

*The 23rd Chronicles
of Kalynthia*

*Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

This 23rd edition of the Concise Chronicles of Kalynthia is designed to serve as a single-volume companion to the history, peoples and events of our planet for home or library use. Our aim throughout has been to provide up-to-date, readable entries, using non-specialised language. It is hoped that the Concise Chronicles will be useful in providing an introduction to each subject with the important facts and dates; readers who would like to know more are referred to the full 50-volume Chronicles, edited by Mas d'Azil and this year celebrating its 500th edition.

Arrangement of entries

For ease-of-use this book has been arranged according to what are now (following the discovery of Xaran's Scrolls in 5170) recognised as the Four Ages: the time of the Old Ones, the Rise of Civilisation, The Emergence of Evil, and the Modern Age. All dates are thus given in Universal Chronology (UC), with cross references to Local Chronology (LC) only where relevant. As far as possible chronological order has been maintained; where dates are uncertain, we have chosen the most widely recognised year.

Style

This 23rd edition continues the tradition of narrative or 'storyteller' history, a form first employed to great critical acclaim for the 5th edition (5120) by the Chronicler Eredri, and used ever since. The exception is the First Part: the study of the Old Ones is still a new science, and until bards and narrators have the entire collection of Scrolls at their disposal, none is willing to commit himself to the task of narrative. The result is a categorical introduction to the facts we do know, and speculation about those we do not. Students of a more prosaic, linear history are again referred to the full Chronicles, where all entries are afforded precise dates and equal importance.

Appendices

For the first time this year the Concise Chronicles include a brief history of the Old Ones and a short collection of Appendices, detailing the important works of our time, without which much of our history would be unknown.

Comments and suggestions

We are grateful to the many readers of the 22nd Edition who have provided invaluable additional information, or who have highlighted errors in the text.

Oxia Luchon
(Editor, 23rd Edition) Third Cycle, 5173

THE FIRST AGE: THE OLD ONES

Most of what we know of the history of the Old Ones is a result of the discovery of the Book of Bal-Ze Xaran (see APPENDIX ONE). This is a compendium of history, religion, superstition, art and science written on almost 1,400 scrolls and discovered in the Mage territory three years ago. From Xaran's complex system of cross-references it has been speculated that this collection is only one tenth of the total, the remainder of which has now been lost, probably forever. The style is obscure at best and unintelligible at worst, so the unravelling of the meaning of the Scrolls has been a long and arduous process - as a result, no claims are made for the precise historical accuracy of the following. However, the general impression remains that our ancestors were a peaceful race who, all too suddenly, were annihilated by some natural disaster.

NB: There are no dates in the Book, but the linear chronology of the scrolls has been verified.

GENERAL HISTORY

The story of the Old Ones is mostly apocryphal. We have no confirmed knowledge of how they evolved, the animals with which they shared their planet, or how they came to divide into the tribes mentioned in Xaran's first Scroll. However, after painstakingly reassembling clues and fragments from the Book, it is reasonably certain that, after a period of several thousand years in which peoples fought each other for territory, language, and the right to preserve their culture, our forefathers lived for a thousand millennia in an idyllic state of harmony.

It needs to be made clear from the start that, physically, they were not like us. As anyone who has seen the collection of ancient canvases at the Kalynthian Gallery will know, they had our outward shape - but there the similarity ends. They were a slightly shorter people, their heads larger and their backs hunched like an ape's. Their skin was much thinner and paler, even translucent if the paintings are to be believed. We assume from this, and from other fragmentary geological evidence, that the world was a few degrees colder then, with darker days and ice old nights.

The best theory we have for their decline is only speculation, but a number of sources point to the truth of it. Current scientific thinking holds that, some time towards the end of the Old Ones' rule, some stellar event - perhaps a passing star or a distant explosion - exerted a minute but permanent gravitational influence on our sun, enough to shift it a few thousand miles closer to Kalynthia. The result was a rise in temperature of a few degrees and

an accompanying increase in light intensity, which melted the polar ice caps and produced the climate we now find so favourable.

Having evolved into one shape, our ancestors were thus devastated by these new environmental forces at work - being much less resistant to the increased heat of the sun, they were forced underground. As we now know, their efforts were quite futile. Most of them could not adapt to the higher levels of radiation; and many of those that could were unable to produce successful future generations. However, as with most creatures, a minute proportion of the population had the necessary qualities to survive, and that strain evolved over millions of years to become what we are today.

Most of this will be familiar to those of you who know the Clerical myth cycle, seized upon by the voices of retribution and doom in the Third Age. These stories tell of an ancient race who were arrogant enough to think they could become gods, and who for their pride were killed, or disfigured, or driven underground. The gods illuminated their dark world, sending light into every shadowed place so that no one might escape judgement, and burning those who dared stand against them. In the end only the pure at heart survived to create a new race, who could stand in the light and glory in their talents, but who did not dare to aspire to divine status again.

GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS

The Scrolls speak of a world 'created by the divine hand of the First Mover in an age before time was recorded.' More than anything, this points to the Xaran's use of symbols and gods to explain natural occurrences - to him, in the last days of civilisation, divine retribution must have been as fair an explanation as any. Considering that the rest of their society was far more culturally and scientifically advanced than even we are, it's safe to consider that Xaran was one of the few believers in religion, and was also one of the new breed of survivors. His tone throughout is condemnatory of the world he lived in, particularly its use of magic and science.

Nonetheless, when we strip away the polemic, we find that legend and stories - those age-old substitutes for religion - were widely used even to the end. Indeed, the Old Ones were surprisingly like us, in that their use of myth and magic was a socially binding factor.

As we now know, of course, much of our world was formed by gases condensing into planetary form; but for them it was a very different place. We have already speculated that Kalynthia was a colder world, capped with ice fields, and with a much lower sea level than at present. The islands in what are now the Mage, Cleric and Evil territories would have been linked to the mainland with rocky causeways - and it would have been quite possible to have walked from one end of Kalynthia to the other!

In effect, this is unlikely to have happened. Much of the northern and southern regions were (to our minds, at any rate) uninhabitable due to the cold, and population there would have been restricted. This geography inevitably dictated the political shape of the land: according to Xaran, most of the early battles were fought for control of these peninsulas and causeways. Then as now

battles were brutal and bloody, but the difference lay in the quality of arms: if the Scrolls are to be believed, men could kill each other from distances of several hundred yards, with weapons that could project death through the air, and magic that could send fire from the skies.

Here we find one of the major difficulties with Xaran's writing: the use of words for which we have no modern equivalent. He speaks of huge, deadly machines propelled through the air as if they had a mind of their own; he speaks of armoured carriages that could release explosions of fire; and, most enigmatic of all, he tells of weapons like the hand of the gods that could destroy a whole town in one blow.

In the end, the imposition of one law which was acceptable to the majority was the only hope for peace. As the Scrolls (59-63) tells us, this is exactly what happened. It appears that a great leader known only to us as Zander emerged from what is now the Neutral zone, then almost entirely mountainous and completely covered in snow. Within thirty years he had risen to conquer or pacify the entire world. His skill lay in forming acceptable alliances and encouraging trade between nations; where he failed to convince the tribal leaders, he crushed them with military power. By the time of his death linguistic conformity was widely enforced, though cultural diversity was still permitted.

This unified land has since been named Ur-Kalynthia, though we have no record of its true name. Zander's triumph over it marked the beginning of a million years of peace and technical advancement; the abandonment of old superstitions and religious belief, and the growth of myth and magic. The only threat to this idyllic place was a natural one: volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods and - of course - the climactic warming of the planet.

It is during these millennia that many of the areas where we now have cities were flattened and shaped. Kalynthia was a hostile place which didn't yield easily to attempts to tame it. This meant that the Ur-Kalynthians were obliged to seek out the limits of their construction and mining skills, with the result that even today many of their achievements are as solid as they were when first constructed. Many of their mines were left abandoned for thousands of years, but most of them survived, and the minerals and ores found there have been of great benefit to our society from the Second Age onwards.

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

The Ur-Kalynthians were undoubtedly accomplished engineers and scientists. Xaran speaks of ships that could pass over the seas without sails, carriages that could take to the air and travel from one end of Kalynthia to the other in a matter of hours, craft that could travel beyond the air and touch the faces of the gods. How much of this is fanciful speculation and how much truth, we will never know: since no mechanical vehicle larger than a bird can fly, we presume these air ships must have been constructed of gossamer-thin material, and would only have been able to carry one passenger at most. It is surprising that, for all their other achievements, the Old Ones were not capable of finding more

natural means of transport.

Weaponry achieved little progress once peace became firmly established. It seems that they abandoned their more sophisticated weapons, so we are unable to discover how they achieved destruction on a grand scale. All the arms that Xaran mentions in detail are similar to the common weapons we have today, and appear to have been used to maintain peace when it was necessary: 'unholy swords of flame, bows and arrows tipped with the devil's poison, stones of fire and stars of shining metal'.

However, the most significant of their scientific and engineering legacies is the network of dungeons. Even before their enigmatic decline our first ancestors were enthusiastic diggers and miners, creating huge labyrinths of underground passages. They appear to have been as happy above as below ground - to the point where it's estimated that much of their world consisted of whole cities beneath the earth - and all the tunnels, dungeons, caverns, houses, squares and trading places therein. If Xaran's calculations are correct (see Scroll 1379), we may assume that 99 out of every 100 of these structures were deliberately destroyed or have collapsed, leaving behind the 70 or so minor dungeons we now have. Whether or not these dungeons were infested with the legions of evil that now inhabit them, it is hard to say. We can only hope that they did not unearth the horrors that we ourselves faced in the Third Age, and that their underground cities were places of light.

Little credence was afforded to Xaran's tales of a 'world' beneath the earth until recent archaeological excavation revealed the existence of a vast, collapsed network in the Neutral zone. Even to our alien eyes, it's obvious that these dungeons had a variety of uses, from grain stores to private gardens, from housing to public squares.

With the tunnels came knowledge. The Ur-Kalynthians passed down to us the methods for growing plants without natural sunlight, the bi-functional use of aqueducts to create a supply of fresh water and a sanitation system, the knowledge of illusory doors and walls, and the complex lock-systems which even now few inhabitants of the underworld have managed to breach. If Xaran had been more careful in the storage of his Scrolls, how much more we might have discovered...

MAGIC

Much has been made of the Ur-Kalynthians' influence on our magical system - without them we would have the ability to do little more than cast light where there is darkness and combat the weakest evil with fireballs. Much of this is due to Xaran's meticulous explanation of the methods of creating magic in Scrolls 981-1055 (a small part of the so-called 'Magical Scrolls', many more of which have yet to be found).

The earliest traces predate this, however. Evidence of magical practice has been found in caves in the Mage zone dating back to pre-icecap times. Paintings on the walls of these early dwellings show that Ur-Kalynthian hands in various stages of mutilation were used to make prints, drawn in red ochre and

surrounded by enigmatical signs and symbols. Closer examination reveals that fingers were removed deliberately - a practice which has parallels with the fanatical Mages of the Third Age who felt that such a sacrifice allowed them to focus natural energies with greater clarity.

However, it was after Zander's unification of Ur-Kalynthia that magic flourished. Xaran speaks of potions produced in huge factories for the benefit of the entire race - chemicals which allowed our ancestors to heal the sick, gain extra strength or energy, intoxicate their enemies, increase the power of their muscles for extra speed. They had wands far in advance of our own, too: sticks that could send flames over a mile and hit their victim with pinpoint accuracy, implements which could cast poison gas over a great area of land, wands that could summon lightning from the sky.

Towards the end of their reign on Kalynthia they began to develop higher forms of magic still. We now know that, like us, they were able to manipulate matter. This allowed them to teleport objects (or themselves) over great distances - far greater than those which we can achieve. They could also create force shields to guard against attack (though what attack they feared we don't know); they could even make themselves invisible. Naturally enough, some of our more common spells, such as the spontaneous generation of fire balls and electrical bolts, were mastered by them to a fine degree.

It may surprise some to know that, far from being the work of our own craftsmen, the magical rings and necklaces of power are also gifts from the past. Most were discovered before the beginning of the Third Age and the emergence of Bronakh and his evil hordes, since after this time most of our dungeons have been possessed by the agents of chaos and darkness. However, where we can gain access to the dungeons, our explorers and archaeologists are still finding objects of magic and power. Knowledge of how to fashion these objects is lost to us, and Xaran makes little mention of them apart from an unhelpful reference to 'the adornments of a pagan people whose confidence overpowered their natural sense of worship.' However, it is hoped that, now that the Heroes have been found and the mission to eradicate evil has been completed (as it surely must), we will be able to scour the deeps and unearth new riches, and new powers.

ART AND LITERATURE

Perhaps the most important contribution made by the Old Ones to our present society and that of our ancestors was language. The creation of an alphabet, the use of letters to create words, the ancient writings of runes and symbols are all their creation. Obviously the phonetic values of certain letter combinations have changed, and few of their words, when spoken, would even be recognisable to a resident in the Neutral zone, but the legacy remains: without the Old Ones we would have no language, and thus no culture and no civilisation.

Xaran appears to write in an ancient tongue - a formal style similar to the codified modes of writing adopted by Chroniclers and Clerics even today. There

is little evidence that our primordial ancestors produced any great body of writing, which has given rise to speculation that they were in some way communally telepathic, the need for writing and speech except in formal circumstances having long since died out.

Names are a vital clue in discovering the Old Ones' behaviour and attitude towards their surroundings. There is little doubt, as far as the Scrolls are concerned, that they exploited Ur-Kalynthia, plundering its resources for their own benefit; however, naming seems to have been an important part of their armoury in doing so. As usual, Xaran is unclear, cloaking his own feelings under a pretence of religious objectivity; but as far as our own clerics have been able to decipher, our ancestors sought out the 'true' name of everything in order to manipulate it with total freedom.

This idea appeared to be the unintelligible ramblings of a fanatical scholar, until the discovery by the Mages some fifty years ago that they could create and destroy objects (on a comparatively small scale) simply by using this so-called 'true' name in conjunction with other magical commands and incantations. How this is achieved is well documented elsewhere, but readers are particularly referred to Jall's Book of Names.

CONCLUSION

Although much of the evidence is masked by prejudice, the picture painted by Xaran's Scrolls is clear enough: the Old Ones had skills and powers even in their earliest days which far supersede anything that we have achieved. Ur-Kalynthia was a different world, geographically and politically, from our own, but the means of manipulating its resources are universally applicable. It may be that, once evil has been driven from our subterranean inheritance and caged without hope of release, new secrets and new scrolls will appear, allowing us to create more powerful magic, and perhaps even achieving some of the distinction of our earliest forefathers.

THE SECOND AGE: THE RISE OF CIVILISATION

INTRODUCTION

As all Kalynthians are now obliged by law to take their first examination in elementary planetary development as part of their second year diploma, all readers older than eight (and younger than 59) will be familiar with the way the tale of our history was narrated for more than 5,000 years. In our modern world which is awash with books, scrolls and publications of varying date and sometimes dubious origin it is sometimes hard to conceive of a time when our whole tradition was entrusted to nothing but the memory of a band of wandering storytellers forced to rely for their living on goodwill and charity. It is also worth remembering how easily that history might have slipped into oblivion in the turmoil of the Third Age if it had not been for that genius of a scholar the Chronicler Eredri. Thanks to his diligent efforts to seek out the descendants of the original storytellers, most then living in abject poverty, and harness vast teams of assistants to record their words, much of our history would be irrevocably lost.

The text as it stands here, in this the 23rd edition of our Chronicles, has been taken from the original source scrolls - not one of the many error-riddled copies produced since.

THE NARRATIVE OF AXIRA

As sure as the sun sets in the east and the dancing fire turns to ash, so must the legends of Kalynthia be told. When I speak, I talk with the tongues of the gods - if I say ill, may they send their rain of death to strike me down.

THE FOURTH DAY

In the beginning this is how it was. The god Kiri-Sam and his consort Gardi were bored of playing in the trees, swimming in the rivers and eating what the bounty of Kalynthia could provide. So together they each took a handful of clay, mixed it with a gobbet of spit and fashioned two figures for three days and three nights. They intended to create the most beautiful creatures they had ever seen - beings as perfect as the sun, as cool as the rain and as dark and mysterious as the trees - but on the Fourth Day they were distracted by the cries of a beautiful peacock, threw the unfinished figures into the fire and ran away to search for the bird in the woods.

When they returned, the heat of the flames had fixed their designs and two brown, misshapen figures were crawling out of the ash. The gods were distraught. These creatures, which they called female and male, were not beautiful or attractive or even very smart: their limbs were crooked, their bodies had patches of hair where pine needles had mixed with the clay and they

resembled nothing so much as a pair of ugly, smelly chimpanzees. The gods wrinkled their noses and stamped their feet in disgust.

In their rage they torched the surface of the planet, burnt up the forests and the wheat fields and left behind a dull, barren world exactly suited to the looks of these misformed, lumpish brutes. Afterwards Kiri-Sam and Gardi left for a different place. The female and the male, who had no names, lived on in Kalynthia.

THE DARK TIME

All this happened a very long time ago, a long time before our scholars began to count the years and a long time before there were storytellers. We don't know exactly what happened after the Fourth Day. What we know is this: the man and the woman with no name are our ancestors and by the year 0000 they had taught their descendants how to build their own huts, the best way to make a fire and which fruits and vegetables are good to eat.

Even at this time, so we are told, a single look at the ugly race they had accidentally created was enough to send Kiri-Sam, Gardi and their great spirit descendants into a terrible rage. For a long time they continued to heap illness and disease on Kalynthia. In some places where the fire of the Fourth Day had caused the most damage it was impossible for humans and other creatures to survive. When they went there they soon became dizzy and sick and could take in no more food. Their bodies ached in many places, they complained of terrible pains in their stomachs or their sides and often grew so lethargic it was impossible to persuade them to get up each morning, let alone dig in the earth for roots. Those who visited these places did not usually live very long.

At this time the gods felt such spite towards the hideous creatures they had made that they often played tricks on them. They wanted the Kalynthians to understand what it was like to create something ugly, so they cast terrible spells on human children while they were still in the womb. And so it happened that many infants were born with deformities: some had two heads, others were not completely separated from their twins, others still were born covered in fur or emerged without the correct number of fingers or limbs. Even when they appeared normal at birth, a single accident or a fall from which a normal child might easily recover would be enough to send them into decline.

It was the ill-will of the gods that killed many children before they were grown and many adults before they were very old. They were so angry they even directed their rage at the birds and the beasts. All the afflictions which affected the Kalynthians troubled their sheep, cows and chickens too. This was called the Dark Time.

Unlike the gods, the birth of so many deformed and ugly creatures did not make the Kalynthians angry. When these human beings survived they were cared for with the same love and affection given to any child. This surprised Gardi and Kiri-Sam and they began to think that perhaps the Kalynthians weren't so hideous after all. And as their anger abated, so they gradually left off exacting vengeance on the men and women trying to eke out a living on the planet below. The poisoned places killed less and less frequently and soon hardly any

deformed children were born at all. Nevertheless, it is known that the gods are never satisfied. It is their will that we should be sent the occasional reminder of our humble origins so our race will never be free of physical mutations of one kind or another.

It was at about this time, exactly when is unsure, but I am told it was around the year 891, that life became easier for the Kalynthians. The sun didn't seem so hot, or perhaps we just didn't feel it so badly any more, and our ancestors began to settle down in small settlements and sow crops. They grew marrows and wheat, they learnt to fashion attractive vessels from clay and they knew, as we do, how to bake bread, catch fish and make oil from olive trees. Many had herds of cows and sheep and knew how to spin wool and weave clothes, but their houses were still made mostly from mud (at this time mud still felt like home).

Back then most Kalynthians didn't know other Kalynthians existed - the land was rich, they had no need to walk further than ten leagues from their settlements and so each tribe of Kalynthians thought it was the only tribe in the world. They ate, drank, worked and slept as if the planet belonged to them. They weren't smart, these ancestors of ours, and they would have gone on like this for ever if it hadn't been for Drexel.

DREXEL THE GREAT

Some say Drexel was the son of the goat-herd Al-Nin, others that he was created from Kiri-Sam's breath when he gasped at the beauty of his mother, others still that he was fashioned secretly by Gardi after her failed attempt to create the perfect human being made her weep. It could be true, it could be false - I just pass on what I've been told.

Drexel was born in the south-east, though his people didn't know it was the south-east at the time. They thought they lived at the centre of the world, as was the common habit everywhere in the year 1001. In this place he learnt to swim and row, to milk goats, plough fields, harvest wheat and sow seed but none of these careers seemed attractive to him. At night Drexel gazed into the sky and stared into the darkness; he wanted to see what else there was.

By day, he often ate his lunch at the corner of his father's field and watched the wild ponies as they roamed the steppes. And this was where Drexel conceived of the idea that would change the future of Kalynthia. Early one summer's morning just before the harvest of 1017 Drexel went into the steppes with some sugar and a soft piece of rope and tried to catch a pony. In a week he had won the affections of a shy, skittish chestnut mare and by the time a fortnight was up he had learnt how to mount it in a single elegant jump. By the third week he was covered in bruises but hardly fell out of the saddle any more. Maybe he was really the son of a god because Kiri-Sam did not complain. Only the Kalynthians moaned. "What's the good of riding a pony?" said the elders. "You can't use it in the fields, it'll tread down the crops and if you use to it to get about you'll get fat. What's the point of it?" But Drexel never listened. He rolled up his bedding, packed his penknife and got on his pony. He travelled for years. All day he rode until the sun went down and all night he contemplated

the wonders he had found. When there wasn't room to ride any more, he stowed his pony on a boat and rowed until he found more land. There he rode on and on.

As Drexel travelled he found out so much about other cultures and tribes that he soon became the wisest man alive. He had eaten octopus with the burly seamen of the north, he had met men who could light up dark rooms with a word, who knew how to heal a septic cut and who prayed and fasted to Kiri-Sam and the spirits for seven hours at a time. He learnt to brew potions, to disable a leopard with a single blow and to walk without a lantern in the underground tunnels of the gods. Some say he met his father Kiri-Sam there and but for the intervention of Gardi, matched him in a duel. It could be true, it could be false - who knows?

Soon there was not a cliff, plain or pond that Drexel hadn't seen - and as he travelled he traded jewels, cloth and spices and brought knowledge to tribes that hitherto thought they were the kings of the world. And gradually Kalynthia became a different place: traders learnt to ride, rowed farther in their boats and took the trouble to visit other clans. Soon they realised that it would be to everyone's advantage to set up a guild of traders and travellers and to the head of this guild they unanimously voted the man every Kalynthian admired most. So Drexel became Chief Guildsman, settled down in Kalys, which was then becoming the richest city on Kalynthia, and learnt to rule as quickly and intelligently as he had learned to ride a horse.

It is to Drexel that Kalynthia owes many of its laws. He pioneered the education of Kalynthians from land-owning families to the age of 11, insisted a store of grain should be set aside in case of famine and made the building of drainage facilities, latrines and public bakeries compulsory in all settlements with populations over 3,000.

This story too owes its being to Drexel. Travelling the world had filled him with so many stories to tell that he decreed the establishment of the Guild of Storytellers so that the tales of his adventures would never be lost. And so Kalynthia's history will be passed down from mother to daughter until the end of time. As my mother entertained your mothers, so my daughters will instruct and improve the mothers of the generations yet to come. All this and more we owe to the father of Kalynthian civilization, Drexel the Great.

AFTER DREXEL

When Drexel was carried to his marble mausoleum deep in the winter of the year we call 2004, it is said that the most lavish funeral games in the history of our world were celebrated: 500 archers, 450 athletes, over 200 discus throwers, 645 wrestlers and over 1000 horsemen took part in competitions which sought the most accomplished athletes in the world. For two weeks all Kalynthia feasted, drank and competed in honour of the man who created history, but there are some who remembered later certain events which went almost unnoticed in the celebrations and mourning ceremonies of the time. Some say that an unusual number of athletes were struck by unexpected injuries in the final stages of the competition, that officials unaccountably

misjudged some of the finer performances and that, incomprehensibly, favourite bows, swords and javelins disappeared. Two dark ravens were observed circling over the temple in which the victory ceremonies were performed. Soothsayers read dark portents in the entrails, the milk curdled at the banqueting tables and in the Great Temple the everlasting flame in honour of the power of Kiri-Sam went out. Strange to tell many of the prizes and awards went to the dark-eyed competitors from the north-west: they were lucky this year, it was thought.

And so it happened that after the funeral games Kalynthia continued to thrive. Our world was ruled well and wisely by the Master Guildsmen and Master Guildswomen of Drexel's dynasty and for several hundred years trade flourished, knowledge increased and society prospered. The gods and spirits smiled on our enterprises, no-one went hungry, we knew how to cure many of the sick and the harvests never failed. As time went by the burdens of the Master Guildsmen and women steadily increased and the bearer of the title soon acquired the title of King or Queen.

QUEEN SOLARA

So we passed peacefully through the reigns of Drenton, Rogar, Bodixa-Nir and Kernaz to the time when Queen Solara ruled. This was a golden time, a time when Kiri-Sam favoured us and Gardi saw that all our enterprises flourished. Solara was wise: she came to the throne in her twentieth year and was married at her own request to one of the most experienced officials of the Great Guild. Youth and age ruled well together and were blessed with four fine, healthy sons: Nikor, Drel, Igon, and Erik.

They were all exceptional. Nikor was so brave he killed a boar before he reached the age of twelve, Drel so devout he gave away his toys, swapped his silks for a hairshirt and spent each day in prayer. Igon's talent lay with the science of magic; at five he could turn an egg from brown to black and produce a coin from behind his nurse's ear. Erik, the fourth brother had a different skill: he was dark and quiet and he knew how to listen. If there was an argument, he understood both sides and could pronounce a judgement which was so fair and true just both parties were immediately satisfied. As soon as they grew old enough, each of the boys was sent away to school - each one to a place most suited to his talents.

Solara ruled well and wisely into her fortieth year. But in the winter of that year her steward died and it was decreed that a new man, a wanderer named Zorin from the north-western plains was to take his place. This man was young and fresh and handsome, he laughed and he smiled and once you gazed deep into his cold, dark eyes, everything that you ever knew was lost and forgotten because you could only wonder how those eyes could be so blue.

In the winter the new steward came, in spring Solara looked into his eyes and by the time the summer fruit was on the trees, her husband, the wise old man and father of her sons, was dead. On this occasion it was not thought meet to stage more funeral games but those who were there say that on the day of his death the sky went black in the middle of the day and that the giant statue of

Gardi in the marketplace began to weep great tears of blood. This may be true - I cannot say.

From that day on the wicked Zorin made a careful snare. Whenever Solara wept in solitude those deep blue eyes were waiting somewhere near. He was there when she smiled, when she laughed, when she ate, when she slept and soon, even before she noticed it, she could not bear to be parted from him. So in the third month after the funeral.. she looked into those eyes, forgot her sons, her dead husband and Kalynthia and declared that she would marry Zorin.

And before long, amidst the pelting rain of a stormy night, Solara bore another son. And even before he was wrapped in the swaddling clothes she looked into his eyes, which were the colour of basalt, the colour of the deepest, darkest seas, and drowned in them. From that moment everything she had ever known, every wisdom she had understood, each of the sons she had coddled and nourished and cherished, was as nothing to her in the face of this perfect new creature, this beautiful blue-eyed son. And as thunder and lightning clashed and tumbled about the palace she whispered five words into the ear of the midwife. "I will call him Bronakh," she said.

It was the year 3891.

THE THIRD AGE: THE EMERGENCE OF EVIL

EDITOR'S NOTE

As a preface to this third chapter of the 23rd edition of the *Chronicles Of Kalynthia*, the editorial board has upheld the tradition (followed ever since the commemorative 10th birthday edition) of reprinting Eredri's Preface to the Third Age in the very first edition of *The Chronicles* ever printed. (Interested historians may consult the original by special permission from the curator in the Great Library). Though many years have passed since the man, whose reputation as our greatest historian is unchallenged, wrote these words, it is generally agreed they are as pertinent to the understanding of the way our history is told as anything our modern structuralist scholars have to offer.

As our language has remained relatively unchanged, modern readers should have no difficulty understanding Eredri's original text, though the fashions in clothing to which he refers are unfamiliar now. Readers interested in the development of Kalynthian fashion can still find examples of pink squirrel furs in the Museum of Costume and Design at New Kalys. Unfortunately, as is the way of things, the particular variety of clogs he mentions fell out of fashion shortly afterwards and were mostly incinerated in the Coal Shortage of 5123. For evidence of what they may have looked like, we refer you to the few surviving portrait paintings of the period 5090 to 5092 which are currently on show in the Drexel Gallery.

EREDRI'S PREFACE TO THE 10TH EDITION

In these modern times it is as it has always been among the young. Those who will bear the responsibility of future history on their shoulders meet and chatter in the market place, scoff at the traditions of their elders and wear their breeches in ways which their parents inevitably find ugly and ridiculous. That is the way it is and always shall be, but in the midst of the current mania for pink squirrel fur and expensive decorated clogs made only by the master craftsmen from Kalys (inferior, more economic imitations, we note, are scorned from all sides) we must remember that if we are to survive in the future, we must recall what happened in the past.

Thus, though it is now as unfashionable to speak of classes or noble birth as it is to wear your hose outside your trousers, it is vital to the understanding of these *Chronicles of Kalynthia*, and the way that they are told, that in the past these distinctions and divisions did exist. As a young man I distinctly recall noble elders who would not speak unless they were addressed as the Sons or Daughters Of Drexel and paupers who would not speak to them unless they had doffed their caps and touched their clogs as a sign of respect.

Regrettably perhaps, Kalynthian society was based on a feudal system for many years, and an understanding of this system is particularly relevant to the *Chronicles*. Though rank or birth was never a bar to the great clans of storytellers (after all Drexel, the original teller, was born a farm boy) there is some difference of tone and attitude between storytellers of noble and peasant

birth. In the previous chapter you may read the words of Axira, a descendant of the Clan of Daria whose forefathers were blacksmiths and coopers - origins which are reflected in her reference to ancient religious beliefs and her more homely choice of words.

The ensuing episodes are narrated as they were spoken by Andira-Gar, the daughter of a lady in waiting, a woman of education and science. We learn a lesson in equality when we realise that at the time of the telling Andira-Gar had fallen into poverty while Axira was a prosperous merchant of some distinction. This is also witness to the fact that the validity of the tale does not diminish because of the narrative style of the teller. As it is written in the Book Of Drexel:

When a war is over, it is over. What matter whether you hear it from the blacksmith or the queen?

THE NARRATIVE OF ANDIRA-GAR

As sure as the sun sets in the east and the dancing fire turns to ash, so must the legends of Kalynthia be told. When I speak, I talk with the tongues of the gods - if I say ill, may they send their rain of death to strike me down.

BRONAKH'S CHILDHOOD

It is said that when Prince Bronakh was a child he could climb the kingdom's highest trees and plunge his bare arm up to his elbow into a beehive to pull out the choicest honeycomb - and all without receiving a single sting. It is said that he caught living butterflies in his childish fingers and wove them into scarves of living gossamer which he made into exquisite gifts for his nurse. These are legends, but they may be true, for Bronakh was a strange and willful child. From the moment of his birth, his mother Queen Solara was infatuated. Until that time she had followed the welfare of her other sons, who were currently being educated in the best schools throughout the globe, with interest and concern. In the manner of the Clan of Drexel, all four received letters regularly, were sent gifts on their name days and honoured with a royal visit at least once each year. But it took just one quick glimpse at Bronakh's gurgling face and the others were all as nothing: apart from a curt note to inform them of the birth of a brother, Nikor, Drel, Igon and Erik received no more news from their mother until the day of her death.

Ironically, Bronakh brought Solara no joy. Even before he could speak (which, at four months, was supernaturally soon) the baby's piercing blue eyes made it clear that the arms of his mother were loathsome to him. When she touched him or kissed him, the child screamed and whimpered, shrieked and balled his fists, arching his back until he was restored to the arms of his father (whom he stoically endured). All this just served to make Solara more desperate. She coaxed him first with toys and soft linens, then later with sweetmeats and ponies and playmates, but Bronakh never directed anything more friendly

than a sneer her way. His brothers were as nothing to his mother and his mother was as nothing to him.

Slowly, eaten up by rejection, she cared less and less for her appearance, ignored the needs of the kingdom and so quietly that hardly anyone noticed, retired to her apartments to chant nursery rhymes over a wooden doll. Inconspicuously, without fuss or bother, she sang herself into a state of neglect and incipient insanity.

Those who knew him at this time record that Bronakh's heart was colder than ice and as hard as a diamond. He cared for no-one, scoffed at most things and seemed to despise the entire court except for a black-haired woman, sent post-haste from his father's tribe on the day of his birth. This gypsy wet-nurse, Xoria, walked with a limp and was neither pretty or plain. Her long nose had a kink in two places, she displayed a black wart on her hairy lip and it is said her wrinkled hands were so hideous to look at that she always covered them in a pair of patched and dirty woolen gloves. She rarely washed, the dark herbal stench of her mildewed worsted skirts made the more sensitive courtiers gag - but Bronakh adored her.

Many speculated that her own baby, a girl named Ellida, was a changeling child: as she grew older her golden plaits wrung the heart-strings of many a moon-faced suitor and at one smouldering look from those large dark green eyes many bold men went weak at the knees. Such is the way of all flesh.

THE PLAGUE OF ACCIDENTS

Xoria was a witch, initiated into all the blackest arts of the darkest, most cabalistic branches of magic, and she taught the two children everything she knew. Ellida was a clever pupil but Bronakh proved to possess a mind of genius. By the age of ten he knew how to mix a poison from crow's blood that was so powerful a single drop mixed in a trough of water could fell a herd of oxen. He learnt and grew proficient in the language of the wolves and became skilled in the powers of auto-suggestion. He crammed his room with bottles, potions and scrolls, hung foul-smelling herbs from the ceiling and inscribed all manner of strange symbols on the walls and floors. At night strange coloured gases licked through the crack beneath the lintel - and servants, forced for one reason or another to pass his chambers, felt the floors shake and were frightened by sibilant echoes, uncanny screeching and dark grunting as they tiptoed past.

At this time, the palace at Kalys became a dangerous and gloomy place. The queen was closeted in her rooms and her advisors feared to speak or send word to her sons because of a mysterious plague of accidents. On the Queen's 53rd birthday her Chief Steward choked on a raisin in the birthday cake. A week later, the cook who had complained to Xoria about the shortage of herbs, was seen leaving the castle with a bottle of whisky and found again two days later in the lower pantry asphyxiated in a vat of porridge. A lady in waiting chanced to remark on Ellida's low-birth - in a matter of hours her hair started to fall out, she developed pustules on the her lily-white face, produced a vile smell no matter how often (or how thoroughly) she washed and was forced to retire from

court. Whether these episodes were coincidences or genuinely malevolent acts, the credit went first to Bronakh, then to Xoria and Ellida, and all three acquired a reputation for brutality.

The years that followed were not happy ones for the courtiers of Kalys. The queen lingered on in her chamber, unwashed and unattended, and the king, never very smart, appalled at the powers of the son he had created, was drinking himself inconspicuously to an early grave. The ministers were too afraid to call on the other princes for help in case they too fell into a well, choked on a glass of wine, slipped off a window-ledge or lost their limbs in some tragic mechanical foul-up. By day, the courtiers padded about the palace speaking in hushed whispers. At night they lay awake shivering as they listened to the primeval screams which were still to be heard coming from Bronakh's part of the palace. He now commanded the whole of the east wing.

THE SECRET OF ETERNAL LIFE

As a matter of fact, Bronakh had long since given up conjuring elementary accidents for his enemies. He left all this to Xoria (who had taught him everything she knew) and Ellida (who had become his consort) while all his own efforts were concentrated on a single aim - the secret of eternal life. Those amongst the peasants who still cling to the old belief say that this is a skill the god Kiri-Sam considered so dangerous he wrote down the spell, cast it into the a seamless iron box and buried it 1,000 feet below the highest mountain of Kalynthia. Whether this is any more true than the modern theory which states that eternal life is only possible under the planetary conjunction of Distera when the particle barrier between ours and the spiritual world is weak, I cannot say. This is something that no-one really knows.

Whatever the nature of the secret there is no doubt that in the entire history of Kalynthia, Bronakh is the man who wanted to possess it the most. It is told that the young prince worked day and night until his eyes were rimmed with red and his body was so tired he walked like an old man, bent double with a stoop. He studied the ancient moving books until the figures swam before his eyes and he stirred potions and traced out marks upon the walls until his fingers bled. Each night he chalked out a circle of symbols on the tiled floor and, more weary and troubled than any man alive, he chanted the name of the spirits until the sweat poured from his brow and channelled his thoughts so single-mindedly he could no more remember whether it was summer or winter, Monday or Tuesday, morning or night.

THE KINGDOM SHUDDERS

At last on the eve of his sixteenth birthday, the kingdom was shaken by a terrible groan. All over the country, hundreds of miles from the palace, there was thunder and lightning, rocks rolled down the mountains and the earth split in many places to belch out smoke. In the cities, houses collapsed and buried their owners, near the beaches whole villages were drowned by great waves from the sea. The lowing of strange beasts and monsters could be heard

in the forests and it seemed as if the whole world was spinning madly on its axis and must soon split.

All night Kalynthia heaved and hissed and rumbled, but by daybreak it was over. The mountains became still, the sea receded and the noise in the forests died down. That day, for the first time in months, Bronakh appeared at breakfast, clean-shaven, fresh and upright, a strange healthy glow to his skin. He ate three duck's eggs and gave orders for a party to celebrate his coming of age.

At first, as the survivors picked up the pieces, it was as if nothing had changed. It certainly looked that way: the hills still broke up the plains, the sun still made the wheat grow and the young men still danced with their girls in the village square. Only later, slowly, imperceptibly a few became aware that something was different, that something did not feel quite right.

The change was not tangible. You could not categorise it, or catch it, or describe it or write it down. Instead, it was something that you might feel in the air, when you were on your own early in the morning or feeding the goats at dusk. It was nothing more than an atmosphere, a hint of ill-will, a cold breeze that might send a shiver down your spine. Most just shook their heads and put it down to the cheese they had eaten last night or a cold they had coming on, but a few, a very few - just one or two who were more aware than the others - noticed that people were smiling less, that they argued more, that there was more shouting in the streets, less sharing, less co-operation than there had been before. But even those who noticed this forget it in a while for, even as they slept and ate and talked, a mist of evil and ill-will was spreading over the land.

BRONAKH COMES OF AGE

Meanwhile, the preparations for Bronakh's birthday party were proceeding apace. Jugglers and tightrope walkers were invited from all over Kalynthia, Queen Solara was washed and brought out of her rooms, Ellida wove herself a spectacular new gown and the kitchens buzzed with feverish activity. Reports were coming in from all over the country that several peasants going about their business near the woods had been attacked and once or twice killed by a race of giants or a band of mysterious monsters, but most of the ministers paid no heed. "Come, come," said a few who bothered to listen to the reports, "Monsters do not suddenly come crashing out of the ground. These are civilised times." The party was the most spectacular event Kalynthia was to see in a very long time. All the most important men and women in the kingdom (except Bronakh's brothers who were invited, but who mysteriously did not receive the message in time) put on their best clothes and fawned and flattered the prince who had now come of age, and who might put a bit of business or money or profit their way.

One fat guildsman, who had six daughters, offered him his pick - he might marry whichever girl he liked the most and would gain half of his substantial wheat empire plus a magnificent palace in the north-east of the country into the bargain. Bronakh exchanged glances with Ellida (whom every man in the room admired) and politely refused. Somehow the man was not disappointed.

Like everyone who attended the party, he went away filled with an entirely new feeling - an irrational passion to serve and defend the kingdom's youngest prince to the death. As he handed his ceremonial robes to his steward, he smiled at his wife and six daughters. "A great man. A man to die for," they all agreed.

A week after the party, Queen Solara was unexpectedly taken ill, and by sundown she was dead. Bronakh declared his intention of succeeding to the throne and the whole court, filled with an intense and passionate desire to serve this marvellous man, unanimously agreed. Brief notes were dispatched, by way of a courtesy, to inform his four brothers - and two days later Bronakh was crowned king. Ellida held the ceremonial cushion.

The year was 3907.

THE FOUR PRINCES

You may be wondering what had happened to Bronakh's four step-brothers while their younger brother was growing up in the chambers and ornamental gardens of the palace at Kalys? This is how it was:

Cut off by their mother for reasons they did not understand, they worked hard at their studies, played hard with their friends and thought little of home or family while they hunted, read, prayed and discussed in their respective universities. At first they hardly noticed that their mother had stopped visiting or writing to them. They knew she had a new husband, were dutifully pleased to hear about the birth of another brother (but not all that interested, if the truth be known) and once they had composed elegant letters of congratulation, went back to their studies. Each was in a school far from home and, if he stopped to think about it much at all, supposed that letters or communications had been lost along the way.

As time passed, their voices deepened, hairs sprouted on their chins and the boys became men, each one acquiring exceptional skills in his chosen discipline of thought. Nikor, the eldest and strongest, learnt to fight like a bear with every weapon familiar to Kalynthians. He could shoot an arrow clean through a cherry from a distance of a hundred yards, and box against the strongest fighters and wrestlers of the land. He could raise the sails of any boat, was an excellent all-round navigator, and taught himself the art of military strategy.

Since battles, with the exception of small skirmishes against pirates, brigands and barbarians, had never been fought on Kalynthia, war-making was an obscure art at this time. Nevertheless, Nikor studied what texts and tomes there were and made himself an expert at it. He established his own army, formed the rudiments of a naval force and made sure every single one of his men was fully armed and in the peak of physical condition. The eldest prince was not a warmonger: he did not wish to shed blood but something in his heart warned him that the future would be troubled and that he had to be prepared. Second in line to the royal throne was Drel, but it was this cleric's most deep and fervent hope that the crown would never come to him. Drel was a devout mystic. He learnt his skills in a monastery high at the peak of a snow-covered

mountain where the monks flailed their own flesh, deprived themselves of warmth, food and physical comfort until in a state of bodily deprivation and physical readiness the spiritual mysteries were made clear to them. He learned to walk barefoot over hot coals by closing his mind to the concept of pain, acquired all manner of healing skills and became an adept in the art of clerical magic. It was the way of the order that Drel should renounce all contact with his family - but his ties to his brothers and the kingdom were strong. Whether Nikor or one of the others were eventually elected as king, Drel felt his role at court would be as spiritual adviser and keeper of the mysteries.

Igon, like Drel, was a magic-user of some skill, and it was his destiny to become a mage. In an exclusive establishment for the most gifted of Kalynthia's students, he acquired the arcane skill of naming, learnt how to make sense of the ancient books whose pages moved and breathed as if they were alive, and conjure magical weapons which flashed and moved, cut and sliced at the beck and call of nothing more substantial than a thought. At last, after a fast of seven days, he was clothed in a white robe and permitted to allow the potent wine-dark liquid of the well of Sama pass his lips. The secrets of this ritual are familiar only to initiates but it is said that the power of the well is so great that those who drink from it are bathed in fire in a place on the very edge of life. This is a country so beautiful that many are seduced by the enchantment of it and choose not to return at all. However Igon, mindful of his kingdom, chose to come back.

As for Erik, the youngest of the four - his talents were of a much more subtle kind. It was his destiny, and his pain, always to see both sides of every argument - so he was schooled in philosophy, law, mediation and rhetoric. Words were his tools and he could weave them so skillfully, with such delicate art that those who found themselves ensnared in his verbal web could not but marvel at the skill with which he did it.

A FAMILY REUNION

And so it was that by dint of broken signposts, a split axle, a lame mule, a peasant who could not tell right from left and a hundred and one other minor but significant little delays, the messengers sent to apprise the four princes of their mother's death and the accession of Bronakh, did not arrive until the fourth day after the coronation was complete.

Immediately, his brothers decided to act. Nikor summoned them to a council at his palace and for three days and nights Drel, Igon and Erik galloped so hard through fields and forests, past plain and paddy-fields, that their horses gasped from the effort of it and the sweat foamed on their flanks.

On the fourth day, unshaven and tired and smelling of sweat, they strode into their brother's audience chamber and without stopping for a bite of bread or a sip of water, they sat down to talk. It was the first occasion on which they had seen each other in nearly sixteen years, but there was no time to reminisce or remind themselves of the boys they had once been and talk of common kinship with each other. Each brother saw three strangers sit down at the conference table and each brother nurtured a tiny seed of mistrust in his heart.

"We need to muster an army," said Nikor. "There is no other way."

"We'll march to Kalys," Igon agreed. "And fight for our rights if we have to," said Drel "But when we get there," said Erik, "Let us first try to reason with Bronakh."

"Agreed," said all four. But in their heart of hearts they were not agreed. For Bronakh, who is the most cunning man alive, had sent Ellida post haste with the messengers to weave her wicked enchantments and twist and distort the minds of Solara's true and good sons. So as they sat around the makeshift conference table, she glided invisibly into the room like a perfumed breeze and hissed poisoned suggestions into their ears.

So when Nikor spoke, he thought he heard Erik mutter. "Idiot. No more brains than a mule." When Igon had his say, he saw a sneer on Drel's and Nikor's lips. When Drel made his speech he could see in the flicker of the candlelight that Nikor was laughing behind his hand and distinctly heard the voice of Igon say, "Fool." Erik saw and heard strange signals too, but he had been taught to keep an open heart. "We are tired," he thought, "We should rest." But as each man went to his bath and his bed of crisp and scented sheets, a small voice at the back of his mind whispered that his brothers were holding something back. "I must keep my wits about me. This could be a plot," each thought. Ellida, who was now back at the camp fire in the disguise of a foolish servant girl, allowed the shadow of a smile to play about her cherry lips.

The next morning, the four brothers prepared to return to their universities. There, so went the plan, each would raise and muster a considerable army and march to a place on the plains not far from Kalys, six months hence. As they embraced on the palace steps, each wished the others good speed, good luck and good health until they should all meet again. But it seemed to each that underneath all this pleasantries, they could hear a second sharper voice. It said, "Luck? You'll certainly need it, all the good you'll be able to do," or "Who would have thought that you'd turn out such a fool," and "Strange - I thought my brother would be a taller man, not this pathetic excuse for a cockroach." And as they rode into the sunrise, their steeds champing at the bit, it was as if a shard of ice had been driven into each of their noble hearts.

BRONAKH PREPARES FOR BATTLE

Meanwhile, Bronakh, who is and always will be the most cunning creature alive, was in the midst of preparations for the great battle. Together with Ellida, his childhood mate and concubine he planned and plotted the way only a twisted, blackened mind can do.

And so Bronakh continued to hold parties and weave his clever enchantments over the court until thousands of men and women and children knew that it would be the greatest glory in the world if they could die for him. And when he felt he had enslaved enough, he told them of a great tribe of barbarians who were coming to lay waste to all that Kalynthia held dear. He told them that these long-haired, unwashed wanderers would pillage and murder and rape and burn until no living, breathing Kalynthian was left. He made a great public show, with brass bands and magical coloured smoke and fireworks; he invoked

Kiri-Sam and Gardi and told the people that they were called upon to fight to protect their nation, their fatherland and the very fabric of their life. If they did not fight this once, he said, everything that they held dear would be plundered and destroyed.

And so it happened that Kalynthians everywhere around the capital felt their blood boil in their veins and were filled with a burning desire to defend their king, their country and their fatherland. And they were prepared to do this even if it meant killing, a thing that no Kalynthian had ever done so willingly before. A great army was raised, with pomp and circumstance, and in a great procession, with horses and supplies and good wishes from the young and old who were left behind, it encamped around the palace at Kalys. And if you had stood on the city walls at this time and looked upon the plain, you would have seen thousands of tents of many colours, and a hundred brilliant standards fluttering in the wind. You would have heard singing and dancing and shouting and cheering, for everyone from youth to elder was filled with a bubbling enthusiasm for the great battle that was to come. Each one dreamed continually of his magical moment, the skirmish in which he would his men into the jaws of the enemy, battle heroically against all the odds and be awarded a medal by the great Bronakh, who would pin it on his uniform himself.

But Bronakh had other fish to fry. Each day his messengers brought eager forces from the north-western lands of his father's tribes, men who were eager to throw in their lot with evil and black magic. It was at night, however, that Bronakh performed his most difficult works. As the moon rose he walked on to the plain with a pouch of cherry stones and cast them like wheat seeds to the ground. Then he got out his staff and muttered and chanted inscribing strange symbols in the air until the sweat poured from his brow.

And slowly, imperceptibly, those cherry stones began to shiver and shake. And amidst a terrible clanking and shrieking they grew and grew until in the blink of an eye each stone split and opened and cracked. Had you been there you would have seen ten giant warriors, with legs like oak trees and swords harder than granite emerge, smart and subservient, as they formed a perfect phalanx on the plain.

Bronakh was building a formidable army.

THE COUNCIL OF PRINCES

When six months had passed, each of the four brothers arrived on the plain accompanied by an army, as he had promised. Because of the suspicions Ellida had sown in their minds, each brought three times as many men as he had pledged, for he did not wish to lose face in front of his brothers. And so it was that the soldiers now milling about the battle plain consisted of almost all the entire young male population of Kalynthia - those who had sided with Bronakh and those who had pledged themselves to one of his brothers.

At first, as had been agreed, Erik sent a messenger to mediate with Bronakh. Bronakh sent back the messenger's head impaled on a stake. For fairness' sake they tried again with different words - this time the messenger's ears were returned in a leather bag. After that, the princes had no option - and with sad

faces, but always checking uneasily to see whether one of the others might be concealing a dagger in his cloak, they declared war on Bronakh who, they said, had no right to be king.

On the eve of the battle the four noble sons of Solara held the Great Council Of Princes to discuss their plans for the war. They called together ninety-six commanders and generals so that, at last, when everyone had found their seats and the clanking of breastplates and creaking of leather greaves had finally ceased, there should have been a hundred soldiers in the tent. Had they counted, they would have reached a total of one hundred and one. The one hundred and first soldier was Ellida, and she sat unnoticed near the four princes at the centre of the tent.

"We have agreed," began Nikor, "that my brother Drel and his fellow clerics should take the left flank." But to Drel it seemed that he had said, "Drel is an idiot cleric - let's leave him behind." And as this confirmed all his suspicions about Nikor, who was clearly weak in the head and in need of a lesson in humility, he leapt up, threw a handful of sand in his elder brother's face and punched him in the stomach.

"Stop!", shouted Igon, but to Drel it seemed he was shouting, "Show him, Show him," so he maintained his advantage, kicked Nikor to the ground and proceeded to grind Nikor's face into the sand. Triumphant, basking in what he identified as general approval, Drel got up and grinned at Igon in a conspiratorial fashion. Igon slapped him in the face.

Only Erik, the great mediator, the man who could soothe the widest rift with a few well-chosen words, had the power to save the situation now. But Erik, who had discussed rhetoric and philosophy with the wisest elders in the land, who knew the best ways to diffuse the wildest argument and had once charmed an inn full of brawling barbarians, this same bold and handsome Erik was drowning in the green eyes of a beautiful woman and could no more speak than fly. Ellida, visible to him and him alone had ensnared him in a powerful enchantment and Erik, who was young for all his wisdom, had not the strength to resist.

That night, while his brothers brawled and argued at the council of war, while the commanders and generals grumbled, and took sides and shook their heads, Erik, who could have saved them all, sat enthralled in his tent, bewitched by the songs of the alluring witch who had slithered into his heart and coiled herself around it like a snake.

THE GREAT BATTLE

On the morning of the great battle, the army of the four princes which was four times larger than the army Bronakh had been able to muster, had no plan, no strategy and no cohesive leadership. The army was scattered over the plain, the generals grumbled and not one of the princes was speaking to his brothers. Meanwhile, Bronakh had drawn up his forces in perfect order, and his soldiers still filled with irrational love for their leader, stood in line ready and willing to die for their lord.

But no-one had given the battle-cry. In his heart of hearts each of the princes

still hoped to find a solution and was waiting for an opportunity to speak to his brothers and make things up. But as Nikor, Drel and Igon sat stewing in their tents, Erik, who was inspecting the troops with his beloved Ellida, looked into her eyes in the cold light of dawn and saw there everything that was poisonous and dark. And as he recognised her, she shrieked and slithered away in the body of a snake. Horrified, Erik raised his sword to strike her and in doing so, quite unwittingly gave the signal for the battle to begin.

With a roar so terrible it split the sky asunder, the two armies clashed on the plain. Many have told of the smoke, the clash of steel and the roaring, rushing, terrible noise. How in the confusion it was impossible to tell one army from the other; how brother stabbed brother, fathers fell by the daggers they had lovingly crafted for their sons and cousins who had once shared flagons of wine over a dying fire drove steel through each others' hearts. How hooves churned up the wheat-fields, burning pitch poisoned the rivers and fire consumed the villages where once may-poles and apple trees had stood. How, as the day wore on, nothing could be seen except a great cloud of black mist, which the gods created, so it is said, to shield them from the pain of observing the terrible folly of men. Bronakh and Ellida had stronger stomachs. From the palace tower, they observed the fruits of their labour and they saw that it was good.

As night fell, and the fighting eased, those who were still standing were left to see what they had done. They stood knee-deep in a wet and muddy plain that ran with the blood of a hundred thousand men and echoed with the keening of a hundred thousand women's wailing cries. The destruction had been so total and complete that neither side could claim a victory; this was a war of loss, and Kalynthia, their pride and joy, the source of all their hopes, lay crushed and mangled, a discarded toy beneath their muddy feet.

Wounded and bleeding, the four princes returned to the tent at which they had held their council. As they stood there, covered in blood and mud and gore, for the first time since the crisis had begun, they saw clearly into each other's souls and recaptured the friendship that had been. Then and there they pledged their vows on their fathers' ancient sword that such a calamity should never in the history of Kalynthia be allowed to occur again. Then they buried their dead. The year was 3908.

THE FOURTH AGE: THE MODERN PERIOD

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following chapter of the *Chronicles* has been read by more students of Kalynthian history than any other single manuscript. This is not merely due to the fact that the document has been used as a compulsory element of the Higher Kalynthian History Certificate for the last fifty years (though that in itself is witness to the chapter's relevance). At least as important a factor in its popularity is that many of those who have been seeking a way out of Kalynthia's current troubles are convinced that the secret to our deliverance lies here.

In these increasingly troubled times, the location of the twelve heroes of Kalynthia, the one army that may be powerful enough to defeat the machinations of evil, remains something of a mystery. At the time of writing, the editorial board has been given to understand that scientists in the Kingdom of The Mages may be very close to a momentous discovery (for details see Appendix 5) - but their procedures are by nature very delicate, and so far no conclusive results have been reached. No doubt their breakthrough, when it is finally achieved, will have significant consequences for us all.

The following narrative was recorded by Eredri as it was spoken by the storyteller Leta-Gl. We thank her grand-daughter Olana for access to the original texts.

THE NARRATIVE OF LETA-GI

As sure as the sun sets in the east and the dancing fire turns to ash, so must the legends of Kalynthia be told. When I speak, I talk with the tongues of the gods - if I say ill may they send their rain of death to strike me down.

THE AFTERMATH OF BATTLE

There is a time for harvesting and a time for rest, a time for singing and a time for sorrow, but never has any Kalynthian experienced a time so dark and so terrible as in the days that succeeded the Great War.

From prince to peasant, there was not a citizen who did not feel the shame of it. In our frenzy we had held knives at each other's throats, we had permitted brother to strike brother - and without thought or care we had torn up the earth until the stench of its trampled and rotting bounty poisoned the air.

Those who survived could only weep as they stood knee-deep in mud, surrounded by corpses and incredulous of what they had done. But the battle was only the beginning of our many troubles. In the year of the Great War there was no harvest. All those who had fought had had no time to care for their crops and the grain that had grown was trampled by thousands of boots as they marched to the battlefield. That winter those who still lived grew thin, walked the streets with a hollow look in their eyes and complained of a terrible ache in their belly. This was not just the pain of hunger which a loaf of bread could

assuage - they carried the burden of their guilt which, some say, will never go away.

After the great famine, during which the gods claimed many who were very young and very old, those who were there say that the spring which followed came with a fetid, foul-smelling wind. Soon afterwards, many Kalynthians were afflicted by a terrible plague in which their flesh broke open in weeping pustules, and their eyes, gummy and inflamed, soon lost the power to see. Many prophets rose at this time to proclaim this plague as the punishment of the gods, who despised and taunted us. Others said we suffered the symptoms of a sickened soul; we were appalled, they said, at what we did, and no longer cared what happened next. It may be true, I cannot say.

BRONAKH IS SATISFIED

And in the aftermath of battle, while the rightful rulers of Kalynthia were appalled at what they had done, Bronakh was satisfied. All around him he saw blood and gore and useless sacrifice, and the pain was pleasure to his corrupt and brooding heart.

But he was also exhausted. The effort of sustaining the mental illusions that had kept his army loyal, and of producing supernatural reinforcements to keep his phalanx strong, had left him weak and deathly tired. Bent double like an old man, with heavy grey rings around his eyes, he summoned what was left of his loyal troops and, together with his consort Ellida, journeyed to the north-western island, once the home of his father and now the source of all Kalynthia's wickedness and black arts. This is the land we call the Evil Kingdom or the Evil Zone.

There, it is said, he built a fortress in an afternoon from a single piece of stone, conjured a moat from a clay jar of water and began to prepare, very slowly (since there is no hurry amongst immortals) for his second attack.

THE GREAT COUNCIL

This time the four princes of Kalynthia were determined that they should be ready. And so it was that a week after the Great War, while all the country was drowning in funereal purple and weeping could be heard on every street, the brothers staged the Great Council at which everyone who had something to say was invited to speak.

It was not the biggest gathering in the history of the planet but there are many who judge it to be the most significant. One thousand men, women and children attended the discussions on the plain. Each was permitted to say exactly what he felt and on every decision every man, woman and child was given a vote. "We have shown by our actions that against Bronakh four minds are inadequate," said Nikor, the eldest prince. "We need your advice."

And so it was that after a week of talking from dawn till dusk, 1004 citizens of Kalynthia decreed the future of our world. Except for the part of the planet which was occupied by Bronakh (the Evil Zone), the land was divided into four kingdoms, each one ruled by a prince. There, it was said, the rulers would

concentrate on rebuilding the damage Bronakh had done, and hone their special skills in preparation for the next stage in the war.

The very next morning, as the sun rose and the fields were still moist with dew, the princes mounted their steeds and set off. Nikor followed the flight of the geese to the north-east, where he established a kingdom of fighters so powerful each man knew how to uproot a tree-trunk with a single hand. Drel, who had become skilled in the mystical arts of healing and herbs, travelled south and devoted his life to the knowledge of the mysteries. The skill with which his clerics prepared miraculous ointments from dry and shrivelled roots is renowned: for hundreds of years Kalynthians have travelled south when they are sick. The third brother, Igon, travelled the wolves' trail to the south-west and established the Kingdom of the Mages there.

Erik, the fourth brother, had the shortest distance to travel in body but the longest journey to accomplish in mind. Racked with guilt for the part he had played in the battle, he pledged himself to maintain the Neutral Zone, by cultivating discussion, understanding and philosophy. So that the future of the kingdom would never rely on the decisions of a single man, he established the Council Of Sages, a group of wise men and elders who still hold sway over the business of our central territory today.

A TIME OF PEACE

And as surely as rain breaks a drought and the spring sun melts the winter snow, so it happened that at last, after the pain of war, famine and plague had passed, Kalynthia entered a period of prosperity and peace. While Bronakh simmered and schemed on his island, his four half-brothers fortified their kingdoms with skill and knowledge, as they had pledged. They met frequently and discussed their plans and never again, until the day they died, did one of them allow a word of disagreement or irritation past his lips. Each remembered the price they had paid for their folly, and the memory was far from sweet. For more than three hundred years all was quiet and calm. The brothers, who had lived long and honourably, were succeeded first by their sons and daughters and later their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren and their sons and daughters, all of whom ruled wisely and well and upheld their ancestors' skills for five generations.

It is written that this was a time of peace, and that is true. But although no wars were fought and no child went thirsty or unfed, this was not a time of happiness. Many who lived through it hardly noticed it, but others claim that an ill wind chilled the land. Somehow no-one was ever satisfied. Those who were well-fed and earned a good living still wanted more, and this made them irritable with their neighbours, whom they taunted and despised. The courts were filled with farmers who had poisoned each other's sheep, druids who would not share their sickles, and women who complained that their neighbour's washing spoilt their view. Everyone grumbled, no-one laughed and if they smiled it was because a joke had been made at the expense of somebody else.

A TIME OF MONSTERS

In many ways, this was a period of discontent in Kalynthia's cities, but around the time of the Apple Blight it was rumoured that in certain parts of the kingdom the situation was a great deal worse. Ever since the night on which the earth had split open and Bronakh discovered the secret of immortality, life in these areas had been lived on the edge of an abyss. Those who walked in the forests or near the abandoned places underground told of inky-black creatures, giant skeletons whose every step shook the ground, and who would drool and foam at the mouth at the merest scent of human flesh. These creatures had jaws, they said, which could snap off the head of a sheep in a single bite. They had legs thicker than oak trees and at a glance from their blue-granite eyes, your heart would turn to stone and your bones would crumble into dust.

These creatures were clever. They only ever appeared to a handful of men and only at night. But real or not, each year for three hundred years at least one man, woman or child, who dared to venture close to these places abandoned of old, never returned to their village again. And so it was that in these hamlets the people lived on the edge of grief for so long that at last they began to crack. A blacksmith burnt down his house when his daughter was killed; soon after, the youths of another village trampled the entire harvest wantonly; elsewhere a woman killed her own child; a farmer attacked with an axe all those who happened to be walking in the village street; a cleric poisoned a whole community with libation wine. Evil was afoot.

And Bronakh, who had been scheming in his castle for three hundred long and spiteful years, was the source of it all. He stood in his tower, observed what he had done in the milky liquid of his scrying bowl, and a smile cracked his lips as he saw the fabric of Kalynthia rotting and falling away. The years had not changed him - unmoved, he had watched his concubine Ellida die more than two hundred years ago, and he was still the most crooked creature alive. His heart was a foul-smelling swamp of wickedness and his aim was nothing less than the entire destruction of Kalynthia - anything else caused him physical pain.

THE MESSENGER

On the second day of the third full moon of the summer of the year we call 4253, a saint day, it is said that a man on a horse, covered from head to foot in the red dust of the traveller, stumbled into the Council Of Sages. "Save yourselves, Sons of Drexel," he whispered, "Bronakh's monsters are burning the villages and murdering the people. They're heading this way." And when he had said these words the man's heart burst inside his ribs, his spirit flew out of his mouth and, with a sigh, Gardi took his soul away.

And when the Sages stepped outside they saw that the sky had turned from blue to black and an icy chill began to freeze their bones. Great pits of blackness opened in the earth, and a hideous tortured groaning was carried towards the city on the wind. It was midday but there was no sun in the sky.

As they surveyed the black and shadowy plain, they began to hear a humming and a pounding unlike anything they had ever heard before. This buzzing, which made their heads ache and the hairs stand upright on their necks, grew louder and louder by degrees until at last, with a strangled inhuman roar, thousands of villagers could be seen rushing across the fields. They ran with their mouths open and their hair streaming in the wind. Some stumbled and fell and were trampled, but not one of them stopped until he was safe inside the city walls and the gates were locked, barred and bolted. No-one could get in or out.

For a long time, the Sages could not see what they were running from. Then, one by one, hundreds of jagged silhouettes, their blue eyes sparkling in the blackness, gathered around the city walls. There were too many for a single man to count, but their jaws dripped with saliva and their hair, matted with the blood of slaughtered Kalynthians, carried the stench of human flesh on the wind. All day and all night they camped on the plain, keening and screeching like a hundred fox cubs in a hundred traps until the ears of those who listened could not bear the horror of it. In the morning the creatures skulked and stumbled in the direction of the forests but no-one doubted their return.

At the same time, the same thing happened in every major city in Kalynthia.

THE RULE OF THE MONSTERS

From that day onwards life on Kalynthia was confined to the cities. The villagers camped in the homes of their city cousins as best they could. By day they ventured outside the walls to tend the fields and trade their wares but each night when the monsters returned, they barred and bolted the gates and not a soul dared venture out. In the old towns and villages life ground to a halt. The houses fell into ruin and the marrows went to seed in the vegetable plots. What had once been living, breathing communities with a church and a school and a bakery were nothing but abandoned places now.

Life which had been unhappy but prosperous now became unhappy and poor. The cities were bursting at the seams, disease was rife and the supply of grain, which was trampled every night under the clumsy feet of Bronakh's monsters, hardly kept up with demand. The four ruling princes and princesses, who at this time were Jabel the Fighter, Dorok-Nar the Cleric, Landia the Mage and Soron the ruler of the Neutral Zone, met at a secret location in one of their palaces, and under cover of darkness discussed what should be done.

"We need an army," said Jabel, "But it must be an army of specialists."

"To deal with a special enemy," said Landia. "In that case, let's hold a contest," suggested

Dorok-Nar.

"I'll draw up a decree," said Soron, "We'll hold it in the Neutral Zone."

They all agreed. And unlike their ancestors who had consented in word but dissented in deed, each and every one of them meant what they had said

THE DECREE

And so it happened that two days later a decree, embossed in gold and distinguished by the scarlet royal seal, went up in every Kalynthian market place. This is what it said:

'By order of the four rulers of Kalynthia, it is decreed that an army of no more than twelve exceptional women and men will be raised to rid our planet of the scourge of Bronakh's monsters. Those who wish to honour the reputation of their country and their clan, should gather in Drexel Place amongst the Neutrals two weeks from today when a magnificent contest to find our planet's greatest warriors will be held. All clerics, mages, fighters, pirates and neutrals are welcome. No minors need apply.'

The decree was received with so much talking and discussion in every part of the country that work was officially suspended for two days. Kalynthians, as our history has proved most frequently, are not cowards. Almost every able-bodied man and woman who was not too young and not too old, who was neither child-rearing nor engaged in an important municipal function from which they could not be spared, packed their knapsacks and travelled as swiftly as they could directly to the Neutral Zone.

BRONAKH BUILDS A FIRE

But while the cities throughout the country hummed with farewells and bustled with activity, another Kalynthian was preparing for the contest in an entirely different way.

For at the instant in which Bronakh had observed, in his scrying bowl, the four rulers discussing the competition, his dry, wizened body had shuddered with the germ of an idea. The king of darkness, who is and always shall be the cleverest Kalynthian alive, summoned his staff and his inky-blue cloak, went down to his kitchens and began to build a fire.

It took him three days to get the oven hot enough but at last, when it had consumed a hundred apple-logs, the fat of fifty human skins, a barbarian scalp and countless salamanders, the clay blistered, the air quivered and the copper cauldrons melted and spilled their soup all over the floor. Bronakh let out a single victorious cry - and into the heart of the blaze, which was so strong his eyebrows smouldered and the blood seemed to dance in his veins, he cast into the flames a dragon's tooth, a phial of purple liquid and a scrap of ox-hide. As the sweat poured from his skin and soaked his inky robes, he chanted and whispered and muttered and shrieked all manner of strange sounds and sibillances deep into the night.

In the morning when the fire had cooled, Bronakh opened the oven again. As he stared into the darkness, from the grey, smoking ashes and the glowing coals there emerged a dusty, naked creature. This being was a giant - it had muscles like a lion and a neck like an ox. The dragon's tooth had given him power, the hide had made him resilient and the liquid, which was blood from Bronakh's own veins, had made him so clever he could out-think most any man alive. Bronakh was pleased:

"Welcome, my son," he said.

THE CONTESTANTS ARRIVE

As the date of the contest of champions drew near, more and more competitors arrived in the Neutral Zone. There were pirates from the north, with parrots on their shoulders and saddlebags filled to the brim with gold; and clerics who announced their presence by the strange, musty smell of lotions and herbs which hung about their clothes. At first the mages showed off their fire-weapons in the market place but after three days in which more children were burned and scalded than had been injured in the entire year, a law was passed forbidding it. Instead they boasted to their fellow competitors, and spirited away their weapons in jest.

It was a time of hope, and everyone had their own favourites. In the market place old men argued about which cleric would come first, who looked tougher than he was, who was all talk, and who would win a place in the army of the final twelve. But on one contender they all agreed. This man, who called himself Ignis, was a giant: he had the muscles of a lion, and the neck of an ox. There was nothing this warrior - with the power of a dragon, the resilience of a bull and the intelligence of an immortal - could not do. As he walked the streets, the citizens followed his every action with admiration and scrabbled in the dust to gather the stones he had touched.

"He'll win hands down," said Princess Landia, admiring his muscles. "They say he comes from a place some distance away."

"He's a genius with any kind of blade," said Jabel. "And I've seen him cast a good healing spell too."

added Dorok-Nar, licking his lips.

Only Soron was unsure. "There's something fishy about this hero," he said to himself. "Something about that face - I'm sure I've seen it before."

THE CONTEST

The Great Contest, by which the prosperity of all Kalynthia would be determined, was begun on a fresh spring morning in the year we call 4255. Jabel, who was a good speaker, began the proceedings:

"We are about to make one of the most important discoveries in the history of our world. The twelve individuals who will emerge at the end of this contest will carry the future of our nation on their shoulders. In the face of great danger we are fighting, as we have always done, in the spirit that made Drexel great. May the soul of our forefather grant us good competition today and may he ensure that the best men and women win."

As he and his three fellow-rulers looked down from the municipal tower onto the plains below, they saw thousands of eager faces gaze back. It was going to be a long competition.

The preliminary rounds lasted for two weeks. Each of the competitors was allowed a major discipline (fighter, mage or cleric) and had to show some additional skill in using a weapon, applying basic clerical potions and wielding an enchanted sword. Everyone was eager and everyone proved brave but at last, from the thousands who had attended only one hundred men and women

were left. Those who had not succeeded were so curious to view the outcome that despite the efforts of the municipal authorities they continued to clog up the streets, the public baths and the alleyways. The city was full to bursting. After a further week of rigorous discipline, the one hundred chosen ones were whittled down, under the personal inspection and approval of the four rulers, to just twenty-four. From this two dozen twelve men and women would be chosen. Each of the last twenty-four had strengths and weakness; all were masters at their chosen discipline but novices in other areas - except one man. The stranger Ignis could do anything: he ran around the city walls three times and when they came to cheer him on he was hardly out of breath. His spells fizzed and sizzled and sparked: he felled an entire haystack with a single fireball and prepared a bolt of electricity so strong the very air crackled with the power of it. His potions were worked faster and more powerfully than anything his competitors, who sweated twice as much and worked three times as hard, could manage to produce. Even Dorok-Nar, the greatest cleric of his time, could not beat him.

And so it came to pass that on the day on which Princess Landia announced the names of the twelve chosen ones, Ignis was inscribed in gold letters at the very top of the list. But Soron, who had watched all these actions with a suspicious and critical eye, was not convinced. How could it be that a man like this, wherever he came from, had not been seen or even heard of before? And why did Ignis' features bear such a close resemblance to the portrait of Bronakh which hung in the palace corridors, a constant reminder of the evil that had ruled here in the past?

Soron had observed Ignis closely - he had seen him worm his way into the affections of the Princess Landia, had watched him flatter Dorok-Nar and had waited patiently for any sign of weakness. So when Ignis approached the royal podium to receive his commission to serve in the Kalynthian Special Army, it was Soron who looked into his steel-blue eyes and saw the face of Bronakh smiling there. It was Soron who lifted his jug of sacrificial water slowly and, without a shake of the hand or a flicker of the brow, poured the entire contents over Ignis' head.

The crowds who a moment before had been cheering wildly fell silent all at once. And before any one of them had a moment to think, the steam started to pour from Ignis' head. Hissing slowly at first, it turned into a roaring, rumbling, rasping, whirring torrent of smoke and fire and water and steam. For to Ignis, a creature moulded in flame, water was fatal - and before the wide eyes of a thousand Kalynthians, he sputtered and crackled and melted until all his strong muscles and sinews were nothing but a glowing, screeching lump of coal. In his castle, Bronakh, who had poured more strength into this one being than into any other enchantment in the world, let out a cry so terrible that even the deer who had been grazing in the gardens of his palace bolted and fled. With the destruction of Ignis, Bronakh was weaker than he had ever been before.

THE HEROES

And so it was that Bronakh was thwarted again. A new warrior was selected

to replace Ignis and the Kalynthian Heroes were sent across the plains. For twelve years they scoured the countryside, battling against Bronakh's hideous monsters wherever they went, driving them back into the dungeons and deep places. Their journey took them to icy mountain peaks, into fertile wooded valleys and as far as any man can travel on the seas. They toiled by day and by night, and when they were hungry they plucked the corn from the fields. They hardly slept, rarely took rest, and each one of them was injured many times. But because they were unhampered by Ignis, who would surely have disrupted everything they did, and because Bronakh's powers at this time were so weak, they succeeded where the great armies of the four princes had failed three hundred years before.

When the twelve years were over, there was no monster to be seen anywhere above the ground. Each and every one of them, no matter how vicious, how bloodthirsty or strong, had been driven back below the ground to the dark and dangerous places. The people were free to return to the towns and villages that they had left; and the cities, which had been filled to the brim with men and livestock, could breathe again.

Once more, Bronakh was exhausted. And so it happened that the four rulers - Jabel, Landia, Soron and Dorok-Nar - travelled across the seas to Bronakh's castle where a shrivelled old woman let them in. She led them up staircases, through cellars, down corridors, into tiny archways and round crooked towers; and everything they saw or smelt or touched seemed to be falling apart at the seams. The illusion was crumbling, for Bronakh did not even have the power to maintain the enchantment of his home.

At last they came into a giant chamber. Rich tapestries covered the walls and the tiles on the floors glittered with mystical symbols and a mysterious, luminous script. Huddled on a throne in the centre of the room, like a cat stretched out on a carpet, sat a small white-haired dwarf, no more than three feet high. He was so weary his eyes were red slits, his grey mottled skin hung like a sack around his bony frame and when he spoke, he could scarcely open his lips. They had to bend down to hear what he said:

"Checkmate," Bronakh hissed, so quietly they had to strain their ears. "You win. For now."

THE VOLCANO

So this is how it was: Soron and Jabel bound Bronakh in a fishing net, and Dorok-Nar and Landia cast a spell so powerful it was to imprison him in the Great Volcano for ever. An immortal, they knew, could not be destroyed, but even an immortal would take some time to move a volcano.

And so it was that the great and terrible burden, which had weighed down Kalynthia for over three hundred years, was lifted - and the people were at last free to rejoice. In celebration each of the cities slaughtered five oxen, the streets were filled with dancing day and night, a complete holiday was declared for everyone and it lasted two whole weeks. There were fireworks and brass bands and free plays and the streets flowed with wine and laughter. A great circus visited the towns and traders gave away their wares for free; for the first time

in years, neighbours were willing to share their happiness. No-one slept and everybody laughed - most people couldn't stop talking and they spoke long and meaningfully deep into the night.

Bronakh was dead - or so it seemed.

THE HEROES ARE CAST IN STONE

When the two weeks were over the four princes and princesses met again. Bronakh, they knew, would not stay beaten for good, so after much talking and questioning and thinking out loud, it was decreed that the heroes who had rid the world of the scourge of the monsters should be frozen in stone in preparation for any trouble that might occur at a future date. And so that their powers might remain safe and not be misused, they agreed that their location would remain a secret; locked in a box, the information would be written on a parchment and passed down from ruler to ruler until such time when the powers of the heroes, which had once saved Kalynthia from a terrible doom, would be needed again. And that is what they did.

The year was 4268.

THE SECRET IS LOST

But the power of evil still remains in some corners of our land, and somewhere between that time and this the secret of the heroes was lost. Someone, we know not who, we know not when, stole the information, and the secret has been missing ever since. May Kiri-Sam and Gardi preserve us should Bronakh ever return. For we are a peace-loving people and have rebuilt our lives against all odds, but we shall be powerless to protect our children should Bronakh, who is the cleverest man alive, gain the power to trouble us again.

STOP PRESS: ADDITIONAL EDITORIAL NOTE

Those of us who have followed the recent developments described in the official proclamations with anxiety and alarm will not be unaware of the irony of Leta-Gi's conclusions. For we have all been painfully alerted to reports, delivered by those who have approached the abandoned underground places, that Bronakh's monsters are stirring again. Though so far there have been virtually no sightings above ground, the resolution passed by the Council Of Sages - that the heroes petrified in the time of Soron should be awakened again to destroy the monsters before they venture abroad - has struck terror into many of our hearts.

Fortunately, however, thanks to the workings of a strong and efficient secret service, the prophecies made by Leta-Gi have not come to pass. We now know (as we did not when the introduction to this chapter was composed) that the heroes were stone-bound on one of Kalynthia's southern isles - something we could only guess at before.

As we go to press, the delegation sent to release the heroes and apprise them

of their quest has not been seen for several weeks. This comes on top of the disturbing news that much activity has been recorded around Bronakh's volcano and that certain evil influences appear to be rife. Could it be that Bronakh has somehow interfered with the delegation? That he has managed to free himself from the volcano and has attacked the Heroes, who were destined to save us all, before they could be released?

If that is the case, we must all fear for our future and must consider the possibility that the 23rd edition of the Concise Chronicles could be the last to be printed at all. It is for this reason that we have chosen to include this addendum on current events. It may be that our fears are ungrounded and we place our hope in the strength of Kalynthian minds - but if they are not, we would like those who survive us (if any survive us) to understand what it was that wiped us out. Under the circumstances, as historians and citizens of Kalynthia, our greatest hope is that we may be wrong.

May the gods preserve us and keep us from Bronakh's return.

APPENDICES

This is the first time that the Chronicles have included extracts from the source authors. The Editors settled on this decision for two reasons. Firstly, that in reading this, more scholars may be provoked into studying the original texts, so that we may learn more of their secrets and come to a better understanding of our ancestors. Secondly, that our readers may know something of their ancestral storytellers and chroniclers, and gain an insight into our past in the words with which it was described.

NOTE: Where words appear in brackets we acknowledge that we do not understand the meaning of the original text - or rather, that we have no modern equivalent. The compromise is nothing more than a best guess.

Appendix One:

Extract from The Book of Bal-Ze Xaran (Scroll 991: The Generation of Spells)

...The simplest form of spell was the Word, and it might have been better if we had left our powers there. There is an intimate connection between the words and the things they signify: with words we could build and destroy, damn and praise; words created kings and rulers from little (men), but they created poverty and hunger, too...

...Arrogant (men) thought differently: they wanted to hold the sun, to look into its heart and not be consumed by its fire. They wanted written formulas which could give them magic, and potions which could generate anything from fantasy to disease. They built huge (workshops) where elements were ground down, powdered, squeezed, shredded, and mixed to create new things which the gods never intended...

...Certain names, of gods, of natural secrets, should never be known; but we poured in vast resources, and wasted the minds of many intelligent (men) in searching for these names, in discovering their essences. Once something that had no name is given a name, it is imprisoned, fenced in, under the control of the one who gave it its title.

...And we found them. Elements, stones, roots, airs, animals - and we gave them all names. With names they could be dealt with as we wished: taken apart until we knew (or thought we knew) everything about them. We took something from one and mixed it with something from another to create a third thing more powerful than either - and this was (magic). Damn the (magicians) as they have damned us. May the gods rain fire on their generations for millennia to come, as they have rained fire on us.

...Let no (man) repeat our mistakes. I have destroyed the Books of (Magic), the black arts and the white arts, the spells and the binding of elements. I have

been to all the libraries I know that are left in this cursed world, and I have torn down the shelves and burned those evil books. There may be others, but in time they, too, will crumble into dust, taking their secrets with them. These secrets that, if the gods had been willing, we should never have unveiled...

Appendix Two:

Extract from the Book Of Drexel (1053). From the Chapter of the Horse.

Editorial note: The Book of Drexel is understood and read by many. We all noted its aphoristic words of wisdom when they were pasted on the walls of the schoolrooms and in the libraries of our youth, and no book is complete without at least one quotation from it. The couple that we have selected seem most to express the dark nature of our times:

When life is dark and gloomy, do not munch idly on butter beans. Go forth on your mount and see what good you and your neighbour can do.

Trouble is like a wild horse - you cannot predict its movements, but it is best to have a stable ready when it comes.

Appendix Three:

The Decree of the Four Princes (3908 approx)

Editorial note: Though many of us are familiar with the contents of the decree which followed the Great War, not many of us have so far had access to the original text. This edition is taken from a contemporary pamphlet found in the recent excavations of an ancient tomb near the northern coast. At this time, archaeologists have not been able to confirm the date.

DECREE OF THE FOUR PRINCES

Drawn up by the princes Nikor, Drel, Igon and Erik in the year of death and blighted harvest, in the wake of the Great War.

We, the undersigned, swear by the light of our mother's memory and our rightful claim to Kalynthia's throne, that the woeful destruction of men that we, as the result of our folly and our stepbrother Bronakh's machinations, have witnessed here on the great battlefield, shall never in the history of Kalynthia, by our own hands or the hands of our descendants, be permitted to occur again. We accept with shame the responsibility for what has passed and beg the forgiveness of Kalynthia's people. We pray that the gods do not desert us.

Signed in the presence of witnesses by Nikor, Drel, Igon and Erik, inheritors of the throne and Queen Solara's sons.

Appendix Four:

Extract from Banzol's Guide To Monsters, Chapter 2 (4254)

Editorial note: In its heyday Banzol's Guide outstripped even the Book Of Drexel in its popularity and recently, given our current circumstances, there have been moves (so far inconclusive) to reprint it. The Guide was most in demand during the period in which Bronakh's monsters laid nightly siege to most of our settlements and cities. Everyone who was forced to travel or had business outside the city walls carried their much-thumbed copy with them wherever they went. Though it is not generally known, Banzol's Guide was actually the expanded version of a chapter on the same subject which formed part of larger Guide for Travellers. Banzol, who travelled all Kalynthia's trade routes for many years, was witness to the book's good sense. In his lifetime he experienced and survived at least a dozen encounters with different monsters but eventually died in his sleep at the age of ninety-nine.

BANZOL'S FIVE-POINT SURVIVAL PLAN (Self-help when encountering monsters)

There are two rules to remember when travelling. The first is that, however well prepared you may be, you can never be completely safe. Knowing this (and remembering it) is the secret to survival in this troubled monster age. The second rule is to obey Banzol's famous five-point plan:

1. Never travel alone. I recommend a party of at least four, comprising a mage, a cleric and a fighter of some skill. If these understand something of each other's disciplines, so much the better.
2. Never travel unprepared. Your journey may turn out to be uneventful - but it might not be, so don't get caught out. Carry healing and other herbal potions, pack magical weapons and make sure your party has spells for basics (light) and specialities well to hand (mage bolts or fireblasts, if available). A combat situation is no time to start rummaging for spellbooks.
3. Be flexible. In your lifetime you may have heard of one or two monster categories, but there are actually many different types. Assess the powers of your enemy and be prepared to try weapons of varying kinds. Obscure spells like Invisibility or Ice Strike can be life-savers under certain conditions.
4. Don't get carried away. In the heat of the battle it is common not to notice you are wounded until it's far too late. Make it a rule to keep an eye on each other. Administer medicine if one of you is hurt.
5. No heroics. Heroics are the most common cause of sudden death by monsters. Travellers get carried away, forget that there are actually four people

in their party and fight to the death in grim hand-to-hand combat while their friends have no option but to stand idly by. Help one another, change places often and you will live to fight another day.

Appendix Five:

Extract from the Harria's essay first printed in Issue 5 of the Archaeological Chronicle of the year 5173. (Reprinted by the kind permission of the Council Of Sages)

Editorial note: Harria has been a renowned student of Kalynthian history for more than fifteen years. Her work has been published in many authoritative journals and discussed by the most learned archaeologists of the land. Earlier this year, her five-year research project investigating the location of the stone-bound heroes, allegedly petrified during the reign of Soron, was accelerated by a chance meeting with a member of the Kalynthia's secret service. Her findings inspired the formation of a special delegation consisting of various historians and politicians which recently set out in search of the heroes, under Harria's leadership. So far nothing has been heard of this party but news of their success or failure is expected any day.

'Given the scepticism currently prevalent in some advanced historical circles, my search for the legendary heroes has been subject to something of a see-saw of alternating approval and derision for some time. All this changed when I met Spymaster Ixel.

'So far my research had told me that the heroes were incarcerated somewhere in the zones of Kalynthia though not in the Evil Zone, because this was then, as now, generally considered an area of instability. I also knew that the location which was to be known only to royal initiates, was written on a parchment or parchments and locked away in a specially constructed box or boxes. These containers (if there were more than one) were then reputedly lost somewhere around the time when Argon ruled the Neutral Zone. Whatever the exact circumstances of the loss, in legend and amongst the storytellers, it was clearly associated with beings from the Evil Zone.

'Here the trail diverged: some said the box was stolen by a white-haired woman, some that it fell out of a messenger's saddle-bags to the bottom of an icy stream, others still that the monstrous Ignis returned to claim it.

'My research had reached a dead end. I could find no evidence of white-haired women and could not establish the location of the stream (if indeed it ever existed) and it was at this point, while lunching at a public inn, that I encountered Ixel.

'During our conversation, it emerged that he had been interrogating a spy from the Evil Zone, who had until recently been operating as a double agent. He claimed that this man, whom we referred to simply as Z, had mumbled something about wishing to exchange a valuable box for a stay of execution and the right, after a period of imprisonment, to start up a small-holding in the Neutral Zone.

'Persuaded that the box might be significantly more valuable than Ixel had at first thought, having first checked the validity of the item, he agreed to Z's proposal and I came into possession of the box.

'The contents - which consisted of highly fragile pieces of parchment and which I managed to identify as originating between 4250 and 4290 - told of an exact location (for obvious reasons I am unable to reveal it here) and quoted the relevant naming spells to raise each of the twelve men and women allegedly incarcerated in the stones.

'As our troubles are currently increasing, I have applied to the Council Of Sages for funding to set up a party to search for these legendary heroes. They could be invaluable in what may be our impending battle against the monsters, but even if they are not, their direct knowledge of past customs and manners will be of immense benefit to our understanding of a much-narrated period of Kalynthian history.'

Appendix Six:

The College of Storytellers

The ancient art of storytelling has been a tradition amongst Kalynthians since the beginning of time. As the reading of the Chronicles often inspires young people with an interest in the art, we are using this opportunity (generously offered us by the board of editors) to apprise those among you who have completed your Higher Kalynthian Certificate that a career in Storytelling is now open to all. Courses last for three years and, for the first time in our history, they are open not only to members of the ancient storytelling clans but also to interested newcomers and other students of the art. In keeping with Kalynthia's recent equal opportunities policy, all students, male as well as female, are made welcome.

For more details or an informal discussion, please contact the Admissions Office, The College Of Storytellers, Drexel Square (Neutral Zone)

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