

A Brief History of the West

by Alfrick of Greyharp

Write only what you saw.

Every Kalinite knows these words. They are drilled into us from the first day of our training, which begins at about five years of age.

Write only what you saw.

I like to imagine now, in the winter of my life, that had I known then what I know now, I would have shut my eyes.

No, that's a lie.

I am being flippant and disingenuous. You deserve better. You deserve the truth. You deserve history.

I would not trade my memories, my experiences or my history for anything. If somehow I were magically transported back, knowing all that I know, I would force my eyes wider and make even greater efforts to record it all.

So where to begin? I suppose at the beginning, as they are want to say. Though who exactly "they" are remains a mystery to me. From your perspective I am writing this far in the past, but it is the future of the events I aim to discuss.

I tend to ramble, reader be warned.

My name is Alfrick and at present I am sixty-seven years old. For the first seventeen years of my life I was raised as a Kalinite. My life was a daily routine of reading, writing, observation training and far too much grey. Lords I despise the colour now. So devoid it is of emotion, or passion, just grey.

There I go rambling again. It will only get worse. It's not so much that my mind is gone, it isn't, and in fact it is sharper than it has ever been.

I think I will start at the beginning of the tale, again as THEY say. Before I do, I think it would be best if I did my duty as a Kalinite and set the stage. So without further ado I give you a brief history of these lands I call home, lands known only as the West.

To understand my perspective on this it is the twenty-first of Cimtabis 3012, a chilly Airday afternoon, which of course is Kalinite reckoning, you can use whatever calendar you prefer. I use this one. Just to be clear. I make this distinction for my history of the West is far older than the Regency calendar allows, well without using negative numbers

which seem just too fiddly to me. That said I prefer the Elisian nomenclature for days of the week, so it is Airedi. Yes, a more elegant sounding word.

Before we jump fully into it, there are two lands we must define. The first, my home, is the West. It is an island of incredible size that runs long from south to north, nearly a thousand leagues by some estimations. It is also the primary concern of this treatise.

That said there is also the Near East, or for simpler purposes the East. It lies just on the other side of the narrow seas, beyond the Eye of Astarra and is but a portion of a much larger land. It is cut off from the Far East by the Dragonspine Mountains, a massive chain of towering peaks that run from Seawall on southern shore to the northern glaciers beyond Turon. What lands lay over those impressive mountains is unknown to me outside of legend, hearsay and the occasional dispatch from a far wandering Kalinite.

All told this is known as the world of Æran, an Attilasian word that means “earth” or “ground”. A rather uninspiring word when you hear it in the common tongue. Some say it is a massive sphere floating in a sea of stars, yet others say it is but a flat disk and below lays the inferno itself. Still others say it sits on the back of a giant tortoise that swims in that aforementioned sea of stars. Who is right I cannot say nor do I care much to know. This world is this world and that is what I care to know about.

And I’m rambling again. Where was I? Oh yes the West, the East, et al... This distinction is important, if for nothing else than to under what I mean when I say The West.

So three millennia past, the dragon ships of the seven Attilasian Kings crossed the Great White Sea and touched land in what is now known as the Flarn.

There they found a primitive people, shorter and darker than these tall fair kings from beyond the sea. Kael, the wisest of the Kings, decided that this would be where he would form his new kingdom and declared himself lord of the these people.

The remaining six Kings set out in all directions, Tael heading to what is now Aquilar, his blood eventually mixing with that of the giants who lived there. Gael went south, arriving in Tenge Bay and setting his kingdom in the area where the Free City of Kestle now stands. I won’t bore you with each of the King’s movements, needless to say they spread out across the West, colonizing, conquering and civilizing the scattered barbarian tribes they found.

Not all these barbarian tribes are gone. Oh no they still exist, in some parts of the West pure as the first day the Attilasians set foot in the West. They call themselves the Ushaki-Algor, Children of the World. They are a tribal based society and are animists and naturalists. Their tribes have mostly been pushed to the fringes of the West or bread in with various conquerors that they have become a whole new people. Still on the Plains of Plenty the Children of the Horse still thrive and tend to their large herds of

wild horses, nomadic and either friend or annoyance to the farmers and settlers on the massive prairie.

There I go again, digression. Can't be helped really, there is so much information about the West that needs to be told that I will have to do this from time-to-time. Also, I like stories.

Now where was I? Oh yes the Attilasian kings and their conquest of the West.

So as well as the Ushaki-Algor they also met the non-humans who populated the West in great abundance. The elves, dwarves, gnomes (or as they prefer haufalins, more on them later) all stood fascinated by these strange tall humans who were nothing like the men they had known.

While battle with the orks and goblins was unavoidable, they struck up strong alliances with the others and built a vast union of seven kingdoms that ruled the West in peace and harmony for centuries, a true golden age.

Five centuries later the descendants of the Attilasian Kings became decadent and power hungry. They coveted the engineering of the dwarves and the magic and long lives of the elves.

Though the names are long lost to history and it is unknown if it was one or many, a darkness came to the West and worship of the Attilasian gods was abandoned in favour of what we now call the Olde Gods, though their divinity is questionable, their age and power is not.

As the black priests of these Olde Gods twisted the minds and souls of the Kings of the West, massive projects building black temples and ziggurats for the blasphemous worship of these ancient horrors were undertaken. I know this to be true for I myself have seen the obsidian Ziggurat of Arwazhul, the Black Toad with my own eyes.

Write only what you saw. Ha! As if words could begin to codify the horrors and madness I saw that night in the Misty Fens.

When the Elves learned of this dark worship they sent an envoy to the Kings to warn them away from the worship of chaos from beyond the veil of stars. Instead those envoys were sacrificed on the blood stained altars.

The resulting war between the Kings and the Elves embroiled the West for almost one hundred years. At the start of the war the dwarves sided with the Kings, though eventually they would retreat to their mountains and swear to never again involve themselves in the affairs of men and elves. Conversely this vow would be broken at least twice again.

When the war ended the elves were all but decimated, their numbers reduced from millions to but a handful of thousands. The Kings and their people had fared ever worse and much of human civilization was destroyed. Mankind was reduced back to being near savages.

For five centuries the West became a barbaric land with civilization trying to hold on. War, savagery and brutality ruled the day. The occasional wars of human tribes against elves decimated the elvish population further and eventually drove them deep into the forests. The rift between the races has never healed. The Golden Age of the West was at an end.

Two thousand years ago a massive Vothic army crested over the Dragonspine Mountains from the Far East and conquered the East, starting with the territory now called Turon. They quickly brought the Turonic tribes under their control and launched their conquest of the West. Like a wave of steel and the barbaric West was no match and quickly after their ships landed at what we know today as Adaire it was brought under their rule.

It was not all a loss for the West as the Vothics brought technology, education and civilization to the West. They set up tribal leaders as lords and local governors as they had not the numbers to rule the entire West in force.

It was not all a boon for the Westerners though, for the Vothics also brought despotic rule.

Separated from their home empire and the journey over the mountains being a perilous and time consuming one, the Vothics sought a solution. They would undertake one of the greatest achievements in the history of the world, the construction of a massive tunnel under the mountains linking them with their homelands.

Called Kharis Thule, it was designed by Dwarven engineers from the Blood Hills, who used the Mithras Minotaurs as slave labour for the massive undertaking. It is said that if one were to travel without stopping they could reach the other side in a month. Since it was impossible to travel for a month without rest, the dwarves built way stations. They piped in fresh water and air from chimneys that reached up to the very peaks of the Dragonspines and lit it with gigantic reflecting silversteel mirrors that brought sunlight down yet other chimneys.

For five hundred years the Vothics ruled the West with an iron fist, still their homelands cared for little of the West other than what resources could be plundered and shipped back through Kharis Thule. More and more the Vothics came to rely on the governorships of the Western Lords and Eastern ones as well. This would be their undoing, for eventually these lords gathered in a secret meeting on the island of Helm, where to this day the ineffectual Parliament of the Regency stands. There they plotted

to over through their imperial rulers and establish their own rule. It was decided not to inform the other races, as they felt only humans could be trusted.

The problem, as they saw it, was the power of the Vothic mystics. These were the Vothic priests who carried the power of their patron god Dagog and with it united the warlike empire. So long as they remained, they could communicate across thousands of leagues with a thought and crush any uprising. To defeat the Vothic Empire, the Disciples of Dagog would have to be removed.

It was Lord Verend who concocted the plan. With many of the ancient Attilasian gods being worshipped once again in the West, their power had returned. They would beseech the goddess of chance, gambling and fates, Vashaela, to enter into a contest with Dagog. Now what the wager was is lost to time, not even the Kalinites know it, but Dagog had bet his sanity against Vashaela and he lost. As madness took him, the Vothic Empire, so dependent on their god, was thrown into chaos. Lord Verend lead the assembled armies against the Vothics for thirty years but in the end he broke their control. For his efforts Verend became the first Emperor of the World and sovereign of both the West and East. His empire would be known as the Verendish Empire. Sadly Verend would not live to see his empire grow as he took with him a massive army and departed in to the mouth of Kharis Thule, promising to conquer the Vothic homelands. He and his army were never seen again, lost to history.

I must at this juncture point out a slightly important side note, after the departure of Verend and his army the location of Kharis Thule was lost. By the time the Verendish Empire had sorted out who would rule and turned their attention to seeking the fate of Verend, the Turonic tribes, now well cross-bred with the Vothics, blocked their path. The Turonics rejected Verendish rule and with the armies of the empire being so depleted from decades of war and their most elite troops lost with on Verend's Folly, as it was becoming known, they could not advance past these tribes. To this day the Turonic tribes remain independent of all outside rule, first from the Empire and then from the Regency that replaced it.

After five strong centuries the Verendish Empire would come to a sudden and dramatic end. In just the span of a few years it all ended in a crusade, a rain of fire and the falling of a star.

Emperor Serovin the first who by all accounts was a weak emperor ruled the Empire at the time. History claims that he was a puppet of the Council of Churches, a lapdog to the whims of their Pope.

It all started in beautiful and verdant Solani where their Priest-King Salazar had ambitions of godhead and had devised a way to achieve it. Using powerful magic and ancient forbidden knowledge he found his way to the Mountain Hall of the Gods and, while they were lost in some celebration of another, stole their godly powers. Caught off

guard by the cunning Solani wizard, they begged him to return their powers. Salazar agreed, but he would do so only if they made him one of them, a god himself. Begrudgingly the gods relented and elevated Salazar to godhood, stripping the powers of the young god Pela Arast to do so, as the story goes. Pleased with his accomplishment, Salazar returned their power and then reappeared to his people as their living God King. His first godly act was to create Zandabar, a city of brass as the capital of his land where he sat on a brass throne and ruled over his people.

The gods were not to be without their revenge though. Outraged, furious and desiring of revenge they appeared to the Pope demanding revenge on Salazar, and promising divine retribution if they were not avenged. What the Pope did not know was that Ghedron, the Great Architect of the Universe and head of the gods had forbidden the Gods from taking revenge. It seems that he respected Salazar's cunning and ingenuity and fully intended to honour the terms of their bargain. Ghedron's wife, Sabria, Queen of the Gods did not agree and secretly pushed for revenge behind her husband's back.

Led by visions from their gods, The Council of Churches concocted a plan that would not only punish Salazar, but also the Solani people, his worshipers. It was called the Burning Rain and it intended nothing less than the genocide of the Solani people.

When Sabria learned of the plan she balked and went to her husband, betraying the other gods. Ghedron knew that he alone could not stand up to the other gods, so he instead decided to use the mortals against the Council. He sent a vision to the Grandmaster of the Knights Ghedron and expressed his great displeasure. He showed to him, through Sacred Geometry of All Things, the way to counter the power of the Council and crush them before they could enact the Burning Rain. Needing a large army he instructed the Grandmaster to in-turn contact the King of Caralon and command him to marshal his armies. The King turned immediately to his most powerful ally, the Baroness Elise, unknowingly seeding his own defeat.

You see Elise was an ambitious woman, who held a grudge against the King of Caralon for marrying her sister and not her. Hearing his tale she decided that this would be a perfect time to make a power play for control. All the while pretending to be alarmed with the news, she secretly contacted Emperor Serovin and the Pope of the Council. She betrayed the King of Caralon and the Ghedronic Knights, revealing their plans to prevent the Burning Rain, and accused them further of plotting to place the King of Caralon upon the Imperial Throne. Pledging her entire army to the cause, the Baroness convinced them to lay charges against the King and the Knights of heresy and then declare a crusade. She then arranged to have her army join with the combined armies of Caralon and the Ghedronic Knights, to await the execution of her plan.

The vast armies of the empire descended on the assembled force, which was wholly unprepared for the betrayal from within and crushed it in a battle that claimed tens of thousands of lives. With the King of Caralon slain and his army shattered, Elise then

turned the Imperial Army against the lands of Caralon itself. In a matter months the crusade had killed nearly every man, woman and child in Caralon. Those that lived were sold into slavery or scattered across the West. The Queen of Caralon was captured and burned at the stake in the Imperial Capital as a heretic and traitor. The people of the West were told that the Knights of Ghedron had planned to overthrow the Emperor and usher in an age of demon and devil worship, even turning their backs on their patron god. The ignorant masses were fooled and shunned these Knights wherever they were.

Refusing to surrender, the Grandmaster of the Knights ordered their massive preceptories all across the empire sealed and then the knights vanished without a trace.

While Baroness Elise oversaw the hunt for the Grandmaster and his men, the Burning Rain was enacted. For ten days and ten nights holy fire poured from the heavens scorching to ash the once lush and green lands of Solani. Reduced in that time to nothing more than a charred wasteland, with volcanoes erupting in the Solani mountains and near to the City of Brass Mount Salaban grew to epic proportions and then erupted with a force that is said to have shook the entire world. All life in Solani was lost. Only Salazar remained, in his city of brass with his loyal priests, protected by his divine power. Wrought with anguish he set a plan of revenge in motion that would bring the Empire and the Council of a Thousand Churches to their knees.

Reaching out with his godly power he plucked a star from the heavens. It was the eye of the constellation Astara, the Goddess of Love. Dragged down by hate and malice the star plunged into the Imperial City of Verend and annihilated it. The mountains fell, the waters rushed in and untold hundreds of thousands were killed in an instant. In a brief moment of hate and anger the Verendish Empire was no more. Forever to history this would be known as the Sundering and it changed the very face of the world forever.

As the empire descended into chaos a strange realization was made. The clerics, priests, paladins and holy men of the gods could no longer commune with their patrons. Their powers faded and in short order their churches would fail, as they could not administer to their people as before.

The gods were gone.

Over the proceeding five hundred years various trumped up kings and vicious warlords would attempt to claim to be the Emperor but none had the power to hold onto such claims. Without the Imperial Legions to enforce these claims, brutal, costly and devastating wars were common. The people endured and in the peaceful times heroes arose and went on epic adventures. Still there was more war than need be as eventually one or two of these heroes would make a play to become Emperor and war would grip the lands once again.

Clearly though, the schism of the past had also drawn a clear distinction between the East and West once and for all.

Out of this bloodshed and violence would come the Regency of the West. A grand idea it was, though its star has dimmed somewhat in my lifetime. A group of powerful lords and generals were brought together at Helm by Arengax, a great and powerful sorcerer. He explained to them that the legacy of the Empire was gone and that should the West continue it would await the coming of a High King, and even as the lords of the East formed alliances and fought each other on the far side of the Eye of Astar, the West should remain alone.

Arnegax counselled the only way to lasting peace in the West was a central authority, but no one man should be ruler save the prophesied High King. Instead the rulers of the West would make parliament and elect a Regent to sit in place of the High King. To further prevent dissatisfaction there would be no titles of king or queen in the Regency. Princes, Barons, Dukes, Lords, Counts, etc.... those would be the titles of the rulers of the nations of the West, with the Regent as the sole arbiter over the Parliament in times of deadlock. By diplomacy or all the nations of the West joined the Regency. Peace ruled the lands and prosperity reigned.

Their efforts to save the West from massive death and destruction seemed a futile effort with what happened next.

With the West at peace the age of adventure got underway in earnest as men and women delved into the ruins of the past to make fortunes off ancient relics. Songs were sung of these brave adventurers and many even raised enough wealth and power to become minor lords themselves. It was heady time in the West. Prosperous and enlightened, the Dwarves returned to the lands of humans and began to trade knowledge of their emerging technologies. The printing press was invented which led to universities and colleges that seemed to spring up in the cities of the West rapidly. Without gods and churches to direct them, the West raised themselves up in knowledge and reached for a shining star of civilization that attracted even the attention of the reclusive and xenophobic elves, who watched the humans with wary eyes.

If the surviving documents are to be believed it was a golden time of science, magic, peace and knowledge, the likes of which had not before been seen and have not since been seen.

The Red Death descended on the West like the vengeance of the gods of old.

It had brewed in the waters and fetid remains of Ancient Verendi for centuries and then was finally brought to the civilized world by a group of treasure seeking adventurers. It spread like a wildfire on dry plains pushed by a powerful wind. Entire cities died horrible deaths as the disease ravaged the lands. Its untreatable symptoms were horrible fevers,

blistering boils and then eventually madness and death. There was no cure and no human was immune. Interestingly enough the elves and dwarves seemed immune to the plague, but not the Hin (Haufin in their own tongue, also called Gnomes, Halflings and Pecks by the humans, though I have learned some Hin see those latter three as grave insults. More on the little people later, I promise). Hin were as susceptible to the Red Death as humans and due to their close proximity to each other in ethnic communities, they were hit hardest by the plague.

More than three quarters of the human population of the West and East died within a century of outbreaks and almost all of the Hin population. Civilization teetered on the brink and nearly collapsed. Even after the main outbreaks of the Red Death passed, having run their course; there would remain sporadic and devastating outbreaks for decades to come.

The Regency was barely able to maintain civilization and keep the peace, though mostly as no one had the resources or the manpower to even rebuild effectively let alone wage war. Trade all but ground to a halt and a Dark Age began and would last for centuries. Knowledge, technology, enlightenment all gone from the world as if a candle had been snuffed in the night. Many of those wonders are all but mysteries to us now.

Now, two things came out of the Red Death that inexorably altered the fate and future of the West and truly the known world. One, as you will see, I am particularly partial to and the other, well let us just say that I have seen its true face and did not like what I saw.

Write only what you saw.

A century after the Red Death first spread, a woman named Kalin began to wander the land. As she wandered, she wrote down the name of every person she met. She also taught of hygiene and sanitation that could prevent or minimize plague outbreaks. It didn't take long for tales of her to spread and soon others followed in her path. Slowly over the course of the years the Order of the Kalinites formed, dedicated to recording everything they could and saving knowledge for the future. A noble order who choose no side in a fight and seek only to preserve history for future generations. An order of which I was a member and like all Kalinites had been since birth, chosen from orphans and raised to know no family but the Order; I am made to understand this assured our neutrality.

To be honest, in the words of a particularly salty pirate woman I once knew, we seemed to be rather up our own arses we thought so highly of ourselves. If you require proof of that, even the Elves came to appreciate the Kalinites. They referred to us as "the one good thing that mankind has done". It was their appreciation of us that made them "donate" for our home the mountain library and sanctorum of Loriril. A rather lovely place, I must admit, though a bit haughty and dull.

Now the other thing that came out of the Red Death that I am not such a great fan of, despite my looking down my nose at the rest of my former Order, was the Church.

After the Red Death a new religion began to spread across the West. At first it seemed little more than a cult at first, but it grew. These priests claimed that Pela Arast, the Lion God had returned now as the Sun Undefeated. This Arastian faith preached the idea of a One True God, the High Father. What more, the Arastian Clerics had powers like the clerics of the old ways, well except for the power to heal, that they do not have. What they did have though was the power to cure the Red Death.

As you can well imagine, the religion spread faster than the first outbreak of that plague. It spread so fast and so quickly it is now the predominant religion of the known world and the most powerful faction of it, based out of the Barony of Elise no less, is well known for its intolerance of magic, pagans, non-humans and of course Kalinites.

Did I say a brief history? It appears I do go on at times. Let me wrap this up and move along.

So at the time of this story we are centuries since the Burning Rain, the Caraligian Crusade, the Sundering and the Red Death. It would appear the Dark Age may be coming to an end and slowly the light of civilization is growing. Trade between many nations is constant. Populations are again growing though naturally with this growth has come the old rivalries and forgotten grudges are suddenly remembered. Many nations of the world now eye each other's resources with ever increasing armies behind them. The Regency stands a bloated and slow moving bureaucracy that is as ineffectual as it is powerful, for the largest army in the West is still the Regency Legion.

Wortigern's rebellion has carved Pendria from the Regency and declared itself a Kingdom. The Lord of Aquilar has declared himself the Emperor of the World no less and may have the army to make it true. For now he pushes the Warlords of Gath against the West. If they break the Duke of Adaire at Swordhold they may well open the door for the Aquilari invasion of the West. The Church has splintered in the Elisian Catholic Church, the Grey Faith and the Brytonian Orthodox Church. Elise, now the strongest of all the Nations has occupied a large portion of the West, having joined the Regency, while remaining a member of the Brytonian League, to legitimize this. Their rule is resented by most of the West, but they flood it with Elisian colonists to "breed-out" the locales.

Many mystics and wise men claim that the signs are aligned for the coming of the prophesised High King of the West, though many others, including the Church, claim that such things are too subject to interpretations and cannot be relied on.

The tensions of a world about to plunge into war are everywhere and yet civilization is thriving. Even the orkes of old have gathered into a nation and petition for membership in the Regency, though few would have them.

If the West, and the world, is to avoid falling back into abyss and slide fully into an age of barbarism, it will take heroes, like those of old to unite the lands and fight the darkness. An age of reason stands ready to be established or extinguished out before it has a chance to ignite.

Yet in the dark places of the world, and beyond the veil of stars, ancient evils also stir and gaze greedily upon the light.

Yes I like the sound of that. Quite evocative no? Overly dramatic and descriptive. Most certainly it is un-Kalinite of me to say the very least.

For now dear reader we will part company for I am no storyteller or bard and fear if I continue I will come across like some dreadful Chorus from those Benaccian dramas that are all the rage in the theatres these days, though I imagine that will be a difficult task given the dryness of history sometimes.

So welcome my friends to this tale and we shall meet again.

Alfrick, Former Kalinite - Ex-Communicated

P.S. Damn I forgot to write about the Hauflin. Oh well, another piece for another time I suppose.