



Black Thorn

Surrounded by mystery and mayhem, the Black Thorn has gone to great lengths to conceal her past from casual investigation. One rumor claims that she is the orphaned daughter of an Elemental League massenliche and Atlantis Guild Altem, the relationship of her parents left to the teller of the tale and running the gamut from true love to—delicately put—the spoils of battle. Other gossip, made popular by bard song, suggests that she is abandoned royalty. Now the mercenary queen for a kingdom of one—herself.

The Black Thorn's dusky beauty and rare half-elven blood certainly contribute to such fanciful legends. She stands taller than most men, with hair so dark it almost disguises the red tints which warn of an infamous hidden temper. Her lupine eyes are a brilliant, inquisitive green capable of shifting from humor to a predator's gleam within a single blink. Such beauty has caused many to underestimate the Thorn, as evidenced in her earliest known tale where, in the Sarna Township of fallen Khamsin, a thin half-blood calling herself Nadia refused to give up her table to a boisterous Draconum warrior named Tyrsis. The mighty Dragonkin was more amused than affronted when this same 'twig of a girl' challenged him to the draw of first blood.

Nadia left him his right eye. She took the left.

Another early legend involves her acquisition of the cameo necklace known as the Blood of Khamsin, an heirloom of the fallen kingdom. Not long after the Draconum Tyrsis formerly joined her small band, the mercenary maiden took service with Darset Frehr, a merchant prince of Venetia. His questionable purchase of the heirloom was a source of pride for him, but no more so than his conceit as a gamesman. Learning of Nadia's interest in the heirloom, he dangled it before her for more than a year. Finally, one lured the other into a private wager, the details of which are unknown except to a select few. What is generally known is that Darset lost. With ill humor he surrendered the cameo, wrapped around a bunch of poison-barbed roses. Nadia carefully accepted her prize, then slashed the thorned flowers across Darset's face. The poison did not kill him, but it did cause a terrible and painful scarring that Darset Frehr lives with still.

It wasn't long after that she took the actual name, Black Thorn, and such tales have become the cornerstones of her legend. It may even have been this preoccupation with acquiring the cameo that led to many bards suggesting her connection with abandoned royalty. Certainly the Black Thorn carries herself as such, proud and arrogant. Very little seems to touch her. She bears her half-blood proudly, showing none of the usual shame for mixed human and Elven heritage. Against her deadly rapier and a steady eye with either pistol or rifle, very few are brave or foolhardy enough to broach the subject, not even when they think it would never get back to her. Because to believe that the Black Thorn would not act, if it ever did reach her ears, is folly in its purest form. She never forgets a slight, or, apparently, forgives

In fact, the Black Thorn has never—to known accounts—backed down to accommodate anyone. She has never apologized, not for insult or injury. Not even to the Draconum Tyrsis, now one her most loyal supporters, for the loss of his eye. But, neither has she ever offered an

excuse for her own failures, or cast the blame on another. In her own words, “There is one person only on whom I completely rely, and one to whom I ultimately answer. Me.”

If that sounds like a hard way to live, no doubts that it has been. Tales of her personal losses, and those inflicted on others who came against her, are many. Understandably so, as the Black Thorn has fought for and against almost every known faction and sub-faction known to The Land. Her small, elite band has worked for the League and the Sect, for independent kingdoms, merchant princes, and anarchist leaders. They’ve raided, stood in garrison, acted as bodyguards and—some claim—assassins, taken vanguard positions for larger armies, and have led charges in battle. About everything a small unit might do. Except that they have never—not once—worked for the Atlantis Guild.

Such pointed discretion has fueled many more rumors and this, along with her frequent dealings with Khamsin mercenaries, has forced her more and more into the camp of the black powder rebels. Not a position she has avoided, either. There is even gossip of an old love interest between the Black Thorn and Snow, Prophet-Magus Karrudan's Assassin. This alone, discounting every battle she has fought in which the Guild and empire suffered, would be enough to justify the large bounty placed on her life by the Atlantis Guild.

But it is not the only price on her head, and to the Black Thorn such bounties are simply a measure of her worth. She tracks every offer made for her life or capture, or for other members of her warhost. As the bounties increase, so do her costs for services rendered. And make no mistake; the Black Thorn always exacts a price. It may not be coin or magestone, but payment will be made in full.

In one manner or another.



Carmine Sura

Lady of the Frost Fell

The daughter of duke Nanja of Rangraz, a cold northern land, Carmine's early years were pampered. The duke's only child and heir-presumptive of the duchy, she wanted for nothing. She learned the courtly arts – dancing, conversation and etiquette. She learned to ride, to hawk and how to handle dogs. Her tutors were the finest her father could hire from throughout the land and by her early teens was fully conversant with the laws of the duchy. Shortly before her fourteenth birthday, Carmine went out riding with her maid, Leta, and bodyguards,

little knowing that the simple ride through the countryside would change her life.

Several miles outside the town, a werewolf surprised the party. Carmine's bodyguards quickly drove it off but not before the beast had savaged Leta's horse and thrown the maid, badly injuring. Carmine knelt beside her friend and cried. "Don't let her die," she whispered as the tears poured down her face. To her surprise, and that of her guards, a mystic glow surrounded Leta and after a short instant she sat up as if waking from sleep. To Carmine this was a miracle but her father's Elemental League advisor knew better. Lady Carmine Sura was a healer and with sufficient training could be a Mending Priestess. Though unhappy with this idea, Carmine eventually acquiesced to her father's will, knowing that such training would bond the duchy more closely to the League and ensure its support against the nearby Necropolis Sect.

The journey to the school was long and arduous, as was the training that followed. Her fellow students cared little for her noble status, something that annoyed her considerably after years of deference, regarding themselves as members of the League first and citizens of their own nations a distant second. Carmine swore not to let this happen to her. She would learn what the League would teach her, but her loyalty would always be to Rangraz. As a result, she never fully integrated with the other students, remaining aloof and preferring to study on her own. The other students called her the Ice Princess though she took no notice. After all, it was just a name. Over the next few years, Carmine mastered her magical skills, learning to heal more serious wounds and, after a lot of practice, to heal people without needing to touch them. When she was seventeen, she received the gnarled wooden staff that signified her status as a Mending Priestess, one of the youngest people ever to complete their training.

A few more years of advanced training and practical experience and I will return home, she thought.

The assassination of the Atlantis Guild prophet sparked rebellions across the land and Carmine found herself busy healing League troops as they struggled to restore order. She learned to work with her fellow Elementalists, using defensive magics to protect those she treated even in the heart of battle. The rebellions spread and Carmine grew sick of the sight of blood, yet the worse was still to come. While treating soldiers after the Battle of Ellis Ford, she received news that Rangraz had been overrun by the Necropolis Sect. Her father remained

in power but was now little more than a puppet in the hands of the vile necromancers and vampires. She petitioned the League for assistance in liberating her homeland, but the magisters refused, citing more pressing concerns. Unwilling to accept the sacrifice of her home, she quit the army at Ellis Ford and set off home. To her surprise, she was not alone. Blademaster Rynn Crow, whose life she'd saved earlier in the campaign, chose to accompany her, as did several of the swordsmen and rangers under his command. They owed their lives to Carmine and would not let her journey into danger alone.

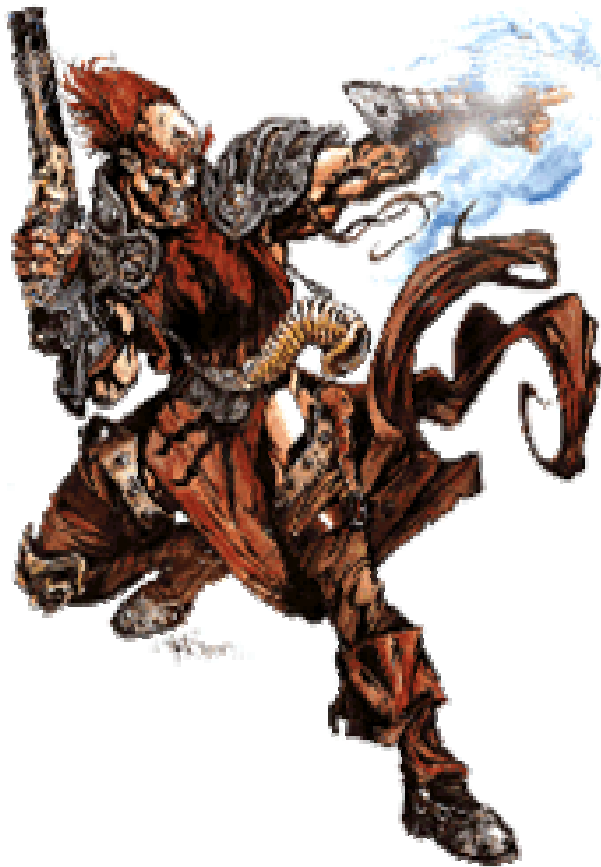
They acquired several other allies on the way to Rangraz. Sir Illian Moore of the Knights Immortal saw the justice in Carmine's cause and vowed to aid her, as did the Dwarven jarl Bannor Grieg and his fusers. Initially the Elementalists and the rebel Dwarves cared little for one another, but they both abhorred the Necropolis Sect and in that hatred found common ground that grew into grudging respect as they neared their destination.

Though caring little for violence, Carmine knew she would have to fight for the city. The initial clashes with Necropolis troops easily went her way, the bowmen, fusers and swordsmen handily defeating the detachments of zombies sent against them. However, as they neared the city darker creatures were unleashed upon them. A vampire nearly killed Sir Illian during the storming of the city though Jarl Grieg drove it off before it could complete its bloodsucking and Carmine quickly healed the knight to full strength.

Recapturing the palace was horrific. Grave diggers had raised a veritable army of zombies. While most were weak, some were the ancient lords of Rangraz, mighty warriors who wrought a dreadful toll on Carmine's forces. Nonetheless, they were victorious and took control of the city. One last horror remained, however.

Entering her father's throne room with Blademaster Crow, Carmine realized something was wrong. Her father stood waiting for her, but something about him was different. As she approached him he lunged forward, fangs bared but Rynn Crow's blades blocked the duke's path. Duke Nanja backed away but laughed when Carmine stopped the Blademaster from counterattacking. "You have a lot to learn about when to be merciful," said the vampire who was once her father before leaping through one of the hall's many windows and flying away.

Despite her upbringing, Carmine no longer desired to rule Rangaz and instead installed her cousin, Rubin, as duke. Based in the Frost Fells on the eastern borders of Rangaz, Carmine and her companions strive to counter the machinations of the Necropolis Sect and gather news on her father. She knows that one day she will have to confront him again and hopes she will have the strength to do so.



Chromazar

The Story of Chromazar

You want to hear my story? Well, you asked for it. You may feel it hard to believe me because this story is a strange and unbelievable one.

To be completely honest, I don't care if you believe me or not. But if you choose not to believe me, let me ask what you think is normal in these strange times...?

My name is Chromazar. I was born in Atlantis in the year 400, four centuries after Tezla was born. I cannot recall much of my childhood or my parents. I was taken away from them when I reached at the age of ten and raised in the Guild to learn the Technomental art - and I was good in it. Really good. Good enough that I became a member of the Guild at the age of fifteen, and a full fledged Demi-Magus at the age of

nineteen. Back then I did not know what my true fate would become.

When we raided a Rebel village my unit was trapped in an ambush. We were cut down to the last man. I was heavily wounded and believed that I wouldn't live to see the light of the next day. But our so-called cruel adversaries did not kill me. Instead they captured me and even healed my wounds.

The following years I lived and served as their bondman. The Atlantis Guild had declared our unit and all warriors dead, so there was no way of returning home for me.

My Magestone had been taken by the rebels when I was captured, so I was forced to learn that there are more things in life than just magic. It was a completely new experience for me. I learned the customs of my clan. I learned what it means to have a family.

And then I witnessed an attack of the Atlantis Guild on my clan. I never cared about it when I was an Atlantean myself, but now I saw the cruelty and relentlessness of my people against the poor, the weak and the innocent with new eyes. I realized then that my heart had already found a new home.

When the Atlantis Guild committed another attack on a small hunting party of my clan, I saved the Jarls' life. In exchange for my help they gave me back my freedom. Now, after five years in serfdom, I became one of them.

I stayed with my clan of course. And I fell in love with Janufa, the clans' medic. When I was 26 she gave birth to our child, making me a proud father of a son. We called him Janar. But my luck should run out very soon after that.

When the warriors of our clan went on a campaign against the Atlanteans, our camp was pillaged by a band of Orc Raiders. They killed without mercy. They murdered my wife. They took my son with them. That day I took an oath to avenge all injustice. With my small band of trusted companions I wander through the Land in search of my son.

Should I ever find the Orc Raiders responsible for murdering my wife I will take bloody revenge. I am Chromazar. I was Atlantean and now I'm a Rebel. I fight for justice.



Darq, the Corrupt

Reviled and forbidden in speech these last twenty years, Darq's true birthname may be forever lost to history. Born a chief's son of the Clan NaBeck, great things were expected of him, certainly. But not the great darkness to which he succumbed.

One of the stronger clans of the Serpine Mountains, the NaBeck had opposed the Sect's authority ever since the necromancers' "desecration" of Isle Fey Necropolis. The legends assert that Clan NaBeck recovered every ancestor resurrected by the black magicks, laying them properly back to rest in new catacombs before turning their full hatred against the Sect. Despite continuous defeats and hardships they remained steadfast, loyal to their cabal of deities and demigods who supposedly occupied the upper slopes of the great Cainus Mons and whom they relied on to eventually tip the balance in their favor. Fighting the dark warhosts for better than one hundred years, relying on their intimate knowledge of the Serpines to persevere, this Clan became the morale and martial center for continued resistance to the Sect presence.

Darq, in his childhood, was a pale and sickly youth. He would wake the camp screaming of monsters in the shadows, of dark men with bright eyes who followed him wherever he went. The clansmen, worried about the Sect's possible influence, took great efforts to instill in Darq a strong belief in the power of the gods of Cainus Mons. Then, seemingly overnight, the boy's ailments vanished and he began to strengthen into a fine young man. The NaBeck took this as a positive sign that the worst was past. They gave thanks. They rejoiced.

They relaxed their guard.

When he came of age, Darq became a warrior of great renown and a leader who inspired those around him. His father remained chief of the NaBeck, but Darq was soon elevated to 'high protector' of all the Serpine clans. Said to be 'touched by the gods,' possibly even a fostered son of the Cainus Mons pantheon, the clansmen named him 'The Bright One' and 'The Uncorrupt' and talked about how he would someday sit at table with the immortals themselves. In the meantime, though, they would revel in his company and in the glory he brought them. Certainly his victories over the black armies must have been worrying the Necropolis Sect as more clansmen turned renegade to join Darq's warrior band. There were even rumors of the Order of Vladd finally turning dark attentions to the NaBeck and their allies, though the clan warriors remained strong and defiant in their righteous belief.

But despite his own gifts for battle and the stalwart support of everyone around him, Darq himself began to openly question the pagan gods on Cainus Mons, asking why they should attribute all good fortune to the mystic rather than to the mortal. Some now believe that his talents had filled him with conceit, and that it was this hubris which led to Darq's downfall. Others claim that he had always harbored a darkness in his heart, reminding those who could remember about the childhood nightmares.

In truth, whatever dark seed had been planted within him, and whenever it had been done, the Order of Vladd had discovered and exploited it. They allowed him to continue winning his minor victories, inspiring the renegades, but at the same time they worked on Darq's sanity

and his faith until finally he paid only the most basic lip-service to the gods. And then not even that.

Turning pale and sickly once more, Darq began acting erratically and often screamed for hours at distant Cainus Mons. He developed bleeding sores that never healed, and took more to directing battles from his tent rather than fighting alongside his warhost. Only his continuing accomplishments prevented Darq's removal as protector, though with the death of his father and the ascension of a distant cousin as chief of the NaBeck talk had finally begun, considering to do just that.

Too late, however. Much too late. Darq had given up to the Order of Vladd the NaBeck catacombs, now being used by all renegade clans as a new and secret necropolis. In a vicious betrayal of their former faith in him and the memory of his father, Darq pretended a new and lasting calm, claiming that the pantheon on Cainus Mons had spoken to him in his delirium. The gods commanded a grand ceremony to celebrate them and the honored dead of the clans. It would be the key to Darq's full recovery and the final turning point to driving out the Necropolis Sect.

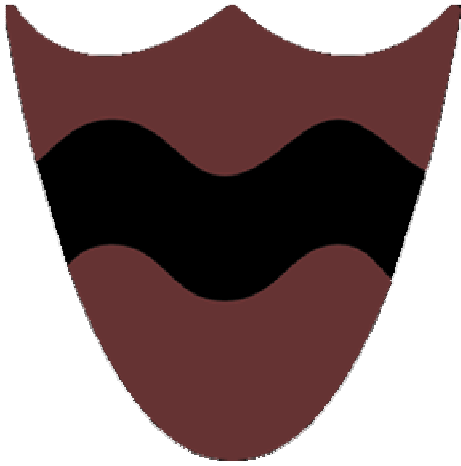
Within the Order of Vladd, the ceremony would be the culmination of years of work. It would also be the end of any real resistance to the Sect's rule of the Serpine Mountains.

Plans were laid at once, on both sides, and eventually the Clan NaBeck and the core of Darq's army came to the catacombs. Huge bonfires were lit and the celebration begun. And then, at middling night, Darq led his best warriors into the catacombs to pay homage to his father. Except that the Order of Vladd had already brought in grave robbers to breathe animation back into the many corpses, and so a host of *nupheratii* awaited the clansmen, falling on them to rend with teeth and claw. Darq himself fought against his former friends at the side of a dark *nopheratus* prince. Those who escaped the catacombs found only chaos and carnage waiting above, as a necromancer led a small army of winged nightmares against the celebrating clansmen. Many were allowed to escape, but all men, women and children claiming kinship with the NaBecks were caught.

At the first light of morning, Darq emerged from the catacombs. Now a member of the Order of Vladd, he presided over the final dispatching of his former clan kin.

Already a celebrated warlord, as a member of the Order Darq rose quickly to power within the Necropolis Sect. A bloody purge of the Order only a few years after his 'birth to darkness' was credited to his machinations, though only as a means of acquiring more power. It is also just one more chapter to his growing legend, as the temptation and corruption of this 'untouchable son' has spawned many fireside stories. Still, the end results are the same.

That Darq succumbed and betrayed his clan, becoming a prince of the *nopheratus*, and was unleashed as a new scourge on The Land.



Kho'Ta

Kho'Ta of Three Lives, Warlord of the Whitespray River

Kho'Ta was born Belwood in a small Elven village nestled in the foothills of the Sturnmonts at the edge of the Roanne Valle. Protected deep in the Wylden Plateau by distance and the strength of the Elemental League, his youth passed relatively untroubled from the chaos rocking the Land.

Belwood spent most of his time exploring the lower slopes of the Sturnmonts and developing a deep love of nature and the miracle that was life in all its myriad manifestation. When he passed his naming day, he felt his path call to him and he made his way to a Sanctuary, where he was accepted and became a Pledge. There, he spent an unknown time tilling and nurturing the earth, breathing the essence of life. His dedication and potential were obvious and he was giving the opportunity to move along the path of becoming an Acolyte. As the years flowed, he grew and matured like the iron-oak he had planted as part of his pledge. As the rest of the Land continued its wars and power struggles, Belwood floated in a sea of serenity, unaffected by the chaos of the outside world.

However, as he came into his full powers of healing and nature, he heard the siren call of the Land. Daily desecrations defiled the skin and bones of Land and it called Belwood to its aid. That very day, Weyr Ria came to Belwood and announced that that this part of his path had been successfully traversed and that Belwood had passed an important bend along the way. She told him it was time to leave the Sanctuary and repay the Land for all it had given him.

Buoyed by her words and the reassuring strength of the Land beneath his feet, Bellwood began to journey. Though initially joyful, the weeks, months and years that passed brought only heart break and sorrow—so much pain and destruction! The peoples on all sides of the Land took and destroyed what they could have nurtured and strengthened. The Guilds, with their endless obsession of MageStone, inflicted countless grievance wounds on the Land in their misguided fervor to obtain the magical substance. Even more insidious was the Necropolis Sect and their defilement of life itself through their use of the dark magics. The weight of it began to darken his soul.

As he continued to search the Land and provide what healing he could, Belwood was captured by a troop of Seething Knights of the Necropolis Sect and taken back to Necropolis. Though most of his kind were put to the sword, a Necromancer came and with out a single word studied him directly for a time before announcing that this powerful Elemental Priest might be subverted. Though he shouted his denials, repulsed by the black magics he felt emanating from the Necromancer, deep in his heart Belwood knew that his despondency at what he perceived to be the ineffectiveness of the way of the Elementalists would be his undoing.

The training began in all of its abomination: the terror of absolute nothingness of the sensory deprivation chamber; the soul-wrenching anguish of experiencing death given by his own hand; dark arts twined around him in an effort to break— he knew he could not possibly survive with the blot on his soul. He fell and in so doing all his former knowledge and

understanding—he footsteps along his path—were swept clean and he embraced the Necromancer way.

From that moment forth Belwood ceased to be and in its place the powerful Svessi emerged. A fanatical convert, Svessi became a scourge know to all the kingdoms that bordered the growing might of the Necropolis Sect as they continued to expand their power through conquest and subjugation. Tireless in his efforts, he became one of the most powerful Necromancers in living memory, able to wield vast powers and rise entire Zombie armies from a field of dead with a word. Though in manner and appearance he was a new person, the League finally discovered the identity of this new Necropolis power and saddened though they were to take a life, they realized the consequences of allowing Svessi to remain alive and continue his aberrant activities. As the person who had over seen his first life, Weyr Ria was sent to end his second. As Svessi took to the field once more with a troop of his most loyal followers, Ria made her move. However, she had underestimated how truly powerful he had become and in so doing she perished. However, Svessi ended the life of the person who had been a benevolent of parent for all those years, the skein of lies and deceits over his mind and soul was torn and as her eyes dimmed forever, Ria smiled with the knowledge she saw written on his face—she had succeeded.

Horrified with what he had become, Svessi first thought to slough off this new skin and return to the life he had known. However, he knew that he could never go back, nor would the League Priests accept him after all that he had done. Though gripped with anguish, he knew where his anger should be directed; the Necropolis would pay for what they had done. He hatched a plan to would allow him to set up a power base from witch to begin his vengeance.

Moving his troops in a new direction he announced that a troop of Necropolis soldiers and their Seething Knight commander had gone rogue and that it was his—and his troop's—duty to eliminate the traitors. As none would doubt the words of the most powerful Necromancer in all Necropolis, they moved forward with firm resolve and engaged the troops they encountered. His troops ignored their cries of innocent—lies, obviously—and continued their mission. Only after the fact did it become known that it was Svessi, not the enemy commander who had become the traitor.

Moving into the Ailon mountains where the headwaters of the Whitespray River begins, Svessi declared himself Warlord Kho'Ta and spat a curse of blood-fued against the Necropolis. Though many of his troops deserted him, most had witnessed his awesome power and believed he had the ability to defy Necropolis. An army was immediately dispatched to deal with the traitor Svessi but the treacherous Whitespray River and the inaccessibility of the region in which Kho'Ta encosed himself—which claimed the lives of a score of men before the army even encountered Kho'Ta's troops—combined with Kho'Ta's power and his troops dedication gave him a resounding victory which sent ripples spreading across the Land. Though he had paid dearly for his victory, his defiance against the abominable Sect was a beacon in the night calling troops and mercenaries a like to his new standard.

Five years have passed and the Sect has yet to dislodge Kho'Ta from from the headwaters of the Whitespray River. Though most of his troops are still fearful of his dark and awesome magics, they continue to follow him in defying the Sect.



Kossak Mageslayer

Kossak was born at night under the open sky according to tradition among troll tribes, many of which still look to the heavens for signs and portents. Just prior to Kossak's birth, the night sky came alive with shooting stars. Hundreds of them blazed their ferocious trails through the darkness. Kossak's mother, spent from the labor of childbirth, smiled at the fierce display and whispered, "The skies are on fire." This omen of personal strength followed her son throughout his life.

Quickly growing strong, Kossak's horn nubs sprouted early—a sign interpreted by the trolls to indicate a fierce warrior. This was, perhaps, a self-fulfilling prophecy, as his early maturity prompted many challenges. Forced to defend himself, Kossak won several of these challenges and was catapulted upward in the ranks of the tribe. He joined League war hosts at an earlier age than most, campaigning a great deal in the north against the hated Necropolis Sect. It was here that Kossak was first exposed to the perversion of the necromancers.

It happened near the headwaters of the Whitespray River, very close to where the villain Kho'Ta would later build his own dark keep. The League war host in which Kossak was a part came under attack by the Sect. Kossak never saw the necromancer in the darkness, or did not recognize him if he did. What he did see were the nupheratii, the lesser undead, who marched forward as zombies without wills of their own. Kossak fought the zombies back, but soon they rose again to lumber forward and tear at him with cold hands, their breath still stinking of the grave and their eyes alight with an otherworldly presence.

Never before had a defeated enemy risen back up against him. Kossak grew more and more enraged as the battle wore on. The appearance of a former kinsman, now an undead troll, drove his anger into white-hot rage. Heedless of his own safety, Kossak tore through the ranks of undead to reach this new enemy.

In single combat, Kossak would have stood undefeated. But there, surrounded by half a dozen of the nupheratii, all Kossak could see were clawed hands, feral teeth and the ghastly gray face of his undead kin. As the grave-risen troll snarled a challenge, Kossak was pulled down and buried beneath animated corpses. That was all he remembered of the battle.

Kossak regained consciousness weeks later in a League Sanctuary, attended by a druid and two massenliche, the League's mending priestesses. He was weak from what they called a 'sickness of the spirit.' They claimed a strong necromancer inflicted it on him, although they did not rule out vampyr. He would be dead—or among the undead, in fact—if his courageous attack had not inspired the League war host to push forward and throw back the Sect forces. Another massenliche had kept him alive long enough to return to the plateau.

After another month in the care of Sanctuary, Kossak learned firsthand more than he'd ever thought on the differences between League magicks and those of the outside world. While he

had understood the differences between them, or believed he had, he now saw how diametrically opposed they were. Whereas the League took their magickal strength from the Land, others perverted the power found there, twisting it beyond recognition. Unable to shake the horror of seeing his kinsman as nupheratii he took to campaigning with a fury born of his encounter, seeking to destroy all of such corrupted magicks. He left with the first League army he could find, a group led by the centaur warlord Poulsa Rhe against the Atlantean Guild.

It was during such an exercise when he and compatriots were waylaid by a host of Atlantean animated machinery under the command of a mage named Surenn outside of Revanlethe, a western city under Guild dominion. The Guild troops fought fiercely, but the tide turned when the massenliche next to him was brought down by a brass golem while healing Kossak's wounds. Fired by his unbounded rage, Kossak helped hound the mage to earth. The Magus and his fiercest warriors escaped into a labyrinth of caves where they could hope to hold out until escape was arranged. When Kossak's warlord refused to pursue Surenn, the troll spat at his commander, declaring him coward. The troll then stormed into the labyrinth alone. Moments later, more than half the warhost deserted the centaur to follow Kossak, all of them ready to put an end to Magus Surenn's corrupt ways.

Magus Surenn did not come out of the tunnels. Kossak 'Mageslayer' did.

Upon emerging from the caverns, Kossak found Poulsa Rhe standing before him, alone. With a mighty cry, the centaur ripped his own standard in half, handing the pieces to Kossak and bowing. The army bowed as well, chanting Kossak's name, and so Kossak became warlord by his own hand. In his first year of campaigning, Kossak destroyed Magus Suniib of the Guild and Yerlith, of the Order of Vladd. The year after that he fought and killed the Beast of Heronn, a magespawnd monster fabled to posses the powers of a basilisk.

Kossak was campaigning in the northern reaches against the Sect during the year that a local orc warlord came out of the mountains, leaving destruction in his wake. Though not one to condemn orcs out of hand, Kossak despised such wasteful rampages. He grew angrier when he learned that the orcish warlord was Rabahn, of the Black Grasses Pass, a powerful chaos mage who'd overseen the destruction of the League village of Antor Hewitt. Rabahn continued to grow in power, gathering more and more strength from his Kossak Mageslayer spent two years after Rabahn. When the Guild finally managed to cut the chaos mage off from retreat, Kossak was able to force Rabahn to battle before the walls of the ancient Citadel of Luxor. Unable to shatter the raiders by strength of arms, Kossak led forward a spearhead of his finest warriors. He was content to just bring down Rabahn, knowing that the raiders would break up of their own accord.

It was also at this time, while facing the orc hordes, that Kossak Mageslayer began claiming blood kinship to the legendary troll chieftain Paragon. Of course, no proof of this can possibly exist, as Paragon is known only through troll song. There are no written records among the trolls. It is more likely that Kossak is following ancient troll customs, in which an individual "adopts" an ancestral figure with whom he or she identifies. Certainly many parts of Kossak's own legend resembles that of the ancient troll hero, even down to his birth during the time of 'fiery skies.

In the end, though, this may prove disastrous for enemies of the Elemental League, as Kossak strives with every action to live up to Paragon's legacy of fierce honor. He is certainly one of the League's most proactive warlords, traveling beyond the confines of the plateau as he

deems necessary. Most requests from the city of Wylden are taken 'under advisement,' though never those regarding taking necromancers or Guild magi prisoner. Kossak handles those magick-wielding souls unfortunate enough to fall into his hands in his own way.

Living in the field, always looking toward the next battle, there is little room left in his life for compromise. Kossak would not have it any other way.

Mikel Bakare

Warlord of Mount Gray and avenger of Nok

Born in the town of Nok, Mikel Bakare's childhood was one of privilege and luxury. His father was a senior officer in the Atlantis Guild force assigned to protect the town from the monsters that haunted the area, in particular the vast Mage Stone quarry in the mountains overlooking the town. Mikel was an able student, learning to read and write at a young age and by the time he was ten he was able to debate Guild history and philosophy with adults. The old stories fascinated him, as did tales of far off lands and their strange occupants. He yearned to travel and persuaded his father to take him on visits to the surrounding towns.

Most of these trips were uneventful, but when Mikel was fourteen he accompanied his father to the now-lost Dwarven city of Regensburg. Here was a true land of mystery, one with alien people and strange artifacts powered by unknown means. Mikel fell in love with the Dwarven people and returned to the city every chance he had. He learned their language and their culture, as well as secrets of their technology. Shortly after his sixteenth birthday, however, he learned something that would change his life forever.

He had always seen the Atlantis Guild as a benign government and his parent's status shielded him from the harshness of the common people's lives. However, while exploring the maze-like passages of Regensburg, something he'd been prevented from doing when he was younger, a young dwarf, Kirk McMurrrough, accosted Mikel and accused the youth of being a parasite, living off the toil of others. Mikel was offended by the dwarf's "lies" and the two youngsters fought. Neither could gain an advantage and eventually, exhausted, Kirk persuaded the young human that he could prove the truth of his statement. What followed was a tour of the city's underbelly, the workshops where children and adults were forced to work side-by-side to meet the demands of their Atlantis Guild overlords, the dark mines from which came the raw materials that supplied the Guild armies, and the hovels to which the workers escaped at the end of the day. The Guild's "generosity" did not extend to this underclass, who were uneducated and, despite their hard work, rarely had enough to eat.

Returning to Nok, Mikel saw comparable inequalities among the town's common folk and did what he could to improve their situation. However, with tensions rising between the Guild and the Necropolis Sect, demand for Mage Stones increased considerably and the mine overlords sought to meet their increased production quotas by working the people even harder. After three months of tremendous hardship, something finally snapped in the people of Nok and they rose up in revolt against the Guild leadership. Catching the garrison unawares, the rebels quickly overpowered the troops and set about arming themselves. Many of the city's rulers and their families were imprisoned but Mikel was spared this because of his efforts to help the people.

The Guild response was swift and brutal. Forces from around the area converged on Nok, encircling the town and demanding the surrender of the rebel leaders. Scarcely waiting for a reply, Atlantis General Sul Dok ordered his forces into action with specific commands not to spare the lives of anyone in the "traitorous town." In a six hour battle, the rebel force was defeated, its rag-tag army no match for the trained soldiers and magicians of the Guild. A handful of rebels escaped, scattering to towns throughout the mountains. Realizing he had no future with the Guild, whom he now saw as oppressive and tyrannical, Mikel joined the exodus, fleeing to Regensburg where he sought shelter with Kirk McMurrrough.

Seeing in the young refugee the desire for revenge against the Guild, McMurrrough introduced Mikel to numerous like-minded individuals – the Black Powder Rebels - in the dwarven city and the other mountain towns. Exploiting the secret dwarven technologies, Mikel and Kirk slowly assembled an army and staged numerous raids against Guild caravans and outlying camps.

Six years after the battle of Nok, Mikel Bakare lead his troops against an army sent to hunt him down and destroy the “threat” to Guild sovereignty. At first Mikel was loath to lead his troops into a direct battle but when he learned the enemy force was commanded by Sul Dok, the butcher of Nok, he knew that the time had come for revenge.

Black Powder Rebels from the dwarven city and the mountain villages formed the bulk of Mikel’s army but the efforts of Kirk McMurrrough, a skilled diplomat and speaker, had persuaded several Knights Immortal to side with the rebels. Similarly, several renegade Atlantean mages joined Bakare’s army in the hope of capturing mage stones and other items from their enemies. McMurrrough’s greatest success, however, was in recruiting the Draconum called Rynmacal to fight with the army. The great beast’s reasons for joining the rebels was unclear, even to McMurrrough, but his presence gave the troops confidence that they would be victorious.

Battle was joined on the plains south of the mine – the town had been abandoned after the sacking and replaced with rough shelters for the workers. Atlantean Golems clashed with Dwarven Berserkers and Ultem Crossbowmen rained bolts on Black Power Boomers as they attempted to close. Though initially successful, Mikel’s attack foundered when a Storm Golem emerged from the Atlantean ranks and began slaughtering the rebel infantry. The arrival of the Draconum Rynmacal drove the Storm Golem back and the rebels renewed their assault. As dusk fell, Mikel Bakare and Sul Dok met in single combat on the edge of the mine, blades flashing in the twilight. The Atlantean commander was more experienced, but Mikel was driven by a desire for revenge and had the advantage of youth. Though taking a number of serious wounds, the rebel warlord eventually struck down his opponent and with their leader dead, the remaining Atlantean troops broke and ran.

Ten years have past since the Second Battle of Nok and Warlord Mikel Bakare remains a formidable force in the area. Operating from his castle on the slopes of Gray Mountain, he seeks to bring an end to the tyranny of the Guild and to ensure justice for all.