

The Ash Gambit
by Shawn Speakman

Richard McAllister ignored the pain racking his body from dozens of wounds, his anger barely bolstering his resolve.

The Heliwr of the Yn Saith had taken a beating. He had expected his task to be difficult but not like this. The home of Christoph Moreau had been built to repel an army. In fact, it was more of a Gothic fortress, protected by various magical alarms, watchful gargoyles, and a state of the art surveillance system that would never exist in Annwn but did in Paris. A wizard could never be too cautious—Richard had learned that more often than not knowing Merle—and Christoph Moreau was no different. He was young in his craft but had the patience and attention to detail of a man three centuries older, his home reflecting it. Merle had thought one unfettered knight and his wise-ass fairy guide stood a chance at infiltrating the home though. And it had worked.

Richard hated to admit it, but he now knew he had been bested the moment he had stepped within the wizard's walls. He knelt on cold stone, gathering his strength even as it bled out of him, livid that he had been brought so low so quickly.

“Would you *stop* with the blood and do your job,” Snedeker snapped.

If he had been close enough, Richard would have knocked his irascible fairy companion into one of the labyrinthine prison's shifting walls and been done with his guide altogether.

Instead, Snedeker hovered on the other side of the room. And Richard could not muster the might to yet again put the fairy in his place.

“Easy to say that when you aren't the one bleeding, Snedeker,” Richard shot back.

“We fairies do *not* bleed,” the other sniffed indignantly.

“Well,” the Heliwr said, spitting red again. “Aren't *you* just the lucky one.”

“Your sarcasm is not going to sav—”

“Shut the *hell up*, Snedeker.”

The Oakwell fairy frowned bits of leaves and bark before returning his attention to their dangerous situation, the walls of the room fixed for the moment. Richard shook his head, cursing inwardly. In the past, they had broken into more fortified locations than the Parisian mansion. This time it had been different. Once inside, the home had become a living entity, a labyrinth of shifting walls, changing rooms, and occupied by a fey guard so intelligent and savage that Richard had been outmatched from the outset.