangthorn had turned himself back into a troll and the battle continued on.

Before the assembled might of Ashbury's adventurers, and the amazing power of Oliver Songbringer, Fangthorn lay defeated before them. The Ashbans attempted to use the book to return themselves and Fangthorn to limbo, but were unable. Ultimately a dragonmage was needed to use the book, and Oliver returned them.

Once in limbo, the Registrar announced that he had checked the records, and that the Ashbans were indeed not supposed to be dead yet. He then shattered Fangthorn's spirit, returning him to the Graveyard of the Shattered Spirits, and returned the adventurers to the capital city unharmed.

## The Order of the Mark

The Order of the Mark was officially an intelligence organization formed and run by Glantri himself. They were given jurisdiction to investigate and carry out justice in all cases involving the charge of treason. In reality, they were a group of killers and thugs who were willing to remove, threaten or kill anyone it took to keep Glantri in power.

It was not unusual for the Order of the Mark to round up innocent civilians when they desired to set an example. They would do the same if they were unable to identify patriots fighting Glantri's regime and then twist the facts to make it look as though the patriots were the villains.

True to this tactic, when the Order of the Mark was unable to determine the identity of Tacitus, they arrested Roger Cartwright, an ordinary wheelwright who had nothing to do with any of the plans of the patriots of the future. Order of the Mark member Grofcus dragged the poor man, who had suffered a number of deaths due to accidents and such through the course of his life, into the center of Ashbury for a public execution. He begged for his life to anyone that would listen and swore that he was

not Tacitus. His pleas were heard by all of the adventurers, but they could not save the innocent fellow without effectively marking themselves for immediate execution. In spite of the public outcry, and the attempts of Ragnar of the Black Forest Mercenary Company, Roger was killed and suffered his permanent death.

In an identical tactic to flush out Keddarik the Dwarven Fist, Grofcus arrested the dwarven tavern proprietor Stoney Deepjug. Stoney maintained his innocence, and would surely have been executed if not for his quick legs and some surreptitious aid from Ieukamariyn (the real Keddarik).

In another example of the tactics of the Order of the Mark, they victimized a poor man named Ofer. Soon after the adventurers of Ashbury emerged from the black mists, I organized a speech to inform the adventurers of what had transpired in the missing ten years. During the lecture, Ofer continuously mocked the Order of the Mark. The next day, Ofer returned to the adventurers, except that he had been race changed to a sarr. He reported being abducted by Urzen, the head of the Order of the Mark and forcibly race changed. At that moment, Urzen arrived claiming that the real Ofer was safe on his farm and that the sarr was merely a spy. With that, he dragged off the poor man. Ofer was never seen again.

## The Rescue of the Battle Queen

The heroes of Ashbury had been forced to endure the rule of a corrupt, evil minion of Black Annis for nearly a year. They saw innocent citizens rounded up and killed on a whim while those that truly fought for Icenia were vilified or executed. As would be expected, they were only willing to put up with so much of this.

Information came to an adventuring group known as the Jade Thorns from Morgasander that the Amani Rangers had created a tunnel to the Imperial prison to rescue Queen Sidraste. The exiled hero told them that it would be a very difficult operation and that they should assemble a crack assault team in order for it to succeed. To that end, members of both the Jade Thorns and the Black Forest Mercenary Company were tapped for the assault.

The rescue involved two particular forces. The first, consisting of Scarn, Gabriel, Perwin, and Lord Du'Gaul entered the facility and made their way to Her Majesty's cell. The second group included Glorianna, Ragnar, Gilwing, Sparticus, Rasq, and Tithraq, were to guard against an alarm being sounded by any guards who got past the first group.

One lone groll guard slipped by both groups. The first group had retrieved the Queen by that point and got her to the lines of the Ash Forest, while the second group pursued the groll to an Imperial barracks, and attacked in the hope of defeating them to keep word of their involvement quiet. However, the soldiers killed one of their own so that a report could be given even if the Black Forest won, and the Ashbans quickly realized that continued fighting would be futile and withdrew.

Though the rescue did not go flawlessly, it was successful. Queen Sidraste was freed from prison, and she personally led the forces gathered in the Ash Forest.

The Order of the Mark was able to determine that Alexander, Sparticus, Gilwing, Rasq and Tithraq were involved in the assault. Sparticus was arrested and obliterated, but refused to help the Order identify others who were involved in the assault. Gilwing race changed to an elf in order to avoid capture, but he was still recognized by the authorities and arrested. The Order of the Mark began an obliteration ritual, but Sparticus cast a *Destroy* spell on the street lamp the caster was using to read the scroll, backlashing the ritual. Gilwing was instead executed and told to return for his subsequent deaths, but his spirit understandably instead fled to the Ash Forest.

Rasq left Ashbury well before the Order could arrive to apprehend him, as did Tithraq. The latter, in fact, placed clues to lead the Order of the Mark to a rented room in Dockside. When the Order arrived to arrest Tithraq, they instead found a trapped room that killed three Order of the Mark agents.

It was also discovered that the stone elf Symerille Strongbow, of

the Black Forest Mercenary Company, had informed the Order of the Mark that the Jade Thorns and Perwin were involved in the rescue. For completely unfathomable reasons however, Morgasander ordered that no one exact vengeance on Symerille, and he did not mete out any punishment of his own either.

## The Adventurers Fight Back

Most of those who were able and willing to fight with Morgasander holed up in the Ash Forest with Morgasander if they possibly could. Since the Ash Forest was the only bastion of resistance able to stand against Glantri, they had long been a thorn in the Emperor's side. Glantri had attempted to destroy the Ash Forest when he first came to power, but the magic of the Forest, as well as the Amani Rangers, defeated him. As a result, Glantri initiated another plan.

In order to weaken the Forest from within, and keep public support against the Forest, Glantri enlisted the aid of Loscarnos De Morganna. Morganna's hatred of the Ash Forest is well known, and the ancient vampire readily accepted the opportunity to be involved in its downfall.

Morganna's part of the pact resulted in the foul creature corrupting five trees and turning them into Trees of Shades. Additionally, Morganna corrupted hordes of smaller plants into necromantic versions and sent them to attack the people of Icenia so that Glantri could blame the attacks on the Ash Forest and keep the support of the people.

Blaming the necromantic plants on the Wold, and using them as an excuse, Glantri declared all out war on the Ash Forest. The only plants that actually attacked Ashbury, however, were those of Morganna's, and the Returned Heroes were only too happy to destroy these necromantic creatures.

Galanthian Warlord Loren Tor had organized a multi-pronged attack against the Ash Forest. One prong involved the Warlord himself leading the adventurers of Ashbury to invade the estate of Tilomon. Loren marshaled the adventurers of Ashbury, and led them to the edge of the Forest, where the Forest itself rose to challenge their advance.

The Warlord ordered the Ashbans to attack, but they refused. At that moment, Morgasander emerged from the Forest. Loren immediately ordered the Ashbans to apprehend Morgasander. Needless to say, the adventurers instead struck down the Warlord without hesitation. Morgasander was about to execute the Warlord, but the Ashbans, particularly Perwin, explained that the Warlord did not know the true nature of Glantri, and that he had proven himself a good and honorable man. Morgasander agreed to spare the Warlord. The nearby Amani Rangers took the Warlord as a prisoner of war.

Meantime, Morgasander introduced an apprentice from the Amani Council who held a seed from the Spirit Tree. Morgasander explained that they had found one of the Trees of Shades, and that the seed could cure it.

The Ashbans readily followed Morgasander to the site of the Tree. It was well protected by many more of Morganna's necromantic plants, and a hard battle was begun. Amidst many cries of "For the Ash Forest!" the Ashbans charged into the fray. Eventually, the Tree of Shades was battered to the point where it could no longer attack the Ashbans. Then the seed was needed to be placed on it, and all the elves needed to form a circle around it and sing. Once this was done, the corrupted tree split apart and the Forest Lord emerged.

The Forest Lord explained that there were four more Trees that would have to be stopped, and called on Amani Ranger Scarn Whiteleaf. The Forest Lord gave him one of the four seeds from the Spirit Tree, and told Scarn to select three more elves to wield the other seeds. Scarn chose Lord Du'Gaul, Graywolf Everstarr, and Raven Nevermore. Each was given the seed which sprit linked to them, and granted them various immunities to chaos magic.

The Ashbans triumphantly returned to the city, finally confident that they had fought completely for right, and not to the benefit of Glantri. The adventurers gathered around the Healer's Guild, where an impassioned speech by Luigi of the Black Forest Mercenary Company rallied the town



*Morgasander*

against Glantri.

The next day, Morgasander sent a messenger in to inform the Ashbans where to meet him so they could cure the other four trees. At that point, Mithrako appeared. He informed the Ashbans that he intended to aid them in helping the Ash Forest, whether they wanted him to or not. When attacked, Mithrako simply went to gaseous form, and followed the Ashbans.

The Ashbans met with Morgasander and quickly overwhelmed the next Tree of Shades. When the tree was defeated, and the Ashbans again turned to Mithrako, Morgasander ordered them to leave him alone, feeling that there were bigger threats.

The Ashbans wandered the woods until they found the next two Trees, both of which were defeated and cured. The final Tree, however, eluded them. Mithrako informed the Ashbans that he knew where the tree was, but that they would have to not attack him while he helped them against it. Ultimately, Morgasander reluctantly brokered a deal where the Ashbans would not attack Mithrako for the day, and in return Mithrako would show the adventurers where the final Tree of Shades was, and would not return to Ashbury for a month.

With the arrangement made, Mithrako led the Ashbans to the final Tree of Shades. Not only was the tree protected by more of Morganna's necromantic plants, but indeed by the foul vampire itself.

The ensuing battle was long and fierce, and more than a few adventurers lost their lives. During the fight, Mithrako himself urged the Ashbans on and healed elves so they could form a circle around the final tree. Once the battle was done, Mithrako left.

Unfortunately, the other fronts of the war did not go nearly as well. Former Baroness Glenduria was captured, as was Amani Council Leader Gwindor Grayhalme and Council Member M'theran Kilentria. So, though a great victory was won with the release of Sidraste and the defeat of Morganna's Trees of Shades, there were devastating losses as well.

## The Rebellion Strikes

On the sixth day of the Fire Ant, the building conflict was quickly coming to a head. Several adventurers of Ashbury were in hiding with Morgasander after the rescue of Queen Sidraste, including the Jade Thorns

and several members of the Black Forest Mercenary Company.

That evening Glantri himself publicly executed Glenduria, Gwindor and M'theran, using the Rhi-Artan stones to fey curse them with obliteration. Council Leader Gwindor suffered his permanent death as a result of this.

Not long after this crushing blow, the gnoll sheriff Harkan Irontail brought forth a man who was arrested for petty theft. Though many adventurers were present, an angry mob of peasants had also gathered for the trial.

Grofcus from the Order of the Mark executed the man, in spite of the fact that the Order only had jurisdiction over cases of treason. When confronted with this fact, the Order responded only that thievery went against the will of the Emperor, and thus was treason.

After the unfortunate fellow resurrected, he reported his death to Sir Eros. The magistrate summoned Grofcus and questioned him about the matter. Grofcus proudly admitted that he executed the man. Sir Eros ruled that since Grofcus was not a noble and that the case was not one of treason, that Grofcus had committed murder. He ordered Sheriff Harkan to execute Grofcus.

Sir Eros was no fool, and he knew that taking such a stand against the Order of the Mark could have dire consequences, and they were not long in coming. Very soon after the execution, Emperor Glantri, Sheriff Harkan, and Urzen, led by a livid Grofcus, confronted Sir Eros in the Dragon's Flagon. The Emperor demanded that the magistrate explain himself. Sir Eros simply explained that he was doing his job, and that according to the law Grofcus had committed murder. Glantri found Eros guilty of treason for killing a member of the Order of the Mark, and had the magistrate executed, over the protests of adventurer and peasant alike. When it was pointed out to the Emperor that according to law only the Court of Chivalry could conduct trials of nobles, he responded that the Code of Chivalry was nothing more than an useless, obsolete concept that allowed criminals to hide.

With that, Sir Eros was executed, and prevented from getting a *Life* spell.

Grofcus and the others then left town, promising that the biggest trial of the day was yet to come. True to his word, Grofcus, Urzen and Sheriff Harkan returned with a group of Swords of Lore and began to round up adventurers for treason. When one of the accused fled, Grofcus simply picked a new person randomly from the crowd.

After announcing that those gathered were the worst form of criminals, Grofcus began to strike them down. At that moment, Morgasander led the Jade Thorns, members of the Black Forest Mercenary Company and other adventurers that were in hiding, in an attack from the woods. The Ashbans in the town quickly turned on the Galanthians present.

The rage the Ashbans felt at the injustices of the past year finally had release, and even the most passive adventurer was eager to deal death. As a result, the Ashbans quickly took the central capital city. Grofcus and Sheriff Harkan were killed in the fighting, and Urzen was subdued and summarily slain.

Morgasander explained that the attack was part of a coordinated effort, and that other forces were leading similar attacks elsewhere to keep Duke Frost and Emperor Glantri, as well as much of the Swords of Lore, busy on other fronts.

Though much of the Galanthian forces were busy elsewhere, several waves of Swords of Lore, as well as a force of gnolls led by Sheriff Harkan, attacked the capital in an attempt to take it back, but the Ashbans defeated them each time. The most despicable of the Imperial "attacks" to take back the capital was to put weapons in the hands of the children's group the Markies and send them off to attack Ashbury's adventurers. The heroes, of course, did not harm the children, they merely took away their weapons and sent them home.

By the following day, word came of help from several sources. The Biata Councils led attacks from Hopewell and Bloodstone, and the armies Brendon Merdik secured areas of Nordenn. Mishrak and his lizardmen attacked from The Fens, the Amani Rangers had taken back Waterwood. Even King Kelenor led his armies of dwarves from Trollsgate. Help even



*Glenduria Goodberry Manyave*

came from the most unexpected sources. When Baroness Glenduria awoke to lead her armies in the Ash Forest, she was met by two hundred Gingerbread Man golems sent by the Candyman at the behest of Perwin Baker.

Back in the capital city, Morgasander informed the Ashbans that in order to remove Glantri's land bond, Queen Sidraste would need to plunge the blade Validius into the fey mound where the dark Glantri first appeared in Ashbury.

Aided by Morgasander, Queen Sidraste, Sassafur the Jester, Glenduria, Eros, and Warlord Loren Tor, who had been informed of the true nature of Glantri and had vowed to destroy him, the Ashbans marched into battle.

Soon, the less than a hundred Ashbans came upon ten thousand Galanthian troops, their sigils glowing and their blades gleaming. Leading this force was Emperor Glantri and Duke Frost.

Glantri taunted Morgasander, asking if "this rabble" was the best he could do. In response, Morgasander simply stated that he had all he needed in the Battle Queen. With that, Sidraste called on the land bond. In response, the land itself rose up and crushed the army of Galanthians, leaving only Glantri and Frost.

Glantri retaliated by calling upon his own corrupted land bond, immobilizing all of the Ashbans except the traitorous Symerelle. Glantri then ordered Frost to kill the adventurers, starting with Morgasander. To Symerelle's credit, when Frost drew his blade and advanced on Morgasander he attempted to stand between the two, but Morgasander ordered the stone elf to stand aside.

Frost put his blade to Morgasander's throat and stated loudly for all to hear: "There are those here who betray the Duchy, the Kingdom and the very land. They have taken oaths and cast them aside. I will not allow this to happen. It saddens me that those I once trusted and called friend have committed such heinous acts of betrayal. I am sorry, Morgasander ... sorry that it has taken me this many years to see the truth." With that, Duke Frost called upon the land bond to free the Ashbans. With Frost at their forefront, they turned on Glantri.

The Dark Fey child, ever unable to fight his own battles, called upon Black Annis to send him aid, and hordes of other dark fey, led by Silva,

began to appear. The Ashbans readily engaged them. As the battle raged, Queen Sidraste immediately ran to the fey mound and plunged Validius in. A white tendril of mist rose from it. The mist began to rift the Ashbans away from the fight, but only those who had traveled from the past.

Without the bulk of the fighting force, Morgasander's attack rapidly went badly. Glantri had obliterated Queen Sidraste and Morgasander, Baroness Glenduria had been struck down, and Sir Eros had been cursed to be forever stupid and had been picking daisies the whole time. Frost ordered Sassafur to get Eros away from the fight.

After the mist had grabbed the last of the Ashbans, Duke Frost was all that was left. After resisting all that the fey could throw at him, and striking several of them down, Frost was finally magically confined by Glantri.

Glantri offered to forgive Frost for what he had done, and said that they could rule the world together. Frost's response was that he would see Glantri permanently dead, burn the Code of Chivalry in his hide, and post it about Ashbury. At this, Glantri used the Rhi-Artan stones to slay Frost permanently.

## Freeing the Time Elementals

The Ashbans found themselves in a land that resembled Ashbury, but everything seemed strange and misty. It quickly became clear that the adventurers were now in the realm of the Lady of the Mists. While there it was learned that Black Annis' power was greater than ever and still growing, causing the Lady of the Mists' powers to be decreasing at a comparable rate.

A group of adventurers rescued a fey named Azula from an unseele fey named Vellik. In return for his freedom, Azula agreed to help the Ashbans return to their proper time.

The fey soon returned with the Lady of the Mists herself. Though visibly weakened and easily distracted, the Lady informed the Ashbans that they would have to perform a fairy rade to Black Annis' realm in order to free the Time Elementals Annis had imprisoned. The Lady also alluded that this action would mean her own destruction, but that it was necessary. The Ashbans readily agreed to perform the rade, and the Lady of the Mists gave Lord Jonathan five tokens that would protect the adventurers from Annis' magic.

As usual in a fairy rade, music was needed to appease the mists, and a Grand Marshall needed to be chosen to speak for the Ashbans. For music, Glorianna, Kuwo, and Lhasa wielded drums. When the matter selecting a Grand Marshall was mentioned, the name called by most was my own. I reluctantly accepted, and was given a pocket watch and a poem of clues to navigate the rade. Many times during the rade, I called upon the mute elf Ciarrah for aid in deciphering the fey double talk in the poem, who quite ably aided me.

As prepared as they could be, the Ashbans traveled into the mists, aided by Azula. The first challenge involved meeting three figures. All claimed to be Icenians who had a dream that they would be needed to fight the darkness. One of the figures wished to go and fight the darkness alone, another wished to hold her ground and defend against it, while the third desired to consider the matter further. While attempting to determine how to deal with this challenge, the mists hardened and Azula informed the Ashbans that they would have to sacrifice one of the tokens the Lady of the Mists gave them in order to proceed.

The next challenge was a lone, heavily armored figure. He told the Ashbans that he would only allow them to pass if one of their champions defeated him in honor combat. Sparticus of the Black Forest Mercenary Company volunteered to fight the figure, but when even his strongest blows could not affect the creature, he yielded. Lord Du' Gaul then stepped up to challenge the figure. Du' Gaul pulled his swings until he was barely scratching the creature, and slowly harmed the creature until it yielded. It gave Du' Gaul a small piece of cloth.

The next challenge was a series of fey games. One involved ten Ashbans following the commands of a fey named Simon. Another was a game of High Man Hurt played by Luigi, Drakonios and Perwin of the

Black Forest. The third contest was a pie eating competition between Rasq Darkmoon and a mouth creature. The Ashbans were victorious in all of the games, and the mists allowed them to move on.

The mists began to turn dark, and Azula informed the Ashbans that they were entering Annis' territory now, and that he could not guide them any further. He did create a floating light to continue to lead the Ashbans, however. The light led the adventurers to a lone figure on the road who demanded a life as a tax to allow them to pass. On a whim, a *Life* spell was cast upon the figure. It vanished and the mists hardened. Another of Lord Jonathan's tokens vanished, allowing the adventurers to continue on.

As the Ashbans continued through the mists, a voice boomed "Choose ten, the rest shall die." Ciarra and I immediately scoured the poem for clues to this test. Finding nothing, we agreed that this was a test with no answer. Figuring that if we chose none, there would be no one not chosen to die, the Ashbans ignored the voice and continued on, suffering no ill effects.

Finally the adventurers reached the heart of the Dark Queen's realm. They were faced by Black Annis herself, leading the black form of Glantri that had first terrorized Ashbury. Annis mocked the Ashbans and attempted to use her powers to destroy them. The tokens granted by the Lady of the Mists protected the Ashbans however, and Annis called upon her minions to attack the Ashbans.

Glorianna Wyndancer erected a Circle of Power and, with the help of Kuwo and Lhasa, continued the monotonous drumming that distracted and annoyed Glantri and Annis. The dark fey surrounded the circle and demanded she stop, but she resolutely continued. The distraction allowed for a few adventurers from the Black Forest to slip away from the fight and discover a dark mound shrouding two figures that they believed held the time elementals.

Ciarra and I were summoned to the spot, and poured over the riddle to determine what steps needed to be taken. First we placed the watch on the shoulder of one of the elementals. This caused the mound to shimmer and seem thinner, but did not break it. A few spells were tried to see if the weakened mound would be affected, but they were fruitless.

Upon consulting the poem, Ciarra and I determined that the sticks that Lord Jonathan carried from the Lady of the Mists and the cloth that Lord Du'Gual carried from the armored Guardian may be required. To that end, the cloth and two of the sticks were placed to form the hands of a clock marking eight o' clock (which was depicted all around the poem.) This proved partially effective, and the mound shimmered and became weaker yet, but was still in tact.

There was a part of the poem that mentioned the sands of time. Ragnar of the Black Forest had acquired a vial of sand during his time in the fey realms, so he was called and the sand was poured over on the shoulder in accordance with the poem. When the sand poured on the mound, it shattered and the Time Elementals were free. The Ashbans quickly explained the situation to them, and they marched towards Annis without a word.

Most of Annis' minions had been defeated by this point, and only she and Glantri remained on the field. The Time Elementals stopped time and confronted Annis. They banished her and Glantri to be imprisoned in time indefinitely, and then released the Ashbans, informing them that they would be returned to their rightful time when they awoke in the morning, and then rifted away. The next day, as promised, the Ashbans awoke in the year 602, exactly one year after they had first been pulled into the future.

## The Return to the Present

As would be expected, there were many questions from the nobles as to where the adventurers of Ashbury had been. The adventurers explained the future they saw to Duke Frost, particularly in respect to Glantri. Having spent the past year of their lives fighting against the tyrant that Glantri was, they were understandably reluctant to accept that the Glantri of 602 had not yet become that creature.

Yet, in 602 Glantri was simply a Windwalker, and had not yet been corrupted by Annis. He denied being contacted by her in any way. He also

admitted that a few weeks before the return of the adventurers that he began having to memorize spells, instead of just being able to magically have them in his memory. The best theory as to what happened was that there were two aspects of Glantri, the dark one that slew Duke Aramis, and the one that remained. When the Ashbans defeated the Dark Glantri, he was not killed, simply returned to Annis' realm. As such, he was able to control the Glantri that came to Ashbury and became the evil tyrant that was seen in the future. When Dark Glantri and Annis were imprisoned by the Time Elementals, their influence over the young Glantri in Ashbury was severed (which is why he lost the ability to cast spells without memorizing them.)

Regardless, the serious charges levied against Glantri had to be addressed by the nobles. Duke Frost called on Baron Morgasander, Glantri's sponsor, about the young man's loyalty. Morgasander explained that he had fought, bled, and broken bread with Glantri and saw nothing of the man that the returning adventurers described. His Grace then called Glantri forward. Calmly, he ordered the squire to draw his blade and fall upon it. Though hesitant, Glantri obeyed without question. After a tense few moments, Frost allowed a *Life* spell to be administered. He then publicly announced that he considered the matter of Glantri's loyalty closed.

The dire situation of the Mastermind and the Crix were explained to the nobles present, and they vowed to take the goblins more seriously and prepare the town for the future.

## Halloween 602

Within a few weeks of the return of most of Ashbury's adventurers, All Hallows Eve came to Ashbury. With the Candyman as the new Lord of Halloween, many did not fear this traditionally horrifying day as they had in the past, and while no horrors came from the beloved fey the time around the dread day was no less dangerous.

On the evening of Halloween itself, a strange crack suddenly appeared in the center of Ashbury City. From the fissure spewed forth several creatures imbued with chaos as well as several undead. Fortunately many adventurers were around at that moment and were able to slay the monsters. At the exact same moment that the fissure appeared, a strange wall of blackness sprang up around the inner part of the city.

Many citizens were trapped inside the city while most of the nobility and armed forces were stuck on the outside. Another side effect of the crack caused all *Ward* and *Circle of Power* spells to cease functioning, and wizards could not memorize the spells anew. Even the permanent *Circles of Power* in the city fizzled out.

During the initial fighting Healer's Guild member Lauroc DerWyvernhaus and Theron "Flatdog" Dragonstarr fell into the strange crack. According to later accounts they fell into the palm of an immense creature of chaos. The creature clenched its fist, transforming them both into beasts of chaos, and then returned them to Ashbury. Fortunately both were defeated but they were forced to resurrect in order to be freed of the chaos taint. Unfortunately "Flatdog" would again be forced into the rift, and when slain a second time to purge the taint he died permanently.

The crack caused many citizens to act strangely. Some would refuse to venture into the darkness under any circumstances and others could not stand any form of light. Several townspeople were strangely compelled to leap into the crack and had to be restrained. These dangerous events were caused by a cult that was suspected of causing the rift to appear so that they could summon a creature they called the "Ancient One."

Meanwhile an elf named Aeoun Nimbus found himself spirit linked to a large book with a skull on it that seemed to have an intelligence. Using Aeoun the book informed the Ashbans that it had knowledge to share when the time was right and urging others to touch the book. Many townsfolk were hesitant given the fearsome appearance of the book but it began to exert mental control over those nearby until several people had touched the book. After several townspeople had touched the book it rifted out and Aeoun had control over his own facilities again. Those citizens were later abducted by the book and told the story of the origins of the chaos rift.

Long before the races of Fortannis existed the pure essence of Chaos

raged alone through the universe. It destroyed entire worlds and civilizations and twisted the very fabric of existence with its rage. In order to counter Chaos, Order in its purist form appeared. The two raged for eons destroying many worlds in their wake. Finally the battle ended and Order imprisoned Chaos. Order entrusted a group of mortals and their descendants to look over the prison of Chaos and keep it safe.

Thousands of years after Chaos was imprisoned it was able to test the boundaries of its prison but was unable to escape on its own. One of the guardians, a young beacon of good named Saduje Profidis, was not content with guarding the prison from afar. This unease was the only flaw in an otherwise perfect guardian. Profidis traveled to see the head of the guardians to discuss his assignment. As he traveled he began to hear the voice of Chaos whispering in his ear. The closer Profidis got to his destination the louder the voice became. The voice was telling him to ignore the hierarchy of the guardians and take the matter into his own hands. By the time Profidis had arrived to speak with the head of the order he had fallen to the voice, slew the Guardian, and released Chaos.

Upon its freedom Chaos again began its rage against the worlds. Again Order arrived to fight Chaos and again the grand battle raged. Chaos was much stronger than it had been and Order was forced to sacrifice itself to imprison Chaos again. The survivors of the order of guardians again took the box Chaos was imprisoned within and guarded it. After this last part of the story the book vanished and the Ashbans it had taken were freed. A creature of order did appear in Ashbury and once briefed leapt into the chaos rift to do battle. The creature was never seen again.

The Ashbans were ultimately able to discern the location of the Cult of Chaos' main headquarters, an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts the city. Ashbury's adventurers assaulted the cult fighting many cultists aided by creatures of chaos including Flatdog who had been returned from permanent death as a chaos being. Leading the cultists was what appeared to be the Chaos creature itself though it appeared considerably smaller and weaker than it had in the story shown by the mysterious book.

During the battle the Chaos being was defeated and forced back into the box that had served as Chaos' prison. Greysmere Orithalcun of the Black Forest quickly grabbed the prison and ran it outside so the minions of chaos could not again release the creature. The rest of the creatures and cultists were quickly slain after their leader was defeated.

With the capture of the chaos creature the wall surrounding the city was lifted though the crack in the center of the town remained. The ducal army, not ignorant of the fact that the heart of the city had been blocked off by unknown means, had surrounded the wall and quickly moved to secure the city.

The following month I performed a vision ritual which showed a wounded arm with a medical needle being passed over the wound and seeming to heal it. It stood to reason that the crack was the wound and the prison the needle. After reporting this to His Grace he called upon the Healer's Guildmistress Shya Corak, who had taken possession of the prison, to turn the prison over so the crack could be closed.

His Grace and a contingent of soldiers, armed with the prison, moved into the heart of the city. When Duke Frost asked for a volunteer to close the rift Glantri stepped forward. Though many who had heard the tale of the Future History objected, Glantri was allowed to undertake the dangerous mission. The process was slow and difficult as creatures continued to spew from the rift and had to be slain before they could disrupt Glantri. A few resurrected, but the mission was successful.

## Barterville

The estate of Barterville, on the northern border of Nordenn, had been a land under change ever since Ashbury was pulled to Amora Fortannis. Once bordering Ravenholt, the estate had been a bustling marketplace, but now Barterville bordered the Plains of Rage, a land far less friendly. In order to protect Ashbury's northern border, Baron Morgasander ordered a fort constructed to watch the Plains of Rage.

As the winter of 602 fell, the orc clan known as the Severed Heads began to attack the construction crews working on the fort. Ordinarily the local militia would have been sufficient to handle the situation but the orcs were exhibiting strange powers and many had mutated. Additionally a mound of the earth itself would rise up and attack the Ashbans. Half of the mound appeared to be rotting while the other seemed normal and the creature would spew Chaos and healing magics indiscriminately yet seemed invulnerable to physical attacks. Baron Morgasander requested the aid of Ashbury's adventurers to assist with the situation.

Shortly after the arrival of the adventurers several elves from Stormwood arrived under the command of an elf named Kylen. They claimed that the earth was agitated because of the construction taking place in the area and warned that if the construction did not cease the earth would continue to fight back. The construction foreman, Milo, insisted that he was not cutting down vast amounts of lumber or strip mining so was genuinely confused as to the earth's reaction. Further the elves had no proof of their claims merely claiming that they were not surprised that the humans did not understand the damage to the land.

Combat with the orcs and the earth mound proved incredibly difficult. The mound proved to be invulnerable to all but magical weapons wielded by the most skilled of warriors and celestial evocation magic. As a result defeating the mound was incredibly difficult. Throughout the course of the adventurer's stay in Bramblebush, the high orc adventurer Noldrick Tanar was able to open a dialogue with a member of the Severed Head orc tribe. From this orc Noldrick learned that there were two factions within the tribe, one that followed the strange earth mound and was some-



*An orc warrior from the Severed Heads clan*

how siphoning its powers for their own use, which explained the odd orc mutations. The other group wished to have nothing to do with the strange earth mound and avoided it. Noldrick suggested to the latter group that they lie low until the matter was resolved so that they would not get caught in the crossfire.

The situation was further complicated with the arrival two con men claiming that a similar situation had occurred in the estate of Bramblebush because of over cultivation of the land. They assured the Ashbans that they had discovered a cure. The men claimed that they could fashion a seal but that it would need precious metals from the earth in the form of twenty gold crowns, thirty silver nobles and forty copper commons. Fortunately the nobility saw through this their lies and refused their "assistance."

Unfortunately it quickly became apparent that a rift was forming in Kylen's group of elves. Aalek, Kylen's second in command, had gained a substantial following with the elven warriors by claiming that negotiation with the humans and orcs in the area was folly. Conversely, Kylen believed that if it were explained properly the humans would understand the harm to the earth and correct the problem. The breaking of the group happened most publicly. Aalek stated that he had forces throughout the woods loyal to him and that he would order them to attack anyone he felt was harming the earth, human and orc alike he was immediately arrested by the order of Baroness Glenduria Manyave of the Ash Forest, but was inadvertently slain while being taken into custody. Kylen attempted to convince the rest of his men that violence was not the correct response to the situation.

A second attack by the Severed Heads and the earth mound accompanied by the shambling mound itself attacked the construction site. The Ashbans rapidly slew all of the orcs. However with so many adventurers having retired for the night the earth mound proved much more difficult to defeat.

Only the Amani Ranger Scarn Whiteleaf was present and skilled enough with a blade to affect the creature and the only practitioners of the Celestial Arts present were myself and a visiting stone elf named Caseopeous. Fortunately with the support of the other Ashbans the creature was defeated and sank into the ground. Certainly without the assistance of healers who kept us up and fighting, and the other brave adventurers who constantly distracted it from the three of us, the mound would not have been defeated that cold winter night.

The following day an elf that called himself Kekar arrived and stated that the earth was particularly sensitive in that particular part of Barterville. He explained that in order to show the earth that no harm was intended they had to plant several seeds in front of the earth mound. Fortunately between Kekar and some recent purchases by the Ashbans from a wandering merchant, enough seeds were able to be obtained. A final skirmish with the orcs and the mound resulted in a victory for the Ashbans. During the fighting several Ashbans buried the seeds in full view of the mound. This seemed to purify the corrupted part of the mound and it sank back into the ground and was never seen again. At the loss of the mound several orcs fled the combat and seemed to abandon their campaign. The construction site for the fortress was moved to an area that Kekar assured Baron Morgasander was not as sensitive and construction of the fort continued.

## Noble Changes 603

While in Barterville, Duke Sir Frost Vardik officially knighted Lady Talin Gildenlily and Lord Du'Gaul Darkfire McEwen. His Grace had each kneel before him and give their own personal vows to their liege.

Additionally Duke Frost officially inducted Talin as baroness of Blythedale while accepting Baron Emery Memminger's resignation from the post. Emery had served as the baron of Blythedale when Talin had vanished into the future with the rest of Ashbury's prominent adventurers, but upon Talin's return he honorably stepped down so she could resume her position. Sir Emery was named the ducal seneschal of Ashbury.

Before long Baroness Glenduria had knighted Du'Gaul (who also was officially recognized as an Amani elf by the Amani Council and took

the last name Mornavor) and added Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik to her court.

Additionally, citing her lack of military experience, Baroness Glenduria named Sir Du'Gaul the Warlord of the Ash Forest. Meanwhile Baroness Talin and Baron Morgasander also began to organize their courts from the returned adventurers.

## Deathwatch Retaken

In February of 603, Duke Frost launched the first stage of his plans to re-conquer the lands of Trelldheim, starting with the estate of Deathwatch. Most of Trelldheim was considered a wild land by this time and had been carved up and conquered by Ashbury's enemies. Morganna, the deep trolls of the Sunless Empire, and the Dur Namarie were all able to conquer large sections of Trelldheim, and the portions that these factions could not conquer were controlled by several of Requin Dracor's warlords, who had fallen to infighting after the defeat of their leader.

Some historians may criticize Duke Aramis for losing Trelldheim after Ashbury was transported to Fortannis but it should be noted that Ashbury was facing many other perils at that time including creating Icenia anew and fending off Ashbury's many enemies both new and old. By the time Duke Frost came to power the Icenian duchies had become mostly self sufficient and no longer required much in the way of aid from Ashbury. With these resources now freed Duke Frost could begin a campaign to reclaim Ashbury's lost land.

Since Requin's defeat Deathwatch had been carved into four estates. Nearly half the estate was controlled by a former general of Requin's who ruled his land with an iron fist and called himself Warlord Mathias. Mathias had growing difficulty, however, with monster attacks and shadowy assaults by black masked figures called the Dark Enforcers as well as many mysterious disappearances.

The other half of the estate was divided into three territories. The largest and most powerful of these three smaller lands was controlled by General Maximillian Farhill, another of Requin's former officers. Maximillian was a former squire who did his best to live by the Code of Chivalry and keep the peace between the other two nearby leaders, Sheriff Sebastian Foxmorton and Overlord Reginald Margrave.

Sergeant Rig Vilmund, who had achieved the rank of general in the alternate future seen by many of Ashbury's adventurers, led the adventurers. Sergeant Rig explained to the adventurers that their primary task was to scout the area, establish relations with the leaders of the lands and slay any monster races that were present.

The Ashbans made contact with Warlord Mathias, and his right hand man, a Galanthian Sword of Lore named Shuar Jathorym, and assured them that they were only there to slay monsters. The cover story of the Ashbans was further helped when they defended the area against fierce troll attacks, one of which resulted in the permanent death of the troll chiefton Grimbriar. Additionally a deadly encounter at a Dark Enforcer hideout led many to believe that the masked figure leading them was Shuar Jathorym. This theory was proven correct the next day when a group of adventurers, acting under Sergeant Rig's orders, broke into Warlord Mathias' office and found evidence that Mathias was working with the Galanthians and that Shuar was the liaison between the two governments. In exchange for slaves, who would be kidnapped by Shuar's Dark Enforcers and sent to Galanthia, Mathias would receive necromantic items and other materials to maintain his power in the area.

Once presented with this information, Sergeant Rig marshaled the Ashbans to march on Mathias and remove him from power. The battle was fierce but successful, as each of Mathias' men was forced to surrender. Ducal forces moved in to secure the area and destroy any pockets of resistance while the adventurers moved on to the other parts of Deathwatch to attempt to negotiate a peaceful integration. What followed was a complex web of politics and betrayal.

Shortly after arriving the Ashbans learned that Sheriff Sebastian Foxmorton's daughter was kidnapped, and that he suspected Overlord Reginald Margrave of the kidnapping in order to gain leverage. Reginald

denied this accusation vehemently. War seemed eminent, and it was only the diplomacy of General Maximilian and some of the Ashbans that averted bloodshed and war. A deal was quickly brokered where the adventurers would independently investigate the kidnapping since they were not loyal to any of the involved factions. The veil of mystery was soon penetrated however. Overlord Reginald's own lieutenant, Bradly Monix, was leading an underground movement to prevent Deathwatch rejoining Ashbury and had kidnapped Sheriff Sebastian's daughter to force his political actions to their whim.

Bradly had holed up in one of the Overlord's forts, and the Ashbans engaged his forces, rescued the sheriff's daughter and arrested the renegade lieutenant. The work of the Ashbans won sympathy of all three of the areas leaders, and paved the way for a peaceful integration of that portion of Deathwatch back into the duchy.

## Expedition to Dwarrenagor

In late winter of 603 King Kelanor IV of Trollgate, along with his top knight, Lorehammer Smith, traveled to Dwarrenagor to open relations with his dwarven cousins. He invited the nobles of Ashbury to accompany him if they wished to establish their own treaties.

Baroness Talin Gildenlily of Blythedale and Baroness Glenduria Manyave of the Ash Forest both attended personally. Baron Morgasander, busy with matters in Nordenn, sent Lieutenant Glantri in his stead. Also attending for undisclosed reasons of their own were members of House Ryujima of the nation of Tarzatteranzan, led by Xitzin Find'rth T'Varian.

Dwarrenagor had once been a large kingdom primarily dominated by five dwarf clans: the Blackaxes, the Flamefists, the Whiterocks, the Steelbeards and the Mithral clan. The clans of these dwarves are identifiable by their beard color. If a dwarf is born with a different color beard than that of his clan he or she always will dye it to the appropriate color. There was also a population of "clanless" dwarves that sported brown beards.

The blond bearded Mithral clan generally ruled Dwarrenagor but the clans often had disputes that were often mediated with the help of diplomats from the Icenian Duchy of Falkirk. However when Glantri's Curse struck Icenia, Falkirk fell and without the diplomats to mediate the disputes Dwarrenagor fell into infighting and was not able to unite to fend off the invasion of monsters under the banner of an orc named Goretongue. Though Goretongue eventually vanished the clans still distrusted one another and had never reconciled.

The visitors gathered in the Mithral City, which had been the capital of Dwarrenagor. The delegates and adventurers assembled in the only local tavern and met with the local clan leaders: Korik Redrock of the Flamefists, Kalgerki Stonehammer of the Whiterocks, Brenner Silvershield of the Steelbeards and Orit Blackaxe of the Blackaxes. The clans were bickering and distrustful of one another. Many times during the initial introduction words nearly turned to blows between the clans.

The one thing that most of the clans were able to agree on was a hatred of the Blackaxes whom they felt were no better than brigands. Orit did little to help the image of his clan; he frequently insulted the other clans, their leaders, and even the Ashbans. The Blackaxe also suggested he knew secrets on each of the clan leaders but refused to elaborate.

King Kelanor was able to arrange a summit of the clan leaders, but the summit was disrupted when Orit was found murdered in his bed. The clans immediately began to accuse one another, pointing out motives for seeing the Blackaxe leader slain. According to Myrok Coalbeard, Orit's second in command, the Flamefists had given tactical information to

Goretongue on the Whiterocks in exchange for being left alone. Myrok then went on to accuse Kalgerki Stonehammer of allowing her hobling accountant to embezzle funds from the clan and Brenner Silvershield of having a perverted fetish for non hairy women that he would want to keep hidden. The clans quickly countered with a motive for Myrok himself: with Orit dead he would lead the Blackaxe clan.

Harsh words were exchanged and war seemed imminent. It was only through the intervention of Lorehammer Smith that war was averted. Smith offered to investigate the murder as a neutral party, but only if the clans would all agree, which they reluctantly did. This masterful bit of diplomacy got the clans of Dwarrenagor to all agree on something for the first time in generations.

Smith immediately began his investigation. His break came with the attempted murder of a detained suspect, and the attention it drew on a non-descript brown bearded dwarf who had left the area seconds before the crime was discovered. Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik and Dwarrenagar native Kyril Flamebeard pursued the dwarf, and found that she was, in fact, a werebear and had been posing as Orit's pet bear for years. The duo was able to subdue and arrest the dwarf and turn her over to Lorehammer Smith.

Upon interrogation the werebear admitted that she had been hired to spy on and assassinate Orit, but refused to identify her employer without a promise of leniency. After lengthy debate, again mediated by Lorehammer Smith, she was sentenced to one death, instead of Obliteration, and she named Korik Redrock. The disgraced Flamefist admitted that he had betrayed the Whiterocks to Goretongue and that he ordered Orit killed so he would not reveal the information. Korik was arrested and sentenced to Obliteration and permanent exile for his crimes.

Ultimately neither the Ashbans, Tarzatteranzan, nor Trollgate signed any official treaties with Dwarrenagor. However friendly relations were established and the clan leaders were very grateful to Lorehammer Smith for his assistance.



Orit Blackaxe's "pet" bear

## Panselore Attacks

In the spring of 603 Panselore again attacked Ashbury City. Since being forced out of the capital by then-Sirs Frost and Morgasander in 602, he apparently found a hidden location near the city to build a keep and build up an assault force. In April of 603 Panselore led his army of minions into the capital and, as per his usual motive, claimed he was the true ruler of Ashbury. He was slain by the adventurers of Ashbury, led by Baroness Talin Gildenlily and Baroness Glenduria Manyave. Later the same night, the location of Panselore's bottle was discovered and an assault force was launched to try to destroy the bottle.

The Ashbans marched on the location of the bottle with a Destroy Magic scroll to remove the circle and an Obliterate scroll to use on the bottle itself. Unfortunately Lauroc DerWyverhaus lost control of the magical energies and failed to destroy the circle of power. The Black Forest Mercenary Company volunteered to return to Ashbury to fetch their Destroy Magic scroll so another attempt could be made. However, they ran headlong into Panselore and his army of undead who had attacked the city in the adventurers' absence.

Black Forest held Panselore at bay until the rest of the Ashbans could arrive. The battle was long and fierce but eventually Panselore was slain again. Haste was made to retrieve the second scroll and return to the bottle but the adventurers were too late; Panselore had reformed and fled with his bottle. A search was initiated for Panselore, but was unsuccessful. Although Panselore's destruction was not achieved several Ashbans

took heart that the undead beast had been twice slain, bringing him that much closer to permanent death.

## Relations with the Sarr Nations

As has been chronicled, the future timeline witnessed by the Ashbans saw the union of Queen Nikwik and Prince Utclag and the near destruction of the Sarr race in part from the war they carried on with the other sarr nations. By the time the Ashbury's adventurers had returned from the future the marriage had already taken place but many adventurers made it a priority to change what they had seen. To that end the sarr Kuwo Mushtee and Lhasa Skamar, accompanied by Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik, traveled to the sarr nations of Ukmutzrif, Darclag and Junjeq to warn them.

The ultimate result of these warnings was an agreement to a major summit of the sarr kings with Kuwo and Lhasa in Ashbury City to discuss the matter. In May of 603 the meeting took place with Kuwo and Lhasa acting as intermediaries between the sarr nations and Ashbury. It was obvious that all three sarr countries were distrustful of one another but that they understood the danger they faced if they continued to war among themselves. The monarchs sought an alliance with Icenia but as long as the practices of slavery and necromancy were allowed such an alliance could never occur. Junjeq's king, Zutclag, had abandoned both of these practices years previous in gratitude to Ashban adventurers Lord Rasq Darkmoon and Saja for saving him from the machinations of his power-hungry son Utclag.

King Ezeghoq of Darclag argued that he had made the raising of the dead strictly illegal and only allowed other necromantic spells in cases of dire emergency. Kuwo explained that leaving any loophole for casting of necromancy was not sufficient and assured King Ezeghoq that unless all necromantic spells were outlawed and harshly punished that Icenia would never ally with Darclag.

The talks did not pass as peacefully as intended. Reports came from Dockside that several ships docked and unloaded a large force that marched towards Ashbury. Lord Jonathan gathered the adventurers present and marched to meet the enemy force. The invaders turned out to be a mixed group of gnolls, humans, undead, and sarr loyal to Utclag and Nikwik under the command of one General Zuk. The mixed races in the army made it clear that Nikwik and Utclag had allied with some factions of gnolls.

During a brief parlay Zuk informed the Ashbans that he was there to arrest King Zutclag for war crimes. Naturally his request was refused and the two forces battled. General Zuk's army was defeated and the General himself was taken prisoner. Those not captured or killed fled back to Dockside and escaped by boat. The talks in Ashbury ultimately led to further summits between the three sarr nations.

## Gnolls

Since returning from the future, many Ashbans took an interest in the prophecy of the gnolls. Since it called for the gnollish leader Gnasetooth getting four magical weapons, an axe, a dagger, a staff and a saber, to make his massively powerful weapon and defeat the sarr the Ashbans wished to get the weapons first to prevent the prophecy from coming true. The gnoll expert Terrance Rigby worked with Ashbury's scholars to determine the locations of the weapons of the prophecy.

Gnasetooth had claimed the axe before the adventurers of Ashbury were taken to the future so it was already considered to be lost to the Ashbans. Many took heart, however, realizing that if even one of the weapons were denied to Gnasetooth the prophecy would not come true.

While the adventurers of Ashbury were visiting Dwarren-agar in April of 603, the staff was discovered in a strange building that only dwarves could enter. Other races were able to enter the building but only if allowed in; the magic seemed similar to the magic of a *Ward* spell. Inside the building was a circle of power with the glowing staff standing inside it but no one could enter the circle. It was theorized that only a gnoll could enter the circle to get the staff. Fortunately a gnoll was captured and dominated

to get the staff for the Ashbans and the weapon has not been seen since.

The dagger of the prophecy was found in an almost roundabout manner. In the early days of May 603, an elven vampire hunter named Kalathanis and his gnoll companion, Servis Loopshanks, presented themselves to the Ashbans and explained that they were hunting several vampires in the area. Throughout the course of the next few days they led groups of adventurers to half a dozen gnoll vampires and helped destroy the creatures. During one of these excursions a magical dagger was found. It was quickly concluded to be the dagger of the gnoll prophecy and was hidden.

The acquisition of the dagger seemed to have prompted an attack on the city by the foul Loscaros de Morganna with a mixed group of undead and gnolls, several of which had been turned to vampires. The Ashbans attempted to fight but were soon scattered to their *Wards* by the overwhelming forces and by Morganna's personal might.

Morganna demanded the return of the dagger and when no answer was forthcoming he began doing a house to house search for it. Fortunately the dagger was snuck out of town during the confusion and Morganna eventually left without it.

Later in the month, Morganna returned with another force of undead, again demanding the return of the dagger and that Scarn Whiteleaf and Squire Gabriel Bruce, both of the court of the Ash Forest, be turned over to him. It has been speculated that Morganna believed that one or both of the men knew the location of the dagger and that is why Morganna was interested in them. Regardless of his motives, Baron Morgasander of Nordenn and the assembled Ashbans faced down Morganna. The baron gave a simple blunt response to the vampire's demands: "Come and get them." The resulting fight was well led by Morgasander, the undead were handily defeated and Morganna was again forced to leave without the dagger or the Ashbans he sought. The magical dagger was subsequently hidden so neither Morganna nor the gnolls could find it.

## Glenrake and Moorgrave

In the days before Glantri's Curse had destroyed Icenia, the colony of Glenmoor had been settled. Glenmoor was intended to become Icenia's fifth duchy but after the Curse of Glantri Glenmoor was seriously threatened by the monsters of the Bile Dens. In order to survive the nobility of Glenmoor turned to necromancy, offered by a group known as The Brotherhood. History is unclear to exactly what caused the bitter civil war that separated Glenmoor but it raged for hundreds of years.

In 599, Duke Aramis Llyrr sent the paladin Sir Jaret Delair to Moorgrave and Glenrake, as the lands had become known, to attempt to turn them away from their necromantic ways. Sir Jaret's efforts clearly met with some measure of success for in May of 603 Duke Frost Vardik held a meeting with Duke Rogan Ghoulreign of Moorgrave. The topic at hand was Moorgrave abandoning their necromantic ways in return for Ashbury's assistance in the bitter war with Glenrake. Rogan explained that Moorgrave wanted to abandon necromancy but that if he did Glenrake would slaughter his armies.

Days later, Duke Frost introduced Duke Rogan to Ashbury's nobles and prominent adventurers and announced the content of their meeting. No sooner were the announcements made when a Glenrake delegation consisting of Baron Roric de Haut and Sir Thomas Wraithborn arrived and demanded that Ashbury keep out of the affairs of Glenrake and Moorgrave.

Frost made it quite clear that Ashbury would stand against any nation that freely embraced necromancy. Outraged, Baron Roric declared war upon Ashbury and activated some form of magic that turned the city prison into a stone crypt, later identified as a Vault of the Bloodless, that spat out undead and would not allow any living being to enter it. At the same time the Glenrake delegation activated the magic upon their belts that transformed them instantly to undead creatures. Frost led the Ashbans to a quick victory but the crypt remained.

It quickly became apparent that the crypt, the Glenrake noble's belts, and various other strange necromantic creatures that attacked Ashbury

were created by the Brotherhood. This group had developed a form of necromancy unlike anything in history. They called their advances in necromancy NecTech (for Necromantic Technology.)

It quickly became clear that the Brotherhood had been laying the groundwork for subversion in Ashbury well before Glenrake declared war. Investigations led by High Sheriff Sir Harrison Ryatt and Guardsman Osrick of the Town Guard revealed connections between the Brotherhood and both a group of gullible Ashban citizens petitioning the nobility to legalize necromancy as well as several illegal auctions of necromantic items. Among the things confiscated in these sting operations was a book that revealed several of the recipes and techniques of NecTech. Among the information gleaned from this book was a way to enter and destroy the crypt.

Mere days after declaring war on Ashbury Baron Roric and Sir Thomas, aided by the reconnaissance of Colonel Angus Deathgroom, led a second force of undead upon the city. Led by Baron Morgasander of Nordenn and Baroness Glenduria Manyave of the Ash Forest the Ashbans tore into the undead force, slaying Baron Roric. Sir Thomas retreated to the crypt to marshal the undead inside. The Ashbans, now able to enter the crypt, invaded and caught Wraithborn and the undead within by surprise. During the fierce fighting, Squire Gabriel Bruce of the Ash Forest was able to make a bold charge through enemy lines and administer a Steak of Woe to the heart of the crypt, beginning a chain reaction of its destruction. The Ashbans quickly fled the crypt and escaped it just before it collapsed entirely.

In December of 603, Duke Frost led a delegation to Moorgrave to discuss possible terms of an alliance with Duke Rogan and the nobility of Moorgrave. Among Frost's delegation was his court wizard Sir Indorian Silverleaf. Sir Indorian engaged in many lectures against necromancy as well as lessons in celestial magic, which was a near forgotten art in Moorgrave and Glenrake, to the nobility and the officers of Moorgrave's armies.

The visit was not without controversy though. While the Ashbury delegation was in Moorgrave a lone assassin was able to penetrate the tower of the heavily fortified Castle Glenmoor, a feat that had never before been achieved. This assassin was able to slay Duke Eddard Lichigate. The Glenrakes claimed that this was connected somehow with the delegation since the Moorgraves had never been able to breach the towers defenses. Duke Frost, for his part, ignored the accusations.

In April of 603 His Grace made an official announcement to his nobles. He declared that Moorgrave had agreed to outlaw necromancy and that Ashbury had officially allied with them. Part of the treaty called for all of Moorgrave's nobles to turn over the NecTech augments they possessed. Another condition of the treaty was that Duke Rogan, who declared that he was changing his name from Ghoultreign to Exeter, would take three deaths while his two top knights would each take one death. In a public display in the center of town Duke Frost personally executed the nobles. After the gruesome display Frost announced that they had paid for their crimes and were to be treated as allies. As a gift to Ashbury Duke Rogan stated that he was having a magical device called the Forge of Purity delivered to the Ashbury. The Forge could be used to destroy any necromantic item instantly without requiring ritual magic. Unfortunately the caravan carrying this wondrous device was attacked and the Ashbans had to find each piece of it separately.

On the heels of Duke Frost's announcement, Baron Elliot Darkshade of Moorgrave emerged from the crowd began berating Duke Rogan for abandoning necromancy and vowed that Moorgrave would never accept Rogan's rule from that point. Duke Rogan immediately stripped Darkshade of his titles and land. In response Darkshade merely uttered recalled his spirit. Within seconds, a skeletal figure emerged from the woods. The creature made a direct path for Duke Frost, even pursuing him through the Circle of Power in the Healer's Guild, and could not be affected by anyone else. After a difficult and pitched battle Frost eventually defeated the creature with the heavy support of the Ashbans. It was later learned that this creature was called a Charnal Assassin and was a product of the necromantic technology of The Brotherhood. It attunes itself to an individual and will hunt that person until it is destroyed, ignoring

even circles of power and *Wards* in its pursuit.

Intelligence soon gathered indicated that it was Darkshade's forces that stole the Forge of Purity, but by chance several small groups of adventurers were able to collect pieces of it from Darkshade's minions. Within days of his proclamation against Duke Rogan Darkshade had gathered enough forces to attack Ashbury. Naturally Ashbury's adventurers marched to meet them. Through a very bloody battle, the Ashbans were able to destroy the undead. Elliot Darkshade was slain twice (he regenerated on the field of battle after the first death) as well as his former nobles Harold NightHaunt, Edward Killingbone, and former guildmaster Arturius Cadaver.

## Sil-Galad

In May 603 a grave new threat emerged in the Ash Forest in the form of a cursed Imladari elven hero named Sil-Galad. In the days surrounding the 603 Tournament two elves entered Ashbury City and asked to speak with nobility from the Ash Forest. In short order they were brought before Baroness Glenduria, Sir Jonathan, and Sir Du'Gaul. They reported that they were from the estate of Kiri-Ashton and that strange shadowy creatures led by what appeared to be a large undead had attacked.

While Baroness Glenduria was preparing an expedition to aid the estate, darkness swept throughout the city and shadowy shapes began to attack the citizens. Like the attack in Kiri-Ashton, the figures were led by a large mummified elf and accompanied by two elven pantherghasts. Healing spells proved ineffective against the mummified elven figure and it was quickly determined that it was not undead and was the cursed form of Sil-Galad. The swift attack caught the Ashbans by surprise and they were quickly forced behind their *Wards*. Sil-Galad particularly sought out elves and stopped at nothing to slay them.

Through the heroics of Raven Nevermore, Scarn Whiteleaf and Squire Gabriel Bruce one of the pantherghasts was lured away and slain. Meanwhile several adventurers in the town were forced to take refuge behind a single *Ward* while Sil-Galad and several of the darkness creatures stood on the porch with the corpses of eight Ashbans around him. The cursed elf offered to trade the lives of those at his feet for any elves in the building. Sir Eros Clearbrook, the only noble on the scene at the time, steadfastly refused. However Ciarrah and Elocin, the only elves in the building, begged the knight to reconsider arguing that two lives for eight was a good trade. After long deliberation Sir Eros agreed to let the elves choose their own fate and they traded themselves for the dying Ashbans. Sil-Galad slew the two elves and threw them near the Spirit Tree placed in Ashbury by Mithrauko, where he had also deposited the slain Baroness Glenduria. This situation limited the amount of healers that could get to the dead elves since only elves could get near the tree. Yet even as the mummified elf performed his murderous actions he seemed to be lamenting them and observers quickly realized he had no control over the shadowy creatures that followed him around.

While the massacre continued Scarn, Raven and the celestial wizard Star were able to continue a campaign of guerilla warfare against the creatures invading the town and slew several. At one point Scarn was able to sneak to the Spirit Tree and administer a *Life* spell to Baroness Glenduria, who in turn began to heal the several elves around her. The Baroness then hid under a nearby building to heal other elves deposited near the tree while Scarn slipped away to continue his campaign. Unfortunately, while attempting to lure away and dispatch more of the darkness creatures and the other pantherghast Scarn was run down and ripped apart by Sil-Galad himself. Baroness Glenduria later credited him as being the hero of the battle and being responsible for saving many lives.

Meanwhile Baron Morgasander led a small force of adventurers to Sir Eros' group and the two consolidated in the *Warded* building. From there the baron asked the elven mummy if he was Sil-Galad, which resulted in an affirmation and the figure crumbling immediately to dust. In the dust a journal was recovered that detailed how Sil-Galad had been an Imladari knight slain by Mithrauko thousands of years previous and

was buried in a crypt in the Imladari custom.

Neither Sil-Galad nor the darkness creatures were seen again for roughly four months. At that time an Amani Ranger came to town seeking Sir Du'Gaul. He informed the knight that the Rangers found a crypt they believed to be Sil-Galad's final resting place. Sir Du'Gaul gathered a small group and followed the Ranger to the location. Inside they found the cursed elf lying on a slab of stone with several of the creatures of darkness surrounding him and taunting him ceaselessly. The group quickly dispatched the creatures and began a parlay with Sil-Galad.

The unfortunate elven hero explained that when his body was mummified and sealed in his crypt, his spirit did not leave for the Graveyard of the Elder Wood. Instead it stayed inside his lifeless body in the dark. In time he began to curse the darkness that was all he knew, drawing the ire of an elemental lord of darkness called Tenebrous. To punish Sil-Galad for cursing the darkness Lord Tenebrous cursed him to rise again and destroy all things elven and to be constantly taunted by the shadow creatures, which were darkness elementals.

When asked how he refrained from slaying Sir Du'Gaul and the other

elves in the party Sil-Galad explained that he could sometimes exert some minor control over himself while in his crypt. Then, as if on cue, he warned that he felt that control slipping and advised the Ashbans to leave immediately. As they did so Sil-Galad summoned an elven pantherghast on the spot and more darkness elementals began to pour out of the shadows.

The party returned to Ashbury just ahead of the creatures but found it nearly abandoned of adventurers. Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik and Sir Du'Gaul realized the few adventurers present could not defeat the vast number of darkness elementals and ordered the few Ashbans around to their *Wards*. Sil-Galad was able to breach the magical defenses of the Ash Forest manor and slay nearly all inside. Fortunately *Life* spells were surreptitiously administered, preventing any resurrections. After destroying the inside of the manor house he and his forces left Ashbury to slay any elves that could be found elsewhere. He was not seen again for some time.

Research into Tenebrous discovered that he was a mythical figure who was said to watch over dark elven children and was the elemental Lord of Darkness. It was said that a short rhyme which dark elven children would say before bed could summon the darkness lord if accompanied by an appropriate offering. Negotiations began between Sir Du'Gaul and Xitzin Find'rth T'Varian of the dark elf nation of Tarzaterranzan.

In the spring of 603, Sil-Galad surfaced again to attack an elven village on the edge of the Ash Forest border. Refugees streamed into Ashbury city telling of the swift attack. The adventurers of Ashbury quickly traveled to the village to try to assist the elves. Once there they began to slay the darkness creatures that were terrorizing the citizens, but soon Sil-Galad arrived to face the adventurers.

Again, the cursed elf summoned two elven pantherghasts on the spot and the force tore into the Ashbans. Several Ashbans were slain and the battle became a rout with Sil-Galad and the creatures chasing down and slaughtering many Ashbans. There were many deaths in the attack and the Ashbans who managed to return to the safety of their *Wards* were weakened and dispirited and refused to venture forth again. Sil-Galad returned to the village and slaughtered many of the inhabitants before crumbling to dust for no apparent reason.

Eventually negotiations with Xitzin Find'rth finally completed and he provided the means to contact Lord Tenebrous. Sir Du'Gaul, Roriathanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil, and Darlassia Fairseer recited the rhyme and offered the tribute. In response Lord Tenebrous appeared, sated simply "it is done" and disappeared. The elves traveled to check Sil-Galad's crypt and found the elf's corpse finally resting in peace. Several weeks later an elven spirit who called himself Sil-Galad traveled to Ashbury city and apologized to all the elves present. He then left town and has never been seen since. It is believed, and hoped, that Sil-Galad's spirit is finally resting peacefully in the Elder Woods.



*Sil Galad*

## Silva, Glantri, and the Dark Fey

The Unseelie Fey known as Silva had been a bane to Ashbans since before they were trapped in the future at the behest of his liege, the Dark Fey Queen Black Annis. It was he who slew the Planar Carnival Ringmaster and stole the Rhi-Artan stone for the Dark Queen. Further, he battled the Ashbans when they were first pulled to the future and again when they sought to return home. He was known as a skilled and manipulative fey with a particular penchant for taunting the Ashbans. It therefore came as a surprise to everyone when, in May of 603, he resurrected in the Ashbury Healer's Guild as a mortal human. Some present advocated his immediate death, but Royal Guildmaster Onyan Hasseo was present and absolutely refused to have anyone slain in his healer's circle.

Baroness Glenduria Manyave of the Ash Forest and Ducal Magistrate Sir Eros Clearbrook were quickly summoned and they began to question Silva. The former fey claimed that he was changed to a human and slain by the Unseelie Fey court when he refused to participate in a plan to return Black Annis from her imprisonment by the Time Elementals. He claimed to have no details of the plan, save that it involved Glantri. He said that he chose to resurrect in Ashbury so that he could help them to thwart the Unseelie court.

A stumbling block was the former fey's murder of the carnival ringmaster. Sir Eros explained to Silva that while he would not charge him for fighting the Ashbans in the future, as those events had not yet occurred technically, he would still be charged with murder for the ringmaster's death. Silva was outraged, and seemed to imply that he would not aid the Ashbans if he were executed and that they were foolish to risk his life when he could help them. Sir Eros was steadfast and ordered Silva arrested. The following day, after consulting with Duke Frost, Silva was tried for murder, found guilty, and executed. The former fey resurrected successfully.

It is unknown what Silva may have privately divulged to the nobility of Glantri's involvement with the Unseelie court, but days after Silva's execution Duke Frost publicly announced that Glantri was stripped of his ranks of squire and lieutenant of the Windwalkers and considered to be a threat to Ashbury. Baron Morgasander, Glantri's sponsor and commanding officer in the Windwalkers, made no comment on his liege's decisions. Not surprisingly, the former squire Glantri was never seen again.

In September of 603 the mystery of Glantri deepened further. A man came to Ashbury claiming to be Glantri reborn. He held absolutely no resemblance to the former squire, and in fact claimed that the man previously known as Glantri had been a fraud. This new Glantri presented himself before Duke Frost and explained that he, as Glantri reborn, was destined to lead the nation of Galanthia and had in fact raised an army and claimed a portion of the land. He went on to assure His Grace that he wished to outlaw necromancy and slavery. Glantri then sought support from Icenia to reunite Galanthia under his banner.

After hearing Glantri out, Duke Frost announced that as far as he could see Glantri was simply another of the several factions fighting to control Galanthia and that Ashbury would not take sides. Glantri then asked that the former fey Silva be extradited to him for crimes committed in Galanthia. His Grace replied that since Icenia had no treaties with Galanthia or any of its factions he would not extradite Silva and that if he or his men attempted to affect an arrest that they would be in violation of Ashbury law and prosecuted.

Soon reports came in describing a cave that had a strange black mist surrounding it that kept people out. Sir Du'Gaul Mornavor and Lord Jonathan Dragonhart Vardik, both of the Ash Forest, led a force of adventurers there to investigate the matter. Upon arrival they found the new Glantri attempting to find a way to enter the cave. The Ashbans considered their options and ultimately decided that it was not in Ashbury's interests for Glantri to enter the cave. Lord Jonathan and Sir Du'Gaul were about to order Glantri and his men to leave the area when a new force arrived on the scene. The vampire Galanthian General Matros Feratu Lochaber led a force of undead to the cave and began to berate the Ashbans for listening

to "false prophets." The vampire addressed Glantri as "Lewixwil" and began to berate him.

Lochaber told the Ashbans that if they turned Glantri over to him he would take his undead and leave. Glantri did not await a response from the Ashbans and immediately ordered his men to attack the undead. The Ashbans, eager to destroy undead, also attacked Lochaber's force. During the fight Lochaber cast several Death spells upon Glantri in rapid succession, slaying him.

Many observers noted that Glantri vanished immediately instead of clinging to life for five minutes. It was subsequently theorized that Glantri, or Lewixwil, was a powerful Unseelie fey attempting to exert influence over Galanthia as Black Annis and the real Glantri had done. Ultimately the undead were slain and the survivors among Glantri's troops quietly left. Lewixwil was not seen again.

## Penthantos' Gaffe and the Biata

Though my desire is often to attempt to be an impartial student of history and events I admit that I do find myself wrapped up in the affairs of adventurers from time to time. As a result, I sometimes find myself taking part in historical events instead of merely observing and recording them. This is one of those times when my actions seem to have had a larger effect on history.

The fire raining cloud known as Penthantos' Gaffe was originally created in the Icenian Year of 604, 2,703 years before the events of this writing. The wizard Penthantos was considered a great hero for creating the magical mirror that banished the evil Damon Thule and thus ended the Undead Wars. The eccentric, though good intentioned, mage wished to make a grand show for the coronation of King James Defour (though he toiled with the exact formula for years.) The unfortunate result was the fire raining cloud that bears the wizards name. It originally struck slaying thousands and raged for two years until the Icenian Royal Mage's Guild was able to find a way to bottle it. Though effective, the bottle only held for one hundred years so it would periodically break free and need to be rebottled.

When Glantri cursed Icenia it suspended the degradation of the bottle that held it. In the early days of being transported to Amora Fortannis, a group of adventurers stumbled across an old tower that held several functioning golems, but found no treasure save an old delapidated bottle. Chieftain Ator Thunderbringer of the Sand Tiger tribe, thinking this bottle held some form of alcohol, opened it and inadvertently released the Gaffe.

The Gaffe raged across the land for years striking both inside and outside of Ashbury and bringing havoc and destruction wherever it went. With the formula provided by the Icenian Royal Mage's Guild, the assistance of many of Ashbury's adventurers, and a pact with the King of the Ice Elementals, I was able to create a bottle to trap the Gaffe. And after much time spent trying to track the Gaffe, it came to Ashbury in September of 603. Again with the assistance of several of Ashbury's adventurers I was able to trap the Gaffe in the bottle, sealing it for one hundred years.

But something completely unprecedented happened when this phenomenon was trapped this time. The instant I captured the fire cloud, a huge burst of celestial energy blasted from the ground. All the biata present were immediately struck unconscious and examination revealed that their feathers fell out. A second effect of this strange event was that celestial spells were unusually potent and potions stopped working altogether.

Perhaps the largest change that had occurred was the sudden appearance of a stone ziggurat in the center of Ashbury City. As the Ashbans approached it for study elementals of all four elements began to pour forth from it and attack. As the fight raged the biata present were drawn to the structure and inside encountered several beings. Those inside were dressed as humans, gypsies and barbarians but seemed to exhibit the abilities of biata. They engaged in private conversations with the biata.

I theorized that there was never a Great Celestial Change that caused

biata to develop feathers and claws on Fortannis as there was on Tyrra. Therefore, the biata of Fortannis never developed their distinctive feathery eyebrows and appeared to be human. However for unknown reasons bottling Penthathos' Gaffe triggered a Celestial Change. Such a theory held vast implications as before that moment it was believed that biata simply didn't exist on Tar'Navaria before the arrival of Ashbury.

In the following days four more ziggurats, each representing an element were found near Ashbury City. Members of several adventuring groups entered them and defeated the corresponding elementals within. When a fifth ziggurat was found it was entered by the Black Forest. Inside they fought all four types of elementals before encountering a large grey figure that did not appear to be one of the four basic elementals at all and wielded a distinct magical blade. It seemed to know to the pre-Celestial Change biata that had emerged from the main ziggurat and told them that they had meddled in his plans for the last time. Despite being outnumbered the Black Forest was able to defeat the elementals.

As the powerful elementals were defeated the celestial energies began to be released, reducing celestial spells to their usual power and causing potions to work again. When the last one was slain the ziggurats all crumbled to dust and the strange grey figure gave an ominous warning of war to the biata and rifted away.

## The Freejyn Horde Return

While attempting to solve the mystery of the new biata and the elemental changes in September of 603, Ashbury also faced the return of the bloodthirsty Freejyn Horde. With their standard cries of "Hail and Kill" and "Glory to the Red Rage" a huge force of the warriors marched upon Ashbury City. As if the violent savagery of the Freejyn Horde was not bad enough, this newly reborn horde was somehow enhanced with elemental abilities. The Ashbans were able to repel the first few waves but ultimately their numbers and the outright fury of the attack scattered the Ashbans to their *Wards*. The Freejyn Horde told the Ashbans they were searching for "The One" but would not elaborate upon their goals. From their *Wards* the Ashbans were ultimately able to pick off the Freejyn a little at a time and eventually defeat them.

The mystery of the Freejyn Horde's return and the identity of "The One" were solved the following month. In October of 603 The Freejyn attacked Ashbury City again, this time their war cries were supplemented with shouts of "Glory to the Elements." However, instead of boldly marching into Ashbury as they always had before, they suddenly rifted into the center of the city. Several recognized the figure that rifted them in as the same gray figure that had been found in the fifth ziggurat. This figure, known only as The One, called the Freejyn Horde the Plane Touched and announced that he would lead him to wipe out all biata on Tar 'Navaria. This time the Ashbans were able to unify and slay the enemy force to a man, including The One.

Subsequent information found on The One revealed that he was a powerful order elemental that had once been a general of the armies of the order elementals. Thousands of years ago gryphons had enslaved the mortal races of Tar'Navaria and freely wielded chaos magics. A group of stone elves crafted an incredibly powerful sword to fight the gryphons but it was too powerful for a mortal to wield.

To that end they summoned the order elemental now known as The One and beseeched him to use the sword. Although reluctant and ordered not to by his superiors, The One agreed and slew thousands upon thousands of gryphons and biata. Then he learned that not all gryphons and biata were evil. Feeling that he had created a balance between the evil and good biata The One surrendered himself to his superiors and was imprisoned with the help of the four primary elemental planes.

Clearly the Celestial Change that occurred while capturing Penthathos' Gaffe somehow released The One from his prison, though no one knew why he had again resumed the genocide of the biata people.

Shortly after being defeated in Ashbury, another force of Plane Touched, again led by The One, rifted into the Biata Freehold estate of Bloodstone and slaughtered many biata unmercifully. The sudden attack



*Freejyn*

caught the biata completely by surprise and an unusual number of Biata suffered their permanent deaths, even those who had never before resurrected. The biata of Hopewell and Bloodstone began to prepare for war, but acknowledged that defending against an enemy who could appear and vanish at will was definitely an uphill task.

By December of 603 the Plane Touched, again led by The One, led three more lightning attacks against Bloodstone. The death tolls continued to rise exponentially with each attack and permanent deaths were reported in the hundreds, with hundreds more resurrecting. Included among the permanently dead was Hopewell Council member Zandar Norik who had been visiting with the Bloodstone Council to discuss ways of fighting the Plane Touched. The third attack, the one that had claimed Councilman Zandar, took place in the heart of Bloodstone below the city itself. In all three attacks ordinary citizens attempting to take shelter in their houses were summarily slaughtered.

In response to these sudden, viscous, and deadly attacks, Duke Frost Vardik sent ducal forces to attempt to bolster the defenses of Hopewell, Bloodstone and Thrommel, all of which have large biata populations, and invited the leaders of those estates to meet with him. Hopewell Council member Arwa Nordik and Bloodstone Council member Xapano Corak traveled to Ashbury to meet with His Grace. Also answering the call from Thrommel were Vivardi Thardik and Aleona Thardik from the estate of Thrommel.

Upon the arrival of the biata delegations Duke Frost held up the sword Slavetamer, which was recovered through the considerable efforts of Squire Glorianna Wyndancer of Nordenn, and offered to return it to the biata councils or destroy it, if such was their preference. Xapano and Arwa explained that the weapon itself meant nothing and that it was the fact that they were lied to by the nobles of Ashbury that had prompted the biata councils to remove their support from Ashbury. His Grace explained that those nobles were no longer in power and that he hoped that Ashbury and the biata councils could work together. The biata council members seemed amenable to the idea and requested that Duke Frost

destroy the weapon, which was done immediately by Ducal Wizard Sir Indorian Silverleaf.

As the talks turned to the Plane Touched issue a delegation from Thessi arrived completely uninvited and by surprise. They announced that they had heard of the summit and were sent to discuss the Plane Touched as they were ravaging the Thessi Empire as well. The Thessi delegation offered to aid the Ashban biata estates in the form of troops, food and information.

Duke Frost rejected the need for food or troops, but did agree to an exchange of information between the nations in order to defeat the Plane Touched. In spite of the obvious animosity towards the Thessi, the talks were conducted peacefully and all parties left without incident.

## The Defeat of the Crix

The terrible black cloud known as the Crix had long brought slaughter wherever it went. It was known to be from the fey realms where it destroyed and killed all in its path and was feared by all sentient beings on the fey realm. It was believed that the former queen of the Unseelie Fey, Black Annis, brought this horrible creature to the mortal realm.

In February of 603, the Crix was spotted in Galanthia killing many people of all walks of life. In May of 603 it appeared again in Ashbury City and was able to slay then Squire Glantri before being forced off by the adventurers. Upon resurrection Glantri discovered that he had one of the Rhi-Artan stones spirit linked to him.

Finally came October 6, 603. In the alternate future that Ashbury's Adventurers had seen, the Crix attacked Dockside on this day and demolished the town. Until the adventurers returned from the future with a list of where and when the Crix would strike, the Windwalkers never knew when it would strike and were often caught by surprise. However with the Battle of Dockside on the horizon Baron Morgasander had evacuated all non-essential personnel out of the town and stationed the Windwalkers there to battle the Crix. On October 3 the Crix entered the heart of Ashbury City. Most of the city's defenders got the citizens behind *Wards* before taking refuge behind their own *Wards*. The Crix moved off without incident towards the Ash Forest. Despite sending messengers to warn the villages in its path many deaths were reported in South Point and Waterwood.

By this time it was discovered that the pieces of the Rhi-Artan stones were needed to destroy the Crix. As the Crix ravaged the Ash Forest many adventurers scrambled to acquire the pieces. Some of the pieces were acquired by entertaining fey creatures and others were recovered by means of a magical map found in the Ashbury Sage's Guild that took adventurers to items of great power. In short order Baron Morgasander, Paythin Allderin and Sparticous of the Black Unicorns, Squire Gabriel Bruce, Raven Nevermore, and the vansir Maif had recovered six of the Rhi-Artan stones.

The seventh stone was last seen spirit linked to Squire Glantri, but by this time the squire had been declared a threat to Ashbury by Duke Frost Vardik and vanished. Left with no alternative, the Ashbans decided that they would have to try to defeat the Crix with only six of the stones.

By October 5, reports indicated that the Crix was heading towards Dockside. Duke Frost ordered ducal forces to secure Dockside while Baron Morgasander took the Windwalkers to try to attack the Crix before it reached the town. His Grace then placed Sir Jonathan and the adventurer Sparticous in charge of the adventurers and ordered them to assist with the battle. When the Ashbans joined the battle they found many of the ducal soldiers and Windwalkers already slain. Baron Morgasander was still alive and fighting the Crix and the Ashbans quickly joined him and the few soldiers still alive.

Those holding pieces of the Rhi-Artan stones found that they were able to exert power over the Crix and were able to force it into the mist-covered cave on the outskirts of Ashbury, where it was believed that the Crix could be imprisoned. The battle lasted for hours as wave after wave of Crixlings emerged from the cloud to attempt to strike down the Ashbans and drag them into the cloud to be engulfed.

Trapping the Crix required seven people to enter the cave after the Crix was forced into it, the six wielding Rhi-Artan stones and a seventh person that was willing to sacrifice his or her life because the seventh stone was unavailable. Several Ashbans volunteered to make the sacrifice including the former fey Silva. Ultimately Baron Morgasander selected Silva, due to his knowledge of the fey, and the seven entered the cave. Inside, the adventurers were able to use the Rhi-Artan stones to fight and immobilize the six powerful Crixlings. The final Crixling was slain by Silva who later resurrected.

As soon as the final Crixling creature was destroyed the Crix imploded upon itself and expelled all the adventurers. A small streaking comet, believed to be the former squire Glantri's Rhi-Artan stone, crashed into the cloud just as it imploded. Whether the Crix was destroyed or merely banished back to the fey realm is unknown, but its defeat was cheered by all in Icenia and Galanthia.

## The Three Kingdoms

In October of 603 it was announced that the sarr nations of Junjeq, Darclag, and Ukmuznif allied into a confederation calling itself the Three Kingdoms. Kuwo Mushtee, who had been named a lord in the Three Kingdoms and their emissary to Icenia, officially made the announcement to Duke Sir Frost Vardik in Ashbury City.

Lord Kuwo announced that the three nations had continued to meet after the summit in Ashbury in May. In the interest of preventing the destruction of their nations at the hands of the gnolls and Bobthitet the Three Kingdoms united. Lord Kuwo also announced that King Zutclag of Junjeq had been named the speaker for the Three Kingdoms, but that he did not have the power to make policy or give orders without the consent of the other sovereigns. Lord Kuwo went on to explain that necromancy and slavery were outlawed in all of the Three Kingdoms, though since gnolls were not considered citizens anywhere that they were still being held in bondage as they had been in the past.

In addition to the war with Bobthitet, the Three Kingdoms faced the Gnashtooth situation. The uprising of gnolls who demanded a country of their own and were calling themselves Gnolls Organized for Liberation, NOL for short, were making themselves known. Most of the land this group demanded was the southern lands of Junjeq and Darclag. The leader of the group turned out to be none other than Harkan Irontail, the Ducal sheriff in the ten-year future seen by many adventurers. Harkan too was aware of the future timeline and had taken to calling himself Sheriff Harkan.

Shortly after Lord Kuwo had made his announcement, a gnoll came to Ashbury without weapon or aura and explained that he sought peaceful discussion. He claimed he had only a slave name and identified himself as Fido. He requested to speak to a noble of Ashbury and refused to even address Lord Kuwo. Fido announced that the gnolls that were loyal to Gnashtooth wished to form a treaty with Ashbury. They wanted a land of their own and to have the magical weapons of the Gnoll Prophecy returned to them.

Fido did admit that Gnashtooth was working with Queen Nikwik of Bobthitet, but claimed that it was only because Nikwik had promised the gnolls their own homeland after the war. Fido said that if Ashbury convinced the Three Kingdoms to make a similar promise that there would be no need to fight with the necromancers of Bobthitet.

After much discussion between Sir Du' Gaul Mornavor of the Ash Forest, Lord Kuwo and Fido it was decided that Gnashtooth needed to initiate several reforms before negotiations could begin with his faction. Lord Kuwo told them they would need to wear unified tabards so that their faction could be identified, not attack any citizens of Ashbury or the Three Kingdoms, and then send an emissary to Ashbury bearing a white flag with two red eyes (which was a feature of Lord Kuwo's heraldic symbol) upon it. If these changes were made it would show genuine desire for negotiation and further discussion would take place.

Fido stated that he would deliver these demands to Gnashtooth and was escorted safely out of the city.

## More Noble Changes

In December of 603 several changes of Ashbury's nobility were again made. The first order of business was that Baroness Talin Gildenlily of Blythedale had vanished and not been seen or heard from for over six months. There were many theories behind her sudden disappearance, the most viable being that she was taken by the mists and could not return.

Duke Frost did not wish to leave a barony leaderless for such a long period of time so he named Sir Du'Gaul Mornavor as regent of Blythedale with all the powers and duties of a baron.

Sir Du'Gaul took with him his long time friends Sir Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik and Squire Gabriel Bruce from the Ash Forest. A decision that seems to have sat well with Ash Forest Baroness Glenduria Manyave, as there was many internal difficulties on that court.

Baroness Glenduria accepted onto her court Baroness Talin's courtiers, Darlassia Fairseer and Roriathanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil, and began recruiting others of good heart and intention to her court.

## Halloween of 603

Shortly before the Halloween of 603, the enigmatic fey the Candyman, who was both the Baron of Nightmares and Dreams and the King of Halloween, came to Ashbury to warn the adventurers that he felt a disturbance in the dream realm. Shortly after this warning a young girl came to town telling a tale of her nightmares literally coming to life and chasing her. With the help of the Candyman, Ashbans learned that her dreams had been altered and brought to life by Shugah Kane, the Candyman's alter ego. They also learned that Shugah Kane was after an artifact called the Forge of Malice that would allow him to destroy his greatest enemy. It was generally believed that if Shugah Kane accessed the Forge of Malice that he would use it to destroy the Candyman.

As the days of Halloween approached the Candyman's assistant, Pixie Stix, came to the Ashbans and told them that the Candyman was battling Shugah Kane to keep control of his body. At that moment rifts began to appear in the town and spew out various nightmares that attacked the Ashbans. It was also later revealed that a wererat named Vermanon was loose about the town stealthily infecting various citizens with lycanthropy for reasons unknown.

Soon the Candyman himself appeared and informed the Ashbans that they would need to travel to the Abysmal Gorge and visit each of the other Halloween lord's lairs to acquire tokens to the Forge of Malice. The next several days consisted of traveling to the Abysmal Gorge and retrieving the tokens of the Kings of Halloween, while also fighting the various nightmares of the Ashbans that Shugah Kane brought to life. After each token was retrieved one of the Kings would lead an attack upon the Ashbans, though each time the undead were defeated.

Once all the tokens were acquired the Ashbans made for the Forge of Malice immediately. Inside the adventurers saw a huge stone archway, the Forge of Malice, emitting smoke and a malicious light. At that moment a physically transformed Shugah Kane emerged from the Forge and told the adventurers that they were too late; that he had used the forge to destroy the Candyman. As the Ashbans looked on with dismay, Shugah Kane ordered his minions to attack.

It is at this point in history that the shadowy figure Vermanon comes to light. The Wererat was a living denizen of the Abysmal Gorge, though his relative weakness resulted in his constant abuse and harassment by the Lords of Halloween and their minions. Shugah Kane offered him a position of power so that he would never be subjugated again and Vermanon accepted.

He had been infecting the Ashbans to force them to fight the Candyman and their own friends. However, seeing the camaraderie of Ashbury and their fondness of the Candyman caused the wererat to have a change of heart. As Shugah Kane and his minions attacked, he activated the taint in the infected Ashbans and ordered them to use the lycanthropic power he'd instilled in them against Shugah Kane.

Even with the additional powers of the couple of Ashbans enhanced by Vermanon, they were still quite demoralized at the apparent death of the beloved Candyman. As each adventurer grimly prepared his or her blades and spells to do battle to avenge the fey there was further activity from within the Forge of Malice. With the words "A good dream is hard to kill," the Candyman, also physically changed, emerged. Heartened that the Candyman was not destroyed, the Ashbans charged into Shugah Kane's lines and quickly destroyed his minions and drove him off.

On Halloween day itself the Ashbans were again forced to choose a lord of Halloween for the year. The Candyman made it quite clear that he had no interest in the Abysmal Gorge or serving as the King of Halloween ever again. This delighted the other lords who immediately demanded that the Ashbans make a choice. Ultimately they chose the lord they felt to be the least dangerous, Jack O' Lantern.

The choice was no sooner made when Muckhead declared that he was tired of voting and that the King of Halloween would be decided "the old fashioned way." With that a mass melee erupted between the Lords of Halloween, with the Ashbans stuck in the middle. The heroes, rightfully despising all the undead, slew each of the kings and their minions, including Jack O' Lantern.

Just when the Ashbans were sure all was settled until the next Halloween, Shugah Kane rifted in with an emissary of the Queen of the dream realm Mythlandria. The emissary announced that the Queen had decreed that the barony of Dreams and Nightmares would be split into two baronies. The Candyman would rule the realm of Dreams and Shugah Kane would rule the realm of Nightmares. With that the figures vanished back to the dream realms to tend to their own business, and the Ashbans breathed a sigh of relief that their business with the Abysmal Gorge was finished for another year.

## Gnoll Prophecy Saber Found

The staff and the dagger of the Gnoll Prophecy were recovered and hidden by the Ashbans in the year of 603 but it was not until a year later that the saber was found. A wondrous map created by the wizard Pentanthos was discovered in the Ashbury Sage's Guild. It would periodically take six individuals to a location where a powerful magical item was located. In one such instance, six Ashbans found themselves in an auction house with the saber having been bid upon by Harkan Irontail, the same gnoll who had been Ashbury's High Sheriff in the alternate future, and the leader of the faction of gnolls called NOL.



*Lhasa Skamar and Kuwo Mushtee*

Apparently Harkan and Gnasetooth had come to some form of alliance because he announced that he intended to take the blade to the prophesied leader.

Unfortunately the Ashbans did not have the fifty gold sovereigns on hand to outbid Harkan, but they were able to dissuade him from taking the weapon to Gnasetooth until he could come to Ashbury and speak with Lord Kuwo Mushtee of the Three Kingdoms. True to his word, two months later Harkan arrived in Ashbury peacefully to meet with Lord Kuwo and the beginning of a deal was brokered. The saber was not given to the Ashbans, but Harkan did agree neither to give it to Gnasetooth at that time.

Lord Kuwo explained to Harkan that if the gnolls would ally with the Three Kingdoms there would be land to spare in Bobthit. He made it clear that before such an alliance could ever occur that the gnolls would have to renounce necromancy for good. Harkan explained that it would be a tough sell to the gnolls, but he seemed to be willing to attempt to convince his people of the wisdom of it. He left peacefully to take Lord Kuwo's offer to his people.

## The War of The One

The winter of 603-604 saw more merciless attacks in the estate of Bloodstone by the Plane Touched. The genocidal horde slew biata as they slept in their homes and even burned down a school killing those inside. Though Duke Frost Vardik and Baron Morgasander of Nordenn had sent additional troops to assist the defenders of Bloodstone they were not especially effective since The One rifted the war bands around making it difficult to anticipate where and when they would strike.

Squire Glorianna Wyndancer of Nordenn and Sir Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik of Blythedale offered additional assistance to the people and military of Bloodstone, but the Plane Touched continued to cause untold havoc.

In a devastating event, Duchess Dara Vardik was slain in a sudden attack by The One in May of 604. Her Grace and her entourage were traveling to Bloodstone on a humanitarian mission. While on route the Plane Touched rifted in and attacked the group, killing them to a man. Although Duchess Dara's spirit was strong, The One was able to permanently kill her as he had many biata since his appearance.

To honor the memory of Her Grace, Duke Frost changed the name of the estate of Deathwatch to Dara's Grace.

Late in May the Plane Touched struck Ashbury again interrupting the annual Ducal Tournament. Since the tournament was mostly attended by Ashbury's most skilled and prominent adventurers, they immediately engaged the Plane Touched in combat.

Duke Frost, still mourning the fresh loss of his beloved wife, launched a personal attack directly at The One with a ferocity that shocked many. His Grace also used the power of the Land Bond to weaken the Plane Touched and caused them to be less able to resist elemental magics. The Ashbans too were not indifferent to the loss of Duchess Dara and fought fiercely to avenge her. As a result the Plane Touched were quickly killed to a man.

In a far less successful conflict with the Plane Touched the enigmatic biata General Brenden Merdik led his armies into the Plains of Rage to attack the genocidal army. A goodwill expedition led by Squire Glorianna weeks later to aid the poverty stricken villages on the Plains of Rage was captured by the Plane Touched. While in captivity they saw Brenden as well as several of his soldiers personally executed by The One. Neither Brenden nor any of the soldiers killed by The One resurrected. Squire Glorianna's expedition too was executed to a man, but fortunately all of them resurrected to tell the tale. A few weeks after Squire Glorianna's expedition was slain the attacks on Bloodstone and Hopewell resumed.

By the winter of 604 the Plane Touched had begun using panther-ghasts attuned to biata in their deadly strikes. However, it had been observed that The One was focusing his attacks in the mountains. It was surmised that he was looking for something, but no one could determine what.

## Ashbury's Diplomatic Achievements under Duke Frost

Duke Frost Vardik oversaw several diplomatic initiatives that came to fruition in 603 and 604. They first began to become known in September of 603. His Grace announced an alliance with the dark elf nation of Tarzatterranzan. The specifics of the treaty were negotiated by Tarzatterranzan's ambassador to Ashbury, Xitzin Find'rth T'Varian of House Ryujima.

In the spring of 604, King Kelanor IV of Trollsgate began to expand his kingdom into the lost lands of Trelheim. His first step was to invade the estate of Oliver, which had been overrun by monsters since former Baron Radric Hallifax abandoned Trelheim. In a fairly short, though bloody, campaign Trollsgate's dwarves were able to rid Oliver of the trolls and other monsters that had taken up residence there. However, this placed the Trollsgate army on the border of Mishrak Fens, an estate that was in part inhabited by a faction of lizardmen loyal to the lizardman chief Mishrak who had an alliance with Ashbury.

Further complicating the situation, Mishrak's faction had an alliance with Tarzatterranzan as well. Duke Frost obviously wanted to keep any bloodshed from taking place among Ashbury's allies and invited all three parties to send representatives to Ashbury for a summit to settle the matter diplomatically. On May 8 of 604 the summit took place in Ashbury City. King Kelanor personally represented Trollsgate, Taji Ryujima and Volverin Wendela represented Tarzatterranzan and a lizard-woman named Arsora represented Mishrak's faction of lizardmen. Duke Frost personally hosted the meeting.

Mishrak had long wished to secure the estate for his people some time, aided by their dark elven allies. King Kelanor, meanwhile, stated that the population of Trollsgate had grown too large for the territory they had and that they needed to expand. In light of this need and the fact that Trelheim had been overrun for years prompted Trollsgate to begin annexing land.

The summit lasted several hours and involved many redrawing of territories to suit all parties. Fortunately the debates were all civil and the only raised voice came occasionally from the boisterous King Kelanor. When all was said and done an amicable agreement was settled. His Grace agreed to cede the estate of Oliver and the southern part of Mishrak Fens to Trollsgate as well as several Trelheim estates that were still overrun to provide a corridor for the dwarves to expand into the Plains of Rage. The dark elves were granted the rest of Mishrak Fens as a freehold and that estate was included into the barony of Nordenn. The dark elves agreed to stay out of the breeding areas of Mishrak Fens and otherwise form an equitable arrangement with Mishrak and serve as a liaison between the lizardmen and Ashbury. Mishrak's faction were still considered to be allies of Ashbury, though lizardmen in general were still not granted citizenship status as many other factions of lizardmen were still hostile. The summit ended with all parties relatively satisfied and war averted, and was considered a complete success.

## The Defeat of the Undoer

During the summit talks between Mishrak's lizardmen, Trollsgate, Tarzatterranzan, and Ashbury, a group of hostile lizardmen who called themselves the Blood Dragons attacked Ashbury several times. In each assault the lizardmen were led by the Undoer, who was now hosted by a powerful lizardman.

Recalling that the spirit of Kendrick Ironsides aided the adventurers of Ashbury in the future timeline, an investigation was launched to attempt to find the body of the fallen dwarf and perhaps enlist the assistance of the spirit early. Unfortunately, all that could be found was the remains of Kendrick, and the Ashbans were left to face this new undoer without the aid of the dwarf.

With the aid of the lizardman Mishrak, whose faction was a long and bitter enemy of the Blood Dragons, the Ashbans discovered a way to

travel into the hammer to destroy the Undoer itself, rather than simply slaying the host it used. But before Mishrak could send the Ashbans into the hammer, its host had to be killed. To that end the Ashbans again met with the Undoer and the Bood Dragons in combat and the two mighty forces clashed on Gwendolyn's Field. After long hours of bloody combat against the lizardmen, hammerwights and the Undoer itself, the creature was finally felled.

With the Undoer slain, Mishrak utilized an unknown magic and sent the adventurers into the Undoer's Hammer. Inside the hammer, the Ashbans fought a horde of hammer wights and a black crackling entity, believed to be the Undoer's actual spirit. The spirit proved to be quite formidable and several Ashbans were struck too dizzy to fight by the hammer wights, making the situation increasingly dire. Fortunately the Ashbans were able to draw upon their resources and slay the Undoer's spirit. As soon as the creature was killed adventurers were all forcibly ejected from the hammer.

Gathering their bearings the Ashbans again found themselves on Gwendolyn's Field and again facing the Undoer and a horde of hammer wights. In short order a *Disarm* spell was cast upon the Undoer and all of the hammer wights changed into dwarves, lizardmen, humans and even an elf. The newly liberated people immediately turned on the Undoer and savagely attacked him. As soon as the Undoer fell before this onslaught both he and the spirits faded from view. And thus ended one of Ashbury's greatest and longest lasting threats.

## A New Nation of Dwarves

In May of 604 a most momentous discovery was unearthed. The expansion of Trollsgate into the estate of Oliver and beyond unearthed the remains of an ancient dwarven city. There was no record among the sages or tales of Trollsgate about such a lost city so many archaeologists and historians were immediately interested in this discovery.

An agent of Trollsgate named Creshin Oakhew originally made this historic discovery. With the permission of his liege, King Kelanor IV, he sought a small group of Ashbans to aid him in searching the labyrinth. The Trollsgate hero Gilwing and Creshin led a small expedition through the extensive subterranean caves. Inside they found hordes of horribly cursed dwarves who constantly attacked the expedition. Bravely risking themselves, they pressed forward to investigate the ruins and found what appeared to be dilapidated city. When news of this find broke, many sages theorized that the dwarven civilization had existed beneath the Kingdom of Icenia and that when the Curse of Glantri struck Icenia that it somehow caused a great calamity to the dwarves as well.

Later the same month a second expedition was commissioned by King Kelanor, this time led by Braveroar Stone-hammer of Dwarrenagar. The expedition again had to fight their way past the strange dwarves that the previous expedition had encountered. The group made their way to another large stone hall where the elf Redcloud, a member of the excursion, spied a large crystal vessel. When he examined it hundreds of the shadowy dwarves emerged from it and began to swarm the adventurers, who were forced to flee for their very lives. Unfortunately the dwarven spirits were not content to allow the expedition to simply flee and pursued the adventurers back to Ashbury City, demanding the entire way that the Ashbans return the Vessel of Light.

In collaboration with Dean Calwan Graem of the Bardic College, Braveroar launched a series of expeditions into the city to attempt to gather information about the civilization and the Vessel of Light. Specifically targeted for investigation were libraries and record halls. Two subsequent excursions, both led by Dean Calwan, were sent and uncovered pieces of a stone tablet that had been scattered across the city. When pieced together they detailed a means to re-light the strange dwarven vessel A third swift excursion led by Braveroar retrieved the Vessel of Light itself so that it could be restored.

After two days of constant attacks by the dwarven spirits the necessary spells were gathered and cast into the Vessel, causing it to shine with the light of the day.

When the strange dwarves again attacked, Braveroar attempted to offer them the vessel but they seemed unable to come close to it. This did not stop the creatures from continuing to attempt to kill the general populace though.

During the fighting, Braveroar led a small group of adventurers to the dwarven city. When they entered the city all of the cursed dwarves in Ashbury vanished and appeared instantly in the city and attacked Braveroar's group. The combatants in Ashbury quickly surmised what had happened and marched to the underground city to aid the besieged group.

Again led by Braveroar, the Ashbans charged into hall and battled the endless waves of dwarves. Braveroar wielded the Vessel of Light, which continued to shun the cursed dwarves, while he bellowed at them that the Ashbans sought only to aid them. In short order he had found a podium at the head of the hall and placed the vessel on it. The instant the vessel touched the podium there was a brilliant flash of light that restored the dwarves to flesh and blood.

The dwarves explained that their city was called Stonehollow and, after hearing the tale of their misfortune and the Ashban efforts to solve it, thanked the adventurers. Food and vital supplies were sent to Stonehollow but as of this writing no official diplomatic relations have been established between Ashbury and Stonehollow. The discovery of the dwarven civilization has drawn the intense interest of several historians of Icenia though.

## The Goblin War

The gray goblins, believed to get their enhanced abilities and intelligence from the machinations of the Unseelie queen Black Annis, began their war against Ashbury in 602. The leader of the gray goblins, a powerful necromancer called The Mastermind, had apparently read about the future timeline in which he had been a powerful liche and sought to become one again.

To that end, in late May of 604 he somehow discovered a way to summon parts of himself from the future so that he could acquire both the powers and knowledge he had in that timeline. However something



Attacking goblins

went wrong with his ritual and the parts of his future self were scattered around Ashbury in the form of a cloak, heart and brain. Fortunately word of the Masterminds plans quickly reached the Ashbans, who also sought to acquire these items to keep them out of the Mastermind's possession.

A patrol led by Squire Glorianna Wyndancer of Nordenn stumbled upon one of the items; the Mastermind's brain. Shortly afterwards the Cloak of the Mastermind was also unearthed. Both of these necromantic items were destroyed on the Forge of Purity. Unfortunately no amount of searching could unearth the Heart of the Mastermind.

While the search for the heart continued ducal scouts quickly reported to Regent Du'Gaul Mornavor of Blythedale that the Mastermind was spotted performing a ritual and was guarded by powerful undead on the outskirts of town. However reports also indicated that a second force of the Masterminds undead was approaching the town from a second direction as well to distract the Ashbans from the ritual.

Sir Du'Gaul assigned a force of adventurers to guard the town while the rest of the adventurers marched on the Mastermind. Sir Du'Gaul placed Koshinara "Koshi" Murakami in command of the defense of the city and led the offensive group himself. The horde of undead was daunting, but Koshi's group, with the sudden assistance of Luigi Marcangelo of the Black Forest at a critical moment, was able to destroy all of the undead sent against the city.

At the same time Sir Du'Gaul's group quickly found the Mastermind and handily dispatched the large force of powerful undead. The Mastermind himself, however, was safely in a *Circle of Power* performing a ritual. One look in the circle and it was clear that the heart had been found by the Mastermind and that he was using it in the ritual. In spite of the best efforts of the adventurers, including an attempt to destroy the Mastermind's Circle of Power, the gray goblin completed the ritual. Unfortunately it seemed that the ritual was partially successful and the Mastermind changed into an undead skeletal creature, but clearly not a liche.

After announcing that he had all knowledge of what had happened in the future the creature Spirit Recalled away.

The following month several Ashban adventurers traveled to the estate of Roderick's Rest in Trelheim to prevent the Mastermind from taking control of a fey mound located there. All research indicated that this was the mound that was being used to transform the goblins into the fey enchanted grey goblins. While there it was learned that the Ashbans could travel into the fey mound and reverse the process that changed the goblins into their gray forms. The benevolent wild fey Hannah offered to lead the Ashbans into the mound so they could cut off the goblins' power source.

After a series of fey challenges the Ashbans had to pass to even get into the mound and then more challenges still to acquire nine shards of the mound that were needed to seal the power source. Though two shards eluded the Ashbans, they were able to acquire seven.

Then the Ashbans were confronted with a strange dark robed figure that told them they would need to return to the mortal world with the shards and perform a Destroy Celestial Magic ritual on the Galanthian sigil on top of the mound.

The figure said that all the shards would be needed or the effect would not be complete and that the caster of the ritual would instantly be Obliterated.

Surprisingly it was the former fey Silva that offered to perform the ritual, even though he was well aware of the risks involved, but the schemer's benevolence was part of a greater plan. Just the previous night Silva had tricked the adventuring group known as No-Code into obtaining a fey crown for him. Over the vehement objections of some, most notably the Amani Ranger Scarn Whiteleaf, Silva was permitted to perform the ritual.

With word that goblins were marching on the mound the Ashbans gathered their forces and marched to meet them. While Silva performed the ritual, a fierce battle with the grey goblins raged. When the ritual was finally complete the goblins all became green before the adventurers' very eyes and were subsequently defeated with ease.

However, Silva's machinations paid off and with the power of the fey

crown that he had obtained he became a fey once more. Before rifling away Silva announced that he would return to Ashbury to return the "favor" of helping him become fey again. In addition to Silva becoming a fey, the victory was further marginalized by the fact that two of the fey shards needed were absent, which meant that some of the goblins would remain grey.

Mere weeks after this victory, a horde of green goblins and undead attacked Ashbury city. Leading the charge was a green goblin calling itself the Mastermind. The assembled Ashbans looked on as the Mastermind, now bereft of his fey powers and intelligence, demanded "shinies." The Ashbans quickly attacked the goblins and slew the Mastermind permanently, thus bringing the Goblin War to an end.

## Further Gains into Trelheim

In 604 a band of Ashban Adventurers traveled into Trelheim, mostly to destroy the gray goblins, as has been chronicled. However while there, the nobles leading the excursion were approached by Maximillian Farhill, one of the former leaders of Deathwatch who had aided that estate's reintegration into Ashbury.

Maximillian informed the Ashbans that there was a force of three thousand soldiers, called the Western Border Brigade, in the nearby estates of Kurash and Bristol that had served Evendarr and Requin but wished to join with a nation. The Ashbans said that they were willing to meet with their leader, Sir Padrin Darrius, to discuss the matter.

Sir Padrin was a well respected noble who had been a Royal Knight of Evendarr and had a good reputation. Introduced by Maximillian, Sir Padrin held an audience with the assembled Ashban nobles in Trelheim. The key stumbling block to Sir Padrin swearing fealty to Icenia was his oaths to King Mykel and Evendarr. Squire Gabriel Bruce of Blythedale seemed to have the most effective argument when he told Sir Padrin that several of Ashbury's current nobles and leaders, himself included, were Evendarrian and found many Icenian morals and traditions to be the same.

After several hours of discussion Sir Padrin said he was convinced, but asked for Ashbury's assistance to cement the goodwill. The Evendarrian knight explained that one of his lieutenants, a skilled assassin named Marcus Nescopeck, had been able to surreptitiously enslave nearly half of his brigade. Sir Padrin feared that if he announced an alliance with Ashbury, Marcus would use his own men against him. The Ashbans agreed to assist, and Squires Darlassia Fairseer and Rorii-athanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil, as well as the foreign elves Talon and Michiko, agreed to pose as Sir Padrin's bodyguards at a previously arranged meeting.

As expected, at the meeting when Sir Padrin announced that he wished to join Icenia, Marcus attacked and ordered several of Padrin's enslaved soldiers to attack as well. The enslaved soldiers were subdued and purified and Marcus attempted to flee but was chased down and slain by Sir Padrin and Rorii. The assassin died permanently, and Sir Padrin was able to take control of his command once again.

The following month Sir Padrin met with Duke Frost Vardik. The knight announced that he was willing to swear fealty to Icenia, but had only two demands: that he be allowed to continue to serve the people he had been assigned to protect as knight and that the Western Border Brigade not be decommissioned. Duke Frost announced that the conditions seemed reasonable but that they should both speak with King Gareth and Queen Sidraste.

## Noble Changes of 604

As the year 604 drew to a close His Grace Duke Sir Frost Vardik made two more noble changes in Ashbury. The first was the public knighting of Roriiathanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil, who was to serve as a knight of the Ash Forest under Baroness Glenduria Manyave.

The second announcement was that the estates of Bristol and Kurash had been added to Ashbury as ducal estates and that they were to be ruled by Sir Padrin Darrius, who was made a ducal knight. Likewise the West-

ern Border brigade was added to the ducal forces and also commanded by the Evendarrian knight. Sir Padrin, for his part, announced that he had researched the actions of Count Requin Dragor and was ashamed that he could be so duped or serve someone so evil and that he wished only to serve the people of Ashbury.

## The Defeat of Mithrauko

The threat of the Kanoredhil had plagued Ashbury and the elven nation of Imladar for years. By the fall of 604 the Kanoredhil had long besieged the Imladar capital of Alacondras with an army of 50,000 to 100,000 trolls, orcs and ogres. Although the Imladar elves were holding out and launching small attacks and raids upon the enemy forces, they siege still held strong.

To further antagonize the situation Mithrauko frequently traveled to Ashbury to try to convince the population of elves to join with him and occasionally slay Mystic Wood Elves. The visits were frequently met with violence by the Ashbans as Mithrauko was a deeply hated enemy and his assaults on Ashbury have been well documented. In spite of the best efforts of many Ashbans, most notably Scarn Whiteleaf who had a particular hatred for Mithrauko, a way to slay the Kanoredhil had not been discovered. What had been discovered was the true story of Mithrauko and how he had once been an Imladari elf named Indorian who fell under the sway of the Minyakan, the leader of the Kanoredhil and ruler of Dur Namarie.

In a clever twist to disseminate this information to the adventurers of Ashbury the Barony of the Ash Forest made this story into their entertainment portion of the annual ducal tournament. It seems that word got back to Mithrauko because he launched an immediate attack on the city and seemed especially wrathful. Although Mithrauko was killed several times (once nearly single-handedly by Scarn) the true way to weaken his spirit was unknown so he just continued to reform somewhere else and attack.

Eventually Mithrauko calmed enough to parlay with several of the elves of Ashbury. They tried to convince Mithrauko that he had been beguiled by the Minyakan but he only responded that one would need to meet the Minyakan to truly understand. To that end Sir Rorriathanderhil volunteered to meet the Minyakan. Mithrauko said he would arrange such a visit and left. Weeks later Sir Rorii vanished in a flash of blue light without warning or explanation.

Several days after Sir Rorii's disappearance, the Imladar Prince Gilthalion Thantellin approached several of the elven adventurers of Ashbury. He explained that his sister and liege, Queen Celwen had seen, through ritual magic, Sir Rorii atop a great tower crackling with energy. Prince Gilthalion tasked the elves present to travel to rescue him. Gilthalion himself was unable to actually travel to Dur Namrie because of the powerful Proscribes against his family there, but was able to transport the Ashban elves into the heart of the Kanoredhil nation.

The Ashbans were teleported to the base of a huge tower, which they immediately entered and ascended. They fought their way past several constructs, golems and Kanoredhil officers to reach Sir Rorii at the top. At the apex of the tower they found a room comprised solely of magical force and Mithrauko, Sir Rorii and the Minyakan behind an inordinately large circle of power.

The Minyakan tempted the Ashbans with many boons of elvenkind, as he had apparently been doing with Sir Rorii before the arrival of the other elves. The Minyakan offered Rorii the chance to serve him as a Kanoredhil, but the stalwart knight refused. In response the Minyakan produced a seed he had somehow acquired from the Spirit Tree, and gave Rorii one last chance to reconsider. Again the knight refused and the Minyakan ordered Rorii to choose one of the assembled Ashbury elves for Obliteration. When Rorii refused this too Mithrauko recommended Scarn, as he and the Kanoredhil were bitter enemies. The Minyakan accepted and, using his own powerful magics and the seed, Obliterated Scarn instantly.

Before Scarn's empty, smoldering clothes had even hit the floor, the Minyakan again demanded Rorii's allegiance and threatened to destroy

each of the elves present starting with the knight's beloved, Squire Darlassia. Met with only silence the Minyakan prepared to Obliterate Darlassia as well when Mithrauko, visibly struggling to disobey his servitude to his liege, suddenly struck the Minyakan down using a powerful ancient ritual.

Whatever magic Mithrauko used was powerful indeed as it seemed to destroy the Minyakan utterly. All that was left of the powerful Kanoredhil was some bubbling remains. Mithrauko then rifted the elves, Sir Rorii included, back to Icenia.

The following day Mithrauko returned, though he was visibly much older. The powerful rituals that had kept the Kanoredhil alive for ten thousand years were rapidly failing. Before dying of old age, Mithrauko parlayed with the elves of Ashbury one last time.

He revealed that the armies of Dur Namarie had fallen into disarray and that the siege on Alacondras quickly broke. Additionally a strange blue dome sprang up around Dur Namarie and none could enter it, even the Kanoredhil who had been outside the empire.

Several weeks later Prince Gilthalion returned to Ashbury bearing the secret to destroy the "spirit tree" that had been left in Ashbury by Mithrauko so long ago. Gilthalion explained that a ritual had been placed upon his sword to destroy the tree, the same one that had destroyed the Minyakan as it turned out. Handing his sword to Scarn, Prince Gilthalion granted him the honor of destroying the ritual on the tree. The magic of the ritual enveloped the tree briefly before vanishing and leaving the tree as it had existed before being tainted. And with that last bastion of Kanoredhil influence on Ashbury purged, it seemed that the threat of the Kanoredhil was also ended.

## The Joining of the Bloodlines

Loscaros de Morganna, the ancient gypsy, dragon mage vampire that terrorized Ashbury for centuries was finally defeated in October of 604. Ironically it was the efforts of one of Ashbury's other bitter enemies, the Kanoredhil, that led to the defeat of this menace. When fleeing the Minyakan's tower the Ashbans were given a small bundled object by Mithrauko. Prince Gilthalion of Imladar took the item and thoroughly examined it, finding that it was an ancient and rare artifact called the Crystal Blossom Ambuscade.

In October Prince Gilthalion held a secret meeting with the nobility of Ashbury and explained that the item could be used to trap Morganna within it forever. The nobility decided that the intractable Squire Gabriel Bruce, who had his own sordid history with Morganna, would have the honor of actually activating the trap. It was not long before unrelated events prompted Morganna and his new mate (the former fiancé of Squire Gabriel) Arianne to lead a force of undead into Ashbury City.

As expected, the assembled nobles and adventurers under the command of Baron Morgasander promptly attacked.

While Baron Morgasander and some of the adventurers attacked Morganna to keep his attention, Squire Gabriel slipped close and activated the Crystal Blossom Ambuscade. Morganna was sucked into the device, which promptly shattered and flew into the strange elemental portals that were in the city at the time. Arianne let out a scream of rage and recalled her spirit. Although history does not indicate that past Crystal Blossom Ambuscades shattered when used, Morganna has never been seen since the events of that fateful day.

Unfortunately it did not take long for Arianne to lay claim to Morganna's "empire." It was well known that Morganna had beaten Baron Morgasander's efforts to recover the Book of the Dawn and laid claim to it, but evidence began to surface that indicated Morganna had studied it before his destruction. According to notes recovered, it told of a way to unite two distinct bloodlines of vampires. Morganna was contemplating joining his own Tyrran line of vampires with those of Tar 'Navaria, although he feared the potential ramifications.

The very night of Morganna's defeat strange spectral red figures appeared in Ashbury city and announced to all that "The Joining" was at hand and beckoned the citizens to follow and watch. The creatures were intangible and could not attack or be harmed. Against their better judgment

many of Ashbury's adventurers followed the creatures to an abandoned warehouse in a dilapidated part of town. Inside the Ashbans found a thick fog and three adjacent circles of power. Inside the circles was the Book of the Dawn and several items that indicated that a ritual was soon to take place.

Before long several figures materialized in the circles. Arienne and several of her powerful undead dragged a beaten and bloodied General Matros Feratu Lochaber into one of the circles and a terrified teenage girl into another.

Despite the vocal entreaties not to join the bloodlines, from both the assembled Ashbans and Lochaber himself, Arienne merely replied that she had nothing left to lose and began the ritual. Arienne then mixed the blood of Lochaber, herself and that of the innocent girl into a cup and continued with her magic.

Then, with a senselessly brutal display, she struck the girl with the Dagger of Morganna, obliterating her. As the adventurers looked on in rage, the poor girl soon reformed, permanently dead. With her ritual complete, she drank from the cup and forced the rest of the concoction down the throat of Lochaber.

At first the two powerful vampires writhed on the floor in pain before both rising and announcing that they felt more powerful than ever. Suddenly, and without warning, the strange red wraiths began to appear everywhere, except that they were now very physical and began to attack the Ashbans. Making matters worse undead began to break through the floorboards of the old building and climb in to also attack the Ashbans.

Several of the adventurers were quickly laid low, and the few that were able to survive were forced to flee by the sheer numbers of the undead. The wraiths, called blood wraiths, were able to infect the downed citizens turning them into mindless thralls that obeyed Arienne and Lochaber. The vampires then led the wraiths and unfortunate adventurers into Ashbury to continue the slaughter.

What followed was a long and slow combat of strike and retreat tactics by the few Ashbans not slain or tainted. At one point it seemed nearly all the adventurers in town were possessed. Fortunately the small pockets of resistance were able to cure many of the adventurers and turn the tide on the blood wraiths.

By the time the town was again in control of the Ashbans Arienne and Lochaber had grown board and left, and nine adventurers had been forced to resurrect.

## Galanthia Reunited

In the waning days of 604 several Galanthian prophets began to announce that a Great Concordance would arrive heralding a new future for Galanthia. However like so many amazing and unusual events, this Great Concordance seemed centered in Ashbury. On the first of October four strange rifts opened in the heart of the city each seeming connected with a specific element; one of Stone, one of Water, one of Death, and one of Order.

It did not take long for Galanthian leaders to begin to arrive in Ashbury claiming to have been drawn there to be infused with the power of the rifts. The first was Sintara Mox, a member of the Sabin Descry, the caste that acted as bureaucrats and administrators of Galanthia. She claimed that she wished to rid Galanthia of slavery, prophecy and necromancy and bring peace to her land. The Ashbury nobility decided that they did not seek to become involved in Galanthian politics and allowed Sintara to touch

the Stone rift and the power of it seemed to infuse itself into her body.

The second of Galanthian leaders to arrive did so in a much less peaceful manner. A large group of Swords of Lore, the military caste of Galanthia, and undead began to attack the city. During the combat the vampire general Matros Feratu Lochaber snuck to the rift of Order and seemed to infuse with it. As soon as he was finished he ordered a retreat and he and the Swords of Lore withdrew.

The third Galanthian, a member of the Devorra caste named Varlisa Tor arrived peacefully. The Devorra caste functions as judges and magistrates in Galanthia. Tor parlayed with the Ashbans and claimed that she did not seek to rule Galanthia, but knew she had to fuse with the Water elements to fulfill her destiny. Again the nobility of Ashbury sought to stay out of Galanthian internal affairs and allowed her to do so.

The fourth and final Galanthian leader to arrive was a hedge prophet named Daress Vale. He announced that it was his destiny to see Glantri reborn and to sit on the Galanthian throne. The Ashbans were more reluctant to Vale to bond with the portal of Death, but ultimately decided to allow him to do it and vacate the city.

The day after Daress Vale left, a huge portal of all four of the elements opened in Ashbury and deposited all four Galanthians into a huge vortex of stone, water, order and death that no one could enter or exit from. Inside the four figures began to parlay. Lochaber declared that he would rule Galanthia, which immediately drew opposition from Vale and Mox. In the face of their opposition Lochaber immediately cast *Prison* spells upon them and turned to Varlisa Tor. The Devorra merely shrugged and said her destiny was to remain a Devorra regardless of who ruled Galanthia. Lochaber seemed to find this acceptable and slew Daress Vale and Sintara Mox, causing the vortex to explode with such a force of both physical and magical power that all watching were blown

off their feet and all Wards and Circles of Power were blasted to uselessness for an hour. Aided by the vampire Arienne, Lochaber and the Swords of Lore attacked the Ashbans, giving them a difficult battle. Eventually the Ashbans prevailed though Lochaber and Arienne escaped alive.

Within weeks Lochaber was able to marshal his armies of Swords of Lore and defeat the various factions in Galanthia. Marshal Law was declared and all the political dissidents were utterly crushed. Whatever new power Lochaber had gained from the Order portal and the joining of the bloodlines had allowed him to conquer Galanthia in record time. In June of 605 Arienne was crowned the Empress of Galanthia by the Devorra. With Lochaber and his Swords of Lore under her control, she maintained an iron grip on Galanthia.

## Halloween of 604

As expected, as All Hollow's Eve approached, the barriers between Fortannis and the Abysmal Gorge weakened appreciably, allowing all manner of terrors into the mortal realm. Also anticipated was the inevitable contest in which the lords of Halloween would force the Ashbans to select a king. However 604 was different, for the Ashbans had a plan.

Dean Calwan Graem of the Bardic College believed that he had developed a ritual to strip the Kings of Halloween of their powers permanently, and Ashbury's adventurers were only too happy to help. Dean Calwan informed the Ashbans that they would need to acquire items of significance to each of the kings of Halloween for the ritual. Evidently each of the items in question housed a portion of their spirits and would allow them to build a somewhat permanent lair on Fortannis, but using



Arienne

those items in his ritual would allow Dean Calwan to trap their spirits.

The adventurers were forced to travel to the manifestations of each of the undead King's homes that had appeared in Ashbury to get the tokens: A pumpkin patch for Jack O'Lantern, a huge swamp for Muckhead, a massive pyramid for Yech, and a grand opera house for Moan n' Groan. Although the heroics of all the adventurers were impressive and brave, special note should be made of the vansir smith Ulthoc in the Opera House. At the cost of his own resurrection, Ulthoc was able to charge through the ranks of the enemy to cut down a powerful undead who was casting a devastating *Chaos Storm* upon the Ashbans.

The final King's realm, that of Queen Nachtface, rifted the Ashbans to some sort of grand ball that the darkness queen was holding. The details of what occurred are unclear, but the Ashbans were able to obtain Nachtface's token.

The timing of the Ashbans vanishing from the city was particularly ill timed however, for while they were gone there was a sudden explosion of undead and diseased creatures in the warehouse district. Ashbury's High Sheriff, Sir Harrison Ryat, had his hands quite full trying to keep the monsters in check without the aid of the Ashbans.

On the last day that the barriers between the Abysmal Gorge and Fortannis were open, Dean Calwan and Sir Rorriathanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil led an expedition into the Abysmal Gorge itself to recover a large black throne adorned with skulls and bones, the Throne of the High King of Halloween. Dean Calwan explained that the throne would allow him to link all five of the undead lords together in his ritual to destroy them. An old warehouse outside the heart of the city, and away from most populated areas, was decided upon for the location of the ritual. Since it was expected that the Kings of Halloween would send undead to attempt to stop the ritual, the building was *Warded* and many adventurers made ready for combat.

As Calwan performed the ritual, a foul smoke began to emerge from the throne and obscuring everything in the circle. Suddenly the circle, and all within it including the throne and Dean Calwan, vanished. Left in Calwan's place were the Kings of Halloween, but mortal and stripped of their powers and the spirits of the Abysmal Gorge. They were not hostile in any way and spoke at length with the Ashbans.

In short order the mystery of where the powers of the Halloween lords went was solved. A huge horde of undead attacked Ashbury led by a large figure that bore the appearance of all five of the Kings of Halloween in one body: that of Dean Calwan. The creature that was once Calwan called itself Mishmash, and was a devastating juggernaut on the field of combat. Its claws tore apart the sturdiest of armors with a single swipe and it launched arcane energies effortlessly. Even worse, Mishmash seemed to be nigh invulnerable and laughed at even the mightiest of attacks. Only the passage of time seemed to save the Ashbans, for as the battle raged on the barriers between Fortannis and the Abysmal Gorge again strengthened, pulling Mishmash and his army back to their homeland.

Some began to immediately question Calwan's motives and claimed that he had intended for the ritual to transform him into such a monstrous being. Others, including the council of regents at the Bardic College, claimed that Calwan was a good man and that the ritual must have somehow gone awry. Also enhancing the mystery was the fact that Calwan's offices and private quarters at the Bardic College, as well as the Ancient Icenain portion of the library, were destroyed in a strange fire in early November.

## The Icenia-Glenrake War

Ashbury struck the first blow in the Ashbury-Glenrake war strongly and decisively. In May of 604, Duke Frost Vardik and Baroness Mathilda Romwing of the barony of Romwing led elements of the Ashbury Ducal Army and the Romwing Baronial Army into Glenrake in a raid upon the undead forces. The Ashbury Contingent, the Oliver Phalanx, specialized in stealth maneuvers and quick attacks, which aided considerably. The attack resulted in the death of Colonel Angus Deathgroom and Sir Thomas Wraithborn and the destruction of many thousand undead crea-

tures. By comparison the Icenian troops reported remarkably few losses.

In March of 605 Duke Frost announced a call to arms to strike Glenrake in the following public announcement:

*To the Good and Brave People of Ashbury and All Lands,*

*I beseech all people within our lands take heed. I beseech all people throughout all lands, both friend and foe, take heed. Make ready and become aware that the moment has arrived to bring the battle against the foul and corrupt rulers of Glenrake to their very door. No longer shall we allow the taint of necromancy and evil to exist upon the borders of our fair sister duchy of Brittington. No longer shall the good and true people of Icenia, nay the good and true people of all civilized lands, tolerate this blight upon the fair face of Fortannis.*

*I call upon the good and true people of all lands to join with me upon this righteous and inculpable endeavor. I call upon the exemplary commonage throughout the world to march beneath my banner into the cankerous heart of depravity and there extinguish it. I call upon the virtuous community to bring a glorious war to the wicked and corrupt. Together we shall bring a war unrepachable in its cause and undeniable in its prowess, a war in which there is naught but the justice and truth of our crusade.*

*The unselfish and exalted deeds yet unborn shall be passed on in legendary tales to the future generations of all lands. Sages of all lands shall fill the pages of their annals with the bravery, honor and passion of all those that attended and served this cause. Our allies and all those of intrepid and chivalric heart shall praise our deeds for years uncounted. Our enemies shall quake in their dank strongholds, knowing they are merely biding their time until they too must face our shining wrath.*

*Do not face answerless the day when your children shall ask where you were when evil and tyranny was expunged from Glenrake. Face that day with tales of your glorious exploits upon the fields of honorable battle. Face that day with examples innumerable of what it means to be a true hero. Face that day able to say that you stood with the Duke of Ashbury, vanquishing the foulest of abominations so that the world might be free. Tell them you were there when the dark citadels of Glenrake were toppled. Reveal to them a lesson that no words may confer, only deeds most true.*

*Thou shalt be always and everywhere the champion of the right and good against injustice and evil.*

*In Service to Icenia and All Good Peoples,*

*Duke Sir Frost Vardik*

On March 11, 605 several Ashban adventurers answered this call to arms and traveled to the town of Hewitt, in the barony of Romwing, located in the duchy of Brittington. The adventurers were considered to be conscripts in the ducal army and were slated for special elite missions

Their first assignment came as word arrived of two of His Grace's phalanxes in trouble. The Red Feather and the Black Feather, both of the Griffon's Claw legion, were trapped in the small hamlet of Foy by Glenrake forces under Baron Jonathan Phantomheart, the liche baron of Coleby. The Ashban phalanxes had been surrounded for days and were beginning to run short of supplies. The adventurers of Ashbury were ordered to break Phantomheart's lines and free the phalanxes.

The Ashban adventurers met the Glenrakes on the bridge to Foy and engaged in a fierce combat. The Glenrakes attempted to keep the Ashbans bottled up on the bridge, but the adventurers were able to burst through the undead forces and destroy Phantomheart's minions. Among the Glenrakes killed were Dame Regina Quietus, Sir Tyrus Apparition and Baron Jonathan Phantomheart himself.

The next opportunity for the adventurers to prove themselves in the war came only a day later. On the front lines a contingent of Glenrake soldiers was attempting to flank a ducal phalanx that was engaged in battle with other Glenrake forces. Baron Roric de Haunt, the baron of Lesser Coleby, and his knights Sir Gunther Phantom and Dame Ankhara Bloodspine led the Glenrakes. Duke Frost announced that he would lead the adventur-

ers in an effort to cut off de Haut before he could strike. His Grace led the Ashbans directly into combat with the Glenrakes, who were quickly and easily destroyed.

Unfortunately the Ashbans did not face only the Glenrakes on the field of battle. Groups led by Sir Edward Killingbone and Sir Harold Nighthaunt, both former nobles of Moorgrave who served the treasonous Baron Elliot Darkshade, had massed a large force of undead near the border of Hewitt in anticipation of an invasion of the Moorgrave estate of Masterson. The Ashban Elite unit was tasked with attacking this force to stop the invasion before it could start. In spite of the efforts of a spy who sought to confuse the Elite force, the Ashbans handily defeated the renegade Moorgrave force.

With the distraction of the battle against the rogue Mooregraves, a Glenrake operative infiltrated the ducal camp and created a Vault of the Bloodless. Ashbury spies, as well as previous knowledge held by the Ashbury Sage's Guild, informed the Ashbans that a *Destroy Magic* ritual would destroy the Vault. Duke Frost provided the scroll and components for the ritual and tasked Sir Rorii of the Ash Forest to see the Vault destroyed.

While mages were preparing enough *Circle of Power* spells to be able to perform the ritual, undead occasionally poured out of the Vault and attacked the camp. The following morning Sir Rorii led the mission to destroy the foul crypt. Many casters created the *Circle* and Squire Glorianna Wyndancer of the court of Nordenn performed the ritual while being fiercely protected by many Ashbans.

Some of the undead from the Vault were able to crawl up from the ground outside the *Circle of Power* and had to be slain by the Ashbans outside the *Circle*. To make matters worse, Glenrake Colonel Angus Deathgroom and a fellow death rogue attacked to create a diversion.

Several brave adventurers including Paythin Allderin, Joshua the traveling gypsy turned Mystic Wood Elf, and a small handful of adventurers were able to keep Deathgroom at bay and even slay him three times even though the foul undead kept regenerating and continuing to attack. Ultimately the ritual successfully destroyed the vault, and Deathgroom was captured and slain yet again. All told, Colonel Angus died about four times during this battle.

The turning point of the initiative out of Hewitt came with a final bold initiative, an Ashban assault on Castle Glenmoor, the capital of Glenrake. Duke Frost led the battle himself, assisted ably by Baroness Mathilda and Duke Rogan Exeter of Moorgrave.

As many historians are well aware, Duke Rogan was cursed to continue to assault Castle Glenmoor every year until he successfully captured it, and that he could never die until he had achieved that feat. Unfortunately every one of Duke Rogan's attacks always failed. It was hoped that the Ashbans would be able to achieve what the Moorgrave's had not been able to.

Glenrake's duke, Eddard Lichigate, was linked to a *Circle of Power* in Castle Glenmoor that allowed him to live forever, but never stray from the castle under any circumstances.

By the time Duke Frost's elite contingent of adventurers arrived, the assembled armies of Moorgrave and Ashbury had already surrounded Castle Glenmoor. Many powerful catapults and trebuchets had already breached parts of the outer walls and several Glenrake sorties emerged to battle the Moorgraves and Ashban soldiers. The Ashbans were aware that Glenrake troops were en route to reinforce the castle so any reserve soldiers held by the Ashbans or Moorgraves were ordered to intercept and stop them, leaving the actual bloody work of taking the castle entirely to Duke Frost's Elite unit.

Frost led his troops through the broken walls and up the causeway, the only entrance or exit from the mountain castle. The Ashbans quickly overran the perfunctory undead stationed outside the gates and reached the castle's huge portcullis. The massive gate was lifted in an incredible display of strength by Duke Frost, Squire Gabriel Bruce of Blythedale and myself, Squire Gabriel and I having had our spirits placed in golems for the battle and using the superior strength afforded to us. While the portcullis was being raised the Ashbans rushed into the gateway and immediately

engaged the undead within while the portcullis was quickly spiked open.

The fighting in the castle was incredibly fierce, and the Ashbans faced not only very powerful undead soliders, but also many Glenrake nobles commanding the undead including Sir Douglas Lichigate, the duke's son, Dame Sonja Wraithborn, Dame Regina Quietus, Sir Tyrus Apparition and of course Duke Eddard Lichigate himself.

The fight was hard and bloody and Sparticous of the Black Unicorns and Koshinara "Koshi" Murakami of the court of the Ash Forest were both engulfed by Eddard Lichigate and forced to resurrect. Duke Frost, aided by Regent Sir Du'Gaul Mornavor of Blythedale, and Air Raksa and Morgan of the Black Unicorns, was able to get into the keep itself and destroy Lichigate's *Circle of Power*. Frost was able to perform such a powerful feat with the aid of Queen Celwen of Imladar, who had performed a *Destroy Magic* ritual among the enhancements of the sword that Duke Frost specially had made for the campaign. With the *Circle* destroyed, Duke Eddard's immortality was ended, and the undead duke would now have his spirit weakened when he was slain and could now be permanently killed.

Heartened by this victory, the Ashbans continued to grimly fight on in spite of having run out of *Life* spells. Duke Eddard was fought to his permanent death, and though most of his nobles escaped, they were slain many times and had their spirits considerably weakened. The Ashbans then began to continue to fight the rest of the minions as Ashban reinforcements, commanded by Sir Harrison Ryatt began to arrive.

Once the banners of Ashbury, Moorgrave and Romwing went up over the battlements of Castle Glenmoor the morale of the Glenrake armies totally broke and the undead soldiers fled. Several of the abominations were run down and destroyed as they attempted to flee.

The following day Duke Frost held a ceremony to honor the valor of those who attended his call to arms and personally honored several groups and individuals. Among them were the Black Unicorns, who were awarded Duke Frost's personal shield that had been made for the campaign, for bravery and valor. Further, Sparticous was inducted into the Order of the Gryphon, a ducal award given to commoners for particularly noteworthy bravery. Duke Frost then awarded his sword, which had also been made for the campaign, to Garuda the high ogre, for relentlessly fighting the undead and being willing to give his life for the destruction of the abominations.

The group known as No-Code was also awarded the Order of the Gryphon award for their selfless actions during the campaign. Finally, Sir Harrison Ryatt gave his personal shield to Sir Rorii and requested that he allow it to be used by good and noble people throughout the lands.

The Ashbury Elite unit was thanked for its service and disbanded. Those brave Ashbans that made up the unit made their way home, content in the knowledge that they had liberated an entire nation from its necromantic overlords. I personally consider it an honor to have served with them and taken part in the war.

## The Resignation of Morgasander

In the winter of 605, Baron Morgasander of Nordenn resigned his position. The baron was of a race called the kontymr. It was long thought that the rest of the kontymr had been wiped out by the kanoredhil.

In addition to his noble duties, Morgasander had long sought out others of his race that may still be alive. It seems that the baron succeeded, and learned that most of his race, including his family, existed on a different plane of existence. Morgasander was forced to take immediate opportunity of a chance to travel to be with his people or lose the chance forever. He hastily sent word to Duke Frost Vardik to secure permission to resign, which was accepted, and left Fortannis.

Duke Frost found himself with a lack of qualified nobles who wished to take the position. Therefore, Duke Frost named himself regent of Nordenn until a suitable noble was able to take on the baronial throne.

His Grace kept Squire Glorianna Wyndancer as the seneschal of Nordenn, and accepted the oaths the gypsy had made to Morgasander.

## Tarvin Plathus and Immodius Alter Time

Again I find myself writing of historical events in which I seem directly involved instead of an impartial observer. The trouble seems to be linked to a brilliant wizard, and distraught father, named Tarvin Plathus, and the manipulations of a rogue time elemental named Immodius. Immodius was originally charged with preventing and fixing paradoxes, but somehow he became corrupted and learned how to enhance his own power whenever a paradox occurred. After intentionally causing paradoxes to enhance his power, he was imprisoned by the Time Elementals. Unfortunately in the year of 605, Tarvin Plathus, after permanently losing his young son in a troll attack, found a way to summon Immodius, freeing the elemental from his imprisonment. In an effort to get Tarvin to create more paradoxes, Immodius stole and gave him the Staff of Endless Time, a powerful token that would allow the wizard to control and travel time.

Unfortunately, Tarvin's son seemed destined to die, for each time the boy was saved a new catastrophe would occur, forcing Tarvin to try again. These constant paradoxes caused Immodius to continue to grow stronger, but also began to cause damage to the time stream as a whole. The events came to a head during the spring of 605.

In the preceding weeks figures from Ashbury's past began to appear, as well as individuals from Ashbury's future and even timelines wholly different from ours. The events began to make sense to the Ashbans when Tarvin Plathus appeared in the middle of a crowded Dragon's Flagon, stopped time, and seemed about to kill the crow scavenger known as Bran. In the nick of time an elderly elf rifted in and used a stunning display of dragon magic to fight Tarvin off. The Ashbans were shocked to learn that this mystery figure was none other than me from 800 years in the future. This figure shall be referred to as "future Cedric" for the purposes of this text.

Future Cedric reported that in his time Ashbury was a decimated wasteland that because of the degradation of the Time Stream. After many centuries of investigation and study this future version of me was able to determine that the cause of the damage was Tarvin altering time. After more decades of study to find a way to travel time future Cedric was able to chase and confront Tarvin.

Future Cedric had determined that one of the Talon Scrolls would be needed to summon the Staff of Endless Time away from Tarvin. Without this powerful boon the mad wizard would lack the power to travel in time and could be defeated. Future Cedric, using his dragon magic to open a limited portal through time, took the Court of Blythedale to Mourn's lair just before she was defeated and the Talon Scrolls were discovered. From there the Ashbans were able to pluck the needed scroll and escape. After examining the scroll future Cedric announced that specific components were needed to perform the ritual. The Ashbans again rose to the challenge and traveled to a variety of times to attempt to acquire the needed components. Fortunately the Ashbans were successful and the items were quickly collected.

In the meantime, Immodius created more havoc by kidnapping random Ashbans and using a second artifact, the Wheel of Time, to randomly cause the Ashbans to grow older or younger. Adding to the confusion, many figures from the past, future and alternate times came to Ashbury city and several Ashbans vanished and were forced to relive parts of their own pasts.

As soon as the final component to summon the Staff of Endless time was acquired, future Cedric summoned the staff to him and, unable to control the vast power, rifted away. In short order Immodius and Tarvin appeared to threaten the Ashbans, but quickly fell to arguing with one another. Tarvin claimed that Immodius had not helped him save his son, and the time elemental berated the wizard for losing the staff. In short order Immodius cut Tarvin down and unleashed a horde of paradox beasts upon the Ashbans. Twice the elemental stopped time and brutally cut down several adventurers. Immodius was ultimately slain after administering a death blow to the orc Air Raksa. The unfortunate orc was cursed

with the Dagger of Lempur, a situation that turned out to be a boon in this case. As Immodius plunged his blade into Air Raksa's heart, the magic dagger struck down the time elemental, who immediately vanished.

Mere seconds after the battle future Cedric returned to Ashbury along with a female time elemental. The pair held a bound and defeated Immodius before them. The Time elemental held the Staff of Endless Time, and informed the Ashbans that Immodius would be dealt with and would not trouble them again. The time elemental and future Cedric thanked the Ashbans before vanishing. As of this writing the full extent of the changes made during this chaotic time are unknown.

## Noble Changes

In the Spring of 605 Sir Du'Gaul Mornavor resigned as the regent of Blythedale. The reason for this resignation was never publicly released but sources indicate that neither Du'Gual nor Duke Frost was especially pleased with the way the other interpreted the Code of Chivalry. Du'Gual retained his title as a Lord of Ashbury and continued to tirelessly fight the duchy's enemies. Duke Frost named his court wizard, Indorian Silverleaf, as the new baron of Blythedale.

Mere days after the resignation of Du'Gaul, Glenduria "Goodberry" Manyave resigned as the baroness of the Ash Forest. Like Du'Gaul, Glenduria cited personal reasons for stepping down and retained her title as a Lady of Ashbury. Lady Glenduria returned to her position on the Amani Council and continued to serve the people of Ashbury in that capacity.



*Roriiathanderhil Colaenlothrodarhil*

Just before resigning, Lady Genduria named Sir Rorriathanderhil "Rorii" Colaenlothrodarhil as her heir. Duke Frost accepted her decision and swore him in as Baron the same day that Glenduria resigned. Rorii's appointment created an outcry from some segments within the Ash Forest from those who were not happy about having an elf who was not an Amani or Kiergani sitting on the baronial seat. Teril Belayson, the founder of F.O.I.L., turned his considerable eloquence and following to speaking out against Rorii.

## Panselore Destroyed

In October of 605 the long standing enemy of Ashbury, Panselore, was finally destroyed permanently. As is recorded through history the undead being claimed that he was the rightful duke of Ashbury, and had attacked the Duchy many times over the years in an attempt to "claim his title." In a multi-pronged attack Panselore's chief minions, whom he claimed were barons of Ashbury's four baronies, led a massive assault on Ashbury City while Panselore himself led an attack on the Ducal manorhouse. Both groups were defeated, but Panselore and his minions resurrected and retreated to hidden lairs in the duchy and began preparations for another assault.

Fortunately, a series of lucky events allowed many of Ashbury's adventurers to track down several of Panselore's minions in their lairs and attack. A group led by Lorehammer Smith of Trollsgate was able to destroy the undead creature that called itself the baron of the Ash Forest and recover the ancient sword Moonshadow, which has special significance to the dwarves of Trollsgate and had been stolen by the undead minion. A second group led by Guardsman Daedric Kregst'yan was able to ambush a group transporting the spirit bottles of several undead and acquire a map indicating where Panselore had built and fortified a keep within the duchy.

Using the intelligence gathered Ashbury's nobility came up with a bold plan. Duke Frost fielded a large force to boldly march towards Panselore's keep and was able to draw the undead out of the fortified keep along with most of his forces. A second force, comprised mostly of adventurers and led by Baron Rorriathanderhil of the Ash Forest, assaulted the mostly empty keep while Duke Frost's forces did battle with Panselore.

The plan worked well, though the battle was quite costly. Several of Rorii's forces were forced to resurrect, including the baron himself. However the sacrifices were not in vain, the Circle of Power that held Panselore's bottle was destroyed during the fighting and rushed back to Ashbury City, where it was immediately destroyed on the Forge of Purity. With Panselore's bottle captured, the Ashbans acted on the orders of Sir Harrison Ryat and retreated back to Ashbury City before Panselore realized his fortress was under attack and returned.

Duke Frost's contingent, while successful in keeping the bulk of Panselore's forces out of the keep, was suffered many casualties. Over one hundred ducal soldiers were slain in the fight, and Duke Frost himself was even cut down and forced to regenerate on the field of battle. The troops were able to rally, however, and ultimately cut Panselore down. Inexplicably the genhorde's spirit came to the Ashbury Healer's Guild, perhaps because it was the last place its bottle was before being destroyed. The nobles present decided to attempt to resurrect the creature so that it could be captured and obliterated, but were elated to see that Panselore's spirit instead shattered, indicating its permanent death.

Both the undead minions of Panselore and the Ashbans regrouped their forces before the final battle of this campaign was joined. The undead fortified themselves in Panselore's keep with surprising speed, and the Ashbans destroyed the tainted structure once and for all.

The Ashban strategy was well planned and the battle went incredibly well for the Ashbans. The main force was led by Baron Rorii and Lady Darlassia Fairseer, with Lord Ivan Drake and Lord Daniel Star Grimsby leading skirmishing units to soften up the lines of the enemy. At the same time that Baron Rorii launched his assault a group led by Sir Harrison and Lord Du'Gaul Mornavor, and aided by a group of elite Amani Rangers, assaulted the rear of the keep. The undead were caught by surprise and were utterly decimated. Duke Frost ordered a monument built to honor

those that lost their lives against Panselore, and to celebrate the defeat of such a dangerous enemy.

## Halloween of 605

As the spring of 605 drew to a close All Hallows Eve, and the horrors that come with it, preyed upon the minds of the citizens of Ashbury. The previous year saw all of the Lords of Halloween being housed in the body of Dean Calwen Graem a powerful juggernaut of necromantic power that now called itself Mishmash.

As the people and defenders of Ashbury attempted to make preparations for the defense of the city from the inevitable onslaught of undead Mishmash launched a bold attack on the Ducal Manor house. Mishmash and his undead utterly destroyed the ducal guards on hand and the foul being single handedly defeated the ducal court and even Duke Frost himself. The next phase of Mishmash's plan involved performing a powerful ritual that transported parts of Ashbury City directly into the Abysmal Gorge.

Pedratos, an unfortunate elf who had once been inhabited by Yech the Sickness King, confirmed for the Ashbans that they were indeed in the Abysmal Gorge. Even worse, the earth circles throughout the city ceased functioning.

Those who were killed by the onslaught of undead found that instead of resurrecting they returned as ghostly specters. It was soon learned that any living being forced to live in such a state could reclaim their spirits by locating a stone where their essence was being held. Many Ashbans were forced to exist in such a state until their spirit stone could be reclaimed.

Through his connection with the Abysmal Gorge Pedratos soon had a vision of Baron Indorian Silverleaf of Blythedale, who had been captured along with the ducal court, being held in the Pyramid of Sickness. The Ashbans assembled under the leadership of Dame Glorianna Wyndancer of the Court of Nordenn, the only noble in Ashbury, and launched a rescue attempt. The Ashbans battled past several undead and stormed the pyramid. Inside they found Baron Indorian, unconscious and in the process of being made into a mummy so he would be forced to assume the mantle of the new Sickness King, and the general of Yech's forces.

It seemed that there was no way to rescue Baron Indorian and save him from becoming an undead lord, but the undead general proposed a duel to Pedratos. If the elf should win, Baron Indorian would be returned, but if Pedratos was defeated he would reassume his mantle as the Lord of Sickness. Pedratos immediately refused, wanting to never again be forced to be such a foul being.

However several Ashbans, clearly wanting their baron back and believing that Pedratos' stout heart would allow him to win, pressured the elf into reluctantly accepting the challenge. In barely the time it takes to write of it the undead general plunged his blade into Pedratos' heart, felling the brave elf. Pedratos reformed in the pyramid as Yech the Sickness King and cut the throat of the prone Baron Indorian, who later reformed as a spirit. The Ashbans retreated to the city to lick their wounds and determine their next step.

Baron Indorian, after reclaiming his spirit stone, ordered Dame Glorianna to hold the city, attempt to find the rest of the ducal court and rescue them if possible, and attempt to find a way out of the Abysmal Gorge. Meanwhile the baron attempted to gather the ducal forces that had been pulled in the Gorge with the rest of the city and rally them.

A mission led by Lord Ivan Drake and Lord Du'Gaul Mornavor was able to rescue High Sheriff Sir Harrison Ryat from the land of Jack O' Lantern, and the adventuring group known as the Wings of Polaris were able to rescue Squire Trevor Donovan from Moan n' Groan, although nearly the entire group and the squire himself were killed and came back as spirits.

Sir Harrison and Squire Trevor assisted Baron Indorian in gathering the ducal forces and setting up refugee camps to keep the citizens safe from the undead. Sir Padrin Darrius found himself in Muckhead's swamp and attempted to fight his way out. He was slain by the overwhelming numbers and returned to Ashbury as a ghost. He reported to Dame Glorianna and she led a successful assault on the swamp to recover Sir

Padrin's spirit gem.

Intelligence reports came to Dame Glorianna indicating that Ducal Magistrate Sir Eros Clearbrook was being held in the opera house of Nachtface. The Ashbans stormed the stronghold but after a long and difficult fight with Nachtface, her undead and several glass golems, the mansion turned up empty. Sir Eros had awakened in the bondage of Nachtface and had killed himself to escape. Using a charge of his Regeneration ritual, he resurrected safely on the Prime Material Plane.

The next challenge before the Ashbans was to locate and rescue Duke Frost. A messenger from Yech sought a private meeting with Dame Glorianna about the location of His Grace. Though reluctant, Glorianna went to the meeting and returned with the location of the duke: the castle of Muckhead.

Glorianna assembled a strike team of the most skilled adventurers to venture into the castle to recover the duke while the rest of the Ashbans fought Muckhead and his forces. The plan went off flawlessly and as soon as His Grace was extracted Glorianna called a fighting retreat. Glorianna brought up the rear of the retreat with members of the court of Nordenn. Dame Glorianna was stabbed in the leg and went down. As the attacking undead swarmed upon her, Glorianna ordered her court to escape rather than try to save her. Fortunately she used a charge of her regeneration ritual to avoid becoming a specter.

Duke Frost was addled and confused from his experience and missing several years of memory. Baron Indorian took command of Ashbury while Frost recovered and discussed options of escape from the Abysmal Gorge.

The adventurers proposed using a Planar Gate ritual to escape to the Prime Material Plane, even though it meant leaving many buildings behind. Donations from the Sage's Guild, the Mage's Guild and Lord Du'Gaul's household resulted in enough resources for two Planar Gates. One set was cast by Mage's Guildmaster William Lenox to evacuate the refugees and I opened the second gate in Ashbury to evacuate the adventurers.

During the ritual the city was besieged by Mishmarsh and a horde of undead. When the gate was finally opened the Ashbans found more undead on the Prime Material Plane. Fighting their way past the undead, the Ashbans escaped the Abysmal Gorge.

The Child of Camulus Kerrigwen Melite erected a circle of power around the Planar Gate to prevent Mishmarsh and his army from following the Ashbans through. Unfortunately Mishmarsh merely laughed at Kerrigwen's maneuver and rifted onto the Prime Material Plane to continue to fight the Ashbans, though many of the undead were unable to cross through the gate. As the year before, Mishmarsh proved to be a juggernaut of destruction and was making short work of many of the adventurers.

During the fighting Yech the sickness king rifted into the fray and called a parlay to allow the Ashbans to choose a king of Halloween. Although loathe to deal with the undead, the Ashbans knew that if they selected Yech, he would have the power to send Mishmarsh back to the Abysmal Gorge. Since Yech could be defeated and Mishmarsh could not, Yech was elected the king.

A seething Mishmarsh was banished back to the Gorge and Yech, promising a year of sickness and plague for his election, also returned to the Abysmal Gorge.

For several days the veil between the two realms remained weak and many undead continued to cross the barrier and attack Ashbans. Baron Rorii of the Court of the Ash Forest and his court were conspicuous in the defense of Ashbury as were Lords Daniel Star-Grimsby and Ivan Drake, who led Ducal Army units in forays to combat the undead, and Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik led a special undead hunting military unit known as Andrew's Hammers from Blythedale in the fighting.

As with many rituals, after five days the one that Mishmarsh's minions performed to transport parts of Ashbury City to the Abysmal Gorge expired and the buildings were returned to the Prime Material Plane, although many were burned and destroyed. Duke Frost's memory slowly returned and the reconstruction process began on the damaged parts of

the city. Many adventurers soon questioned the decision to pressure Pedratos to risk being remade as Yech again. All who had encountered the kindly elf noted his kindness, generosity and how haunted he was by his unfortunate history.

And the weight of Yech's final words, that Ashbury would suffer a year of plague and sickness, weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of many Ashbans as the year of 605 drew to a close.

## Lifting of the Lempur Curse

For over three hundred years the people of Lempur suffered a terrible burden. Cursed by the mad prophet Glantri at the same time that the Vacarran Pirates and the kingdom of Icenia were, Lempur received the worst of the three great curses. Their lands became a nightmare of swirling black mists and horrific monsters that chilled even the most hardened warrior to the bone. The few survivors of the land had the flesh and muscle melt from their hands and the most terrible luck follow them wherever they went.

The survivors of this once great nation were reduced to banding together in nomadic tribes and constant persecution from others because of the bad luck that they unwittingly took with them wherever they went.

For over three hundred years the unfortunate Lempur people suffered this fate, but in the Ashban year 606, the curse was finally lifted. The tale of Lempur's salvation is a somewhat complicated one, and centered around two events in Ashbury.

The first was the cursed dagger of Mendorant Lempur finding its way into the hands of the orc adventurer Air Raksa Menggosok Tarang. The dagger was a truly powerful artifact but brought the orc terrible luck and slowly began to drive him mad. Air Raksa would have liked nothing better than to be rid of the cursed artifact but was it linked to his spirit. Efforts were quickly made to learn everything possible about Lempur, the curse, and the dagger.

The second event driving the cure of the Lempur people was the arrival of a Lempur into the adventuring class of Ashbury. Daedric Kregst'yan came to Ashbury to find the adventurers already attempting to determine a way to save his people and was a welcome addition to the efforts. Daedric and his companion Cora Scaldren quickly moved to the forefront of the efforts to restore the Lempur people.

The fey prince Silva offered, as a means repaying the favor he claimed to owe to the Ashbans for unwittingly allowing him to become fey again, to help restore the Lempur people. When his motivations were questioned, Silva claimed he had a great hatred of his brother Glantri, and would be all too happy to attempt to remove one of his legacies on the mortal realm. The nobility were loathe to deal with Silva but ultimately they accepted when the fey threatened to grant a boon to a random commoner who would not know enough to avoid dealing with an unseelie fey. Daedric and Cora were notably displeased, feeling that a dark fey created the problem and could not be counted on to remove it and that Silva specifically was not to be trusted. In spite of their objections Cora and Daedric, along with the assistance of Olivia Delrune, Morgan Smythe and the Sage's Guild, continued the investigation.

Research found that the dagger was likely given to Mendorant Lempur, one of the great lords of Lempur before the curse, by a seelie fey. The dagger was said to be of great power, but there was no mention of the dark and shifting tendencies that it exhibited upon poor Air Raksa. It was speculated that when Lempur, and its inhabitants were cursed to live in darkness as a twisted monsters, that so too was the dagger changed by the curse.

Silva announced that a series of fey marks and the Dagger of Lempur were needed, as well as at least one Lempur, to successfully undergo the fey ritual to cure the Lempur people. Air Raksa had the dagger linked to his spirit but a problem soon arose with the marks and Air Raksa's allegiance. When the unfortunate orc was cursed with the dagger he was a member of the adventuring group known as Black Forest.

As such, many of his comrades accepted fey marks in an effort to attempt to cure the Lempur and, by extension, their friend. Unfortunately,

as the marks were nearly collected a very public and very nasty split took place within the Black Forest. A large number, including Air Raksa, left to re-create the Company of the Black Unicorns, while some remained with the Black Forest. This split the number of marked Ashbans between the two hostile groups.

Air Raksa claimed that he could not control his rage long enough to cooperate with the necessary ritual to perform the cure as it would require gathering in close proximity to those on the Black Forest who had received the fey marks. Silva offered to take the dagger and spirit link it to someone else, but His Grace Duke Frost ordered that Air Raksa refuse and, if he could not bear to be near those he hated for the time necessary, to take the dagger and travel through the mists to another realm where the dagger would not follow. Since the Dagger of Lempur was required to cure the Lempur, it was unknown if this development would cripple the effort altogether.

Finally in May of 606 Silva announced that he was prepared. The Ashbans had gathered the Fey marks required, and Silva was able to pluck the dagger from the mists and force it upon Sparticous of the Black Unicorns. The dark fey also constructed a bridge through the fey realms into the heart of Lempur, where the ritual needed to take place. Unfortunately many adventurers were lured from the bridge by will o' wisps, and a weakened force arrived in Lempur. The people of Lempur themselves were cursed and mindlessly defending the land with all their might.

Led by Barons Rorii and Indorian, the Ashbans engaged in a long standoff to attempt to reach the location for the ritual, a small field of grass that somehow survived the destruction of Lempur. Several times the Ashbans reached the field, but each time were forced back, unable to hold the lines.

Eventually a side deal was made with Silva, and the necessary group was rifted to the proper location by the fey. Part of the ritual required a Lempur to be slain, and Daedric willingly filled that role.

The ritual was successful, and the Lempur people stopped attacking. They were bewildered and unaware of the previous three hundred years. As of this writing it is unknown if Daedric Kregst'yan resurrected or willingly suffered his permanent death so that his people would be released from their long nightmare.

## **Galanthia's 'Humanitarian' Efforts**

In the Spring of 606, Galanthis began engaging in a series activities it described as "humanitarian." The empire was led at this time by the vampire Arienne the First and faithfully served by her top general, Matros Feratu Lochaber, who was also a vampire.

In April of 606 a Galanthian ship docked in Ashbury and her captain asked to see Councilman Zephrin Alfild and Councilwoman Kerrigwen Melite, the leaders of the Children of Camulous ever since their homeland was decimated by Dur Namarie. After the defeat of the 'elves' of Dur Namarie the Vacarran Pirates claimed and occupied the Isles of Camulous, capturing and enslaving many of the inhabitants.

When Kerrigwen and Zephrin met with the captain a formal statement was read in which Galanthis offered the Children of Camulous a military alliance against the Vacarran Pirates and then, as a show of good faith, delivered nearly a dozen Child of Camulous slaves who had been somehow acquired from the Vacarrans.

His message delivered, the captain was reminded of the state of hostilities between Ashbury and Galanthis by Sir Harrison Ryatt and ordered to leave.

Shortly after the curse of Lempur was lifted, the previously uninhabitable lands of that nation sprang to life. The unfortunate spirits there likewise were returned to life.

With their infrastructure in disarray and her people confused Lempur had a difficult road ahead of her. Galanthis began sending food and building supplies, under heavy guard, to Lempur and rumor held that the Empress Arienne was personally overseeing some of the humanitarian effort. As of this writing the greater plot behind Galanthis's apparent acts of kindness are unknown.

## **The Gnasetooth Prophecy**

As chronicled earlier, the prophecy for the resurgence of the Gnolls called for their leader Gnasetooth to acquire four magical weapons that would merge into a single artifact that would make the wielder unstoppable. Gnasetooth had acquired the axe, but the Ashbans had managed to secure the dagger and staff and safely hide them from the gnolls.

The saber became a more complicated matter. In the Spring of 604 the Map of Penthanthos transported a six Ashbans, including myself and Luigi Marcangelo, to an auction house where the blade had just been sold to the gnoll Harkan Irontail. Known to the adventurers who had traveled to the false Galanthian future, this younger version of Harkan had just procured the blade. He was convinced to travel to Ashbury and speak to Lord Kuwo Mushtee of the Three Kingdoms before turning the blade over to Gnasetooth. True to his word, Harkan arrived in the city and held negotiations with Lord Kuwo.

The Gorbe lord had a natural hatred for Harkan, one which was clearly returned, but the two were nevertheless able to hammer out an agreement wherein Harkan would not turn the sword over to Gnasetooth and would put his support towards the defeat of Nikwik and Utclag and end the war among the Sarr nations. In return, once the Three Kingdoms were victorious the gnolls would be granted their own land and sovereignty, provided they absolutely outlawed and severely punished the act of Necromancy.

Harkan agreed that he would withhold the saber, but admitted that convincing his people to agree to such a deal would prove to require more time.

Two years later, in May of 606 the tale reached its conclusion. New versions of the prophecy began to appear, indicating the new hidden locations of the weapons, as well as a copy of a song needed to secure the weapons from the gnolls forever. Groups of visiting Gorbe were able to learn the song and the melody.

It was only a short time later that the visiting Three Kingdoms dignitary Zsla Nikklag arrived and informed the Ashbans that he knew where Harkan was holding the saber. A group of Ashbans led by Dame Glorianna Wyndancer of Nordenn and Lord Jonathan Dragonheart Vardik assaulted Harkan's cave. Harkan's force was quickly destroyed and the gnoll leader himself suffered his permanent death in the combat and was decapitated by Ikmoqs Beux who quickly claimed the sword.

As fate had it, the Ashbans arrived only minutes before Gnasetooth led his forces to Harkan's base to take the saber from him by force. As the Ashbans found themselves assaulted by this force Gnasetooth spied the blade and was able to summon it from the hands of Ikmoqs.

Quickly, Bran the Crow scavenger led a few nearby Ashbans to sing the song that had been unlocked. Instantly both the sabre and the axe vanished from Gnasetooth's hands. Enraged, Gnasetooth assaulted the Ashbans with even more vigor.

The gnoll leader was also permanently slain during the fight, a fact that caused his followers to press for bloody vengeance. Dame Glorianna, feeling that their mission was accomplished and nothing more could be gained but losses on both sides, ordered the Ashbans to retreat from the field. Effective hit and run tactics by the retreating Ashbans discouraged pursuit by the gnolls, and Dame Glorianna ordered stealth missions to ensure that no wounded Ashbans were left behind. With the Gnoll threat behind them, the Gorbe nations were freed to turn their efforts again on one another.

## **The Defeat of the One and the Release of the Dominion**

On the morning of April 21, 606 all the biata of Ashbury had the same prophetic dream. In it, scores of powerful gryphon and biata heroes were lying dead and the mad Order Elemental known as The One plunged his artifact sword into a homestone, shattering it.

The destruction of a homestone would permanently kill and drive

mad scores of biata within hundreds of miles and serve as a deep spiritual blow to the biata people. Determined to prevent this prophetic dream from coming true the elder for the Bloodstone Council, Xapano Corak, traveled to Ashbury City to seek help from the adventurers. Elder Xapano requested that the Ashbans assist in defending the homestone that was seen in the dream. He explained that he had arranged to place most of Bloodstone's military forces in other parts of the underground cities in the hopes of the large troop movements luring the Plane Touched away from the homestone. Xapano requested the presence of the adventurers in case the ruse failed.

The origins of The One were well known by this point in history, and the decision now was how to stop him, for even if the homestone were successfully defended it would not deter the mad agenda of The One. It had been theorized that summoning another Order Elemental would be necessary to defeat The One, either to assist in the fight or at least grant the Ashbans leave to visit the elemental plane of Order to destroy him permanently there.

To that end, the Sage's Guild suggested summoning the Order Elemental who specialized in keeping order amongst rogue Order Elementals, Constabulary Gendarme. Elder Xapano agreed to such an idea, but lacked the resources to perform the ritual immediately. The household of Lord Du' Gaul Mornavor donated the only scroll to be found in the city to the cause. Elder Xapano performed the ritual and Constabulary Gendarme appeared.

Thanks to the prophetic dream, the Ashbans knew where the genocidal elemental would strike, and Gendarme agreed to accompany the Ashbans to Bloodstone. Elder Xapano arranged to have the Ashbans transported by Gryphonback to Bloodstone, and then led them through the complex catacombs of the underground city where the homestone was located.

Xapano's military ruse had failed and the Ashbans were barely afforded enough time to arrange their lines before The One teleported into the caverns with scores of his Plane Touched.

Thinking quickly, Lauroc DerWyrvenhaus erected a Circle of Power around the Homestone, effectively blocking The One from reaching it. As the battle raged Constabulary Gendarme confronted The One, and drove him to the elemental plane of Order. Gendarme immediately rifted away to give chase. Leaderless, the Plane Touched were easily defeated by the organized Ashbans.

Constabulary Gendarme bested The One in combat and contained him. She then returned Ashbury and explained that part of his essence was imbued into the Plane Touched, which is how they were granted their elemental powers, and that with that essence spread The One could not be destroyed. Gendarme presented to the Ashbans a choice: to Bind The One, imprisoning him forever but in the process enhancing the power of the Plane Touched over Ice, Fire, Lightning and Stone, or to Unbind him, which would destroy him.

However, this second option was not without peril either, and to fully understand it we must look back to the events that first spawned The One.

As has been chronicled, the Order Elemental Arbiter Tendentious was summoned by an ancient civilization of Stone Elves and asked to wield the blade they had created against a powerful nation of necromantic gryphons and getragen (note: the biata indigenous to Tar' Navaria call themselves getragen.) The elemental agreed and became the genocidal beast known as The One.

Also chronicled is how The One became aware that not all the biata and gryphons were evil, and he ceased his war. It was through Constabulary Gendarme that the rest of the tale came to light. The evil nation of getragen were known as The Dominion, and they were warring to conquer Tar' Navaria.

There were four other nations of getragen fighting a losing battle against the vast power of the Dominion. The might of their armies could not contend with the ability of the Dominion to enslave gryphons and raise vast armies of undead, and the war was going badly.

In an effort to save the rest of the world from the Dominion, the allied getragen approached The One and offered to have all the getragen of Tar' Navaria imprisoned in an eternal slumber. The One would only agree if a

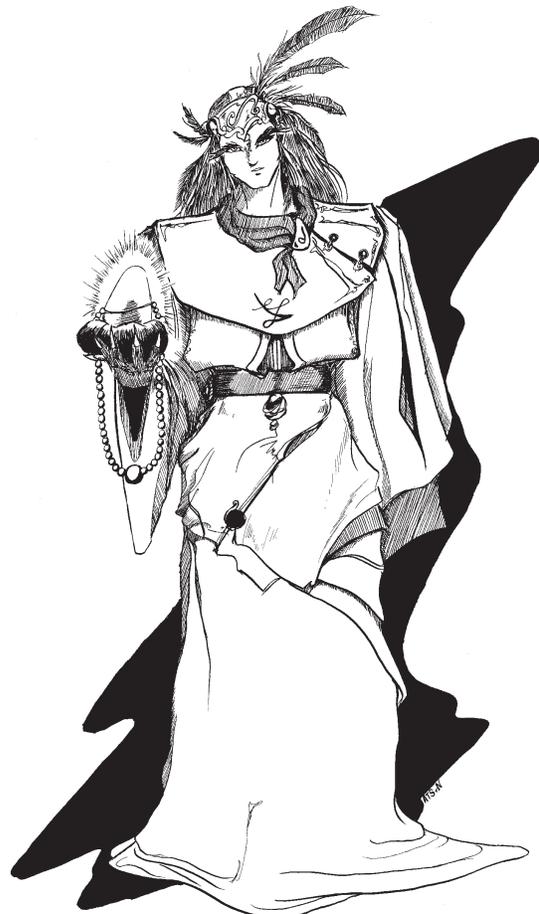
representative from each nation agreed. All of the allied good getragen readily agreed and, to everyone's surprise, so did the representative of the Dominion.

Suspicions arose that the Dominion's ambassador had been mentally controlled in some way, but they were not followed up on. The One was good to his word, and put the getragen into their slumber. These emissaries were the same five getragen who were released along with The One the day that Penthanthos' Gaffe was bottled in 603.

Constabulary Gendarme theorized that the coercion of the Dominion's agent flawed the prison, which prompted the negative consequences of Unbinding The One. If he were unbound, the seals holding the getragen in their prison would likewise be unbound, and all of the nations would return, including the Dominion. Gendarme also made it completely clear that while the Methodic Assembly, the governing body of the Order Elementals, would abide by the choice of the Ashbans that it would be their final act in this saga regardless of what events took place as a result of the decision.

It is here where you, as scholars and true investigators of history, must investigate beyond my account of events. For while I have always and shall always strive to uphold my academic integrity and record the events without passion or bias, I am not without opinion on the matter and as a contemporary of the events I record those opinions can sway my assessment no matter how hard I may try to prevent it. The events recorded are fact, and it is my utmost attempt to write them as neutrally as possible.

A report of Constabulary Gendarme's revelations were put before Duke Frost Vardik, Baron Rorii Colaenlothrodarhil and Dame Darlassia Fairseer of the Ash Forest, as well as Baron Indorian Silverleaf of Blythedale and Dame Glorianna Wyndancer of Nordenn. The report made to the nobles made clear that Unbinding The One would release a nation of necromancers so powerful that four other nations, even though allied, could not defeat them. The nobility previously mentioned took the matter under advisement in a meeting with Lord Ivan Drake, Healer's Guildmistress



*A Biata Elder*

Zatarina Norik, and a collection of local biata. The meeting seemed to be a private one to witnesses, though afterwards the nobility stated that it had been open to anyone who chose to attend.

After long debate the nobility emerged with the decision that The One would be unbound and the Dominion released. Five keys were needed to affect The One's defeat and Duke Frost ordered that anyone who did not turn over a recovered key be arrested on charges of treason.

As the keys were being collected some concerned Ashbans voiced their opposition to this decision. When approached by these concerned citizens Dame Glorianna expressed uncertainty as to which decision was right and in line with the Code. She confessed that, though she had not voted against the decision in the council, she had abstained. Several nobles since claimed that no vote was actually taken, and that therefore there was no actual mechanism for abstaining.

Constabulary Gendarme was appealed to, in the hopes that as an Order Elemental she would work to keep this army of chaos contained, but true to her nature she proclaimed that she would abide by what the leaders of Ashbury decided.

When the keys were collected and Gendarme was prepared to activate them, either to Bind or Unbind The One, a last ditch appeal was made to the ranking noble on the scene, Baron Indorian. He stated that he disagreed with the decision to unleash necromancy, but that he would not disobey his liege Duke Frost, and ordered Gendarme to unbind The One.

With that order given Gendarme obeyed, announced that the Methodic Assembly would not get involved in the matter again, and rifted away.

Many Ashbans were outraged over the decision. Lord Du'Gaul Mornavor resigned his title in protest. More than one commoner wrote letters of protest to the Ducal Paladins and to the Royal Court itself.

The nobles of Ashbury, however, largely banded together and defended their decision. Duke Frost penned the following public letter:

*To All Icenia and All Tar Navaria,*

*Let it be known that a deadly enemy has been destroyed. Let it be known that brave and true peoples have been set free. But most importantly, let it be known that a foul and vile evil has been released to once again walk the lands of Fortannis.*

*I take the responsibility for all three decisions. Although I did not make these decisions alone, I held the power to override any decision made.*

*As the ranking noble present, that was my prerogative and the burden falls upon my conscience and no other. It was a decision I knew would draw the fanatical ire of those that pursue one evil over all others, of those that pursue one evil over even the good of the innocent, that pursue one evil to the very blindness of their own spirit.*

*I stand armoured in my righteousness and I stand prepared to withstand the darts and barbs of those people. Doing what is right often conflicts with doing what is safe and easy. I shall never choose the less difficult path.*

*As I have often told my nobles and squires, my soldiers and my charges:*

*We will not always agree with those we trust and love. The love, the trust and the knowledge we serve the same ends of chivalry, goodness and virtue shall keep us united as friends and allies in the face of such disagreements.*

*Some of my nobles may not have agreed with the decision made, but that does not change their trust in me and their trust in my spirit and my motives. This may be said of the soldiers and the tavernkeepers, the blacksmiths and the council elders, the merchant and the general, whose trust and love I have earned. Their faith in me shall not falter nor waver.*

*Those who bowed to me in feigned respect to merely satisfy their own ends, those who were fair weather friends and those that were always truly enemies but hidden behind masks of civility and propriety, they shall surely attempt to make this an opportunity to slander and libel my name and my honor. They will attempt to use recent events as a catalyst for my undoing.*

*But it shall not be so, as I know in my heart that I have earned*

*much more respect and even love than I have earned enmity within our borders and the borders of our allies. Your lies shall not avail you and your deceit shall only lead to your own misery.*

*I shall now afford explanation, but I shall make no excuse for the decision made. I would be a coward and a hypocrite if I did so now. I shall not retreat from the truth of what has transpired.*

*The past as well as the future has shown us time and time again that prisons do not endure. The One escaped its cage. The gaffe was released from its bottle. Glantri's vile and shrivelled heart was all that was needed to return him to our lands. Dragons, both fair and foul, have been released from millenia of imprisonment upon Tar Navaria. Our beloved majesties were released from their centuries long slumbers. Prisons fail, and this is fact.*

*The One escaped from the very prison that the five biata civilizations were trapped in. The five leaders of these lands were released two years ago and have walked among us since. There were cracks in the prison that held their civilizations entombed. This is obvious.*

*What many may not also know is that the prison was imperfect from its inception. All five were required to agree of their own free will to be imprisoned. All five did so, but only four truly did so willingly. The prison would not hold indefinitely and had already begun to rupture.*

*The choice was made to release all five tribes. Those of good heart and virtue are released to once again walk in freedom, not only the leaders who made the decision millenia ago, but everyone else from the smallest child to the most venerated elder.*

*True defenders of the weak should not be so single minded in their pursuit of one evil that they ignore the plight of the innocent.*

*We have also chosen the time of release. Be assured, it would have happened someday and we would be craven cowards to let this evil be released upon future generations who might not be as prepared or as strong as we are now. Several of our enemies are newly destroyed.*

*Peace reigns in much of Icenia, except for our beloved Trelheim. We have strong neighbors and allies. Far better to face the evil now than at a time when we, or worse yet, our descendants are weak. The foul criminals that have been released have not been paroled, they have been released so that they may be led to their execution.*

*I stand by the choice that was made and I bear no apologies to anyone. I would make the same decision if presented with it again.*

*My enemies within our borders will use this as an attempt to assassinate my character and to harm me politically. I am prepared for you and welcome the fact that you have been revealed in your treachery and true character. Many more know my heart and know the truth of my service to all the land and all good people. We shall stand together and fight the true evils.*

*In Service,*

*Duke Sir Frost Vardik*

His Grace made no mention of the innocents on Tar' Navaria who would be killed and enslaved as a result of freeing the Dominion, nor did he make reference to the damage the necromancy of the Dominion would do to the land, though he did suggest that those who opposed the decision because of the necromantic practices of the Dominion and their army of undead were zealots who were blind to all other forms of evil. Frost argued that the decision to release The Dominion was in line with the Code of Chivalry because Ashbury would now be able to destroy them, and that this decision also destroyed the One instead of imprisoning him forever.

Sir Eros Clearbrook, the Magistrate of Ashbury and one of the ducal paladins, declared that the act was a good and just one because he believed that an alliance with Ashbury and the good nations of getragen would be able to defeat the Dominion. Eros, like his liege, made no mention of the innocents that would be enslaved and killed in the war. Even the paladin Sir Harrison Ryat, who had hitherto been considered by all to be the embodiment of the Code of Chivalry, defended the decision claiming, in part, that those who served the Dominion were misguided and

should be shown the error of their ways and that there was no proof that necromancy harmed the earth.

Those who opposed the decision argued that because the Dominion freely engaged in necromantic practices that would damage the earth the noble's choice to loose the Dominion put the innocent and ordinary people of Ashbury at far more risk than if the Plane Touched were strengthened. They argued that the Nobility violated the Code of Chivalry and essentially abandoned their duty to protect the commoners of Ashbury by releasing a far greater evil and more powerful enemy upon them. Some even compared the decision of the nobles to free a greater evil as a means to defeat The One as an act on the same level of Alaric Dragonhart's foul behavior. They countered Frost's claim that now the Dominion could be destroyed instead of imprisoned with the fact that there was no overarching plan to defeat the Dominion. They argued that it was arrogant and irresponsible to unleash such a horror on the world with no means to defeat it. They stated that it would have been safer, wiser, and more in line with the Code of Chivalry to imprison The One, and find a way to destroy the Dominion and release the getragen while the Dominion was still imprisoned and unable to do harm.

In the span of hours some of the released getragen leaders made their positions known. The Elder of the Getragen clan known as Braun, Waygen Dahr, was livid that the sacrifice of his people was ignored and traveled to Ashbury with haste to condemn the decision to Ashbury's nobles. He verbally berated Baron Indorian at length about the arrogance of spitting on the sacrifice of his people. The elder of the nation known as Blaus, Matron Mahu Verstien, expressed concern about having to combat the Dominion again, but hoped that the added might of Ashbury would prove pivotal.

Within a day of being released, the Dominion sent a scouting party of undead and getragen into Ashbury City by gryphonback. The party was defeated, but not without considerable effort. In an effort to acquire knowledge of the world they had awoken in, the Dominion assaulted institutions of learning in Icenia, Dwarrenagor, Trollsgate, Home, Cuulanni, Amisara, and Galanthia. In each case Gryphons and their riders descended into a city, looted libraries, kidnapped scholars and slaughtered any who attempted to oppose them.

In response three of the clans of Dwarrenagor declared war on the Dominion. The elven nation of Imladar publicly condemned the decision of Ashbury's nobles to release the Dominion, but pledged their aid to Icenia in the coming war. As of this writing no other nation has responded.

Barely three weeks after being released by the nobles of Ashbury, the Dominion launched a more coordinated attack upon the duchy. A woman claiming to be a ducal soldier reported that the Dominion had landed in Ashbury City. Led by Baron Rorii, the Ashbans assaulted the Dominion head on and were led into a devastating ambush.

The Ashban lines were cut to pieces and there were several resurrections. One brave combatant, a traveling high ogre known as Garuda, met his final death fighting the undead of the Dominion. Eventually the Ashbans were able to rally and defeat the evil getragen and gryphons but it was a long, hard fight.

In response to the complaints of some commoners to Their Majesties, the Royal Court sent Royal Seneschal Dame Sonia Forthiatistis to investigate the issue. During the investigation the argument was made to her that the sacrifice of the Getragen was similar to that of Dame Natasha's, and that by freeing the Dominion Ashbury had arrogantly disregarded it. After an investigation that lasted nearly two months, Dame Sonia issued the following report:

*People of Ashbury,*

*On the eve of your tournament I spent a good amount of time speaking with nobles and commoners alike regarding the decision to release the Dominion. My thanks to Squire Koshinara Murakami for his assistance in scribing the information. I have presented and discussed the statements gathered with Their Majesties.*

*The decision presented to His Grace and the assembled nobles*

*was not an easy choice by any means. They had to decide the fate of thousands of people, and were only given a few hours to come to a conclusion. Their choices were these: bind Tendentious and allow the Plane Touched to grow stronger; and continue killing thousands or unbind him so that the Arbiter could do justice upon him, thereby releasing five civilizations of biata (who call themselves Getragen) one of whom was a powerful and evil entity: the Dominion.*

*I was challenged with the task of determining whether or not this decision was against the guidelines of the Code of Chivalry. I shall detail the tenets which were alleged to have been broken:*

*"Thou shalt respect the weak and constitute thyself defender of them."*

*At all times members of the peerage are obligated to protect those unable to protect themselves. Not only were the victims of the plane-touched considered here, but also the four civilizations of Getragen who were too weak to fight the Dominion and who chose to imprison themselves to contain them. Their sacrifice was admirable. Now we are strong enough to allow them their freedom and destroy the evil they fought so hard to contain. Some went as far as to compare this situation to the sacrifice of Dame Natasha to Amora Dun. As with the Getragen, there was no other choice at that time. If there were a way to save Dame Natasha and fight the legions of evil trapped within Amora Dun with her, it might be considered.*

*"Thou shalt never lie and thou shalt remain faithful to thy word"*

*Several commoners alleged that some of the nobles abstained from the decision, as they did not agree with it. In truth, some nobles questioned admitted that they would have liked to abstain, as it was a horrible choice to be made. In the end there was no vote, but a consensus. One cannot abstain from voting when no actual vote takes place.*

*"Thou shalt scrupulously perform thy noble duties be they not contrary to the laws of the land"*

*One of a noble's duties is to ensure that justice is done. The Dominion will be defeated just as was Glenrake. They will be held accountable for their abominable practices.*

*"Thou shalt not recoil before thine enemy."*

*In this decision, Ashbury had the chance to eliminate not one, but two evils. We shall not fear the enemy which is caged. Nor shall we flee from a foe simply because they use magic most foul. We shall meet it head on and serve it justice.*

*"Thou shalt make war upon evil without cessation"*

*Imprisoning evil is not defeating evil. It is delaying the inevitable. When war was declared upon Glenrake, there was no cry of dissent. Nay; noble and commoner alike took up sword and spell and valiantly fought against evil. Why should this differ?*

*"Thou shalt be everywhere and always the champion of the right and the good against injustice and evil."*

*In all things we are the servants and protectors of good. Should we have merely bound Tendentious, and risk his escape again? Should we have left the Dominion to their slumber, only for them to awake and destroy Icenia generations from now? Nay. I would not lay in my bed, an old woman watching my grandchildren die at the hands of the Dominion, knowing that in my youth I had the chance to destroy them.*

*I do not envy the decision that was forced upon Duke Frost and his nobles. Nor do I envy their position now. The decision was made with the best of intentions; to uphold the Code and protect the land and the people.*

*Know that King Gareth ap Moire, Queen Sidraste Deannan and the Kingdom of Icenia support Duke Frost and the duchy of Ashbury to the fullest, and will lend any and all aid necessary in defeating the Dominion. And know in your hearts that the right path is rarely the easy path.*

*In Service,*

*Dame Sonia Forthiatistis*

As of this writing the debate, and the war, rages on.