

# The Tragedy of the Winter Queen

*This is the Story of New Athens and the Recovery of Our Citadel*

Once upon a time, deep in the South, a city stood proud as war raged around her. Three decades later, her residents built a massive structure celebrating her status as the Athens of the South: the Nashville Parthenon.

It sat, a popular destination, until in 1913 and 1914, the two massive productions of "The Fire Regained" and "The Mystery at Thanatos" cracked a trod into the Hedge and revealed one of the most stable locations that a Freehold could ever ask for. Starlight on the roof caused the doorways to open into the hedge, and have done so reliably ever since. With both doors located at either end of a large, empty room (situated in the real world, readily visible), and with slowly changing hedge gateways to the sides, the Parthenon quickly became home to the Delian League, the great freehold of the early 20th Century.

In 1953, the Delian League lost the Parthenon to Darklings who fancied themselves vampires. Locking out all of the Changeling, and not even using the trod themselves, except on rare occasion, most Changeling of the city spread out and made do with what resources they had, reestablishing themselves around Nashville.

Over the next half century, the Courts founded new places for their reign here and there, but there remained no strong citadel for the Freehold. Remembering the Parthenon as the golden age of Changeling culture in Nashville, many eyes watched as a struggle took place between the Darklings and some kind of magic wielding group. The

Darklings were deposed themselves, and the wizards took their place in the Parthenon, making it their home. But not all Changeling, even those who are not of the Summer Court, are willing to give up on a better future.

Erika Laudanum, Queen of the Winter Court, listened patiently to whispers and gathered information on the strange magics that the people wielded who had forced out the Darklings. It is rumored that she even walked among them, her glamor deceiving them into believing that she was one of their kind. Jack o'Lead, her consort, traveled far and wide, collecting objects and items and even bringing several renown Wized tinkers to the city. There they worked on a secret project that was only known to the Queen and her consort.

One evening, late in December 1997, Queen Laudanum invited King Williams of the Spring Court and Queen Hidalgo of the Summer Court to a conference. Together they talked for two days, finally striking a deal. In January, the Freehold assembled and was told to prepare for War. They were told that, within four months, the Parthenon would again be in the hands of the Changeling of Nashville.

To convince the Autumn Court, the Winter Queen unveiled what she had been working on. Blowing a whistle, two giants -- one of fire and steel, the other a living tornado -- strode up and took their places behind her. With artifice and glamor, contract and cunning, she had created champions for their cause.



The time came and went for the Spring Court to gain power, but the Queen held her crown, biding time and waiting for the right moment to lead the city into battle. Winter persisted well into April. Finally, on April 15th, a cold and stormy day, the Changeling gathered at noon to claim the Parthenon as theirs under the command of Queen Laudanum. Three hours later, the opposing forces struck, and Changeling surged forward and the giants were unleashed with devastating results.

Elementals wielded fire, water and brambles against witches who clouded minds, Fairest seduced and stole time from death wizards. Beasts roared and struck women commanding armies of spirits with their thorn spiked swords that tore away their souls. But worst were the giants. Tearing through the city, furiously hunting down those who were wielding magic against them, they laid waste to the city, tearing trees up by their roots and destroying nearly a thousand buildings, all as eldrich forces burned and seared their bodies.

The war rampaged for two days, slowing and twisting, then flaring back into fierce battle, but ever locked in destruction. The city was burning, the people terrified, and the wizards were becoming desperate and calling on ever more powerful forces. The back and forth raged, destroying bystanders and the city itself in increasing amounts.

Finally, on the second evening, seeing that the battle was too evenly matched and the city as a whole might be destroyed, Erika ran inside the Parthenon as soon as the evening star shone out. There she presumably plunged into the hedge. Striking a bargain none have ever heard, when she returned, it was with Athena herself, or at least a living statue of the Goddess. Nike and a serpent accompanied her, and they strode into the battle.

Rather than engaging the enemy directly, Athena raised her shield. With a crackle of lightning, those who were there swear they saw a tower in the clouds, falling to the ground. Her serpent struck the ground, sinking fangs into the dirt. A thin purple mist rose from low points in the ground, and the earth itself shuddered, as if moving past a critical faultline. Afterwards, no magic was cast, and whatever forces were arrayed against the Changeling hid in the night.

A moment of quiet held and then a cheer rose up from the remaining forces who had fought so hard and lost so many. Queen Laudanum quickly gathered as many as she could into the Parthenon, and, standing on the pedestal, spoke to the gathered city.

"The battle is won, and now the Price must be paid. I have but one warning to those who would be free! Do not trust the wisdom of..."

As she spoke, Athena rose up behind her, to resume her place atop the pedestal. Her serpent darted out one more time, striking the Queen in mid sentence, and causing her to instantly fall, lifeless to the ground. Athena's flowing robe enveloped her body as he stood over her, and she became, once again, a lifeless statue in the center of the Parthenon.

Since that date, the Freehold of New Athens has held court inside the Parthenon. Jack, embittered, left the Freehold and the city proper, but is rumored to still live in the surround area of Nashville.

Erika Laudanum's Crown has never been claimed since, and the Winter Court exists today without any Royalty.

**The End - SO FAR.**