

# Before Hammerhoof

## A History

By Yosef Alaric (mka Jonathan Edward Feinstein)

### Part the First: A Black Hole Is Born!

In days of yore, when great beasties still trod the earth and kudzu did not reach quite so far, when the earth was young and rocks were still yet a feasibility study, there were four ancient and distant lands far beyond the horizon and they were (in chronological order) the West, the East, the Middle and Atenveldt. And it was to ancient Atenveldt that a young land in its far eastern range, sometimes called the Southern Marches allied itself, thereby succeeding from the East. And in its youthful beauty that land cast its siren call far and wide to members of those other kingdoms. And those people came forth for reasons of honor, for glory, for sanctuary and even those who came although they knew not why.

And lo from those frigid lands in the Middle known yet in this modern era as the Northwoods there came a "Hammerdwarf" who stood... well, not tall... (Oh really, guys! Just how tall do you expect a dwarf to stand?) but the stature of his spirit cast a shadow long across the Mid Realm that stretched verily unto the warm southern lands and it was in that direction to which he stepped forth on bare foot one day in order to find a home where the snow did not form drifts above his head. And this mighty "Hammerdwarf" was known to all as Lord Foscahd.

Yea and verily, this is indeed the same Foscahd of song and story who fought often without the benefit of footgear. Yes, it was even this same man who fought with the forbidden flail and all other manner of experimental weaponry. For this was a man who knew no fear in battle save, perhaps finding himself facing a foe who was even more imaginative than he.

And round about this same time there also lived a man in the Kingdom of the East on the shores of Dragonship Haven, where the baron and his lady were known to make their oaths to the Crown of the East in a form most often ascribed to Limerick of the Emerald Isle. Large and tall he was with a swagger and a laugh to charm the most disagreeable of foes, but though he hailed from a land of Vikings, he was no Viking and so he sailed south seeking fame, fortune or at least a passable education. And this man became known across the principality as Stephen de Raymonde.

These two men met in a small university town that as yet had no name within the Current Middle Ages but which was sometimes referred to by mundane persons as Oxford. And in this first year of their friendship did Foscadh teach Stephen how to fight with many strange and divers weapons. How to eat off and exciting foods and where he might find other persons with similar interests. And so interesting did this seem to those who witness this gentle instruction that others sought out Foscadh that they too might learn.

In spite of their interest, however, these others hesitated to join Foscadh without reservation and so this small town remained unknown to the king who lived thousands of miles away. Nor was it recognized by the officials of the nameless land, but while they remained unenlightened, these officials studied a map of the world and noted that Merowald Sylveistan the Mapmaker had used the Latin word for south at the bottom of his map and thinking that it referred to them, these people began to call their incipient principality Meridies.

There was winter and there was summer and thus the first year passed.

And in that first summer there came forth a prince among men in the land of Draconia. Of impressive skill was this self-proclaimed protector of furry snakes, the one formerly known as Baron Sir Francois Duvant. Though of modest height, he strode across the shiny new principality on the feet of a giant. Eventually, the giant got tired and made Francois walk under his own power.

But while the coronet still sat untarnished on his head strange rumblings could be heard from the north as strange and horrible omens were witness across the placid land of Meridies. For, though all was peaceful in those idyllic days, there was an evil tailed-star that crossed Meridian skies, the earth shook thrice and terrible storms ravaged the coasts. For far in the north a young minstrel, recently appointed Shireve of Smoking Rocks against his will, sought to escape the burden of responsibility. Armed only with his wits, a guitar, a large round shield, a collection of swords and a bag of royal money large enough to buy several years of sanctuary in the lap of luxury, he fled south. And this scoundrel and varlet was known as Lord Yosef Alaric and the less said about him, the better... (uh... oh yeah... too late!)

On his way southward, he stumbled directly between the armies of the East and Middle as they fought the fifth battle of the Great Pennsic War, and narrowly escaped with his life, but on awakening that next morning he found none other than his old friend Foscadh, who had traveled back to the Middle Kingdom to defend it against the godless aggressors of the East. Seeing Yosef was forced to flee a kingdom for the second time (NB Yosef was a particularly scurrilous troublemaker and had already fled justice in the Mid Realm just over a year earlier), Foscadh told Yosef, "If thou must spend years in exile, there is a small town that the primitive mundanes hight Ox-ford. It may not be the Northwoods, Cleflands, or even Smoking Rocks, but I do believe thou willst find it most friendly and accommodating."

And this did Yosef respond, "Best offer I had all day." And so it came to pass that Yosef Alaric came in due course on the wave of late summer heat to Ox-ford and having naught better way to pass his time chose to enroll in the local university and so to achieve an advanced degree. But on inspecting the room to which he was assigned in the hall known as Faulkner, he was heard presently to say, "Haven't you yokels heard of air conditioning? I'll have a better chance of surviving camped out in that 'Olde English Village' called 'Ox-ford Square.' though, indeed I knowest not why it is nearly as far from the square as it could be and still be in the Ox-ford." and "These Meridians are crazy!" He was heard to say the latter on many occasions, sometimes prefaced by the phrase "Trust me!"

And in time Yosef met in counsel with Foscadh and Stephen and together they decided that it would be fitting should this strange and unsung town become known to the king and Yosef asked them, "So why have you not founded a shire in this place already? It seems to me that you have many potential and interested persons such as Devotie and his lady, Cathy, John (NB: later known as Tinheart and sometimes as Folderol) and all the others with whom we sometimes play the noble game of *Dungeons et Dragons*."

"We have not enough who have committed themselves to the foundation of a shire," Foscadh replied.

So Yosef told Foscadh and Stephen, "It may take four to play Bridge, but it only take three to make a shire. (NB: back then it really did only take three SCA memberships to establish a shire) And we are three."

"I'd like to think I'm a bit older than that," Stephen declared tartly.

"Fie!" Foscadh responded, "for three is a noble and magical number. There were the Three Musketeers, the Tree Wise Men..."

"The Three Blind Mice," Yosef added quickly. "But wait, I even have a name for our neophyte shire that is fitting and appropriate, for long has this land been known as the Black Hole of Atendveldt and so should we proudly garb this land with this fond name of antiquity."

"The Shire of the Black Hole," mused Foscadh. "It is a name of dark foreboding."

"It has a certain seemly gravity," Stephen noted.

"It sucks," Taliesin the principality herald told them. But while he had reservations, he kept still while the new shire gained approval from the rest of the principality, the kingdom and BoD Almighty, who was at that time an ineffable entity that never left the West. "That name will never get past kingdom level anyway."

## Part the Second: Our Event Horizon

And so did the Shire of the Black Hole begin life, gasping for breath on the shores of Lake Sardis. And the first foray by the army of the Black Hole was to yonder Gray Niche where Samhain was in celebration and where Stephen, Yosef and Foscadh each earned great glory in tournament and living chess by day and enjoyed the Bacchante and Valhalla-like revelry that was afforded in the evening. And thus was bold Prince Francois Duvant impressed by the fighters of the Black Hole.

It was here too that Yosef's musical talents first became known in the principality, and by singing "Catalan Vengeance" and "Causes of Rebellion" both Prince Francois Duvant and his heir apparent, the self-styled bastard, Sir John the Bearkiller knew that this strange new minstrel was one on whom they must keep a close eye. Yosef, however, was only vaguely aware of the notice, except to grin at Francoise's grimace at the line "but we know the worth of a French knight's word." Nor too, did Stephen nor Foscadh for all three were too involved in the kissing contest, the wet tunic contest and the naughty motion pictures that in those dim days were a staple of Grey Niche entertainments.

Later that year, they all followed Sir John on his long trek into the southern hinterlands, later known as Trimaris, for his investiture as prince. And there in the land of Oleno, where the land was built upside down for the river runs underground, was Prince John invested with the coronet of Meridies on a very warm and pleasant day. And the good tidings of the principality were foretold as the temperature crashed nearly sixty degrees in a single night. And lo did the mundane authorities proclaim "Global Warming!"

And these were but two of the events the members of the Black Hole did attend in that first official year, traveling to the South Downs and Axemoor and frequently to Grey Niche.

And in this year the ranks of the Black Hole began to implode with the addition of the Family Stone: Mary, Paula and Ronda, and Judy Pace and Joanna, and others whose names have been mislaid in the historian's woolly mind.

And while the Black Hole held no official events in that year, it did host a demo on the lawn of Ole Miss' Student Union and also played host to many of their friends from Grey niche, who came down to help at the demo. The revel that evening was held at Yosef's house.

And there was winter and there was summer, thus did the second year pass.

## Part the Third: And Bambi Came Out of the Forest...

As the Shire of the Black Hole began to approach its first anniversary Foscahd was forced to leave the fledgling shire, but many new people arrived with reasons as diverse as they were themselves. Among them were Lord Gordon Blackwolf and Lady Antonia de Castilla (Cindy), Mary Gray, Thorbjorn Wulfgrimmsonr (Mike), Fritz Wilhelm Hammer (another Mike), Kay Wu (the Wu Monster), Liz, Polly and a plethora of high school students with names like Greg and Richard and Rick and Nancy and Leslie and Alison and Alison and Alison and Alison and Alison (there may have been still more Alisons, but after Alison Three, they pale in comparison.) And also that was the autumn in which the infamous Alisoun MacCoul of Elphane (aka Bambi) made her first appearance and was instantly suckered by Yosef into serving as seneschale,

It was also at this time that many people chose to serve in new offices. Stephen served as the Black Hole Pursuivant. Gordon became the Master of Sciences, Cindy (Antonia) was Mistress of Arts and Yosef was knight marshal (or at least that's how it is currently remembered).

The first Crown Tournament of Meridies was held in Black Hole Territory, although it was sponsored by Grey Niche. Being only about thirty miles outside the shire seat most of the shire turned out that day in time to watch John the Bearkiller win, although some of our costumes were still a bit rough, including Bambi's which she made mostly of felt because there was nothing else available she liked to buy from in town. That same felt, however was used to make the first Black Hole banner which featured a stylized black sun in its splendor on a gold field. Those colors, reversed, became the basis for the current Hammerhold arms.

That year also marked the beginning of a close friendship with the Shire of Oktibbeha (later Riviere de Sang), when the Black Hole Gang traveled south at Brademante's behest to assist in demos on the Mississippi State Campus. That was also the origin of the Kentucky Fried Feast, so named for the "caterer" of the feast after the first such demo.

But not all activities by the Black Hole Gang were medieval in nature. There was also the epic trip to New Orleans to pay homage to King Tutankhamen, for which several cars caravanned down to Biloxi late one Friday afternoon and then before dawn woke up again to arrive in New Orleans just in time to discover just how long the lines at the museum really were. However, crazy people do crazy things and everyone did finally get in to see the tons of gold and other precious commodities that Egyptian kings got to take with them.

Then came January when on the heels of a major ice storm several carloads of the Black Hole Gang loaded up and headed for Jessup, Georgia. Bambi was delayed still further in Tupelo, where she was supposed to meet with Brademante and caravan with

her. There followed a series of "I was here while you were there" stories and eventually Bambi gave up on Brademante and continued on toward Jessup. And why were they going there in spite of roads that were officially closed all the way across three states? The coronation of John the Bearkiller, First King of Meridies, that's why!

Most of the caravan arrived around false dawn, while the pitch black sky was just starting to turn "God-awful Grey," but they gamely checked in and after sufficient dawdling about, went to find someplace to get breakfast because in temperatures around twenty degrees, and in frozen mud, they didn't like the idea of pitching tents, although strangely enough some people did.

When finally able to check into a motel, Yosef and Bambi each thought the idea of grabbing a nap for an hour or two before court would be a good idea. And that happy thought lasted all of five minutes when Stephen called up from the site to report that the King Khoris of Atenveldt demanded to speak to them. And so, with no sleep in about thirty-six hours, both Yosef and Bambi drove back to the event site and an hour-long lecture by the Atenveldt King about how to redress issues in the SCA. The full story of that will have to be left for a dark and drunken night at Pennsic, but suffice to say Yosef was firmly outspoken in a written debate with the regional seneschale and the King had been only given the "Readers' Digest" version there of. The issue beneath it all, of course, was the fact that the Black Hole was growing so fast that Bambi consulted the regional seneschale regarding the requirements for barony. When the regional seneschale did not give a full answer to the question the situation escalated a bit until Yosef wrote his now infamous "friendly note." Brief conclusion: both Bambi and Yosef acquitted themselves well in that encounter and Khoris was shocked somewhat later when those two "troublemakers" were called into Court directly after the great officers of state had sworn fealty; Yosef received a Court Barony that day and Bambi, her Award of Arms. Stephen was also awarded arms that day

This was a banner year. Not only did Yosef manage to get into deeper trouble than ever before (see above) with the regional seneschale, but the Black Hole planned and held it's first official events, starting with the Star Mangled Spanner Tournament for which Yosef was autocrat. He also organized the tournament, fought in it and won the first ever Order of the Battered Wrench, taking a certain amount of friendly heat, especially from Sir Beorn Collenfehrt who lost in the finals of the wounds-retained tourney, with only had one arm and one leg left while Yosef was still intact. The feast that night was produced as a team effort by many of the Black Hole Gang including Cindy, Bambi, Cathy, Thorbjorn and Yosef. The recipes for the entire feast was collected into and distributed as "The Kudzu Cookbook." (NB: said cookbook is still available online - possibly with permission - at <http://www.tirbriste.org/dmir/CookingFeasts/0802/0802.html> )

Also Gordon, Cindy and Bambi started publishing a regular Arts and Sciences Newsletter called "The Kudzu Wreath" which many shire members contributed to. However not everything was happy-happy, joy-joy for the Black Hole Gang. Early that spring we got the bad news. Even the Laurel Sovereign would not allow us to use the

name Black Hole. A new name was needed. In a marathon-length special meeting many such names were tossed into the pool and then discarded until Yosef suggested Hammerhome (in honor of Foscahd, the "first of the three founders to make it out over the wall", but which Devotie misheard as Hammerhold and wrote that version down on the blackboard. Yosef saw that and decided it was probably a better name (although he later admitted he thought it was a bit trite at the time) and the name was quickly accepted by all those present. The name Hammerhold and its new arms, the kudzu-entwined hammer, became official later that year, in a remarkably short turn-around time.

Soon after that John the Bearkiller won the third Crown Tourney of Meridies in a close fight with Viscount Francois (NB this is early in the first reign of Orlando Cavalcante) and after some discussion John agreed to allow Hammerhold, now about to submit a proposal for baronial status, host his second coronation.

And there was winter and there was summer, the third year.

Here ends "Before Hammerhold."