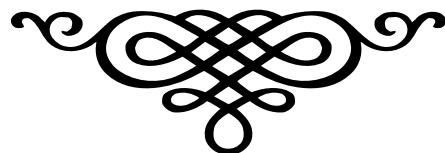
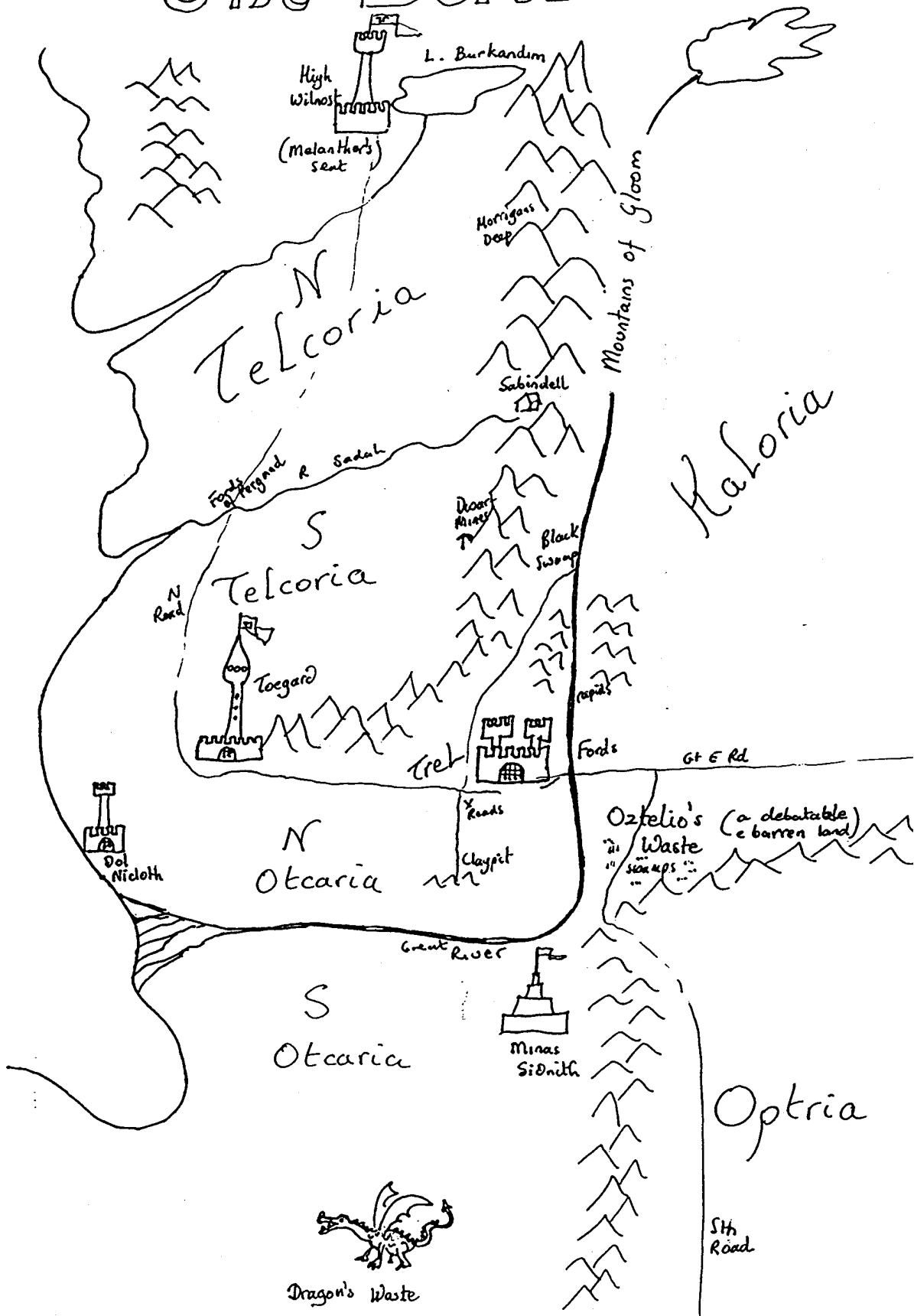


*Tells the dark and sad tale of eternal Trel  
and the mighty heroes that dwelt therein*



# The World



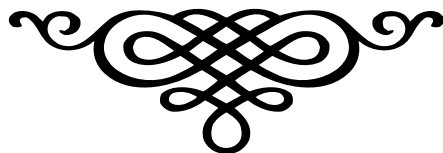
## Preface

*There is eternal Trel, and as is told in the Lay of Trel it has grown since the forgotten years when it was but a stone circle and some sundry caves, the hideout of Hug and Rug, and now is a mighty pile of six towers, great and strong, and a grey pleasure dome which some call Harbold's last folly. This latter is flimsy and cheaply wrought and not fashioned to withstand a siege, yet the lords prefer it to the sterner towers inhabited by the fighting men and those that account themselves wise gather to take mighty counsels on its upper floors. Trel stands beside the great road from Claypit to Blackbog. The men of Trel have never known defeat yet theirs is a tale of unending sorrow.*

*There is also the tower built in Melanthor's time which grins at Trel from a distance of five leagues across a great waste, and to which he and his household removed from their decaying former seat of High Wilmost and is commonly called Tooth Fangy Tooth. Very tall it is, and fashioned like a hideous clenched claw with one upraised digit signalling derision at the Gods. Forsooth, the Gods must reckon it of little consequence for it still stands, or else the time for it's ruin is not yet. Black it is and wondrous smooth, seeming like glass and it casts a long and baleful shadow under which nothing grows at all. Its gates are like the gates of hell and outside are stone men, frozen at the mere sight of them and it is built on the site of Gohmorrah. It's uppermost pinnacle is the tower of the emperor Francus Bluntus Teflonicus himself and his lieutenants dwell in the floors below and below that a great multitude of slaves toil in perpetual misery for the greater glory of the empire.*

*Now what passes in the dark tower after nightfall is beyond the conjecture by any sane mind but at Trel the custom is to gather round the fire in the great mead hall and listen to a new story every night. The master has decreed that a certain eloquent but mischievous prankster is to lose his head but may keep it so long as he can entertain his lordship with a new tale of woe from the dark history of Trel for a thousand and one nights. The book of these tales which grows daily and which few have ever seen is known as:*

## The Chronicles of Trel



# I

## *The Coming of the Good Shepherd and the Peasant's Revolt*

*As was the wont on winter evenings the good folk of Trel would gather about the fire in the great hall and quaff mead and sing songs and tell tales of the mighty heroes of old and of the glories and sorrows that the long years were wont to bring. Now there is hush as the chief bard takes up his harp, for one has called for a tale out of the dark ages, long forgotten except in songs such as these. For fifty score times had the leaves fallen since such men as these had walked the earth. Now in those days Trel was nowise the mighty pile it has since become, and it has grown whilst the stature of it's men has diminished. At that time there was but a track from Clappit to Blackbog, where now there is a great road, and in place of the mighty keep that marks the fastness of Trel there was but a great earthwork made of rank upon rank of ditch and bank with houses of wood and thatch in the great clearing on the top. Yet to the south west there stood a great circle of standing stones and from hence came the fullness of the power and authority of Trel.*

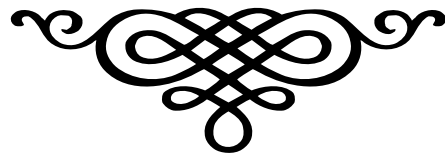
*It fell upon the day following the winter solstice, and as was the wont at such times the Summer King, Parkigern his name was, had been ritually slain and devoured for the betterment of Trel and the fertility of it's good farmlands. The new King stands within the great circle of stones wherein the will of the gods is revealed in the movements of the heavenly bodies and raises his hands and say's "I AM the Good Shepherd", come follow me for "I AM the Way" and other wondrous and strange things and he shared his great design withal for the healing of Trel and the bane of its foes. And all sat in awe at the glory of it for it was wrought exceedingly cunning and it was subtle and all the gods were accounted for in this mighty quabbalistic pattern. This is a new religion many thought unto themselves, and mayhap better times are coming and we will have to sacrifice no more kings, for men of quality are getting hard to find who will accept the job.*

*But up stands the leader of the thralls, and yells "Crucify Him, how dare he bring in a new religion of love and fellowship, how can we fertilise our fields, we need the blood of kings for that". Now Kerki, for such was this man's name, knows full well, that nowise would the blood of a thrall, be of any use whatsoever, being profane and unconsecrated, in the ensurance of the fertility of the land, and so he and his kindred, being in no danger at all, calls for the continuance of the old order. He then gathers up a ragtag band of followers and marches forth muttering all kinds of dire oaths. For Kerki also knows that a new order will break the power of the serfs which relies most assuredly on religion being tied to growth and fertility and not on commerce and trade. The Good Shepherd is nowise astonished by this uncouth behaviour, but seemed to be expecting it, and listens attentively as one of the lesser Druids, Goudie Tveshooze, a man skilled in speechcraft who had somehow managed to get the speakership for those who accounted themselves wise, pronounces that his followers will meet in secret to take counsel among themselves regarding the message that they had heard. Now the wrath of the serfs was brought about by this; in their thought the design of the Shepherd was flawed and it's majesty was marred, for there was a new god, where never before there was a god, and they that divine such things had not seen fit to consult with them. Moreover, this new god was sending his vicar, one St. Hugo, to rule over the spiritual needs of the men of Trel and they liked that not at all, for here was a man wondrous wise and subtle of speech such that besides him all others seemed like to be of little mind, and so men greatly feared his coming and*

*murmured openly against the Good Shepherd and said that these things must not be allowed to be. So the little minds invented for themselves all kinds of reasons for the crucifying of the Good Shepherd and made out that he had betrayed them and their law and profaned their great experiment in some new and outlandish Greek thing called democracy.*

*Now all this came to the ears of Batticus, yet many days had to pass, for it was wondrous hard to get the ear of Batticus as seldom did he cease speaking for sufficient space for another to get his attention and long the messengers did wait on bended knee. Batticus goes straightway into the terrible presence of the Lord of the World, Cambellicus Caesar himself, and stands before his face and delivers his errand. Now Caesar mightily rues the hasty crucifixion just a few weeks before of another great and charismatic leader in one of his southern dominions, for men of worth are always needed in Rome. So Caesar takes thought, and dark were his thoughts that day and when he came back from his solitude his countenance was fell and grim and men fled before it. This is what Cambellicus did*

*But the harp fell from the good bard's hands and his tongue was stricken and inspiration left him and he could sing no more. Mayhap when he has recovered his composure he will find the strength to finish the terrible tale that marks the ending of this most sorry chapter in the annals of Trel.*



## II

### *An the War Drags On*

*It came to pass that a book was compiled with the uncouth name of the Expectations of Serfs, though many, unwilling to admit that serfs could have expectations, simply spoke of it as EOS. Now, at the time that this venerable tome was compiled, the serfs were mightily distressed, a big reason being that Brennius of Sorrento whom they looked to for the easing of their accustomed misery has disappeared without trace after being summoned to Cambellicus' tower.*

*So it came into the mind of Francus Bluntus Teflonicus, Emperor by Divine Decree, Conquering Lion of Judah, etc., etc., that he might use the discontent of the serfs to great effect for the keeping of his unruly barons in check. Now, nowhere was the discontent of the serfs so great, nor the barons so unruly as in Trel. So Teflonicus Caesar summoned Johanicus Batticus Invisibilatus, so named for his habit of walking unseen for long periods of time and hence unnerving his simple subjects by the uncertainty of his appearances and told him that the pay of his barons would depend on the lessening of the burden of the serfs as seen in the next volume of the EOS, for it was to become a perennial thing.*

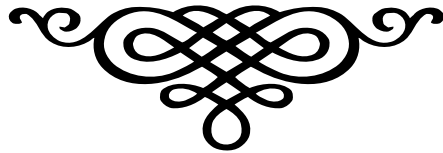
*Now it was a strange thing but the then Master of Trel, Lord Jim Parlance called mighty councils at which both lord and serf might sit together and speak their piece and take counsel for the good of Trel and there were many of these, for progress was for the most part but slow. Yet to show how just how daring the serfs had become, at one such meeting, Berry Kinto, Chief Serf actually dared to ask Parlance how much he had at stake from the goodwill of the serfs. Needless to say he did not know, having a mind far above such profane matters, but Baron Tadius was there to help him so the day was not lost.*

*Now Trel is a noble pile, as piles go, yet its structure is all rotten and corrupt and there are too many old men in high places. So there came about more meetings and councils, some with only serfs, some with serfs, soldiers and nobles together, and others for the masters only. At these times pieces of parchment bearing strange geometrical designs were passed around and pondered over. The priests were troubled, thinking that the appearance of these hermetic diagrams might indicate a resurgence of sorcery and other arcane arts of the sort that the superstitious are ever swift to resort to when times get dark and the future uncertain. Yet their fears were not groundless for these were no quabbalistic spells for the raising of dark powers, but something much more terrible and far more dangerous. They were working on organisation charts. "As above, so below", thunders the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trimegistus and the mystic knows that the only true structure is that which mirrors the eternal hierarchy of heaven and hell. This, as can be read in the venerable works of Dionysius the Areopagite, consists of a Hierarchy of nine orders of bright radiant Aeons and nine orders of evil Archons. These are subject to the Seven Spirits Before The Throne. Thus, according to this Divine Plan, the only legitimate structure for Trel is the one ordained by God. There must be seven Earls under the Master, each with his appointed sphere. The men of Trel will be divided into two streams depending on whether their work is abstract or manual, and there are to be nine grades in each. As such there will be four*

*grades of serf and five grades of warrior, leading from stable boy to captain. Similarly there will be nine grades of learned man going from junior scribe to archbishop.*

*But the ignorant did not know all this and thought that they could improve on that which is embodied in the mystic number forty two, which when factorised into one times two times three times seven, reveals the first three stages in the process of divine unfoldment in going from the One to the Many, and hence is an occult number of great power and the model for all manifested structure.*

*So men sat huddled together pondering these strange diagrams which their little minds had produced, and having built their castles of sand, mistook them for the ramparts of the universe. They sit there still while the war drags on.*



### III

## *The principles guiding the persuance of the business of Trel*

*As expounded by Lord Jim Parlance and the noble Baron Tediuis*

*The business of Trel is to make good use of the emperor's monies through better carrying out the knightly quest and the defence of the realm, finding new and more glorious ventures, going boldly where no knight has gone before, slaying more dragons, rescuing more damsels, hanging more ruffians and killing more enemies with less drain on the emperor's purse. It shall also be the purpose of Trel to increase the love of the common folk for the emperor through fighting social injustice and protecting trade and the collection of taxes and to do this withal, now and evermore.*

*Hire more common soldiers in line with the commands of the emperor and his lieutenants and to never question no command but to do unflinchingly whatever is asked especially where the collection of taxes is concerned.*

*Turf out all the alchemists and soothsayers and astrologers and sundry other idle folk and get more people who play mental games, particularly the sort that like playing with toy soldiers and cardboard models on the Great Hall floor and have nothing to do with nasty bits of hardware like spurs, shields and spears.*

*As a consequence of the aforementioned, the following has come to pass*

*The few astrologers, alchemists and men of like sort who remain are mighty fearful vainly try to read their own future in the stars. The best have already gone far away.*

*The Great Hall is covered in cardboard models, chess boards and lead soldiers which are pored over by various weedy and introverted types who could hardly lift a sword, let alone wield one. Meanwhile the science of making new and improved weapons languishes.*

*Less time is spent on knightly quests of the dragon slaying or damsel rescuing kind. These are only undertaken when the presence of a dragon or robbers is causing economic hurt to the realm of such magnitude that it far outweighs the cost of mounting the expedition. This must be demonstrated before any quest is initiated. Damsels will no longer be rescued because it is the chivalrous thing to do, but only if her relatives are willing to pay handsomely for the rescue service. No money will be spent on testing weapons; it is sufficient to show the blacksmith the headsmans block and he will understand.*

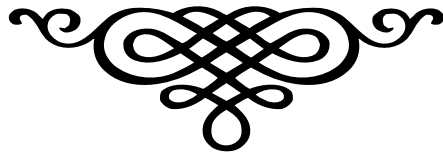
*Warefare is to be simplified through the convergence of honest fighting with the arts of the devil. This will be accomplished through the introduction of weapons of mass destruction such that a few men wielding such weapons may gain victory in a matter of minutes. The most promising method of doing this is through the use of the cannon. This wonderful and beautifully elegant device can fire simultaneously chains of various lengths as*



well as vast numbers of small darts and sundry other sharp and nasty objects, killing huge numbers of enemies at a single shot even though they be protected by armour. An arms race is bound to ensue but Bernicus Chief Smith is certain that the looked-for all-artillery warfare will not come until the turn of the tenth century and in the meantime a few cannons backed up with a larger number of catapults will suffice and be a lot more affordable. This is doubtless as it should be since after the casting out of all the alchemists nobody is quite sure of the correct formula for gunpowder and consequently it is very expensive. There is no cause for concern even though it is reported that certain allies of the Optrians are well advanced in the making of powder and shot and some of our alchemists are with them.

There is no need to do much in the way of prophesying or thaumaturgising, or in the studying of alchemy or advanced smithcraft at Trel since all these will be rightfully undertaken in the institutions of learning where the will not drain the purse of the emperor but will be paid for by increasing taxes on the common folk (who don't pay enough anyway and will be glad to foot the bill).

Mayhap there are some contradictions here but since the turfing out of all the aforementioned learned men there is not much intelligence in Trel



## IV

### *From the Black Book of Trellium Canto XIII*

*It is a thing wondrous strange that the chronicler has remained silent for so long yet a legend grows with the passing of the long years and small men and small deeds get greater with the telling. It is also a fact that your humble chronicler is nowise yet weary of this humble frame and would fain have his head remain attached to his shoulders for a little while longer.*

*Yet these things must be written down, lest they be forgotten. Now Legolas had gone out a hunting and never came back again and some suspected the fell hand of Dougdal and there was no master in Arden and all the designs of Legolas were brought to nought. Now, Dougdal, as he was known to the common folk, was in truth Cambellicus Caesar, master of thirty legions and the emperor's lieutenant.*

*Now it was the emperor's thought that a wise man should rule in Trel, for Arden was forgotten, and the great druid Brennius was sought out, and little loth was he to accept the keys of Trel.*

*A man exceeding cunning was Brennius, and of silken tongue and subtle withal, and many became enamoured of him and knelt at his feet when he asked for fealty at the great council of Trel. And he told the tale of how he was summoned even to Rome and stood before the emperor, and yea, even before the senate themselves and he told them how mightily he fared in his craft, even to the turning of straw into gold and how his great wisdom might be put to serve the advantage of the empire. And he was commanded to come again before the senate when his plans were full wrought, and great glory he had there so that the emperor and Cambellicus were well pleased with their choice of him.*

*Now Brennius goes abroad and he takes somewhat of his captains with him and he tells in whispers of a great treasure that might be obtained but of which it were too soon to speak in plainer words, and men look upon him as one of the heroes of old come again and look towards better days for Trel.*

*Now with Brennius off aroving, men sit around the fire in the mead hall and tell tales and sing songs and the bard puts forth all his craft and sings the Lay of Brennius. The tale begins in the forgotten years when Brennius was in his youth and he learnt his druidry in long study on the Isle of Mlona, which in these days is called Anglesey and is sundered from the Welsh mainland by the Menai Strait. Here, of old, was the heart of British druidry and here was taught the druidic art to him who was fearless and tireless and of cunning mind.*

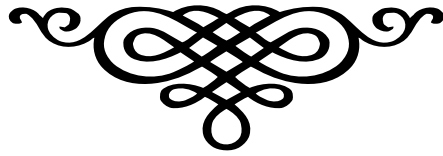
*And the good bard goes on to the Tale of Branven which is in the Mabinogion, and tells how Brennius was at the feast of the Wonderful Head with Taliessin himself and was in the company of Arthur, even sailing with him on the Priddeu Annvyn. This great adventure tells the tale of a raid made by Arthur on the otherworld to get the Cauldron of Inspiration and from which but seven returned though thrice the fullness of Prydven, Arthur's magic ship, went into it. Men shuddered at that dark yet wonderful tale,*

yet some misdoubted their ears when the good bard sang of how great the counsels of Brennius were with Arthur, for Arthur was a mighty king, and wise men believed him to be the god Gwydion, come among men for some great and unfathomable purpose. "These things must be true, for Brennius told them to me himself," said the bard, yet methinks the stories were somewhat different when first I learned them. And some said that there was no Priddeu Annwvyn and that it was a myth, for had not Gwydion himself led a similar disastrous raid on Annwvyn in the time before time. "And the name Brennius", up spake the loremaster, "is not that just a modern way of saying Bran, who was the great god of prophesy who was worshipped at Avebury, and as was told in Brannven's tale he was at the Feast of the Wonderful Head, because he was the Wonderful Head. As with the tongue of Brennius, the speech of Bran's severed head was eloquent beyond compare yet that was silenced at the opening of the door to the west and the mastery of Britain passed to Beli his brother whose shrine is at Stonehenge. And that was a score of centuries ago". And folk began to murmur in secret that Brennius' past might be no more than a myth, and nowise real, and slowly the murmuring got louder yet it did not reach the ears of Brennius.

And whilst Brennius was still abroad Parsonius Chief Bard (who was also a sort of tribune who represented the interests of the common folk in the counsels of the nobility) saddles up his horse and rides night and day till he comes to Menai and crossing the flood enters the holy isle wherein the dark rites of the druids are enacted, hidden from profane eyes, in shaded groves. Now whilst no written sign the druid ever makes; nothing is forgotten yet nowise could the elder druid remember ought of Brennius, and counsels that mayhap it was in Erin he studied, or mayhap under another name. Mighty troubled is Parsonius and a great dread is on him and he fares straightway the uncounted long leagues to Rome and comes to Cambellicus and stands before his face and delivers him his awful errand.

Now Brennius is recalled to Rome and is brought into the presence of Cambellicus and is commanded to prove beyond all doubt that he was at Mona and that he learned there the druidic art. And Cambellicus, who is a man mighty in ancient lore, calls in his slave Francophilus. This same man made a speech after the loss of Legolas but it was dull and few remember it, and fewer still knew who he was or why he should be worthy to speak on that sad occasion, and very few indeed were those who understood this jokes withal. He is also charged with hiring and dismissing the cooks and drudges at Trel and has sundry other duties, and imagines himself to be noble since he does the tasks that once fell to the Lady Farina of the Flame Red Tresses and is provided with a horse and squire. Nonetheless he carries no sword and is still a thrall. Cambellicus commands Francophilus to go out and get mushrooms if any might be had. Then takes Cambellicus an ancient tome, writ in runes of British script, and turns to the Tale of MATH, Son of MATHONNY and reads to Brennius how Gwydion who was a skillful druid cast a spell for the turning of common fungi into splendid horses with magnificent trappings and had beguiled Prydion for a while (for the spell lasted but a day) and achieved his designs, but as it was to turn out, at terrible cost. Now in comes Francophilus with some toadstools and Brennius is invited to make some horses, though in no wise would have Cambellicus dared to ride one lest it return to its humble origin whilst he was upon it. Now Brennius calls forth his druidic art and begins the enchantment, but as all versed in such arts know, if his theurgy is not sufficiently skilled and he is a false druid then his making will turn about and rend him to pieces. What happened in Cambellicus' tower no man knows, but forsooth, no man's eyes fell on Brennius ever again.

*Cambellicus never got his horses, the tale tells, but Sir Lonjohn did, and with this gift of Brennius he is well pleased, and as far as is known, it did not turn back to a mushroom.*



# V

## *The Chronicles of Arden - The Book of Bones.*

*Tells the tale of the ruin of Arden, that formerly was Trel in the days when the power of Telcoria was at its height.*

*As was told in the tale of the passing of Harbold, Legolas Elfray took up the mastery of Trel and Harbold departed across the sundering seas and no word of him ever came back to Middle Earth withal.*

*Now Legolas knew naught of fighting and warfare being aforesome a merchant of sorts, and being afeared that the purpose of Trel was gone awry, he took into his service, sundry sly and cunning men to spy out the ways of Trel and see how that it might be bettered. Such a one was Split Bones who had once mucked out the stables at Trel before he took up with tinkers and went abroad in the world selling pots and pans and the like. Some whispered that he had like as not made his real living as a pirate.*

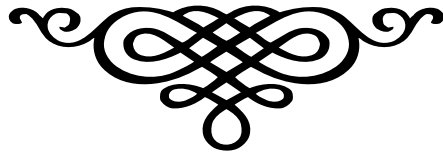
*Mighty was Split Bones in the counsels of Elfray and in exchange for much gold he made a great volume which purported to show how the affairs of Trel might be redirected for the betterment of all. Two score and ten pages of wisdom were in it, yet it was kept as secret as the wizard's grammarie and none but the captains were permitted to see it. Those few who had an illicit peek were heard to say that the reason for the secrecy was to keep the throat of Bones from being slit until he could be gone far off with his gold.*

*Now Elfray had renamed Trel and called it Arden and whereas before it had been a fortress for the protection of Telcoria now it was to be a marketplace and many of the soldiers were told to become merchants although few could foresee how this change might be effected. At this time there was much fear in Arden, not of pain or death in battle, but of being unwanted and unneeded, especially by those who beforetime believed their services had won them renown in the land. Moreover, there were a great many, some six score who were veterans and had served Harbold when Trel was at the height of its power, who had great skill in both smithying and fighting whose task it was to see that the arms supplied to the men of Telcoria were of good quality and would not fail in battle. Bones in his book, wrote that this was folly and that they who made the swords and spears and shields should answer for their quality and repair them if they broke. Yet here is a thing wondrous strange. Bones wrote that the reason for this would be plain for all to see in the tenth chapter, yet to reveal such a profound mystery to the riff raff was like casting pearls before swine. Accordingly the tenth chapter was written in the mystic elf script that could be read only by he who had great wisdom and spotless purity of heart, yet to the profane was invisible. Although the hallways of Arden resounded with discussions on the meaning of the mysterious tenth chapter, your humble chronicler, ever mindful that truth is the greatest virtue, must humbly admit that as yet he has not himself read the words but by steadfast prayer, meditation and fasting he hopes soon to be able to do so.*

*Months passed, then one day, on a chill autumn morning a great army of Optrians came unlooked for over the mountains to the east and fell upon the rich farmlands and unprotected towns of Telcoria, robbing,*

*burning and carrying off whatever they took a fancy to. Out rode the host of Arden, grim faced men under a grey sky, and the thunder of their hooves and the sound of their horns echoed throughout in the mountain passes and both men and wild beasts hid themselves and shook in terror. Anxiously the wives and maidens of Arden looked east from the ramparts and awaited news of husbands and sweethearts.*

*Then it came to pass that the army, returning victorious was sighted at last and fast riders came to report the bane of Optria but they were joyless and spoke in whispers of victory dearly bought. Whereas five columns had ridden out, but three came back and each rider bore a great bundle. As each knight rode past the gate he cast his burden to the ground until there was a great pile and it was seen that the grim heap was made of the shards of broken swords and sundered bowstrings and splintered lances and split shields and cloven helmets. And the last of all dismounted from his horse, carefully for his saddle straps were frayed and barely held together, and he slowly climbed the mound and took from his pack a dark object and stuck it on the upright point of a broken spear. It was the Book of Bones.*



## VI

### *The Passing of Harbold*

*Tells the tale of the passing of Harbold, a lay strange yet wondrous sad wherein the wise may discern things it were needful to know. Not for Harbold the long home of those who fall in battle but another fate darker and more mysterious. For Harbold has been summoned into the uttermost west, even to the feet of Franve himself, of whom many tales are told, but few have returned alive from the meeting therewith.*

*In the grey morning, a chill wind full of rain brings a strange ship to the hard stone quays of Trel, that same vessel which was to bear away Harbold on his last journey into the west. Aboard that vessel was the new master of Trel, Legolas Elfray, standing proudly at the bow. Yet an eagle outflying the wind had brought news to the men of Trel and they were troubled as to what manner of tidings these might be. Harbold was well loved and he would be sorely missed, and men were well acquainted with his ways withal, yet few had ever dealt with Legolas and these were eagerly sought for clues they might give about his character or his designs.*

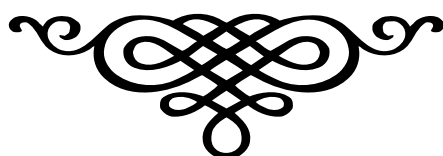
*The eagle, delivering the errand of Franve, spoke not of war and battle but of trade and moneymaking, buying and selling. The hardy and grim men of Trel had heard of these unpleasantries, and had seen and greatly disliked the fat and effeminate merchants who travelled the road that passed by Trel and stayed at the inns. In truth their real task had always been, supposedly, to protect the trade and wealth of the realm, but the goodmen of Trel preferred to think of warring being done for its own sake and the glory it brought, as in days of old. Forsooth, although Franve sat in timeless halls atop the great tower of Exhiquetil, whose pinnacle is above the clouds and wreathed in stars, and in whose innermost mind the will of God was revealed, yet he was of the younger gods and had not been at the forging when the world was being newly wrought out of ice and fire. The elder gods, Ma Ki Non and Melu Aard, and yet even more ancient powers withal, whose names are forgotten had departed beyond the spheres of the world and troubled men's thoughts no more.*

*Yet the new god Franve brought a new revelation, of the goodness of wealth and riches, and of delighting thy neighbour, and serving him and growing wealthy together. Some of the knights of Trel jokingly asked whether damsels in distress should be asked to pay before being rescued, or what killing an ogre was worth, but they were told not to be stupid. Yet little did they know that a certain scribe, high in the counsels of Harbold, and a notorious supporter of the black and white jousting team, was drawing up just such a scale of charges. This man who had never held a spear, and whose name sounded something like Chigrat was a mighty maker of mischief in Trel, yet Harbold held him in honour nonetheless.*

*There were on the battlements of Trel, certain great engines, mangonels they were called, whose task it was to catapult a deadly rain of stones and fire far out into the ranks of a besieging army. As certain of the men of Trel were passing these, one remarked as to what possible use they could be put to in the furtherance of commerce as Franve commanded. Then one of them, after quietly thinking for a few minutes stated, "I have a new and strange idea that will make us wondrous wealthy and draw folk to Trel from leagues around. We push the arm of the catapult out over the battlements and we tie to it a big piece of rubber and a length of rope.*

*We invite folk to have the rope tied around their ankles and they jump off. Then they bounce back in the nick of time, just before they reach the moat, and they will pay a fortune for that." After the echoes of the long scream and subsequent splash had died away, the remaining men began to amuse themselves with tales of the mangonels. "Did you know", one said, "that these used to be named after gods from foreign parts, but now they are called cat and dog and pig and so on." "Howso?" said another. "Some said it was blasphemous, and devotees might be offended, yet the days of the week are still named after gods, as are the constellations," answered the first. "That is somehow more appropriate," said a third. "Yet I was reading in an ancient book from that country after whose gods we used to name the mangonels, and it was said that there were thirty million gods or some such and that they were just the temporary and periodic manifestations of the one eternal and absolute principle who has no name. What is more, they call Shiva, the 'Destroyer', so what better name to give a mangonel, and most of the others did in their fair share of demons in the early days." "Didn't know you could read," remarked the first, and shortly thereafter the sound of another splash arose from the moat fifty fathoms below. Somebody then said, "Isn't old Chigrat's first name Michael?, and that means; Like unto God". "If he's that close to God, then why doesn't his bloody team win a bit more often?" said another, and they all rolled about on the floor in fits of laughter.*

*Yet it soon became clear that Legolas was no tried warrior but rather a master of trade and finance and Trel began to take on a somewhat gaudy appearance as folk began to think of ways to use whatever skills they might have to earn money. Commerce became the order of the day. Many of the knights went out to be mercenaries, fighting for whoever could pay what they asked, although at 124 golden guineas a year few could afford them. The dungeons became a museum and row boats could be hired on the moat. Since most of the men and women of Trel were busy with the preparations for a surplus weapons and tapestry sale, few noticed the grey ship bearing Harbold glide quietly away from its moorings and begin its long journey down the river and towards the sea.*





## VII

### *Ye Arrowsmiths of Trel*

*"Sufficient unto the day, is the evil thereof." As the good lords and ladies of Trel departed the church they pondered as to what these words might mean. Yet the good vicar had thundered them from the pulpit and they of Trel were not wont to gainsay in thought or word, the voice of authority, either sacred or profane. Yet all thought of evil was far from the minds of the men and womenfolk of Trel. The land was flourishing and there was peace for the first time in years. Kalaria had been utterly destroyed and the borders with Optria settled by treaty. Yet in the grim days of the war few could even imagine that the ancient enemies Telcoria and Otcaria would be joined together into a great new land Kaotica. Yet this unlooked for dream had come to pass, and with it hope beyond hope, the king had come back and was setting the realm in order from his twin seats of Minas Sidnith in the south and High Wilnost far to the north. Strange in speech was he, yet noble and wise, and brought with him the gathered wisdom of his kin, long sundered from western men in a far land across the ocean.*

*Now when the men of Kaotica fared abroad, either alone or a few together, they were wont to carry with them a good bow of yew and a quiver of arrows. These were lighter than weapons of steel and besides providing sport and food, were proof against certain wild beasts and lawless men that haunted the pathless wastes that covered much of Kaotica in those days. Now because of this great love of hunting and faring abroad there was much smithying of good steel arrowheads, and much fletching withal, and many men were gainfully employed in the fashioning of bow and shaft. Thus each was gainfully employed in his chosen craft and all were content and had profit therefrom.*

*But the fruits of victory seldom last for long, and soon the bitter began to mingle with the sweet. For there came outlandish men, from Optria, even, with camels and mules, and they brought great bundles of arrows and began to sell them in the markets. Now the arrows of Optria were of a strange and cunning design and wonderfully crafted. Yet besides these, the arrows of Kaotica appeared blunt and crude and they were all the same withal, after a design that hadn't changed in centuries. And men were enamoured after the arrows of Optria; for such is the bane of man, that he is nowise content but always seeking for some new thing, and this the elves have long wondered at.*

*Now this came at last to the ears of the king, and he pondered it, and summoned his wisdom and at long last he issued a proclamation. And he spoke: "This woe hath befallen thee because of thine own misdeeds and ye should have foreseen it. Thy arrows cost too dear and ye must cut the price. There be as many arrowsmiths as there were in times of plenty, and many stand idle. Two score hundred shall cease smithying arrows forthwith and take up another craft. Thus shall the kingdom be enriched. And, moreover", quoth he, "thy customers shall be delighted with thy wares, and ye shall be exceeding swift in meeting their demands, or ye shall make thy excuses to the headsman."*

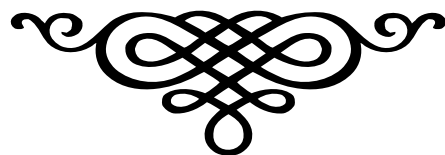
*And up spake the little chronicler of Trel, in the council chamber, when Harbold passed on the royal commands and he saith trembling, "What other crafts shall they take up Lord? For we have already cut the*

number of bakers and grooms and stonemasons and soldiers and weavers and wagonwrights. With the ending of the war and the opening up of the borders all these things that they were wont to make can be got in trade. And with twoscore hundred fewer arrowwrights there will be twoscore hundred less men with money to buy arrows, or the products of the other crafts for that matter. And with all the other unemployed craftsmen unable to buy arrows either there will be need for even less arrowsmiths". After the poor chronicler, forgetting his station, had begun a scholarly discourse on the theory of asymptotic functions converging on zero, Harbold had him thrown in the dungeon with a warning that if he would fain remain attached to his tongue he should keep it shut tight within his mouth.

After the screams had died down, after all they had to torture him just a little bit, on principle, Harbold rose and said, "Now to the real business. A great plague is come upon Trel and this is its mark. That many are afflicted with idleness and lie abed feigning sickness and go not to work. I call upon Lady Farina to speak plainly on the matter." Thereupon the fair lady arose before the assembled nobility of Trel and delivered her errand, and there was much murmuring as they heard of the slothfulness of the scribes and clerks and how it was very great, and how that of the craftsmen was little less, but the soldiers fared somewhat better. "This must end," thundered Harbold, "for the King has ordered it", but many pondered in their hearts as to how this might be achieved. Some were for a few beheadings as a gentle example, others were for more drastic action, but the token thrall at the council, Jack Elftoes said nought. And though none spake it, many thought they understood the king's design. For with the men at work more days, fewer men yet could make the same number of arrows and still keep the travellers and huntsmen delighted.

Yet in the end it was all right. For with all the penniless unemployed craftsmen gone out into the wild for robbers and thieves and highwaymen there was a great leap in the need for bows and arrows and armed guards and there was much beating of plowshares back into swords and spears. At the end of a weary day, as Harbold, wiping his bloody sword slumped back into his great chair and as his favourite wench tugged off his muddy boots and handed him a goblet of mead, he said, "It's just like old times."

"It all goes to show," muttered the chronicler, out on sufferance, "sufficient unto the day, is the evil thereof."



## VIII

### *The Dragons of Trel*

*In the fading days of the glory of the West, a shadow lay upon the realm of Telcoria. The wise gathered together in hidden places and took mighty counsels of doom. There was talk of war and fell deeds. Spies reported that the numberless hordes of Kaloria and Optria in the east and south, beyond the Misty Mountains, were on the move. So it came to pass there was darkness in the hearts of men and they were afraid.*

*Far off in the north, in the great city of Minas Wilmost by the starlit shores of Lake Burkandim, Melanthor was seen high in his tower consulting the stars and strange lights were seen coming from the window of his chamber. Six hundred leagues to the south in the fastness of Toegard, Dougdal shut fast his gates and began building an great armament for its defence. The armiouries and furnaces of Toegard were seldom silent and a thick and evil cloud hung over the place.*

*But these were still safe, only to fall at the bitter end when all else should be lost. It was the brave citadel of Trel, as always keeping its sleepless watch over the southern route where the mountains failed, that held the savage Kalorians at bay and let simple folk sleep safe in their beds at night. Should Trel fall then nothing would prevent a march in power by the invader through Otcaria and into Telcoria along the coast.*

*Grim was Harbold as he leant weary on his sword after yet another day of battle and watched the blood red sun slowly set into the western plain. Terrible was the Witch Queen Stacka and beyond counting her willing slaves, yet the men of Trel had not faltered before their dread onslaught and beat it back again and again with sharp swords and bitter spears. Niether did they listen to her fair sounding entreaties telling them life would be better under Kalorian sway. They feared that her fine words hid foul deceit and suspected that rather than buying locally, under Kaloria goods would be brought in from elsewhere and sold at the expense of their own craftsmen. The brave men of Trel cried out, "Begone Bitch, get thee back to the black abyss that spanned thee and gnaw thysself in the darkness of thy own soul, for we are not enamoured of thy lies." Yet some, in their heart of hearts, harkened to her words and considered that under Kaloria taxes might be less, and their lot no worse than under the tyranny of Telcoria.*

*Yet whilst no evil could come into the land from without because of the valour of the men of Trel a darkness was slowly brewing from within. At first men did not recognise it for what it was, thinking it to be a good thing for it came in fair guise and brought men hope of better times. Aforetime the power of of the councillor Ocra had been abuilding and he had whispered his designs into the ear of Dougdal and Dougdal had listened withal.*

*This was Ocra's rede. For the legions of Telcoria there was to be a new means of ordering men with four ranks instead of the five that there were aforetime. Men would be reckoned according to how they were accounted worthy and valorous. The knights of Trel were known to be the finest body of men in the world in those days and they felt wondrous joyful, expecting that many of them would get the new rank of Captain of the*

*Host, second only to the Marshalls under the Lord. Truly, the Marshalls had been greatly honoured of late, and well rewarded for their service in the war, but as time passed men began to murmur loudly when no Captains were chosen and the better men accounted no more than the lesser.*

*It was whispered that Dougdal, safe in the fastness of Toegard had given to Harbold the true number of the Captains of Trel, and it was very few, and loth was Harbold to reveal it withal. Years passed, and the war dragged on, and still Harbold forbode to speak on the matter and appoint any to the captaincy. Then upon a time, Harbold did speak, and let it be known that those who reckoned themselves worthy might apply on parchment after the fashion of Ocra's pronouncement. Few, verily were the extra rewards of captaincy. A Captain might wear a larger plume on his helm and have his bedstraw changed every week instead of every month, yet such men would, because of their rank, have honour in the land. But as time passed and Harbold still named none Captain, the murmurs grew louder and men were openly heard to say that should Ocra by mischance fall into their hands then he might look for some mischief to befall him. Yet whilst hope still lingers, the spirit does not falter, and mighty patient were the men of Trel. As ever, Sir Lonjon, made the most noise, and mighty were the dents he hewed with his mattock in the good round table of the council of Trel.*

*Yet the heart of Harbold was heavy, and this was the cause of it. Ocra had persuaded Dougdal that a Captain of the Host must be mighty beyond the measure of ordinary men. A true captain must have fourfold powers and be strong in each of them, and this is their tale. Skill in knighthood beyond the measure of champions and mastery of all weapons and battle lore. Fell and grim to his enemies, yet kind and loyal to his friends and obedient to his masters must he be. Yet he must be wise beyond measure and might in counsel, a master of strategy and a leader of men. And he has to be lordly withal and accountable for the conduct of his men in battle.*

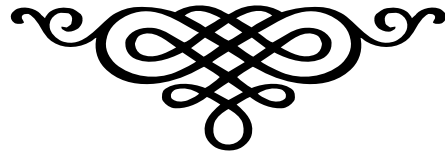
*This was a new and unlooked for thing. Accountable was an uncouth word and men disliked the sound of it, and it was a thing that came from the scheming of Dougdal and so men distrusted it. It had come first with the order for the cutting of the number of spears and men had accepted that, but now accountabilities rained down like the arrows of an avenging army. In the mess hall at noon, the men were discussing the latest order for the rationing of tins of metal polish and horseshoes. Sir Lonjon said that it was a wondrous thing that Dougdal should concern himself with such mean and lowly things, what with the war on and all.*

*Now the men of Trel answered Harbold that they were such, though some excelled more in one quality, and some in another. Then cried Harbold, "How many dragons have ye slain?, how many fair damsels have ye rescued from the troll's den?, have ye dared the lingworm's slot and brought me the forbidden gold?, how much have ye increased the wealth of Telcoria?. Fetch me the Grail or the crown from Stacka's head and I will think upon it." And they hung their heads, and turned from his face and wept in sorrow, for many battles had they fought in the defence of Trel, and not a few went out in search of worm or Grail.*

*Now, as the fell design of Ocra hastened to its fulfillment, men's vigilance faltered and watch on Kaloria and the southern passes slept, and on a dark morning the joined hordes of Kalorians and Optrians swept across the river and set a great leaquer about Trel. And still Trel had no captains to command its host, but through the strength of its walls it endured.*

*From her seat out of bowshot of the walls Stacka the Witch called out to the men of Trel. She raised a golden cup and her voice was soft and seductive and filled with all her power, and those hearing it thought that they had never heard such wisdom in Trel. This is what they heard, though for each it came in the guise of their most secret desires. "Come out to us, fearless defenders of Trel, and join us, and honour and lordship shall you have, and riches beyond the measure of Trel. And the great cities of the east shall be open to you such as Bellsa and Calalia and Amtekia and ye may dwell there if ye will".*

*"Stay" cried Harbold. "Maybe some of ye yet will attain the captain's plume and the bed of clean straw". But it was too late and his entreaty failed him. Right soon the portcullis was raised, and the drawbridge crashed down and the host of Trel thundered out, save only the lame and the simple. Yet spear and sword and shield were left behind, for as the last man cried, "we shall soon have new and better".*



## IX

### *Ye Decline and Fall of Ye Telcroman Empire*

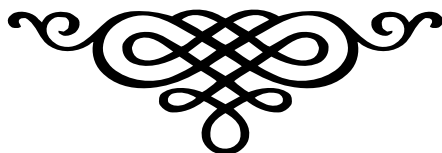
*A decree went out from Cambellicus Caesar. Yea, and verily, from the Lord of the West himself. And who dares argue with the master of thirty legions.*

*The borders of the empire were threatened, barbarian hordes pressed in on all sides. Bellissa the Hutch, Cabal the Gutless to name just two, and others of whom only dread rumour had come to Telcrome. But they had no name.*

*The empire must be preserved. Hard times provoke harsh measures. Every tenth part of the empire lost and the army must suffer decimation went the proclamation.*

*Decimation had been in use since time immemorial as a means of maintaining discipline in the forces. The soldiers gathered into groups of ten and were asked to choose a straw. The man unlucky enough to choose the short straw was promptly siezed and strangled by the other nine. It was quick, clean and every man had a sporting chance.*

*Such were the desperate measures taken in those desperate times. Cambellicus fell fighting alone in the last defence of the ancient city of Telcrome before it was finally destroyed.*



# X

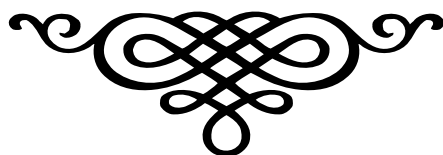
## *Ye First Chronicle of Trel*

*Of old the citadel of Trel stood beside the high road from Claypit in the south to Blackbog, three leagues to the north. Harbold the Good was lord of that fortress of renown, and through his mighty deeds and strong counsel, for he was very wise, the land of Telcoria was maintained free from fear. Wisdom sat on the brow of Harbold, farsighted was he, and knowledge of things beyond the ken of other men came to him. Thus no threat could enter, unlooked for, into the pleasant fields of Telcoria.*

*But a shadow has fallen over the heart and mind of Harbold and his vision has failed him. At first the source of his doubt was unclear to him and he was troubled. The Warden of Telcoria, Melanthor had ruled for years uncounted and Telcoria had prospered. Never since the forgotten days of the old empire of Pomgor had there been such peace and contentment in the land.*

*But Melanthor was much concerned with events outside of Telcoria and the coming war with Otcar. So it was that the running of affairs of man and beast was given over to his lieutenant Dougdal. Strong were the counsels of Dougdal with Melanthor and none might gainsay him. Yet men feared the growing power of Dougdal and in secret called him Toecutter. None knew whence he came, yet some said it was across the Great Ocean which few had dared to cross. In truth his speech was strange and some even doubted that Toecutter was human, thinking him perhaps a creature of malice sent to trouble an unhappy world. In stature he was short and could speak fair words, yet he was subtle and cruel withal and fell, like a serpent.*

*There came a time that an edict went out from Toecutter commanding the garrison of Trel be reduced, especially amongst the scribes and functionaries. Moreover the number of spears and swords was to be reduced to less than one per man since the cost of weapons was hurting the treasury sore. Some of the knights waxed full wroth and vented their anger before the captains but these were adrad of Harbold and said naught. Others held the decision to be wise since in a properly ordered battle not all would be fighting at the same time and those in need could get weapons from the dead and wounded when they reached the fray. But they were the fewer. For the most part, men said that it was unmanly for a knight to go to war unarmed and murmured in secret. Many said that it seemed wondrous strange that Harbold was promising that by the eleventh century every man might own a crossbow yet was taking the spears from his own warriors, the leading fighters of the land. Some said that it was but a passing madness and would end when the challenge to his lordship was decided, for it was known that others coveted the mastery of Trel. Few knew their names, but rumour, ever swifter than fact, held that Morrigan the Black, or Har-Savinius Goldenhair had such ambition.*



# XI

## *The Great Debate*

*The weary traveller coming at last to Trel after faring the long uncertain leagues of Telcoria might be heartened by all the familiar sounds of modern life. The grinding of metal on stone, the ring of the good smith Roger's hammer on his anvil, the squeel of pigs on the way to market, the dull thud of the headsman's axe. Yet a time has come when the halls and streets of Trel have fallen silent. The wayfarer might reckon it a day of festival to mark the passing of summer and the lengthening nights of cheerless winter. Mayhap he may fear that some dreadful pestilence borne out of the east on a fell wind had cast its shadow on the folk of Trel.*

*But he would be deceived. Men might be found huddled together in small groups speaking softly. Others boldly proclaimed their wisdom (however little it might be) to any who would harken. For a new thing had come to Trel and doubt knaved at the hearts and minds of the goodly folk that dwelt therein. For Melanthor had decreed that all men must choose, and swift must be the choosing thereof. Yet hard and terrible must it be withal, for none accounted themselves exceeding wise in the matter.*

*For it was long the way of it in Trel that when a man might hang up his shield for the last time that the Lords of Trel would make somewhat of provision for him that he might end his days in comfort. A man would receive a parcel of land being greater or lesser according to how long he had served his lord and in what manner. Also he would receive each year fresh seeds and grain that he might be nourished thereby and nowise may him or his have any fear of loss or famine.*

*But Melanthor had given out that he fain would have matters otherwise. "Harken to this rede," say'th he. "It would be in everywise the better if each man take his monies all at once and then be free of Telcoria and wander whither he wouldst." Yet no tyrant would he be and each may have a choice in this matter, save this, that ere the coming of spring his mind was made up. "In this way," quoth he, "Telcoria would prosper."*

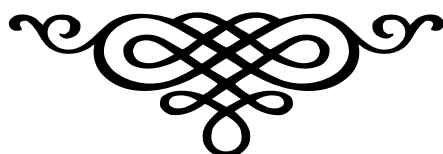
*But some men said, "If Telcoria have the more, surely will we have the less. Methinks here is foul intent wrapped in fair words." But some might have said, "Let us wait and see what Harbold intends, for he is wise." But such was the offer of Melanthor that some might profit by it but with the rest it was otherwise. For in order to choose to his advantage a man must know the price of a spear or the rates of usury for many years hence. But the laws of these things were strange and not to be reckoned by unsighted men.*

*So in those days the astrologers and soothsayers and sriers were much sought and men listened to their words with eager ears. Bones were rolled and lot cast, and old men stood in high places and sought counsel in the stars.*

*In this way was Trel fashioned in those days. Four mighty towers that rose full fifty fathoms above the*



*plain and there were sundry lesser edifices. Yet Harbold was naught content with that and had taken up the building of a great pleasure dome in imitation of that in fabled Xanadu.*



## XII

### *The Monolith*

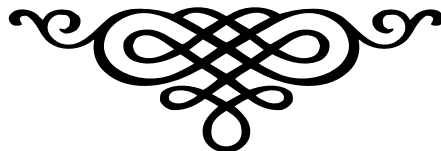
*Deep in the unfathomed mists of the forgotten years there was a but a low hill where now stands the mighty fastness of Trel and in it were certain caves. In these dwelt a small band of stooped and hairy creatures, manlike in form yet their minds were small and progress was slow. The strongest of these, and hence their leaders were Hug and Rug.*

*One morning Hug emerged from his cave and instinctively knew that something was wrong but because of his slow mind the sun was well up into the sky before he knew what it was. Standing right outside the entrance of his cave was a huge white monolith. Rug appeared and scratched himself and stared at this strange and unlooker for thing. As they slowly approached, one suspects to see if it held any potential of the edible kind, a strange music filled the air and both Hug and Rug thought that they didn't like it and it would have to go because it was blocking the view from their caves of where they wanted to put the stone circle. Neither of them realised that this thought was the first real thought that either of them had ever had or that the great monolith had anything to do with it.*

*Rug picked up a large piece of mammoth collarbone, the remains of their last meal, and likewise did Hug and after a few minutes of weighing these promising objects in their hands with avestruck looks on their faces, proceeded to beat one another senseless with them.*

*So Trel was founded, and still it stands, the place where civilisation first came into being and the place where warfare was invented. Some things never change.*

*As for the monolith, it has long since disappeared and many have speculated on its real nature. The wildest tale is that it was actually a jetisoned fuel tank from Dugth Caber's spaceship and it was the strong emanations from the Dark Side of the Force which started humanity on the long road to who knows what. The only evidence to support such an outlandish idea is that during the fading days of Legolas Elfray, the monolith broke its long silence and spoke. All trembled as a deep and terrible voice said simply, "The Emperor is most displeased with your apparent lack of progress.*



# XIII

## Ye Dark Crystal

*Tells the tale of the dark crystal and its coming to Trel and the sorrow and woe it brought about and somewhat of the great quest for the mastery thereof.*

*It was in the days when the excitement brought about by the great fair had started to wane that rumour that the dark crystal had been found and was growing in power first came to the halls of Trel. Aforetime it had been but a legendary thing, forged some said in the forgotten years by the great Weyland himself after he had come to the fullness of his skill in the company of the elves in Alfheim. Others said it was Odin's lost eye transformed into a baleful jewel and filled with fathomless evil, having been fashioned from his discarded primeval energy at the getting of wisdom. But whence it came was of less account than the fact that it was in the world again and must needs be reckoned with.*

*Four sided it was, dark blue in hue and powerful, for a fell spirit abode in it, and he who had skill, and knew the secret runes, and moreover had the will to master it, could touch one of the sides and work mighty wonders thereby. Mastery of the crystal could confer great power yet its secrets were lost and the wise men of Trel long debated in their hearts what they would do should it come into their possession.*

*At the council of Trel, St Hugo who was Lord in those days after the ascension of the Good Shepherd, spoke of the finding of the thing, and that it had indeed come to Trel, and he ordered his Earls to each choose a wise man from amongst his following who could learn to control the talisman so that great good for Trel might be brought about. Some felt that it was a baleful thing come out of the scheming of Dougdal, and warned against it, saying the bane of Trel was in it, but Hugo would not be gainsaid. It had, said Hugo, been in the keeping of a certain mighty wizard Skaebane of whom it was told had gained some measure of control over it, and withal, he could initiate those who dared into its terrible secrets.*

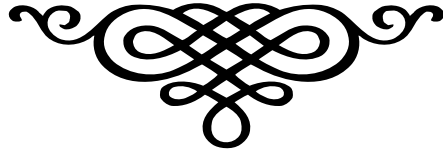
*Skaebane's tower was two hundred leagues away, and he was soon gone, wafted away by some cunning spell to a far place where none could reach him and he was of little help anyway, so it was left up to those of less learning in Trel to learn to master it by themselves. Late at night a strange blue light shone out into the darkness from windows high in the towers of Trel, but ordinary folk closed their shutters and looked away and took solace in tales of bucolic innocence.*

*To the dismay of Trel's wise men, far from working immediate wonders, the crystal was hungry and demanded to be fed, and long and hard was the feeding thereof, for it was a fell thing and was never satisfied. Moreover minds it ate, not meat or drink, and the screaming of the mindless was a shame unto Trel and long in the healing were those slaves who had been forced to touch it withal.*

*Nevertheless, a few such as Terdil the Tenacious, possessed of a will of adamant and with a mind of such stuff as to be indigestible even to the crystal slowly gained the mastery and were able to perform such feats*

*as their stature allowed. Even he could not have gone so far without the help of his steadfast acolyte Crarey the Magnificent. What works they did with the power of the crystal is another story.*

*Meanwhile Hugo, ever subtle and cunning, was toying with the idea of either mounting it atop his helm or on the pommel of his sword. This, assuredly, would dismay his foes in battle and bring about an easy victory. That way when the host of Trel rode out to war, it would need fewer men, and thus gain him even greater glory in the sight of Dougdal.*



## XIII

### *The Passing of Sir Jellyshaw*

*Tells the tale of the great sorrow which befell the goodmen of Trel at the passing of Sir Jellyshaw.*

*Sir Jellyshaw had appeared suddenly at the gates of Trel seeking audience with his lordship, the Good Shepherd. "Howsobeit that the most renowned knight in all the world should seek to serve in Trel and forsake the glories and comforts of the French court," his lordship asked.*

*I would serve an honest king, says Sir Jellyshaw. "I try to be" answereth the Good Shepherd. "Amen" quoth St Hugo stirring from his meditation most sublime to gaze for the first time on the gallant knight.*

*Just then a page rushed in with an avestruck look on his face and when asked "what news" replied that the name of one Sir Jellyshaw had appeared in fiery letters on the round table in the place right next to the queen's.*

*Thus Sir Jellyshaw became the boldest and most trusted knight of the round table. As spring passed to summer and the Good Shepherd ascended to meet his maker, The counsels of Sir Jellyshaw were held in high regard by St Hugo and he was ever foremost in the fray, neither did his spae-wrights ever bode him ill.*

*Not that everything always went perfectly. At a certain council Sir Jellyshaw held on a sea girt island, he was beguiled by certain wormtongued characters into believing that the men of Trel should put an end to dragon fighting and damsel rescuing and leave that up to the peasants and certain professional damsel rescuers. That would surely free up the men of Trel for more worthy pursuits.*

*Jellyshaw soon revealed what he had in mind. He had become enamoured of certain black arts which involved trying to predict the future. It meant great groups of knights sitting around trying to descry what would happen to the fortunes of the empire in case of a plague, an invasion of barbarians or a schism in the church. Jellyshaw was soon seldom to be seen as he went off to try to convince all in the empire who would listen of the glory and majesty of his vision.*

*At the same time he managed to avoid the ever watchful eye of the church for any soul deluded enough to pry too closely into the forbidden secrets of the sorcerous arts.*

*Meanwhile a couple of very nasty dragons had been slain and one or two damsels of high renown rescued to the island debacle was forgotten.*

*Another of Jellyshaw's great works was the promotion of Jousting and skill with spear and lance. This is not to be wondered at in those close to the world's greatest knight.*

*These exalted knights were called thrusters and they were five in number, but one of these, Sir Battlefield was lost.*

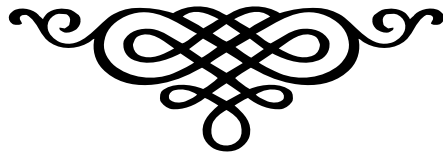
*There was also Terdil, but the less said about him the better. He was more interested in whacking little round balls than knocking the heads off goblins. And there was his tireless servant Chandra.*

*But after a time, with his endless acts of chivalry, the world around Trel had grown tame, and the swordarm of him was grown weak for lack of exercise. So all unlooked for he announces, "I am off to the wild in search of new challenges, and new dangers." But if your need is great then call and I will help if I can.*

*No sooner than the dust of Sir Jellyshaw's horse settled and the glint of his spear lost from view, that a loathsome monster crept out of some pit where it had lain hidden for ages beyond count.*

*This fell thing set about devouring Trel, stones, towers, men and horses until well nigh have of the fortress was consumed.*

*Men were powerless to resist it, for their will to resist had been sapped. For this was no mere lingworm but a favourite pet of the emperor. It was the Gnoccy monster.*



## XV

### *The Last Chronicle of Trel*

*Alas, the time has come when your good chronicler must take up his pen for the last time and leave the last chapters of the *Lay of Trel* to whoever dares to risk the wrath of the powerful and continue. My pen indeed has written little of late, except to compose the *Lay of the passing of Sir Tellyshaw* which was spoken at his wake. But I now go far from Trel, to study druidic lore and follow the old ways, something hard to do so close to the empire.*

*“Beware the Jabbernock my son, the teeth that bite, the claws that snatch”. Thus begins the tale that wives would tell to entertain their children on the dark winter nights. And the children would tremble in mock horror at this fairy tale monster out of old stories. For monsters, along with wizards and elves, as all the sensible folk of Trel in these civilised middle ages know, do not exist except in old tales from an ignorant past.*

*So the good folk of Trel were unprepared when the fell beast, spawned in some unimaginable pit in the deeps of time, descended on Trel unlooked for and utterly destroyed almost half of the fortress. The men of Trel were not the heroes of old, who thundered off to war behind the banner of Harbold the Good, and of who, it was said, were afraid of naught. There was now no spirit to fight, and Sir Hugo, then the master of Trel, bowed down before the baleful dragon and offered whatever it wanted to appease it.*

*Folk called it the Snokky monster and eventually learned that it served Cambellicus, and was his creature, yet it was evil and greedy and devoured all in its path and was never satisfied. And folk began to fear that it would not be sated until all of Trel was under its dominion. And to those who fostered evil in their hearts, it offered gold, and they were drawn to it and it became its willing slaves.*

*First it destroyed the smithy, and then the armoury, yet so soft had the good men of Trel become in their decadence, that these things were hardly missed, except by the smiths who were the first to face the flames of the Dragon’s wrath. Barely had it settled upon the ruins of the smithy, than with a single sweep of its enormous tail, it totally demolished the tower that aforesaid was the domain of Baron Tadius.*

*Then as days passed it seemed to slumber, but the ranks of those benighted souls who fell under its power and worshipped it grew, and when it demanded the tower that was aforesaid called Park’s Palace, it was freely given to house its might host of slaves and minions.*

*Yet the men of Trel seemed unaware of the danger, not sensing the strength of the monster’s will and its power over lesser minds. The study of things arcane having been long discouraged in the more modern age which began with the ascension of the Good Shepherd, none knew whence this strange blindness came or even being aware of it.*

*Yet a power lingered still in the two oldest towers, that aforesaid were the seats of Sir Gibbs and Micklegrim the Merciless, and the Snokky monster was held back from assaulting them openly by the mighty spells cast in days of old. The beast could only watch and bide its time, yet dragons time is nothing, and it could afford to wait, for sooner or later all spells must fall.*

*The tower had once been the seat of Sir Gibbs, and was nearest the great gate, and the first to fall under attack, had in its first days been the very seat of power of Harbold himself, and his council chamber was there, and passage of centuries could not erase the magic of his presence, and the very stones of the place remembered him. And great magic was worked in the place withal. On the uppermost level of this keep, there was once a great shining cauldron and a host of sorcerers brewed strange and terrible potions in it, and called it Mebe. After the goddess Mave, and it was very dangerous, but now it was gone. And others fashioned strange glowing crystals which could blaze forth with a great blast of light and utterly destroy enemies at great distance.*

*In Micklegrim's tower, in times past, there was a great alchemy, and men in strange robes delved deep into the secrets of metals and stones and so were the weapons of Trel matchless in battle. And on the uppermost level, a dark bearded man, built a mighty vessel and with his servants sought to discover the philosophers stone and thereby attain great wealth. Such things would nowise be allowed in the days of Trelcare when anything perilous is greatly discouraged, for as everyone knows, the alchemical quest begins with mercury and that can make a man go mad. Mercury, and worse things still were brewed in that tower, but whether the alchemists went mad or nor is unknown for they are all gone. Your humble chronicler must confess that in more youthful times, he played some small part in the great work, and perhaps he is mad and all this is a bad dream.*

*Thus it is by the power of these great magics that the Snokky monster is held at bay, and hope for Trel still lingers.*

*Not so for Harbold's folly. Harbold, in his dotage, grew tired of living in a castle keep and began construction of a palace for himself and all his servants. This was very great because he had a great many secrets in those days, but it was flimsily wrought and could not nowise withstand any kind of siege, and no spells were bound into stone and mortar.*

*Even St Hugo himself was soon gone from the place, and abandoning Trel, took up his abode in chambers somewhere in the bowels of Tooth Fangy Tooth, the dark fortress itself. "Better to serve in Hell, than rule in Heaven", the men of Trel would say, a saying which was stolen and corrupted by a poet several hundred years later. But Hugo saw it otherwise and claimed to serve the interests of Trel by better being able to influence the counsels of the mighty. But mostly he was playing DoMinOes which had just been invented. And he was spared the awful sight of the dragon.*

*So when the monster demanded full half of Harbold's folly to raise its awful brood of little dragons in, it was freely given. Only the council chamber had lingering power suffice to repel the beats.*

*Now upon a time two young squires and a maiden were seeking a lost cat in the cellars below Gibb's Keep when they happened upon a long forgotten storeroom filled with dust and cobwebs. Something glinted in*



the torchlight, and as they came closer they saw that it was the tip of an old spear leaning against the wall. As soon as he touched it, the first squire rushed back through the keep with an averse look on his face, and reaching the outside, cast it at one of Snokky's minions who happened to be passing. The minion fell to ground dead and the spear pulled itself free and flew back to the squire's hand in a blaze of light. "Now fancy that", he said.

Meanwhile, the maiden was looking intently at the cauldron, which in the torchlight revealed itself to be a work of marvellous and cunning craftsmanship. It had a rim inlaid with mother of pearl, and nine carved figures of maidens were spaced around it, leaning so as to appear to be breathing inside. "I wonder what this is for" she said, but the second squire had not heard her.

His hand slowly reaching out to the hilt of an ancient elvish sword which was embedded in a block of rough hewn stone. Engraven on the blade were the words. *Caedelfvch, Brand of Gnydion, and many runes of power.*

And as the sword swept out of stone releasing as it came the pent up song of ten thousand centuries, a dark face appeared in the water which young Linette had poured into the cauldron.

One eyed was he, and of ancient aspect and he wore a wide brimmed hat and cloak dark as the night, and a raven sat upon his shoulder.

"At last", he said, and the raven smiled.

