

# ÁR PÄTS

A CHEAP HISTORY OF TALOSSA

R. BEN MADISON

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ABBAVILLA

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*Ar Päts*

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## FOREWORD

*By Chris Gruber, PLN*

As has been said in the past, Talossa is a community, seeking out those things which its citizens find fun. Fun is the reason all of us came along for the ride. Fun is the reason we stick around. And fun is the reason we bore our friends and family with continuous updates about current Talossan events. We *love* this stuff – that cannot be denied. For if we did not love Talossa and all of her stuff, we would have taken off a long, long time ago.

I was lucky enough to be interviewed for the famed article in *Wired* Magazine (March 2000) and I feel that quoting myself is a legitimate (and wholly Talossan) way to end a foreword like this one. I quote:

*When we were growing up, maybe we looked around and things were OK. Maybe we saw both good and bad. But we kept looking up, kept thinking, 'There must be people like me somewhere out there.' And then when we find Talossa, we think, 'Holy moly, this is what I've been thinking about all my life.'*

*In a way, I feel like I've always been Talossan. I just didn't know it before.*

How true that still is.

*Azul,*

Chris Gruber  
10 December 2002/XXII

*"...[A] place where we grownups can pretend to be children who are pretending to be grownups."*

– King Robert I

## PART ZERO: BONES OF CONTENTION.

*"...a community of persons having fun..."*

Talossa is. What it is, exactly, has often been a bone of contention. According to its 1988 *Constituzjün* ("as amended"), Talossa is an independent, sovereign country in North America. In a 1993 referendum, a majority of Talossans agreed to call it "a community of persons having fun by doing things which are reasonably similar to what other ('real') countries do—whether for reasons of tourist nostalgia, out of a lust for power, in pursuit of parody—or, yes, as nation building." One much-derided interpretation preferred to call Talossa a "weird thing" or "spiritual plasma," without borders or other trappings of nationhood. And there are shades and gradations in between.

Where Talossa is, is easier to answer. Long ago, the glaciers melted away from a peninsula between the Milwaukee River and the Talossan Sea (known to some as "Lake Michigan"). Talossa's territory is at the southern tip of this peninsula, an area about two miles wide at its widest point and about 4 miles long from its southern end to the US border in the 'far' north. Where it hasn't been ploughed flat by urban sprawl, Talossa is packed with forests and hills. The country borders on Milwaukee and Shorewood, Wisconsin, USA, and enjoys a continental climate with four distinct seasons. Summers are beastly hot, winters bitterly cold—with lots and lots of snow—and spring and fall are rainy. Still, it's home and we love it. You will too if you know what's good for you.

Talossa has been home to many peoples, another bone of contention—except here we get into real bones. Ages ago, mound-building Indians roamed Talossa's forests, killed some deer, and heaped up mounds of dirt in at least two Talossan provinces. Ever since 1984, when a certain Talossan historian started his "research" on these ancients, the Kingdom has had a vague and (shall we say) controversial sense that these Indians were actually North African Berbers who sailed across the Atlantic and colonized America centuries—even millennia—before Columbus. Here these Berbers made corn tortillas and conquered the American desert Southwest, which, some Talossans will tell you, is why the Kingdom of Talossa later voted to make "Taco Bell" its official national cuisine.

The "Berber Hypothesis" in all its full-blown kaleidoscopic pseudo-racial-lingual magnificence proclaims that North African Berbers spawned the Megalith-builders of Stonehenge and the Ferengi-like "Beaker People" of prehistoric Western Europe—and sailed across the Atlantic to Milwaukee. (Hey, there are real scholars who believe this. Trust us.) According to the official line, these Berbers called themselves "Talossans," and left their name all over the place from *Tlemcen* and the *Atlas* Mountains in North Africa to *Tolosa* and *Catalonia* in Spain, to *Toulouse* in France, to the *Talayotic* culture of the Balearic Islands, all the way to the Moundbuilders of North America, whom the Indians called the *Tellegwi* and who built their capital at *Aztalan*, Wisconsin. The same root *talo*, meaning "mound" or "house," made its way into languages as far away as Finnish. And, of course, these Berbers left their genes coursing through the veins of our own European ancestors.

The discovery of a 1,500-year-old Byzantine coin on Talossan soil around 1987 confirmed all this Berber stuff, for its believers, and "proved" that there was indeed contact between the ancient Mediterranean and the Talossan Peninsula. Later one of the country's leading lights published *The Berber Project*, an elaborate textbook detailing just how Berbers settled America and much of Europe as well. Some Talossans today have enthusiastically embraced this vision of Talossa's past, the product of research, study, and an overdose of Diet Barq's Root Beer. Others, mostly German radical-right types, have rebelled against it with almost violent intensity, but as of this writing it's twelve years in the making, so the Berber thing is older than most Talossan culture and actually pre-dates the Talossan citizenship of most of its modern critics.

Talossa's ancient inhabitants (Berbers or otherwise) were exterminated or driven out and the country was resettled in the early 19th Century by French-Canadian fur trappers and traders, who were later supplanted by Americans and Germans—lots of Germans—who built up a city, "Milwaukee," on and around the Kingdom's intrinsically sovereign territory. Even then, however, life east and west of the river was different, and two separate towns of Milwaukee grew up. In 1845 the two towns actually went to war over who controlled the bridges across the river, with muskets and even a cannon loaded with clock weights. Ever since then, the East

Side—the side facing the Talossan Sea—has been a distinct society. Humour us if you please: call it an incipient national consciousness.

After the Bridge War of 1845, boring bureaucrats imposed a truce. Milwaukee was united and grew into a sleepy metropolis with curious traditions like Socialist mayors, squeaky-clean city government, and world-class museums, plus a peculiar local dialect of English in which water fountains are called "bubblers." Beer became a major industry (as it was among the Beaker People). But as the settlers kept coming, it seemed like Milwaukee was destined to be just another American city.

But in the 20th Century, Talossan families began moving into the area: Germans, Irish, Czechs, Swedes, Poles, and others. Most relevant to our story was one **Harry Madison** of Louisiana, whose Swedish grandfather had fought in the US Civil War on the Union side and moved south after the war. Madison settled on Talossan soil in 1956, arriving to teach psychology at a newly-created local university. In 1965, after marrying **Jean Matters**, a local girl 17 years his junior, he produced a son who would lead the Talossan people to glory and victory, back to their ancient Berber heritage, on to their destiny, or... wherever.



## **I. 1979 – 1984: THE SILVER AGE**

*"I put all of my hopes, dreams, aspirations and better qualities into  
this Norwegian sausage machine, and look what came out."*

## PART ONE: THE SPIRIT OF '79.

### *"A Man's Room is his Kingdom"*

Once upon a time there was a boy named Ben. **Robert Ben Madison** grew up on the East Side of Milwaukee, raised by his father, a psychology professor. Young Ben grew up surrounded by idiotic bullies in grade school, and when he entered high school in the fall of 1978 and discovered politics, he wrote florid manifestos plotting a perfect society where normal citizens (i.e. shy, law-abiding, sport-hating atheist intellectual science-fiction fans as Ben was at the time) would be protected from thuggism, vandalism, fundamentalism, and the sort of me-first anarchy he associated with America, capitalism and democracy. A trip to Germany and Iceland in 1979 convinced him that America's "corrupt culture" had to be crushed and defeated so he and the world could live in peace and quiet.

In December of 1979, when Ben was 14, he found himself at the downtown library, reading about Esperanto. In a fortuitous burst of genius, as the bored Madison ruminated on his adolescent dreams of a perfect society, he suddenly thought: "You can't change Milwaukee, you can't leave Milwaukee: So secede from Milwaukee!"

And so, that is just what Ben did. He spent a week planning his move. He decided to take his bedroom and declare it to be an independent, sovereign country. At first he wanted to call it *Seltsam* ('silly', in German), but instead settled on The Kingdom of Talossa, *talossa* meaning "inside the house" in Finnish, a perfect name for a bedroom nation.

In the week leading up to Independence Day, Ben chose the symbols of the new state. First was the national anthem: one of the soon-to-be-King's favourite songs, Fleetwood Mac's "Tusk." It was an unusual choice, being a mixture of rock 'n roll, university marching band sounds, and tribal grunts; but it seemed to suit the unusual country in the making. Ben had discovered a Chinese character pronounced "Ben," which means "energetic, strenuous, brave," etc. For obvious reasons, this character, or the "Ben Symbol," became our coat of arms.

Perhaps influenced by Christmas, he chose as the country's flag horizontal stripes of white, green and red, with the coat of arms in the corner. Later the King would boast that every Independence Day, Milwaukee was festooned with Talossa's colours! Ben headed to a local convenience store to buy white, green and red fabric which he sewed into the first Talossan flag—pieces of which still exist, a kind of "holy relic." But the original flag looked too much like that of Bulgaria, so later the white stripe was taken off, leaving just green over red as the Talossan national flag. "A Man's Room is his Kingdom" became the national motto; the budding linguist translated it into slightly incorrect Finnish as *Miehen Huone on Hänen Valtakunta*, often shortened to "MHHV."

Independence Day was 26 December 1979. At 7:00 PM, members of the King's family assembled at his Prospect Avenue home, where the Talossan flag was draped across the coffee table. Ben's friend **Gary L. Cone**, whom Talossa recognized as the US Ambassador, entered the room. Next came Robert Ben Madison, in the blue suit he wore to debate meets, done up with paper medals and ribbons. For a crown, he carried an ancient blue Milwaukee fire department dress hat he bought at a used bookstore for \$3.00. A friend called it the "Romanian train conductor's hat." Madison read a brief speech (since lost) about his new nation. Then, in his first official act, this High School sophomore read a Declaration of Independence officially proclaiming that Talossa was seceding from the United States. Fastening the blue hat upon his head, he was transformed into His Royal Majesty, King Robert I of the Kingdom of Talossa, and a bedroom on the second floor of an American house became a free, sovereign, and independent nation, as champagne toasts were enjoyed downstairs.

The Kingdom was first ruled as a "democratic dictatorship" by its only citizen, King Robert. His Constitution in its entirety proclaimed:

*ARTICLE ONE: All power of law, finance and anything else is vested in the King.*

*ARTICLE TWO: This constitution is perfect and shall have no need of amendment.*

After the ceremony Madison went to his room through the door that was now an international frontier. He hung the flag on his dresser and started typing a Talossan "phone book," in pidgin Norwegian, which was declared the official language in an effort to make the country more "foreign." He set to work on official money, and proclaimed that *Stotannet* (Norwegian for "Tusk") was the official newspaper of the Kingdom—even though it had not yet been printed.

Madison proclaimed that all people ought to secede and form their own countries, a goofy plan for 'world peace' which Madison called "World Singular Secession" in an effort to give Talossa an official ideology.

But the King's own ideology, which tilted towards totalitarian atheism rather than world peace, led him on 11 January 1980 to declare himself officially "deposed": the Kingdom was proclaimed a Communist People's Republic! Enver Hoxha, the despotic head of Albania, was Ben's newest hero, and he attempted to rework Talossa in Albania's evil image. This lasted all of a month, when Ben gave up his tongue-in-cheek Communism and proclaimed himself King again. "The King was reported to have said nothing," the Talossan press reported, "at least in any known language."

And that was the one lasting gift for Talossa from the "People's Republic": it began the tradition of Talossan journalism. *Dårliget Løgner*, or "Dirty Lies," was the Communist paper. It was replaced in February by the monarchist *Stotannet*. Though at first hand-drawn and crude, this newspaper (now called *Stotanneu*; say "sto-TAH-new") is still being published—since 1996, on the Internet—and has chronicled Talossa's story since 1980.

## PART TWO: THE CONE WARS.

*"You have incurred my wrath!"*

After February 1980 Talossa lay dormant; its bored King started reforming Esperanto and writing fascistic **Regulationist Party** manifestos in a dubious effort to Benize America.

But that summer, Madison found his interest in Talossa returning. While on vacation in Birmingham, Alabama, he wrote up a two-page booklet of 'facts' and data, and after returning to Talossa in August, wrote up an issue of *Stotanneu* that claimed Talossan astronauts had reached the moon! He soon discarded this issue and resolved Talossa and fiction were incompatible. On 1 September 1980 he began to put out issues of *Stotanneu* with some regularity—and has done it ever since.

In those days, the paper reported little more than the shifting of Talossa's cultural sand: the national language going from Norwegian to Swedish to Greek and so forth, the national anthem changing to one Abba song or another, or mysterious headlines proclaiming "Social Upheaval Stuns Talossa!" and reporting simply that "Talossa was stunned by social upheaval today." While King Robert plugged "World Singular Secessionism" at every turn, his friends resisted his blandishments to declare their own little bedroom countries. It was clear that a one-man country had very little to do but change its symbols and policies and pretend this was progress and history.

But in September 1980 there appeared a glimmer of weird light on the horizon that thrust Talossa into the spotlight of Ben's friends. Gary Cone was fired as US ambassador for "vehemently" lying about his religion to the King: Cone pretended to be an atheist but was in fact a choir boy and self-described "socialist Methodist" who supported Reagan (whom the King detested). *Stotanneu* claimed the firing averted "Talossa's first political scandal." The aggrieved Cone skulked off to form his own sovereign state: the Glib Room Empire. Talossa was born of a desire to oppose boredom, but the Glib Room seemed destined to oppose King Robert and Talossa. *Stotanneu* said the new nation was a repressive Methodist state that threatened the peace of humanity.

On September 24th, 1980, an upswelling of political boredom saw the King again "depose" himself in the so-called "Third Talossan Revolution" or "ÜTD." Ben proclaimed Turkish the official language and Talossa was now said to be a republic—devoted to the authoritarian ideals of Turkish reformist despot Kemâl Atatürk, who had replaced Enver Hoxha as the 'ideal leader' of the ex-King's dreams. This only lasted a few weeks, and on 8 October Madison quietly became King again. Antarctica and Portugal, which the country had furtively annexed during its brief Atatürkist period, were formally returned to their rightful owners, and the country's paper replaced Atatürkist dogma with exhortations to quash or laugh at Gary Cone and his Glib Room Empire.

This was not hard to do, and Madison, along with several friends, played a series of pranks at Riverside High School on the extroverted, nerdish Cone, who served as library monitor—or "library moron," as Madison rewrote Cone's hall pass to read. This provoked Cone to hurl the great works of Western Civilization at the King in the library one day, while cackling "You have incurred my wrath! Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!" as an ever larger audience gathered to laugh at Cone.

Ben survived the incident unscathed, but Cone next lashed out at Ben's sister **Jennifer Madison**, and tripped her on the pavement after church! Though there has never been any love lost between Ben and his sister, the unending stream of verbal and physical abuse from Cone and his Glib Room *reich* drew a retaliatory response from Talossa in the form of a formal declaration of war against the Glib Room on 18 November, after what *Stotanneu* billed as "deep thought."

Talossa's war, which so far consisted of an occasional glower, was joined on 21 November when the vacant US Ambassador post was taken up by a new Royal friend, **John Jahn**. Described in *Stotanneu* as a "warped, egotistical fascist," Jahn at the time was a raving Nazi racist whose amiable character saved him from total condemnation. Jahn announced that he would form the "Imperial Jahn Empire" (abbreviated "KJK" in German), a World Singular Secessionist state, apparently for the sole purpose of making war on the infernal Cone. **John Eiffler**, another Riverside pal of the King's, though of substantially more liberal leanings, also

made plans for a "Kingdom of Thord" to join Talossa and the KJK in a "League of Secessionist States" (LOSS) united by their opposition to Cone. It all came to be called the "Cone Wars," a name inspired by the Clone Wars of the Star Wars universe.

Jahn's support proved crucial, as the *Stotannen* of Tuesday, 25 November 1980 announced the greatest news Talossa had seen since Independence: victory in what would come to be known as the Battle of the Garage. Cone had, the night before, snuck over to Madison's house—and defaced the Royal father's garage with black printer's ink. He then made the idiotic move of bragging about this to Jahn—who informed the King, who informed his father who informed Cone's mother who informed Cone who informed the King that he was surrendering. The King called Cone's vandalism a "typical act of religious irrationality," and Cone's defeat "the final destruction of present-day anti-Talossanism." Cone formally surrendered (he even signed a peace treaty with Talossa to that effect) and scrubbed all the ink off the garage during the first blizzard of winter.

The "Cone Wars" were the first foreign act which recognized the Kingdom of Talossa as an independent state. Talossa had fought, survived, and won its first war. This was a sobering moment: Talossa would have less time for make-believe. The King was said to be "visibly enthused," but more importantly a growing audience among Ben's friends was visibly entertained. Ben's Talossa was beginning to take on the shape of something more than the proclamations of a single monarch: it was becoming a community.

## PART THREE: COMMITMENT AND LUST.

*"Talossa exists as a frame of mind..."*

As the dust cleared (or as the ink dried) life in Talossa returned to normal. Ambassador Jahn resigned in a dispute over the King's refusal to despise Blacks, with Jahn calling him "a leftist race-traitor." *Stotanneu* responded by calling Jahn "a crazed pseudo-Germanic fascist."

Other news involved minor silly changes like unending new national anthems, new place names, or names for the newspaper, and the brief adoption of an official time zone. Perhaps the most interesting tidbit from this period was the "Talossan Land Reclamation Programme," a pompous name for the laborious cleaning out of the King's messy room—but appropriately pompous as this did involve the Kingdom's entire national territory.

The ever-changing national language (it was Finnish by now) hardly represented anything genuinely Talossan. And so, on 11 December 1980, King Robert put an end to multilingual chaos in Talossa by decreeing that Talossa must have her own language and not any foreign language—even English—as official. It was a bold move, and for the next several months all the nation's newspapers would be written in "Talossan," a jumbled mish-mash of English, Spanish, French, Swedish, German and a whole slew of oddments like Berber and Albanian. Eventually Talossan was standardized and codified, and it remains to this day a symbol of Talossan nationality. Many terms in use by ordinary Talossans come from the unique Talossan language, such as *Cosá*, *Cestoúr*, *Regipäts Talossán* ("RT"), *për*, and *contrá*.

And on Friday, 26 December 1980, though nobody a year earlier would have believed it, Talossa celebrated its first anniversary of independence. The Kingdom of Talossa was here on the Earth to stay. Foreign nations had risen up against the King and been defeated; the Kingdom had allies, and a Talossan language and culture were on the road to becoming national treasures. The country's first birthday was ballyhooed in a special issue of *Stotanneu* published that day on a huge sheet of freezer paper.

1980 ended with a flurry of claims about World Singular Secession, as Madison tried to get **Dan Lorentz**, **Bob Murphy** and **Josh Macht**—three leftist friends—to form new nations. But his work came to naught; even the LOSS was breaking up over disputes between Madison and Jahn, and Talossa gave up on the whole World Secessionism ideal. Instead, something much more interesting was happening: All these would-be nation builders found themselves unwittingly building Talossa, simply by being around and putting their two cents in as the King told all the diplomatic details of their arguments and negotiations in the pages of *Stotanneu*.

Dan Lorentz began writing a "column of foreign opinion" in *Stotanneu* on 24 January 1981 advocating that Talossa be "invaded by leftists and destroyed." Lorentz was certainly one such leftist as future events made clear. His column was called "TZ," from the last letters in his name. It continued for many years, touching on local politics and even Talossan poetry. "TZ" was a bright spot in a paper full of atheist tirades and stories about abortive Talossan-language novels, the changing name of the King's official one-man political party, or Talossan money—all in an increasingly difficult Talossan language.

Lorentz's interviews of the King that spring helped build Talossa as an interaction of people talking about Talossa. "Does Talossa really exist?" asked Lorentz of the King in one of these interviews. "Yes," Ben answered. "Talossa exists as a frame of mind, a reference point from which to launch wave after wave of Ben fanaticism. But it is more than a state of mind, it is a piece of territory with a flag. That, in my mind, makes it a nation." Lorentz then asked: "If I were to place a toothpick with a flag on it onto a bar of soap, would you consider it a nation?" Madison replied: "No, I wouldn't. Would you? I'd consider you a trifle odd."

The King, who was now writing reams of boring essays about how religion was destroying humanity, went off to Alabama in June on vacation, and upon his return he formalized his friends' participation in Talossa by making them "honourary citizens" at a ceremony of knighthood at Josh Macht's house. Macht, Lorentz, Murphy, **Harry Wozniak**, and Josh's girlfriend **Dawn Scher** all became Talossans. Later, all marched to the beach where the King, overwhelmed as usual by the hugeness of the lake, mused and thought.

The ceremony left Ben in a bad mood. Handing out knighthoods was not what 'normal' boys did in Milwaukee, and he was worrying about the label of eccentricity Talossa helped pin on him. His friends understood the whimsical micro-nation, and even enjoyed playing along. But how to explain it to strangers? A trickier problem still: How to explain it to girls?

Such was the Royal preoccupation in July of 1981, which saw the King pursuing a variety of amorous flings and concluding that Talossa would have no part in the New Romantic Ben. The Royal mood in early July of 1981 saw *Stotanneu* (then temporarily named Ben Wu, in imitation of a Chinese magazine) announce that "The most important development in Talossa's history" would soon occur, the King saying that it involved "a great deal of sadness and apprehension on my part." On Sunday, 14 July 1981, huge, black letters in Ben Wu intoned, "IT IS OVER." The King announced "I am giving in to my own maturity," and declared that he would abdicate and Talossa would dissolve itself.

In July of 1981 the ex-King decided to forsake Talossa's history—and its potential—in pursuit of a conventionalized 'maturity.' What would become of the Talossan dream and the tiny community that embraced it, now that its own creator and guru had abandoned it?

## PART FOUR: BLOODY TAKE-OVER.

*"Talossan democracy...has never before existed. I hope it works."*

*Renaissance! Return! Royalty!* screamed the headlines in the 22 July 1981 issue of *Ben Wu*, proclaiming the end of the Interregnum. A visiting French exchange student, **Frédéric Maugey**, had noticed the Talossan flag still fluttering in Ben's room and expressed enthusiasm for the recently defunct Kingdom. "Destroying this 18 month old institution did not solve anything," Madison admitted. "Indeed it left the King in a bored state of American citizenship." Imbued with a new sense of pride, Ben vowed to build a new multi-ego society. He recrowned himself King on 4 August amid promises of a vague "Renaissance" that involved "a total re-planning" of Talossan life—including free elections (after a fashion) in which all Talossans could participate.

The King, of course, announced he would contest the elections, under the banner of the **Royal Socialist Party**. To his left, an anti-Talossan opposition appeared, led by the erratic Dan Lorentz. He and Bob Murphy commandeered the King's hand-written *Stotanneu* book, and scrawled a "Bloody Take Over" naming his aims: "UMM AH BOOM DOP DE DOP! If I am to run for Prime Minister, I must be guaranteed that I shall have unlimited power to mold Talossa as I wish. My wishes are divinely inspired, of course. I must have control over *Ben Wu*. I will serve America by attempting to return Talossa to America in part or in whole. Thank you very much." Lorentz announced a new **Democratic Dandipratic Party**, its name taken from a worthless English coin.

"The forces of the 'Democratic' Dandipratic Party," the King wrote, "have pooled their vile resources in order to accomplish the unthinkable: The destruction of a nation whose proud traditions extend back until December of 1979." The DDP called for "subjecting Talossa to reality by eliminating it" and the "official renunciation of all Talossa's past history as silly nothings issued from an inebriated brain." The Talossan language was to be abolished, and "a new (or better yet a dead) Talossa" was the DDP's avowed aim. According to the King, the DDP's promise to "destroy Talossa" and return it to the USA was "like giving Poland back to Russia," and was the product of Dan's obedience to American and UN "imperialists," "hegemonic forces," and "corporate masters."

The forces of "the senseless voices of American plastic conformity" and the "Fascist, screwed up and inept 'king' Ben" did battle for the next two months, vying for control of a majority in Talossa's six-citizen electorate. "This is an experiment," said King Robert in the 7 August *Ben Wu*. "Talossan democracy—that is, a democracy of many people, has never before existed. I hope it works."

August 9th saw an "assassination attempt" against the King; his sister Jennifer had "poisoned" a pitcher of water in the refrigerator with baking soda, saying that it had something to do with a diet. "Baking soda passes by, but Madison lives on!" cried the paper in an esoteric allusion to Benito Mussolini, the King's latest fave dictator.

The King issued a Mussoliniesque platform in English and Talossan, demanding that Talossan be "imposed" as the "one and only official tongue." But then tilting suddenly leftwards, he declared Talossa a "Socialist Kingdom dedicated to the principles of Democratic Socialism," because "The world's only True Democracy must espouse ideals which are truly democratic." In that spirit, elections were formally set for September 1, 1981; but the date passed with no voting. The King declared: "Josh won't be here on Saturday, so we'll have the elections when everybody can be here. Stop throwing things!" *Ben Wu* reported the King's praise of "Democracy as an institution, founded and unshakable, not a system for men to tamper with." The paper then added, "Asked why he was tampering with it, His Majesty offered no comment."

"The essential elements of the King's character are flippancy and deceit," warned DDP "party boss" Dan Lorentz as balloting finally began on 18 September. "These vile characteristics may render the Talossan experiment in elections meaningless. We hope they do not, but we shall see, when the final vote is cast."

On 22 September, *Ben Wu* noted that a new word had been adopted in Talossan for "Kingdom," namely, *Regipäts* (pronounced "REGGIE-pats"), derived obliquely from words meaning "king country." The "Kingdom



of Talossa" was now officially Regipäts Talossán, a term found even in English documents ever since. Its abbreviation "RT" is familiar to all Talossans. The RT's national newspaper changed its name back from *Ben Wu* to *Stotanneu* the next day, and interviewed Dan Lorentz:

**Q:** *What, if anything, shall you do as PM?*

**A:** *We shall all see. I will endeavor to wrench Talossa into reality. America is not going to annex Talossa. I am a 17 year old socialist. I am not an American soldier or diplomat.*

**Q:** *Haven't you committed yourself to the destruction of an independent, sovereign state?*

**A:** *There is no such thing. Talossa is not independent nor sovereign nor a state. Therefore, I can't "return" Talossa to the U.S.A. And as I have said, I work not for the U.S.A. Ask me questions which might hint that you have some intelligence. If I ever said "I will serve America," I was wrong. I didn't mean to say that. How do you figure I'm a corporate imperialist? I've already explained what I am. You seem to be a dense skullhead. Cut the crap!*

Ben ended the debate calling Lorentz "an inconsistent and blubbering corporate imperialist baboon," but on Sunday, 27th September 1981 the ballots were counted at the close of the Kingdom of Talossa's first democratic elections. The DDP won 60% of the vote—Lorentz, Murphy and Macht—to 40% for Royal Socialism—Ben and Wozniak. Dan Lorentz was sworn in as Prime Minister at Riverside the next day, becoming the RT's first elected leader.

## PART FIVE: CHEAP GLORY.

*"Mussolini was hung and killed like a pig. Die Dead!"*

Prime Minister Lorentz called for a new Dan-centric constitution and, when the King refused, called the King a "vile obstructionist" and a "dictator-like bastard." Lorentz quickly lost patience with the King's refusal to help him destroy Talossa, and ranted: "I want to destroy Talossa! The King is an undemocratic jerk. Depose him immediately!" But among Talossa's other five citizens there was no sign of revolt. Instead, *Stotannen* reported on 11 October that Lorentz was fired, "and will be tried by the Talossan Supreme Court on charges of High Treason stemming from his attempts to destroy Talossa by useless and meaningless Prime Ministerial Orders. Prime Minister Lorentz, upon hearing his dismissal, said 'Ha, ha.'"

The King was souring on democracy in general and on 18 November replaced the Royal Socialist Party with a Fascist **Thundersword Movement**, describing it as "both Leftist and Fascist.... Thundersword is what is right." Along came green shirts and Duce salutes in a dramatic lurch to the right that received a big boost when Ben was defeated in an election for Senior Class President at Riverside by mobs of racist Blacks.

With Talossan democracy now dead, the King spent the rest of 1981 writing a huge, involved grammar and dictionary of the Talossan language as a term paper for **Florence Yarney**, his Creative Writing teacher, and making plans for the "glorious" celebration of Talossa's second birthday. "I never expected anything this long, this glorious," he swooned. He planned to publish a "multi-page anniversary issue of *Stotannen*" to "recount our glorious past and salute our glorious future." But little came of this, and by December the country was clearly floundering in "glorious" stagnation.

Dan Lorentz, on the other hand, commandeered *Stotannen* in December for another "Bloody Take Over." He denounced the growing fascist leanings of "GVB," i.e. Glorious, Victorious Ben: "Talossa hasn't existed for several months. Prime Minister Lorentz officially abolished Talossa. By refusing to acknowledge this the pompous tiresome GVB has totally eschewed democracy. I want to remind all of Talossa that it doesn't exist. And if it continues to deny facts, I wish it the absolute worst of luck. Ben you're no longer a baby. Mussolini was hung and killed like a pig. Die Dead! Talossa has been DEAD for quite a while. GVB is a ludicrous farce. FASCISM is bankrupt of ideas and success. REPTILES are what Ben wants to sleep with. 'PLEASE f— REPTILES.' —Ben."

On December 26th, Talossa celebrated its 2nd anniversary of independence. The national flag was flown at the King's house, later named Vuode Palace. It was reported that "Anti-Talossan US lackeys Dan Lorentz and Bob Murphy threw snowballs" at the flag. The paper also announced that the King's sister was clearing out of a room adjacent to Talossa, and that Talossa could expect soon to realize "the ancient dream of a two-room *Grütl Talossa* [Greater Talossa]."

In a fit of boredom harking back to the make-believe of late 1980, King Robert "deposed" himself on 9 January 1982 with a "Council for Nationalist Victory" (CNV) consisting of himself. This nonsense did not last more than two weeks, but at least genuine Talossan news took its rightful place again in the national press, which spent time issuing military edicts condemning 'General' Madison's sister for periodically stealing his cat, Flyball, from his bedroom.

Of slightly more significance the "military government" continued to demand that Ben's sister leave the adjacent room, now named "Enver Hoxha State," which Talossa sought to annex. On 19 January, *Stotannen* warned: "Jennifer has done absolutely nothing to ready the room for a triumphant Talossan entry. The formal date of annexation was a long time ago. The government is impatient."

On 21 January 1982 King Robert resumed Royal command of Talossa after a "vote of confidence by the one-man CNV." The King lifted "press censorship, martial law, and other freedom-stiflers." From that moment on, Talossa had no more fake coups or revolutions, but its 'fake' nature as a bedroom country continued, and the press continued to rail against Jennifer's occupation of "New Talossa," the other room. "In order to further establish her claim," *Stotannen* noted on 14 March 1982, Jennifer "has moved heavy military equipment into the

region, including a large set of weights." The standoff forced the King to look outside his house for martial glory.

During all this inter-room diplomacy, the King had been reading about "Bophuthatswana," one of South Africa's Black "Bantustan" reservations, a so-called "independent state" consisting of specks of territory scattered across South Africa. This pseudo-country, composed of disconnected pieces of territory, had a strange appeal for King Robert, and on 16 March 1982 he signed the Cheap Glory Act, which officially annexed his entire house, Downer Woods, and BA Beach. These three non-contiguous blocks of territory were the RT's first steps in establishing territorial permanence on the North American Continent—Talossa could now boast of grass, trees and sand! Ben's house became the capital: Vuode Province. BA Beach was named Kemâl Atatürk State; Downer Woods (the "Enver Hoxha Rabbit Reserve") became Enver Hoxha State.

The annexations were made east of the Milwaukee River, on lands once owned by Potawatomi Indians and never legally incorporated by treaty into the United States of America. No protest from the Potawatomi, or the United States, was ever received. And as King Robert I is fond of pointing out, the secession of the Confederacy after 1860 was met with force of arms; the secession and expansion of Talossa have been ignored. "So obviously they have no complaints," the King likes to say.

## PART SIX: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

*"Three years. That's a long time. "*

While Talossa was annexing little bits of Milwaukee in the spring of 1982, Argentina annexed the British Falkland Islands on 2 April. Talossa immediately sided with Britain and declared war on Argentina. This "belligerent blood bubbling" provoked sneers from Dan Lorentz in the press, calling Talossa a "dream farce"; but Talossa rejoiced in the British victory.

The "dream farce" was alive and well as the King began to print Talossan currency, at the rate of 59 "Ben" to the U.S. dollar. The number "59" assumed mystic significance when Lorentz announced he'd had a dream prophesying the death of Ben Madison at age 59; this became a running joke and later a hallmark of RT culture. But Lorentz was also calling for new and fair elections, stating that an "administerer of reality" should be elected "to advise Ben." While the King at first resisted, he did realize Talossa was more than just his proclamations. His "loyal subjects" needed to have their say too.

On March 9th, the King had written an editorial about how the US should gloriously annex Antarctica. Knowing they wouldn't, King Robert announced that Talossa was laying formal claim to a slice of Antarctica between 90° and 150° West, never before claimed by any other nation. Talossa formally christened the new territory *Pengöpäts* (Penguin Country) and also declared the annexation of seven tiny Pacific islands, already claimed by the US, Britain or Kiribati.

International recognition was received on 20 April 1982 when **Antonio R. Riley**, whom Talossa recognized as the US Ambassador, gathered with King Robert at Riverside to sign a "Treaty of Milwaukee" formally ceding lands to Talossa and recognizing Talossa's independence. While Dan Lorentz and Bob Murphy pleaded with Riley not to sign the treaty, Riley declared: "The United States wants to establish good relations with all nations of the world, no matter how small." The treaty ceded Lake Park, the UWM campus, and Riverside High School to Talossa. Lorentz denounced the treaty as "ludicrous spasms of childishness," while Riley was eventually catapulted into the Wisconsin state legislature.

But the King, seeking even greater glory, soon violated the treaty and annexed even more land from Milwaukee, including Mitchell Field—the city's airport! *Stotannen* lauded the annexation of "great gobs of glorious terra firma" but Ambassador Riley pronounced the Treaty "null and void" (sic) while Talossa proceeded to make other annexations in the area.

While Dan and Bob complained about the annexations, the King gave into their demands for elections. He announced that a "Parliamentary Congress of National Assemblies" would be created, in which only a minority of members would be elected; the rest were to be appointed by the King. Lorentz' DDP and Murphy's **Order Party** announced they would contest the race, but both of them failed to vote. The King's **National Fascist Party** technically won the race but in the face of leftist apathy the "Assembly" was never convened, even though a building had been picked out for it to meet in on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) campus, recognized since June 6th as Montevûdio, the RT's capital.

Murphy, Lorentz and Madison all graduated from high school in June of 1982. The former two headed off to Ohio for college, while Ben went to UWM. Ben's proclamation of a neo-pagan Kwakiutl Indian religion as the "official state religion" of Talossa that summer and fall took up an inordinate amount of space in *Stotannen*, as did his bewildering and unexpected conversion to a sectarian variety of Mormonism.

Fortunately, Talossan affairs continued as well. During a trip to France to visit Frédéric Maugey, the King annexed Cézembre, a small island off of Brittany, on 17 August; it is now a Talossan province. Maugey, for his part, created "Fira," his own secessionist nation, in the Paris suburbs. Over the next few months Talossa and Fira signed various treaties and made and abandoned a number of Third World "colonial" claims.

The Kingdom was also patching things up with another secessionist state: the King met with Gary Cone to discuss the signing of a "peace treaty" to formally end the Cone Wars. *Stotannen* described the "glorious" events

of the war against Cone as "an amusing chapter in Talossan history. If any single event justifies the existence of Talossa as a pompous bulwark against stupidity everywhere, then that event is the 'Cone Wars.'" Cone's country still existed, then known as the "Confederation of One," and on 30 November it signed a treaty with Talossa recognizing Cone's Glib Room as the "defeated nation" which had paid "reparations" to Talossa.

All of Talossa's frenzied annexations, which stretched from Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, to Gulfport, Mississippi, were so poorly recorded that they even baffled the King. In late November 1982 Talossa began a phase of territorial consolidation which ended on 26 January 1983 with the proclamation of Talossa's current borders: "Edgewood and the River." These borders placed Talossa squarely on the East Side of the Milwaukee River in its present size and location with easily defined borders, leaving the country sort of "rectal" in shape.

The Kingdom of Talossa celebrated its third birthday as an independent country on 26 December 1982. Milwaukee, said *Stotannen*, was "festooned with the red and green" Talossan colours (which may also perhaps be interpreted as the colours of Christmas). In what soon became an annual event—a Royal address on the anniversary of Independence—the King promised:

*Three years. That's a long time. I put all of my hopes, dreams, aspirations and better qualities into this Norwegian sausage machine, and look what came out. Fabulous. I shall try to make the next year in Talossa as glorious as possible, and shall try to avoid make-believe coups and revolutions, unlike the beginning of 1982.*

## PART SEVEN: MUSICAL PRIME MINISTERS.

*"... pick either the general or the blimp, both are equally illustrious."*

In December 1982 the King prepared a "List of Government Jobs" to be filled with Talossa's various citizens. This, he imagined, would solve the "problem" of getting non-Ben citizens active in Talossan government without them being able to vote him out as King. In January 1983 he named the first non-him government in Talossa since the DDP election débâcle of 1981. Dan Lorentz became Prime Minister (PM) and Bob Murphy became Foreign Minister (FM). Both participated by mail from Antioch College in Ohio, where they were students. The King stated he was considering naming Moral Majorityite Jahn as War Minister. Murphy fired off a letter on 5 February urging Ben to "turn a deaf ear to all petitions" to make Jahn a citizen. If that happened, Murphy warned he would resign as FM and "renounce his Honorary Citizenship and all supposed affiliations with your Royal Numbskull's fantasy, the Kingdom of Talossa." Lorentz added: "Talossa needs a psychiatrist, not a prime minister." For a remarkable eight years, from 1983 to 1991, this political trichotomy of Lorentz on the Left, Madison in the Centre, and Jahn on the Right, dominated RT politics.

The King formally appointed Jahn as War Minister on 16 February, but Murphy and Lorentz refused to have anything to do with him. The next few months were dominated by Lorentz and Jahn trading places as Prime Minister at the King's behest while he tried in vain to get them all in the same government together. The hysterical Leftists thwarted every attempt, but Madison's too-frequent bowing to their demands prompted a hail of invective from Jahn, who denounced the Left as "slime-sucking pigs, socialist swines and pig-headed homosexuals."

Almost as if to provoke the King's totalitarian fevers, on May 1st, the Talossan flag flying in front of his house was stolen! He declared May Day to be "A perpetual Holiday of Hatred" and claimed that "the fundamental struggle at work in the human sphere of existence is the struggle between Good and Evil." He praised "totalitarianism" as the only way to oppose "criminal zombies who have sought to destroy all social cohesion from the dawn of humanity. Only when corpses hang from the façade of City Hall will people realize that their rights, granted them by the almighty State, are protected. No freedom for the criminal or the potential criminal! All power to the State!"

At the same time, John Jahn was moving to found his own "pro-totalitarian organization" on the fringes of the RT, a **Nationalist Party of America** which sent reams of letters and Teutonic artwork to the King. Madison kept it at arm's length, claiming to be a fascist but not a Nazi.

On 4 May 1983, King Robert again appointed Dan Lorentz Prime Minister, with Murphy Foreign Minister. John Jahn was not in the new Government. Murphy formed a **Talossan Glory Against Jahn and Other Pedantic Parties Party** and demanded new elections, denouncing Jahn as "a military and historical charlatan who'll bestow favors on anyone foolish enough to support his wild fantasies and inflate his Hindenburg-sized ego (pick either the general or the blimp, both are equally illustrious)."

The Lorentz régime demanded Jahn's expulsion from the RT and return of all lands outside the King's bedroom to the USA. King Robert refused (despite Dan's threat that refusal would result in Ben's "immediate lifetime imprisonment in the realm of the fantastic"), but surprisingly he gave in to Lorentz' call for new elections on 28 June. Not surprisingly, the Leftists went on to boycott the election they themselves had demanded. Jahn was appointed PM on 7 July but the King pleaded with Bob Murphy to take his place as PM. When Murphy refused—and quit as Foreign Minister—the King gave up. Jahn's embarrassing swastika-filled letters and the Leftists' buffoonery had beaten Ben's multi-ego hopes for Talossa, for the time being. Murphy warned that any more toleration for Jahn would lead to his own departure from the RT. So the King asked for Jahn's resignation, Jahn denounced the "exalted and prominent leftist scum" that had supposedly taken control of the RT, and that was the end of democracy in Talossa for another two years.

The King left for a semester in London that helped RT politics cool down. Jahn and the King made up, jointly

hailing US President Reagan's invasion of Grenada that fall, but Ben spent most of his time reviving the Talossan language or celebrating the 3rd anniversary of the Cone Wars as "a great festival of civilization" and of "the natural purity of our will." He returned to Talossa on 17 December and spent months in post-European gloom denouncing the US political system and even running for President on the "I Hate America Party" ticket! His Speech to the Nation on the RT's 4th Birthday (26 December 1983) was a flood of anti-American invective.

His anti-US efforts became comic-delusional on 22 May 1984 when he concluded that Talossa, as a "nation of immigrants," was "fake" and needed to be more "European" and ancient. So he announced Talossans were somehow "descended from" Celtic warriors from Toulouse, France (get it?) who sailed across the ocean to build Indian mounds in Lake Park. Later his Celts became North African Berbers; official tales of Talossa's "Celto-Berber nationality" were pushed as late as 1986. Snickering over "Berber heritage" never went away. In 1994 Talossa adopted a law proclaiming itself "inextricably and inexplicably connected somehow to Berbers," and in 1996 Madison published his vast "scholarly" work "proving" the Berber-Talossan connexion, *The Berber Project*.

The important news in Talossa in 1984 can be retold on a post card. Was Talossa slowing down, losing steam, even dying? To escape the doldrums of anti-US ramblings and Berberisms, the whole nation—not just the King—would have to rise as one. And it happened.

## **II. 1984 – 1990: THE GOLDEN AGE**

*"We have a man who will be King."*



## PART EIGHT: DEMOCRACY!

*"...less and less important in the King's life..."*

In late 1984 things began picking up again for Talossa. Dan Lorentz, now working for the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, arranged the publication on 16 October of an article on Talossa, and 40,000 shocked Milwaukeeans woke up to find they were living in a foreign country under Monarchist rule.

The Kingdom too had awakened. Lorentz was again interested, the King's father and sister had become citizens, as had Florence Yarney and **Jean Williams**, two of Madison's former English teachers. With a burgeoning population, interested citizens, and new political parties being formed, there was only one step left to take: on 30 November 1984 King Robert announced that free, democratic elections would be held, which his **Talossan National Progressive Conservative Neo-Feudalist Fascist Party** would contest. On Independence Day, 26 December 1984, the King set up a parliament: He would appoint its upper house or "Senäts," but the lower house, called the "Cosâ" ('thing'), would be democratically elected.

The election was delayed as the King fretted over a possible DDP victory, but newer citizens all rejected schemes to "destroy Talossa." On 1 April 1985 voting began with the King's Progressive Conservative Party ("PC") faced by Jahn's **American Nationalist Party**, Dan's "Democratic Dandipratic Party" and a **Communist Party** backed by citizen John Eiffler. Lorentz campaigned to "eventually" make the RT "less and less important in the King's life" (as opposed to "destroying" it?). The King had already earmarked John Jahn as Talossa's next Prime Minister, but to make sure everything went on cue, the King pulled one last sleazeball scheme: any citizen who did not vote was assumed to be voting PC! He said he would wait for the election before appointing seats in the Senäts: "I want to know whether I should be magnanimous or furious." All through the election the King tinkered with the rules.

At the same time the King began publishing *Tú Phäts* ("Your Country"), a photocopied mass-market newspaper for Talossans which competed with his own hand-written *Stotanneu*. The paper consisted mostly of Celto-Berberisms and proved a complete flop. John Jahn began publishing his own photocopied paper on 23 April, called *Talossan Nationalist News*. Soon renamed *Talossan National News*, TNN was Talossa's first opposition paper and became noted for its sarcasm and wit, soon rocketing past the hand-written *Stotanneu* in readership.

TNN appeared just in time to report on the country's first successful democratic election. Dan's DDP won 16.7% of the vote, the Communists 8.3%. Jahn's Nationalist Party got 16.7%, and the King's Progressive Conservative "Tories" (as they were soon nicknamed) got a whopping 63.3% of the vote.

The King was elated, and Jahn was named to head a "national unity" government which included everyone except the destructionist DDP. The government soon adopted a 66-article "Organic Law" which served as a sort of constitution. While the much-derided "OrgLaw" gave the King a veto over every aspect of government, it set out election procedures and the workings of the Cosâ, and was a good base on which to build a viable democracy, as proven by the fact it lasted 3 years.

Unfortunately, relations between the King and Jahn's government deteriorated quickly. The King's newly-published *History of Talossa* played up the Berbers, and the Americans' wholesale slaughter of Talossa's ancient Indian population, and Jahn blasted the book in TNN, calling the author "snotty and obnoxious." Jahn proceeded to praise Joe McCarthy and launched into tiresome Moral Majority tirades on "moral issues" like heavy metal music. The King, whose own political views were moderating at breakneck speed, grew increasingly disillusioned. The King and Lorentz met for a "summit" at Antioch College in Ohio. Dan urged the King to fire Jahn, but the King refused. Dan's college acquaintance **Brook Gläfke**, a right-wing aristocratic Germanophile Gay ex-Marine hypochondriac nudist, became a Talossan citizen during the summit and allied himself at once with moral crusader Jahn.

When the King returned to the RT, he had to face Jahn's new "autobiography" which spoke of the "inherent inferiority" of Blacks and Hispanics. The King hinted that he wanted Jahn to resign, and Jahn did just that, on 6 June 1985. The King immediately appointed pliant do-nothing Florence Yarney as Prime Minister, to fill out

Jahn's term as a reliable Tory stooge.

The King, on vacation in Canada, drew up a PC platform endorsing fair elections (no more counting non-votes for the PC) and on 22 July he dissolved the Cosâ and called new elections. Jahn, busy in his own "Pórt Maxhestic Province" within Talossa, hailed the decision. New citizen **Wes Erni**, a moderate-right wargamer, ran a **Black Hand** party (Talossan abbreviation: MN) which called for annexing two nearby suburbs, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay. Frédéric Maugey created a **Front Uni pour la Nation** (FUN). Williams and Yarney, prodded by the King, set up a **Liberal Party** (PL) to lure moderate leftists away from the DDP. Jahn, head of the **Talossan National Party**, drifted off into the political bulrushes after demanding the "annihilation" of his rivals. Madison blasted his Reaganite chest-beating while Jahn condemned Ben's endless, naïve anti-American rants.

The election ended on 15 October 1985 with a deeply divided Cosâ. The PC had only won 40% of the vote. The DDP and Liberals tied at 13.3% each, the TNP had 20% and the Black Hand and FUN, 6.7% each. The King got everyone but the DDP and TNP into a grand coalition of the centre, and named Frédéric Maugey—who lived in France—PM. Despite the divided Cosâ it appeared the King was again in total control, surrounded by fawning centrist parties.

## PART NINE: CIVIL WAR, PAPER WAR.

*"...the smaller, more idiosyncratic, more honest, crankier  
Talossa..."*

Madison continued to see Talossa in "anti-American" terms, writing in his Speech from the Throne on Talossa's 6th birthday (26 December 1985) that "America was great once, because it stood as a gigantic protest against the rest of the world. Today, America is the rest of the world, and the world longs for a new protest nation. What does this mean in practical terms? Well, perhaps Talossa is just a waste of time, a farce, and a great big joke. And if so, WONDERFUL! That is what this 'mature' world needs! Not a slap in the face, or a shot in the arm, but a good joke. And if our joking makes us happy and infuriates the world, so much the better."

Meanwhile, Vuode Province held elections and on 1 January 1986, Dan Lorentz became Premier. He abolished Vuode's constitution, warned he might secede from Talossa, and told the King to "watch out." He then banned Jahn's TNP in Vuode, unless it renamed itself the "Homosexual Communist League"! After more such antics the King deposed Lorentz, but Lorentz announced that he was seceding nearby Maritiimi Territory from the RT; the King fired him—at which point Dan declared himself the legitimate government of Talossa.

On 6 March Lorentz presented an ultimatum allegedly signed by five citizens, demanding the King abolish the Cosâ, become a dictator, and return all land except Ben's bedroom to the USA. The King refused, and pronounced the signatures on the document to be forgeries! Lorentz proclaimed himself "Divine and Eternally Patient Provisional Dictator" on 3 April 1986, and set up a "provisional government" in the hills of Vuode Province. Both protagonists soon agreed to defuse the situation, and to hold early elections so voters could pick their preference. The election began on 10 March with Dan arguing a Ben dictatorship would be "a return of the smaller, more idiosyncratic, more honest, crankier Talossa" that he preferred. But his 'cranky' ideas proved ridiculous to voters, and Lorentz recreated his "guerilla movement" before the polls even closed. The DDP got 14.1% of the vote compared to 25.1% for the PC. Maugey put together a PC-Black Hand-FUN coalition which controlled only 53.8% of the seats; Jahn's TNP floundered at DDP levels. Referenda showed no support for Dan's schemes, and he eventually quit rebelling and vowed to play by the rules.

Just as Lorentz was apparently moderating, the TNP was moving right, adopting the nickname *Stahlhelm* ("Steel Helmet") from an anti-Semitic racist German political party of the 1920's that teamed up with the Nazis. *Stotanneu* gleefully printed embarrassing articles about the original Stahlhelm which Jahn clumsily denied.

In May the King headed for a long vacation in Europe, where he toured Cézembre—the RT's island colony off Brittany—with PM Frédéric Maugey and visited Cézembre, the RT's island colony off Brittany. He came back to Talossa on 11 July where *TNN* was ranting about "dark immigrants," claiming Jahn was only a moderate conservative, and calling Ben the real crypto-Nazi. Jahn blamed his own Nazi reputation on the King "duping" people, and trumpeted the fact that far more Talossans read *TNN* than the hand-written, inaccessible *Stotanneu*. Jahn vehemently attacked the Talossan language, proposing that it be abolished in favour of German, since most Talossans were part German and therefore, German ought to be the RT's "racial" language. (Madison suggested Proto-Indo-European would be more inclusive, and just as irrelevant.) Finally, Jahn denounced Madison's bombastic Berber-inspired RT cultural separatism as "Unamerican."

Jahn's bitter attacks prompted the King to copy *TNN*'s format and on 2 August 1986 *Stotanneu* was launched as a mass-market, photocopied newspaper. It soon surpassed *TNN* in readership, which provoked more bitterness from Jahn as the papers started a mud-slinging "Paper War." Jahn denounced any 'patriotic' attachment to Talossa as evil, and claimed the PC was somehow plotting to "force" Talossans to learn the Talossan language in order to cut them off from their "German racial heritage." Since Jahn's American nationalism was scarcely-disguised German racial bombast, the King denounced Jahn's race fixation. He put up a laundry list of social decay in the US (crime, divorce, etc.) to blast Jahn's claim that America was the best country in the world. Jahn warned that Talossa was slipping into "real subversion" and might become a security risk for the US. The King backpedaled and contrasted America's historic ideals with Jahn's nonexistent

"America" where everyone listened to classical music and took pride in German heritage—an "America" that Ben called no less an imaginary country than Talossa. Even Jahn's TNP deputy, Brook Glälfke, applauded Ben's article; but Jahn condemned it and changed his province from a Talossan name to a German one (*Südlicher Großhafen*) to underscore his "racial heritage."

The two bickered for the rest of the year. On 24 September, the "Love Rock," an island in Talossan waters off our east coast in the Talossan Sea, was destroyed by an American "attack" since it had been judged a "hazard to navigation." Ben's *Stotannen* denounced the move as "state-sponsored terrorism," while Jahn's *TNN* angrily supported the US destruction of sovereign Talossan territory.

In October 1986, elections were held, marked by a complete turn-around on the part of Dan Lorentz. Having just called for a Ben dictatorship, he was now calling for Ben to be deposed as King by a democratic republic! Stunningly, PM Maugey endorsed this call—so the King fired him and named Wes Erni the new Prime Minister. Now under siege from Left and Right, the King's PC got a huge sympathy wave and won 53.3% of the vote. The DDP-FUN republican bloc got only 20%, as did the TNP. The Tories were jubilant; their plans for a constitutional monarchy under majority rule had struck the right chord. The DDP and TNP seemed to have hurled themselves into the trash can of history. At least for the moment.

## PART TEN: DOBBERPUHL.

*"Talossa needs its Monarchy."*

As soon as the polls closed in October 1986, Dan Lorentz was complaining about the results while Jahn and Gläfke were threatening to quit over Talossa's "subversive" nature. The TNP even sent campaign literature to voters (the next election was six months away) warning them that PC rule meant "a one party state and the King has been given autocracy!" To give the King more headaches, the DDP and FUN formally united and became PUNK: **People United for No King**.

The PC and PUNK ploughed ahead on reforming the Organic Law. Lorentz suggested a "Vote by Post" system by which Cosâ legislation could be voted on by mail. The PC warmly endorsed the plan, which opened participation to multiple "Members of the Cosâ" rather than just party bigwigs. The useless Senäts (upper house) was abolished.

On the Right, however, the *Stotanneu* -TNN "Paper Wars" continued with each side calling the other "Nazi" and "Fascist," and Jahn blasting Ben's unpatriotic subversion. Jahn denounced *Stotanneu* as a Talossan *Pravda*, and on 9 November cancelled his subscription to the "sickening" *Stotanneu*: "We shall NOT be shut down by the obfuscating 'party line' of PC-owned *Stotanneu*! Don't be duped by the King!"

The King visited Lorentz in Madison, USA, for another legal reform summit. Lorentz asked Ben to step down as King because it was unfair for one citizen to have so much power. But Ben refused to support a Talossan "republic," which seemed boring or not quite fairy-tale enough for Talossa. Ben proposed making someone else—like his father, or Queen Elizabeth!—a purely figurehead King. But PUNK demanded a republic, arguing that Ben had served a legitimate unifying rôle as King and no other person could wear that symbolic mantle.

Meanwhile, John Jahn's adversarial approach to RT politics provoked several angry replies from various citizens in *Stotanneu* including one from John Eiffler lampooning Jahn as a paranoid Nazi masturbator. Under that kind of pressure, on 17 November Jahn quit his RT citizenship out of "disgust, disgrace and disillusionment," blasting all Talossans as "a bunch of leftist scum." But his departure received almost no attention, crowded out by the all-engrossing Monarchy issue.

On 20 November the PC and PUNK agreed to hold a referendum on the Monarchy in January, but on 5 December the subject took an abrupt and surprising turn. **Dr. William Renzi's** T.A., **Robert Dobberpuhl**, expressed interest in Talossa. Dobberpuhl chatted with King Robert on the topic of his own noble Pomeranian origins. The enthralled King got the Cosâ to put an option on the upcoming referendum which could make Robert Dobberpuhl King of Talossa—as King Robert II.

The PC and Black Hand lined up behind the newcomer Dobberpuhl. PUNK opposed any King, especially an "outsider." Liberals begged Ben to stay as King and retain the "Ben-Ego Kingdom." But "Talossa needs its Monarchy," he wrote. "Without it, we sink into pseudo-modernistic trendiness. There is only one solution. We have a man who will be King. Robert II will be a true symbol of our national future."

The rhetoric escalated. Lorentz denounced Dobberpuhl as a "Neo-Nazi" without the slightest shred of evidence. But the January, 1987 referendum ended with a narrow majority (53.8%) in favour of Dobberpuhl taking over as King Robert II. By the same margin, the people endorsed Wes Erni's plan to annex Shorewood and Whitefish Bay, but the King failed to find film for his camera in time to obtain photographic proof of the annexations, so they were never carried out.

On Wednesday, 11 February 1987, King Robert I visited Dobberpuhl and asked if he wanted to be King with only 54% of the vote. He said yes, and so, both men signed a document formally stripping the Monarchy of its political power and abolishing the 1979 Constitution. Ben Madison then abdicated in favour of Dobberpuhl, who became King Robert II of the RT. Dan Lorentz attacked the new King: "In order for a King to be a meaningful symbol with justified authority for the nation, he must be from the soil of the nation, and he must be integral to its integrity and functioning." Dobberpuhl, because he was not a long-standing citizen "from the

soil of the nation" (the "Soilitariat," as Ben lampooned the country's élitist old-guard) was a mere "opportunistic bug"; and, as Lorentz advised his readers, "It's okay to swat this fly."

PM Erni called new elections on 25 February 1987, to last a month. The Liberals, in disarray and lacking a programme, failed to run. So only the PC, MN and PUNK turned out. The PC blasted PUNK for its clannish bigotry, while PUNK ran solely to "dump Dobberpuhl the Dummy King." The one person with nothing to say on the question (yet) was a now chastened and more tolerant John Jahn, who applied to have his citizenship restored once the election was over.

In the midst of all this, the virtually unknown King Robert II gave his first Speech from the Throne. The new King leaped blandly into his rôle of Entertainer to the Nation by calling for a paper airplane air force and proclaimed himself "the Friend of Small, Furry Mammals." Nobody was entertained.

A huge voter turnout on 25 March saw unprecedented results: The PC got only 35.3% of the vote, to a stunning 58.8% for PUNK. And this time there was no almighty King Ben to quash the results. Dan Lorentz was sworn in as Prime Minister, in full control of Talossa's destiny. "A change of power from Ben to a non-Ben has finally happened," Lorentz declared in his first speech to the nation as PM.

## PART ELEVEN: ONE KING AFTER ANOTHER.

*"I pledge to do all I can to make Talossa prosper."*

On 29 March 1987 Lorentz' government "legislatively decapitated" King Robert II, ending his 47-day reign and kicking off the "Provisional Peculiar Republic of Talossa." Lorentz noted that "PUNK realizes that it was elected on an anti-Dobberpuhl-as-King platform, not an anti-Monarchy one," and promised a referendum at the end of his six-month term to decide the fate of the Throne.

Meanwhile, John Jahn returned to Talossa and teamed up with fellow conservatives **Andrew Wozniak**, Wes Erni, and Ben Madison to form a **Rally for the Kingdom** (RPR) to restore King Dobberpuhl. The RPR was based in Ben's Vuode Province, so Lorentz sicced Ben's arch-enemy Bob Murphy on him as Vuode's "Governor General" to scrutinize Ben's every move. They banned all royalist symbols and the word "King" from the papers; Vuode threatened to secede from Talossa.

But on 10 April, Dobberpuhl himself suddenly quit Talossa in a bizarre, paranoid, angry letter claiming his defeat was all a brilliant plot hatched by Ben Madison to cure "liberal apathy" by getting Lorentz's followers to rally against him!

The cause of monarchism in Talossa was in a shambles until May, when Florence Yarney put herself up as candidate for "King" with Madison's blessing. The Tories wanted a non-Ben King and Yarney, a widely-beloved teacher, fit the bill perfectly. "King Florence!" became the Tory rallying cry. Talossans were able to vote on the issue earlier than expected when PM Lorentz suddenly dissolved the Cosâ on 29 July.

Ever the contrarian, Dan declared that Ben should come back and be King again. Arguing the RT "must orbit the big-Ben-ego," Dan formed a **King Ben Party** to challenge the PC. But Yarney was popular and only the PC really campaigned: on 15 August the Tories won a landslide 62.5% of the vote. Even Dan voted PC; his King Ben Party got no votes. Jahn's TNP got 12.5% of the vote and a host of minor parties shared the remainder. Talossa's newest citizen, **Sandee Prachel**, was chosen to be the next Tory Prime Minister.

And on 24 August 1987, King Florence I was crowned at a ceremony in Lake Park. Calling herself "the king of swat, the king of rock and roll and the King of Talossa," she vowed not to banish her sister to Scotland.

Sandee Prachel emerged as an activist, anti-apathy PM. On 3 September she vowed in her first Speech to the Nation to "encourage each Talossan to know more about Talossa, to wish to know more about Talossa, and to wish to wish to know more about Talossa. I pledge to do all I can to make Talossa prosper." She bought copies of Talossa's *History*, and of Madison's new *English-Talossan Dictionary*, to model her enthusiasm.

Even more important was the appearance that month of the first "Clark," the monthly journal of the Cosâ which sends copies of all bills to the various MCs (Members of the Cosâ) for their votes in the "Vote By Post" system, which prevailed in RT government until 1996, when the government went onto the Internet. This first Clark contained 14 bills, and showcased the talents of Secretary of State John Jahn, who published the Clark (named for "Clark Graphics," a copy shop in Talossa where the first Clarks were photocopied). The system was quickly mired in controversy: MCs refused to pay fees to Jahn for bills they submitted, so Jahn refused to count their votes.

MCs, infatuated with their own new-found power, tended to ignore party discipline. Madison's own PC delegates revolted against him to support Leftist legislation. A major showdown came when the Left (and many Tories) defeated Ben's proposal that all future citizens buy his 200-page *History of Talossa* so they would know something about the Talossa they were joining. Ben even threatened to bolt from the PC!

While Talossans were vituperating over that and other issues, Florence Yarney announced that she was tired of being King and (like most everyone else) wanted Ben to be King again. When Madison formally withdrew his support from the left-leaning Prachel, who barely survived the November 1987 Vote of Confidence, politicians like Lorentz started calling for new elections. Dan fielded a cynical **Bob Fights Ticket** (BFT) so Robert I

could be King while Bob Murphy was made Prime Minister, just so the country could see the cat-fighting between those two long-time rivals.

And so, tired of all the whining, PM Prachel dissolved the Cosà on 29 December and called new elections. Madison announced that John Eiffler was the PC's next choice for PM, and vowed to oppose restoration of the Ben-Ego monarchy. The PC and Black Hand ran as a **United Party** (UP) in the election, as Madison again half-heartedly endorsed MN leader Erni's call for annexation of Shorewood.

The BFT, UP, TNP, FUN and Liberals were joined by Andrew Wozniak's rabid **Conservatives Against Liberal Laziness** or CALL, and STOMP: **(Jack) Schneider's Talossan Marxist Party**. It was an odd election with no important issues, and ended with the electorate in utter confusion. The UP won only 32% of the vote, its worst ever. Its rival BFT got 26% and the other 4 parties tied at around 11% each. Observers expected a UP-TNP coalition, but the two parties did not have a majority. Rather than rely on Wozniak's CALL, the UP turned to the BFT and a ridiculous centre-left "grand coalition" took shape.

The only issue was of course the Monarchy. Madison was refusing to budge, but when Wes Erni—his last ally—deserted him, he finally gave in. On 2 February 1988, Robert Ben Madison announced he would accept the Throne again.



## PART TWELVE: BOB FIGHTS.

*"Nineteen eighty-eight was not our happiest year."*

The bizarre Ben-Bob coalition took office on 7 February 1988 when Bob Murphy, "surprised as hell to be made PM," was sworn in. He kicked off his term by refusing to give Tories their traditional cabinet portfolios, and called for Talossa to give most of its land to the USA; at each cry of criticism from the UP, Lorentz taunted and dared Madison to quit the 3-hour-old coalition. As *Stotanneu* pointed out, it was hard to blame Ben for the squawking, as it was a BFT campaign promise.

Feelings were more positive when 15 Talossans gathered at Dan's house on Saturday, 27 February, for the official re-coronation of His Majesty King Robert I. Murphy and King Florence made speeches, and then Florence officially recrowned Robert I. The newly-restored King had few powers, but vowed to be "a do-things King," not a "mouthpiece for the PM."

The PM had somehow acquired the right to veto bills, and Murphy used this power with relish to block the will of the Cosà, while Dan passed legislation chastising the King for his veto—which he had never used! In an effort to save the coalition, the King and Murphy signed a "Compact" on 10 April: each agreed not to veto the other's bills. But on 3 May, the PM tore up the "Compact" by vetoing a trivial bill making Ben leader of Cézembre, the RT's tiny island colony near France. When Ben protested, Murphy condemned "bitter, bitter Ben" and his "hysterics," and proceeded to announce that both Lorentz and Murphy would boycott the next Talossan election. *Stotanneu* summed up their antics:

*Their overall strategy is this: Push Ben back into as prominent a position as he can be (King) and then portray him as a power-hungry, closed-minded, right-wing, sniveling petty hysteric who is leading Talossa to stagnant doom. This populist, 'send him a message' type strategy presupposes the existence of a vast, untapped well of anti-Ben discontent out there in Talossa. Does it exist? We think not, but an election might clarify things. Bring it on.*

While Murphy blasted Ben's "tiresome shrillness" over Murphy's broken promises, the United Party voted on 11 May to quit the coalition and changed its name back to the **Progressive Conservative Party**. Much to its amazement, the PC found itself out in the cold when Murphy rallied the minor parties in the Cosà to form a huge coalition to shut the PC out of power. The coalition had no agenda and Murphy admitted it only existed to piss off the PC; it proposed not a single bill.

Despite all the infighting and bickering (or maybe to have more of it) Talossans sat down on 24 July to write a "1988 Constituziun" to replace the Organic Law. Madison, Murphy, Lorentz, Jahn and Andrew Wozniak argued for five hours at a Constitutional Convention. The Monarchy became hereditary and the King got a real veto (needing a Cosà vote to override it) while the PM's veto was replaced by a PM's right to issue "Prime Dictates" ("PDs"): executive orders with the force of law. Lorentz provided eight aptly named "Vague Principles" against which the laws of Talossa would be judged. Madison urged strong referendum rules, but the élitist Left blocked efforts to allow the people to make laws by referendum.

Voters approved the new Constituziun and elected a new government but no left-wing party had registered for the ballot. So when the polls closed on 14 September, the PC trounced the TNP by winning an utterly unprecedented 79% of the vote.

Murphy ended his government with a blast of hot air, taking credit for bills the King had written and defending apathy. But his last blow came when Lorentz announced that voters who had refused to vote (since no leftist party was on the ballot) should be "represented" in the new Cosà by empty seats. The Uppermost Cort laughed this argument off, but Murphy—temporarily serving as a Cort justice—said it should have been done even if the Constituziun forbade it.

**Tom Buffone**, a new citizen friend of Wes Erni's—and a Leftist to boot—was very critical of the Dan/Bob reasoning in the Cort case, and King Robert tapped the completely unknown Buffone to become the RT's next

Prime Minister. He was sworn in on 21 September, ending Murphy's 228-day tenure.

His first challenge was a mass immigration of right-wing teenagers. Andrew Wozniak got his friends **Ron Rosalez** and **Dave Kuenn** to join the RT; Rosalez gave little reason for joining beyond a desire to 'crush communism.' *Stotanneu* called Andrew's disciples "Androids," and they promised to bring ten more Androids into the country. The Cosâ tightened immigration laws, requiring a Cort interview of the prospective citizen, and a detailed "What Talossa Means to Me" essay. But Lorentz began moaning that "it's all over" for RT leftism if the Cosâ let these Androids into the country; the issue helped bring Dan back into political activity after months of slumber.

Talossa celebrated its 9th birthday on 26 December 1988. Population grew from 22 to 26 that year, but in his Throne Speech the King conceded: "Nineteen eighty-eight was not our happiest year." He praised Leftist Buffone and Rightist Wozniak for participating without "an anarchistic desire to trash the Big Ben Ego." Buffone, in the only issue of his abortive third RT newspaper, *The Neophyte*, summed up the year: "Where else could you find an election challenged on the grounds that those who did not vote should receive inactive seats in parliament, and a party that wins 75% of the vote which names a potential opponent to the post of Prime Minister?"

The PC government's job now was to heal the wounds of 1988's "Bob Fights."

## PART THIRTEEN: THE BUFFONE ERA.

*"Mussolini once said, 'Fascism is Mussolini.' Well, Peculiarism is Dan."*

Buffone quickly put his underlings in their place: He blocked Erni's plan to annex Shorewood and imposed sanctions on Ben's beloved Iceland over whaling. But he moved forward with plans for a summertime lakefront party, TalossaFest.

He also arranged a so-called Living Cosâ on 21 January 1989 at which MCs could meet and debate bills: Buffone, Madison, Eiffler, Lorentz and Kuenn (now of Jahn's TNP) showed up. After voting on bills—in which Kuenn altered Jahn's hand-written votes—the Living Cosâ was judged a success. But Lorentz sued the government for illegality: the *Constitutziun* said nothing about Living Cosâs. The Cort ruled that Lorentz was right, but Buffone refused Lorentz's suggestion that the government, overcome with contrition, ought to dissolve itself and hold new elections.

But Dan wanted back into power, and sent out a petition urging Buffone to call elections. Instead Tom simply amended the *Constitutziun* to allow Living Cosâs. Dan started complaining, again, that the Cosâ must 'represent' non-voters with empty seats, and called Buffone immoral for not doing this. Suddenly, Dan then quit RT politics, vowing never to return. The Right also fell apart. Jahn's TNP now counted Androids Dave Kuenn and Ron Rosalez (collectively: "Davron") as members. They demanded, *inter alia*, that Talossa brew nerve gas and assassinate Chinese leaders. But when Kuenn amended the TNP platform without Jahn's approval in March, Jahn purged him. "Night of the long knives!" cackled *Stotannen*.

The PC predicted it would win a 2nd straight majority in upcoming elections, unless any Left party ran—even some do-nothing vote sponge like the old Liberals. On April 1, the King's sister Jennifer, after prodding from Lorentz, declared her intention to "offer the voters apathy" as head of a **Talossan Sponge Party**. Lorentz, its lately "inactive" instigator, forecast a Sponge win and promised to serve in the Cosâ as a Sponge MC. "What a turn-coat!" exclaimed TNN.

The PC stressed its vision of Talossa as a community of Living Cosâs and TalossaFests. Sponge vowed to "give Ben a hard time"; its campaign was so dull that Murphy nearly ran another leftist party against it. Wozniak and Kuenn ran a **Talossan Activist Party** (TAP), bashing Jahn. Wes Erni, fed up with Ben's duplicity on not annexing Shorewood, broke to join the TNP. When it all ended on 14 May the PC had won half the vote: Buffone was reelected with no coalition. The TNP got a record-high 25%, Sponge 20% and TAP 5%.

Lorentz had earlier quit his seat on the Uppermost Cort, but now wanted it back. Right-wingers blocked his renomination, but PC leaders and Lorentz found an article in the *Constitutziun* which implies that Cort members can't resign in the first place—so Lorentz was still on the Cort after all!

The country found more entertaining the circus antics of Dave Kuenn. He declared that he wanted to be King; the nation laughed. Then he complained that the real King "has totally no concept on how a deal is made," and explained that when he demanded the Throne, all he really wanted was for Ben to offer him, say, a seat in the Cosâ. As the King said, "In the last US election, George Bush asked voters to 'read his lips.' Dave wants me to read his mind." Davron's weird bills (e.g. banning Gays from the RT; mandatory tattoos) drew ridicule all year.

On 1 July Dan Lorentz returned again from retirement with yet another ideology. He claimed Talossa's problems resulted from its "boring" King trying to make the RT a real country. So Dan offered "Peculiarism," urging Talossa to be "interesting" by having empty Cosâ seats 'represent' non-voters, or having Talossa renounce physical space and become a Zen-like "afterglow." All else was unimaginative "Derivatism": "Shall Talossa be just another nation, or shall Talossa be Talossa?"

The King saw "Peculiarism" as a corrosive absurdity. Talossa simply was a country, or at least pretended to be. And as Ben pointed out, Dan was happy to keep the Cosâ, the flag, and other 'real country' features;

"Peculiarism" was simply a label for Dan's own weird esoteric tastes: "Peculiarism is simply 'DAN LORENTZ' written on a rainbow. It has no doctrine. It is not a philosophy. Mussolini once said, 'Fascism is Mussolini.' Well, Peculiarism is Dan." Jahn put it more succinctly: "PECULIARISM IS TO TALOSSA WHAT TERMITES ARE TO WOOD!"

A Living Cosâ was held by the lake on 22 July, as part of TalossaFest. Things were not festive. *TNN* launched a spiteful attack on Buffone's personal life, and most people were in "bash Jahn" mode. Buffone quit as PM to devote more time (he said) to school. Deputy PM Jack Schneider was sworn in as the new PM. Kuenn and Rosalez denounced Jahn, tore up his TNP platform—and then Buffone let them join the PC to spite him!

The PC's membership now stretched from Davron, who were Marines, to Jack Schneider, who was a Marxist. Erni called it the "pot-pie blob" and it split, predictably, into pro-Ben and pro-Davron wings. Jahn denounced the King, threatened to quit Talossa and bemoaned the fact that the PC seemed to be the only means to success. Personal bickering hit a new peak. And so, on 23 July 1989, the King announced he was personally dissolving the Cosâ in hopes that a new election would channel the vituperation back into the political arena.

Talossa faced "a crisis of public confidence in her leaders, her institutions, and her purpose," the King told his loyal subjects. Would a new election help change any of this?

## PART FOURTEEN: THE HITLER-STALIN PACT.

*"I am King of the original dream."*

The campaign started in August 1989 with Davron's rump "PC" and Lorentz' **Peculiar Way** up against Schneider's and Madison's reorganized half of the PC, called the **Christian Democratic Party** — soon changed to the **Päts Vräts** ("Real Country") after offending Talossa's atheist majority.

During the campaign, PM Schneider presented an eclectic agenda. He promised to team up with Jahn's TNP on "moral issues" (banning smoking in the RT, for example), while trying to give Talossa's 40,000 American "natives" or "Cestoûrs" the right to vote. He hoped this would overturn the RT's "élitism," but most RT citizens saw letting 40,000 "natives" outvote the 25 or so Talossans as absurd. "Apartheid" had worked well for many years in Talossa, and Jack's speech offended everyone but Jahn — to whom Jack made an overt pitch for a coalition.

Voting ended on 15 September 1989. As predicted, the Päts Vräts won only 40% of the vote. And as promised, Jahn and Schneider formed a coalition to keep Jack in power—and bring Jahn across the aisle from the opposition for the first time since 1985. *Stotanneu* called the team-up of ex-Nazi Jahn and Marxist Jack the "Hitler-Stalin Pact."

But Jahn joined the King and Lorentz in trying to talk Jack out of his Cestoûr vote scheme. Schneider pushed boldly ahead and on 15 November 1989, voting for a powerless Cestoûr Council began. As it turned out, only one person cast a ballot out of the 40,000 eligible to vote: Ben Madison, who voted for his own "Vote Don't" party, which won every seat on the Council and promptly asked the Cosâ to dissolve it!

It was a humiliating defeat for Schneider, but hardly the last. Jack supported a Dan bill in the Cosâ which condemned "nationalism." The King vetoed the bill and explained in an 8 December speech that Talossa must not oppose "nationalism" since one of its definitions is simply "the desire for national independence." The King noted that this bill would call Talossa's very existence into question: "Because of something in common between us—I call it a sense of nationality—our political aspirations cannot be satisfied solely by our participation in American politics. Ergo, Talossa. To reject 'nationalism' would reject the profound sense that we are people whose lives would be less bright if there were no Talossan state."

Schneider hit the ceiling and began phoning other Talossans, trying to rally them against the King. As the Living Cosâ scheduled for 30 December 1989 neared, tempers were flaring. Jahn tried to persuade Schneider to drop the whole Cestoûr Council matter and concentrate on the Peculiarists, who "want to demolish our present nationhood and throw Talossa on a funeral pyre of burning dictionaries!" But Schneider refused.

When Buffone, Madison, Eiffler, Lorentz, Murphy, Jahn, Andrew Wozniak and Davron assembled at the Living Cosâ on the afternoon of the 30th, they were badgered by the PM the moment they walked in the door. Jack threatened to resign if the bills banning smoking and setting up a constitutionally mandated Defence Ministry (a sop to Jahn) did not pass. Since the King by this time wanted Schneider to resign, he fished for excuses to vote against these bills, which he had earlier endorsed; the meeting opened with Schneider currying favour with Davron, offering to ban *Stotanneu* from referring to them as "Androids." This clumsy attempt to censor the press came out of pure opportunistic spite and the King vetoed it.

The Living Cosâ roundly approved the new citizenship of **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**, a left-wing Canadian whose essay spoke of "dual citizenship in countries obsessed with their own identity"; she bribed the Cort to admit her with delicious, gooey homemade snacks. But the rest of the business was acrimonious. The smoking and defence bills both went down in flames thanks to Madison's flip-flops. And Dan's attempt to override the King's veto of his anti-nationalism bill failed.

At this, Schneider admitted defeat. He dissolved the Cosâ and quit as PM. Tom Buffone was sworn in as his successor. The Living Cosâ came to a depressing end and guests arrived for the RT's 10th Anniversary party only to see the King's Speech from the Throne become, with Schneider vanquished, a verbose and panicked

attack on Peculiarism. If the Peculiars won the upcoming election, they might keep their promise and declare the RT a "weird thing" (their words) instead of a country. In that case, Ben warned, he might abdicate again—because he would serve only as King of Talossa, not King of a weird uncountryle like silly thing: "I am the King of a nation of dreamers, but I cannot be King of every dream." So, he added later, "I am King of the original dream."

Elections featured the Päts Vräts (Madison and Buffone), the Peculiar Way (Lorentz and Schneider) and the TNP. Dan, sensing victory, looked reasonable and talked of esoteric legal technicalities—while fielding referenda to abolish Talossa's territorial existence and 'represent' non-voters by empty Cosâ seats. The King prophesied doom and reminded voters of the Peculiars' promise to declare Talossa "spiritual plasma" rather than a country. Schneider (with Jahn's help) also wrote letters to citizens, bashing the King with rhetoric. Amazingly, this was the first time direct mail had ever been used in a Talossan campaign. It was an innovation that allowed the Peculiar Way campaign to circumvent the PC-owned (at that time) *Stotanneu* and helped make Talossa substantially less "Ben-centric."

Voters split the difference on 14 February 1990 by electing the Peculiar Way (with only 50% of the vote) but rejecting its policies in the two referenda. (The puzzled King called the results "a sheep in wolf's clothing.") The Tories got only 36% of the vote; the TNP held the rest. Seventeen months of Tory rule ended in disgrace, and now the nation was turning to Dan Lorentz, demanding that he be the one to deal with all the scandals and personal bickering that threatened Talossa's peace.

### **III. 1990 – 1994: THE DARK AGE**

*"May Talossa survive this government!"*

## PART FIFTEEN: SPONGE-SOFT MUSHINESS.

*"[T]here's nothing left but this dried-up skin as Prime Minister."*

After a year and a half of PC (or Päts Vräts) rule, Talossa awoke on the morning of February 15th, 1990, to discover the hapless Tories routed from power and the Peculiar Way—Dan Lorentz' latest political incarnation—poised to form his first government since the collapse of the Peculiar Republic in 1987. Despite winning only 50% of the vote Lorentz was sworn in as PM on 6 March 1990 in a quasi-coalition with Jahn, who was fuming about the King's "deceit and arrogance."

The first situation Dan faced was John Eiffler's renunciation of his citizenship in a spasm of grief over the viciousness in the election. The King ignored Eiffler's departure, essentially saying "good riddance" since Eiffler had voted Peculiar before quitting; Lorentz blamed Ben for the whole affair in his first Speech to the Nation on 12 March. But Lorentz vowed to help quell the vituperation—by this time a standard Talossan political promise—and then showed how: After serving only six days in office, Lorentz resigned! He appointed notorious do-nothing Harry Wozniak as his successor and disappeared.

The move stunned and even disappointed both Madison and Jahn. Jahn hoped to do deals with the new government, and pass legislation over the King's helpless objections. But with Dan's resignation, there was little government left to deal with. TNP deputy Erni quipped that "Lorentz has slithered away, and there's nothing left but this dried-up skin as Prime Minister."

In the Cosâ, Wozniak's new breeze of moderation was not immediately evident. The big parties kept wrangling over legislation. But Peculiar delegates soon drifted into inactivity and in March, only 62 of their 115 Cosâ seats voted. Only continued squabbling between Madison and Jahn kept them from teaming up to knock Wozniak out of power on the Vote of Confidence. In April, however, Jahn and Madison began a rapprochement and TNN denounced Wozniak's somnambulant government as "plants" which ought to be "destroyed."

But the Government was hardly unrepresentative of the country's social climate. Apathy was rife everywhere. Jahn was in the process of uncovering his hitherto-repressed homosexual identity (thus wrecking his chance to recover the votes of the bigoted Davron) and veered away from things Talossan for the time being. Other Talossans had less interesting excuses, but not a single RT newspaper appeared in May and the same month, the Leftists almost completely abandoned ship. The May, 1990 Clark contained not a single bill, and the King and Jahn finally agreed that the Wozniak government was not worth saving. Only Charmaine Chvala-Smith turned up to support it; on a 74 to 10 vote, Wozniak was booted out of office on the Vote of Confidence for the first time in RT history. When told several days later what had happened, Wozniak reportedly burped "Oh, no!" and then vanished back into his beer.

In June the country geared up for a very strange election. The King's party changed its name back to the Progressive Conservative Party—which name was still being used by the Davron schism; so two different PCs contested the race. To compound the weirdness, Lorentz declared that he was personally all but giving up on Talossa and called for Talossa to "mutate" into an annual picnic and give up its political life. Buffone, the King's choice to be the next PM, disappeared.

The resulting election was incredibly uninteresting. The Left was dead. Jahn's Gay TNP was giggling over its "firm, steel-hard leadership" but tried to form an alliance with the PC, citing "considerable moderation and lack of any formal right-wing agenda," while Davron proved uncharacteristically vapid ("get Talossa back to business"). The voting ended on 13 July 1990 with the PC winning 125 seats, Davron 38 and the TNP 37 in the 200-seat Cosâ. Wes Erni had quit the TNP when the King offered him the Prime Ministership out of desperation—there was barely anyone else active left in the country. Only 16 of 27 voters had voted.

It says a lot about the social climate of Talossa in the summer of 1990 that after elections ended on 13 July, with the rout of the incumbent government, the story was not reported in *Stotannen* until 31 August, or in *TNN* until September! It can be frankly said Talossa was in the midst of a depression—the closest to an emotional depression this nation has ever witnessed. Not a single issue of *Stotannen* was published between 23 June and 31 August. *TNN*, normally published every month, reported the election results in its "July-



September" (!) issue, and dared hint at the possibility of "ceasing publication completely" owing to a lack of things to report. *Stotanneu* downplayed all this, claiming that nothing was wrong in Talossa, but Ben's clumsy Kiwanis Club boosterism bore little fruit. Jean Williams said "Talossa is dead" while Brook Gläfke said it ought to "fade like the Cold War." Even Jahn was leaning toward the Lorentzian vision of Talossa as an "annual picnic at the lakefront" with no political system.

The country had to be reminded that it had just held an election in July. The King refused to swear in Prime Minister Erni till Erni wrote his Speech to the Nation—but relented out of desperation and swore him in at the end of September.

A few days after taking office, Erni finally wrote his Speech which set out all too plainly the government's official goals: Continuation of the Wozniak "enlightened apathy" policy. Erni wistfully recalled his old Machiavellian dreams for a Talossan conquest of Shorewood but concluded that the modern moment called instead for a "kinder, gentler Talossa" which would meekly be "an enjoyable forum for us all." He signed off "in Sponge-soft Mushiness," as the nation wondered aloud: Was it time for Talossa to die?

## PART SIXTEEN: DEATH OF A NATION?

*"How doth the city sit solitary, she that was full of people!"*

Even as Erni offered "enlightened apathy" to the nation, Dan Lorentz deserted it once again. He resigned his one Cosâ seat and proclaimed, "I just don't care about Talossa!" The King saw the whole apathy phenomenon as simply the latest malevolent political position Lorentz had espoused, but he could hardly blame Dan for the fact that the Erni Government's first Living Cosâ, on 22 October 1990, couldn't even achieve a quorum due to absentees. When a quorum was finally attained a week later, Jahn soiled himself with a bill calling for Germany to conquer most of Europe, and for Talossa to assassinate a local alderman who himself had threatened to assassinate commuters. The PC balked and a serious PC-TNP rift occurred.

The only truly important bill on the October Clark was a "National Destiny Referendum Act," a nonbinding, nationwide referendum to allow Talossans to choose between one of three potential futures for Talossa: Continuing "as is," surrendering to apathy by going back to a "royal dictatorship," or, lastly, resolving that "Talossa has outlived its usefulness and should cease to exist, passing into history."

By all rational standards, that should have overshadowed all other legislation on the October Clark, but this is Talossa. The October Living Cosâ showcased the TNP as the zany party of urban terrorism and the Fourth Reich. It was evident to all from Jahn's last sparkling burst of fanaticism that while Jahn's lifestyle might have changed, the TNP's had not. In the King's eyes, and those of most Talossans, the TNP remained what it had always been, a fringe party. Its Big Huge Birds and Iron Crosses and *Triumph of the Will* soundtrack remained, as did its radioactive reputation.

So November, 1990—which one can fairly say was the nadir of Talossa's existence—began with John Jahn resigning as an Uppermost Cort Justice, as Secretary of State, and as head of the Talossan National Party. *Talossan National News* (TNN) ceased publication on 7 November, and Jahn expressed his regret for "the obvious decline and impending fall of our Talossan State as we know it." Jahn proclaimed:

*I am disgusted with the status quo, from which there is no possible escape save a further spiraling into the abyss. Talossa has simply lost its fire, its raison d'être. Personally, I am insulted by the lack of respect the PC has shown me over the years. Despite my extreme level of commitment, patriotism and involvement, I have remained an outsider at best—a scapegoat at worst. In light of all this, it is time to quit.*

While Jahn's right was collapsing, Dave Kuenn, leader of his own right-wing 'Progressive Conservative' splinter faction, dashed off a strongly worded "angry reply" to the King, blaming the "imminent destruction" of Talossa on the King and "a few jerks who ruin the fun for others."

On 15 November 1990 the Destiny Referendum began. Ben lamented the RT's current woes in Biblical terms: "How doth the city sit solitary, she that was full of people! How is she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations, and princely among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" He called for voters to rally behind a living, democratic Talossa because, he wrote, "without Talossa in our lives, we shall become pale and uninteresting." He was almost alone, forcing the feeding tubes into the unwilling patient despite all around him becoming "realistic" about Talossa's inevitable doom. It was precisely his own lack of "realism," of course, that kept Talossa alive in the next crucial months. But its pulse kept on weakening; Lorentz quit as a Cort justice on 24 November, and six days later, Foreign Minister Bill Renzi died!

As if to add insult to injury, Davron began a new (and abortive) Talossan newspaper on 26 November 1990, called *The Integrity*. It consisted largely of personal attacks on King Robert for not naming Dave Kuenn King—and a detailed "fecal log" that explained in depth the frequency and consistency of Kuenn's bowel movements. This was no substitute for TNN.

Only 13 citizens voted, but the Destiny Referendum ended on 14 December 1990 with a resounding "yes" for Talossa. 84.6% of voters backed Ben's call for a living, democratic Talossa. Jahn and Madison's sister supported the "royal dictatorship"—but nobody voted to kill off Talossa.

For the thankful King at least, the referendum breathed new life into Talossa, and he was able to write his annual Throne Speech on the nation's 11th birthday, 26 December 1990, with considerably more optimism than he had expected:

*While much in Talossa is inherently hard to believe, it still seems hard to believe that we are now into our twelfth year of sovereignty and still plugging away at it. However, the sound of our plugging has changed in the past year, as has its pace. What Talossa tells us now, in her falsely-rumoured twilight, is that the greatest irony of Talossan history, perhaps, is that for some, Talossa is far too 'real' for their tastes. We, the survivors, the blemished, the persistent members of a community who refuse to quit: We are proud to say that we're still here. Why? Perhaps precisely because we like ourselves, and each other. Let 1991 be our greatest year yet, and here's a toast to another year of plugging away at Talossa.*

That same issue of *Stotannen* also contained a letter from Andrew Wozniak, and quotations from Jahn, Schneider, Gläfke, Buffone, Yarney, Chvala-Smith, Williams, Erni, Harry Madison, Lorentz and, of course, the King. When 1990 finally ended, there was still a community called Talossa. December 1990 was the month when things began to change.

## PART SEVENTEEN: JAHN UNLEASHED.

*"I could run amok in this office, but I haven't the inclination to do so."*

Tentative optimism continued into January, 1991. After quitting his oodles of rôles, John Jahn in December had voted "no confidence" in PM Erni's government and demanded new elections. In January, however, he changed his mind and said "yes" to keeping the PC in office another month. The Clark that month forced two wayward provinces—Kuenn's Atatürk, which hadn't held required elections in years, and Jahn's Pórt Maxhestic, which wouldn't dream of holding elections—to submit to democratic rule. The King seized power in Atatürk, but in Pórt Maxhestic, Charmaine Chvala-Smith arose to topple half a decade of Jahnocracy, defeating Jahn humiliatingly after being denounced as "weak and feminine." Jahn had to flee to neighboring Maritiimi Province, which he quickly re-Jahnized.

The Cosâ also amended the Constituziun to allow write-in candidacies in elections, in order to encourage political participation. The barely active Erni was approved as Jahn's successor on the Cort, though the Cosâ warned that "jumper cables" might be needed to "activate" him. But by February, something unheard-of was happening: Jahn and the King jointly sponsored bills to revoke Talossa's recognition of an independent Palestine, and to join George Bush's war on Iraq (Iraq's doom was only a matter of time; why let the US get all the glory?). PM Erni declared war on Iraq in February.

On 15 January Dave Kuenn sent an odd letter to John Jahn, ostensibly apologizing for various anti-Gay remarks. He bashed the King, said he was quitting Talossa, and urged Jahn not to "comprimize" with the King. But the bigoted anal-phase nuttiness of The Integrity gave Jahn the peculiar experience of being outflanked from the Right. In US politics—which means more in Talossa than many realize—Jahn had also moved away from the fundamentalist right wing during his sexual revolution the previous year. He came to identify more with moderate-right positions that King Robert had also wobbled into in recent years; the two could now talk politics without arguing.

*Stotanneu* soon reported that Erni "probably" would not seek reëlection: "John Jahn, who has been cozying up to the PC for months, is seen as the most likely candidate to take over the PM-ship in the event of a PC victory (Jahn was last PM in 1985 and is positively drooling at the prospect)."

At the time it still seemed like a desperate move; the King really had nobody else to turn to for Prime Minister. But the alliance was cemented in mid-February with the announcement that the King's former ally, Tom Buffone, would run his own hippy leftist party against the PC in the election set for March; the King joked that it was a choice between "Gay government or Reggae government." Actually both parties stressed the same themes: Buffone's **Un-Named Party** (UP) sought to "reactivate" the country while the PC sought a "revitalized" country. *Stotanneu*, of course, endorsed Jahn:

*Whatever his extremist bizarrities may have been (and may still be), Jahn has been consistently impressive as a leader, a statesman, and above all an active, informed and interested Talossan citizen. At this moment in our nation's history all who are truly Talossan cry out for leadership that is active, informed and interested. Jahn's enthusiasm for Talossa, despite political disillusionment and last year's resignation as Secretary of State, has been unflagging. He deserves a chance.*

Buffone reaped his harvest among left-wingers for whom Jahn was still a pariah, but the Tories captured a majority of the 13 ballots cast and won handily with 108 seats to the UP's 92. Jahn took office as PM on 20 April 1991, picking Hitler's birthday as an "in your face" to the spooked Leftists. (Erni urged him to wait a week and a half, till the anniversary of Hitler's suicide.) His government got off the ground slowly, its first Clark not appearing until June. Jahn addressed the people in sober and tentative words which turned out rather odd compared to the dramatic upsurge in activity which his government would see. Jahn touted his "history of unquestioned involvement and commitment" to the RT, and promised that "I could run amok in this office, but I haven't the inclination to do so. Besides, I was not elected to smash the system—to reform, reorganize,

renew, rebuild. Rather, to retain."

On 1 May Jahn urged more parties—social ones, not political ones—"to 'revive' Talossans to some extent, and renew friendships as well." The "New Jahn" proclaimed his "seemingly irrevocable movement leftwards, away from an extremely closeted and hypocritical past." His increasing social openness went hand-in-hand with concentration on parties and community as vital to RT identity and survival. Not all was positive: the nation gaped as Jahn and Erni bickered over whether Frank Sinatra or Gloria Estefan should be the RT's "National Entertainer"; Erni (and Gloria) won. But the revival was genuine. Jack Schneider, who peppered the press with erudite and opaque legal complaints, stepped up to fill Dan Lorentz' empty seat on the Uppermost Cort, while Dan himself returned to the Cosâ after a long absence. Jahn replaced the numerically challenged Madison as Secretary of State.

The image of Jahn as Moses, leading the people out of apathy, began brilliantly on 20 July, when nine Talossans gathered at Talossa's lakefront for the annual TalossaFest, an afternoon of cooking out, snacking, music (Estefan *et al.*) and Talossa-oriented conversation. Jahn declared it "a wonderful success" and helped make it a permanent part of the RT social landscape. The atmosphere was very positive, perhaps due to the fact that a Living Cosâ was not held at the same time. It was sedate, pleasant, and fun: People were there to enjoy being Talossan. No one could mistake the facts. Talossa was back!

## PART EIGHTEEN: RE-ENERGIZATION.

*"Besides, I'm above negative campaigning. "*

Jahn's community spirit continued on 13 August 1991 when the Old Country Buffet ("OCB") in Brookfield, USA, hosted an "OCB Forum" on the *Constitutziun*, attended by Jahn, Buffone, Schneider, Madison and Erni. Schneider and Buffone were plotting to keep the King's 'disruptive influence' out of elections. "They want to tie me to a tree in Downer Woods for a month," claimed Madison, who used the occasion to unveil a "bill of rights," the Covenants of Rights and Freedoms. These 19 "Covenants" covered almost every right imaginable, including guaranteeing assisted suicide and bashing Creationism. It also banned "affirmative action" as racist and prohibited hippy protests. Voters later approved it all by a 77% majority with Schneider dissenting, objecting to the provision that said that only the government could take away private property.

Voters went to the polls on 30 September and approved a referendum to allow the Cosâ to strip "dead" people of their citizenship, a book-keeping measure to eliminate people from the rolls who hadn't been seen or heard of for years. Words were exchanged when it was found a week later that Tom Buffone had tried to vote, but left his ballot at Ben's house while Ben was out of town as the other ballots were counted. Ben urged Tom to sue the Secretary of State so a formal decision could be rendered. But like so many "aggrieved" Leftists, Buffone took out his frustrations on Talossa and the King rather than using the rules of the game to obtain justice.

On 12 October 1991 the Living Cosâ met for the first time in a year. Buffone, Jahn, Erni, Madison, and Schneider attended and debated 10 bills. Debate on an excruciatingly complex Schneider bill to strip the King of his veto took over an hour. It vaguely demanded that Ben and Jahn go into the *Constitutziun* and figure out exactly what needed to be changed for it to become law! It died on a party-line vote. Other bills included Schneider blasting Capitalism as un-Christian; another Jack bill proposed a secret ballot—it was so baffling it had to be withdrawn before a vote—and Jahn gave the RT what is purportedly the world's most liberal Gay rights law.

In November, the Cosâ approved a bill liberalizing the nation's electoral system, over the mass abstentions of the Left. It empowered all party leaders to distribute ballots, giving to all the power Ben once reserved to himself. Of course, the Left saw this as another evil plot to increase the King's powers. But soon the abstentionist Left started unspooling again. Lorentz and Buffone refused to run in the next elections—and Buffone refused to take seats in the next Cosâ. Speculation that Jack Schneider would rally the troops proved unfounded, and the PC entered the election unopposed for the first time in history.

The PC was solid behind their Leader, John Jahn, while the King was doing his best to convince Jahn the PC actually could still lose. Campaigning started in mid-December; voters were greeted only by Tory campaign literature which begged them to support Jahn rather than plunge the RT "into yet another Sargasso Sea of Dan-inspired backbiting." The PM stood amidst a froth of statistics and spoke of higher themes:

*I honestly feel I have earned both the votes of those Citizens who supported me last summer, and those who did not. I cannot specifically denounce any organized opposition to my reelection plans, because so far there isn't any. Besides, I'm above negative campaigning. Rather, I stand on my record, alongside the King and my other allies, and ask for your honest appraisal. I hope and trust I've earned your vote, and I hope you'll allow me to remain your Prime Minister.*

The King gave his annual Speech from the Throne on 26 December 1991, the Kingdom of Talossa's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday:

*Talossa's canvas has always had the ability to highlight the two kinds of artists who paint her: community-builders and community-users. Tom Buffone and Jack Schneider have opted out of an active rôle in the process for now. Whether they will go down in history as builders or users of Talossa remains to be seen, and Talossans who need their balancing voices are urged to urge them to speak up for balance.*

In an effort at canvas-painting, the PM tried to help the Leftists out with a party commemorating Talossa's birth day—after all, they won their Cosâ seats by endorsing "apolitical functions such as Independence Day celebrations." But the ever-baffling mood swings of the Left had swung again, and they refused to come! Instead, they set up a rival party with no Talossan trappings. Madison showed up with ballots and was jeered; Leftists who refused to run denounced the vote as a "sham" since only the PC was on the ballot. But thanks to the PC, write-in votes were now legal. Bob Murphy ran the **Spastic Progressives Against Regressive Konservatives**, or SPARK. Buffone ran a one-man **Anarchist** party. Others wrote "Mickey Mouse" in as a joke, refusing to vote. Macht and Lorentz realized they could form a **Mickey Mouse Movement** and claim those votes, representing, Macht wrote, "those who have seemed ambivalent and apathetic and who will rise to remind the powers that be that nothing is for certain in Talossa." Jack Schneider created a **Social, Economic and International Responsibility Party** (SEIRP), derided as 'syrup.' He was a day late in handing in his ballot, but Secretary Jahn generously counted it anyway. Jack then accused Jahn of "corruption" for allowing him to vote! Only in Talossa.

On 14 January 1992 our most hotly contested election in two years ended with the Cosâ evenly split between the PC and a host of Leftists, with Jahn still clinging to power on a technicality: a 50/50 tie counts as a win for the incumbent. Turnout was up, people were active—and it was clear the RT had truly been "re-energized" as PM Jahn proclaimed.

## PART NINETEEN: PERSONAL FANTASY FIEFDOMS.

*"[T]he Left really doesn't want, or know how to use, political power."*

Jahn followed up his re-election with a makeshift 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary party attended by six Talossans including, oddly, Davron, the right-wing Marines who stormed out of RT politics in 1990 calling Jahn a "Homo-Nazi" and Madison a "boring jerk" who had "ruined" the RT by not making Dave its king. They provoked the first big split in Jahn's government by asking for two Cosâ seats from the PC. Despite the fact the PC would have to depend on Davron's loyalty to preserve its razor-thin majority, Madison and Erni persuaded Jahn (against his good judgment) to give them seats, in the interest of getting as many citizens involved as possible. Erni downplayed their potential mischief ("They could be Karl Marx and Lenin, but they've got one seat each!"), but it was in fact a ruinous idea.

The Tories also gave away seats to John Eiffler, who had left Talossa in disgust in 1990 over excessive spilling of personal vitriol. He was welcomed back by all who saw him as something of the "conscience of Talossa." PM Jahn celebrated the uptick in national vibes in a February speech, in which he noted the return of so many active citizens:

"It's perhaps too early to speak of 'morning in Talossa,' but I don't think it's too far fetched to say that our Kingdom is better off than it was before I became Prime Minister. And the best is yet to come (I can hear the chants already: 'No third term! No third term!') We'll see about that."

Unfortunately, happy time gives way so easily to silly time in Talossa and much of Jahn's second term was spent in pitched battles with Davron's revived right-wing screed *The Integrity*. Davron launched a series of savage personal attacks on Jahn, while Madison sprang to Jahn's defence by quoting Hamlet and suggesting they used steroids, to which Davron reacted in horror, fearing a plot by the King of Talossa to have them thrown out of the US Marine Corps. All three newspapers—*Stotanneu*, *The Integrity*, and *TNN* (which Jahn revived that January)—were consumed by this bizarre morality play for months, which amounted mostly to name-calling on all sides, punctuated by frantic appeals for Davron to be "tolerant" while they accused Jahn of "necrophilia" and Madison of "childishness and lesbianism." It was not Talossa's finest hour.

Surprisingly, despite the escalating verbiage, Kuenn and Rosalez kept their promise and voted "yes" on the February Vote of Confidence in Jahn's government. The same month, the Cosâ finally restored to the Constituizun the right of native-born Talossans, or "Dandelions," to become Talossan voters upon reaching maturity. Not that the RT had a problem attracting immigrants; for the first time since 1989, a new player took the stage. **Nick Kovac**, a quasi-leftist high school debater from Riverside, was inducted into the nation that spring. The Left began to look longingly at him as a possible new leader—a Wunderkind to do the job of attacking the PC while Lorentz and Buffone could plop back into comfortable apathy again.

Irrked by Jahn's lack of enthusiasm for their proposed "Talossan Chess Championship," roommates Harry Wozniak, Bob Murphy and Dan Lorentz suddenly declared on 21 March 1992 that their apartment was "seceding" from Vuode Province and forming "Bradford Province"! By the 9th of May, Vuode and Bradford had reluctantly settled their border dispute and the new Province was recognized, in time for the ten-man chess fiesta to take place. Wes Erni defeated Nick Kovac to win the event. Jahn did not attend; he was fending off abstruse and ridiculous court challenges from the paranoid Jack Schneider.

Feelings were more positive when Talossans arrived for a cookout/Living Cosâ on 30 May. Half the population showed up! Debate on bills was as usual interesting, with the anti-King Left voting down the King's bill that would have given all the King's power away to a President elected by the Left. Jahn called their move "the biggest indication ever that the Left really doesn't want, or know how to use, political power." The Cosâ also faced a crucial Vote of Confidence. The Tories had taken a huge risk handing over so many of their seats to Eiffler, Kovac, and Davron. The defection of one seat could kill Jahn's government; for once Talossa's rulers had acted selflessly rather than crassly. But re-energization's bats were coming home to roost in the



Kingdom's legislative belfry: the Left most benefited from the huge upsurge in activity.

The treacherous Davron broke their promise and voted "no" on the May 1992 Vote of Confidence, but when they were joined by left-wing PC Cosâ Member John Eiffler, PM Jahn quickly dissolved the Cosâ on 30 May and called new elections to avert a humiliating defeat on the Vote of Confidence. The Left, totally re-energized, launched a vigorous campaign. Davron joined them, ran as "champions of evil," and vanished. No matter; Buffone and Lorentz flamed the PC as corrupt, warmongering, even somehow anti-abortion! The Un-Named Party (UP)'s grotesque, incendiary falsehoods set a new low in RT politics: "We've got to have leadership that encourages participation in Talossa. We must prevent Talossa from becoming the personal fantasy fiefdom of Jahn, Ben and their militaristic and bureaucratic allies." Jahn's government had given its own life away handing over Cosâ seats to all its enemies in an effort to involve as many Talossans as possible. Accusing it of discouraging participation was bizarre. The letter rankled Jahn and Madison to no end, but it did the trick.

When votes were counted on 14 July 1992, the UP had knocked the PC out of power and, failing to win a majority itself, formed a coalition with Jack Schneider's SEIRP party, ending two unbroken years of PC rule. *Stotanneu* sermonized: "A fog of illegitimacy hangs heavy over this new régime. We just hope their conduct and their bills show that they are truly as concerned about Talossa and participation as they were with getting elected. May Talossa survive this government!"

## PART TWENTY: VINDICTISM.

*"...a mind Jesuits would envy."*

The UP-SEIRP coalition government took office in July of 1992 across the aisle from a bitter and angry PC Opposition. A relatively moderate **'Minor'ity Party** (MP), started by new citizen Nick Kovac, what Jahn called the "big imponderable" in the new Cosâ, remained aloof from both sides.

Tom Buffone started things off by refusing to hold TalossaFest or write a Speech to the Nation, the normal first step in any new Government. He then left all his party's Cosâ seats vacant by refusing to tell Secretary of State Jahn whether anyone would occupy them. But the Clark went out to all who were registered as Cosâ Members—which so far included only the PC, the 'Minor'ity Party, and Jack Schneider. When the Vote of Confidence was held at the end of August, it revealed a total of 24 votes "for" and 55 "against" the Government: Tom had been voted out of office after only a month in power!

Buffone refused to accept the vote, claiming he hadn't "authorized" the Clark to be issued in the first place, despite members of his party, suspecting they might have seats, trying to vote on what Tom now called an "illegal" Clark. The Cort untangled this mess and pissed off both Buffone and his rival Jahn by ruling that the Clark was legal, but giving Buffone a second chance on the Vote of Confidence. The government was saved, but Buffone railed against the decision anyway. Justice Jack Schneider, who voted for the compromise, was soon beaten into a froth by his coalition partner Buffone, and he too began railing against the very Cort of which he was a member.

The result was an outbreak of gridlock in the Cosâ as UP members voted against anything PC regardless of its merits. To circumvent the Cosâ, Buffone issued a series of unpopular PD's—legal edicts—overturning various laws. Tories denounced these undemocratic efforts, but though he objected to nearly every one of them, the King signed them into law, bowing to the PM's authority. But when Buffone issued a PD negating the Cosâ's support for the candidacy of Bill Clinton, the King balked and demanded the Cosâ be able to vote on it. He vetoed the PD, using his veto pen for the first time in many years.

At the same time, Talossans were confronted with a Royal referendum on "national identity," asking them to officially define Talossa as "a community of persons having fun by doing things which are reasonably similar to what other (real) countries do—whether for reasons of tourist nostalgia, out of a lust for power, or in pursuit of parody." The King considered this moderate statement a repudiation of any "peculiarist government" that denied Talossa's true country nature. He warned that rejection of the referendum by Leftist obstructionists could have dire but unspecified consequences.

A big majority approved the referendum—but, thanks to Tom and Dan, it was one vote shy of the 2/3 majority it needed. Under pressure from an investigation by Buffone's Attorney General Bob Murphy, the King reacted by declaring his home province, Vuode, to be a sovereign Principality that was seceding from Talossa! The King reasoned: Buffone refused to accept the fact that Talossa was really a nation. Therefore, he couldn't complain if Vuode violated what the Constituziun called "national" law. "I will admit it does seem like you've managed to come up with something pretty clever," Lorentz conceded; he later denounced Vuode's "Unilateral Proclamation of Secession" as "bewilderingly complex and ambiguous," the product of "a mind Jesuits would envy."

Meanwhile, Buffone was faced with the resignation of John Jahn as Secretary of State. Nick Kovac had submitted some very long bills to the Clark, and the law put a fee on such big bills. Kovac refused to pay, and the PM refused to enforce the law, so Jahn quit out of disgust with Buffone's fiasco-ridden administration. Lorentz took over as Secretary.

Tempers boiled over on 16 November 1992 when King Robert dissolved the Cosâ. The government ignored him, claiming the King was no longer a Talossan citizen! The King claimed a "junta" had seized control; the country spun into a constitutional impasse with the King and Lorentz suing each other in the Uppermost Cort. The King argued that only if Talossa is a real country and Kingdom, was Vuode's secession illegal; he asked the

Cort to rule that Talossa is a country and that Dan's "Peculiarism" was an invalid philosophy, which the Cort (Erni, Schneider and Kovac) proceeded to do enthusiastically. With his point thus affirmed, Ben gave up Vuode's rebel posturing. The Cort did convict him of treason but only forbade him to vote on one Clark, since he was a "first time offender."

But before the King could not vote on the November Clark, PM Buffone decided to utterly perplex the nation. He dissolved the Cosâ and called elections two months early. *TNN* exulted: "The UP leadership has lost its way and it's been blown asunder in the aftermath." Voting began with Dan boasting that the UP would get 2/3 of the vote and strip the King of all his powers; this after refusing to strip him of any of his powers only months earlier. Madison led a manic, tireless campaign: scarcely a week into the election, the PC had seized enough votes to dash any hope of a UP victory. Given the UP's adverts in this election—as misleading as the last time—the Tories found this especially sweet.

When it all ended on 14 January 1993, the PC and UP tied at 87 seats each. The MP of Nick Kovac and newcomer **Andrew Worm** held the balance of power—and coalesced with the PC, bringing Jahn back as PM. After the frenetic election, Tom's failure to win Kovac's support, and the shaky coalition the PC now led, *Stotanneu* remarked: "It just doesn't get any weirder than this." Oh, yes it does!

## PART TWENTY-ONE: THE TUNGUSKA EVENT.

*"Tom, Jack: You blew it. End of story."*

On 19 January 1993, the newly-re-sworn-in PM, John Jahn, issued a Clintonesque Speech to the Nation, expressing his hope that he would preside over "a relatively tranquil period of government." Unbeknownst to him, Tom Buffone had just received a letter from the notoriously chimerical Brook Gläfke, who had voted PC in the election by submitting a VIA Form (an absentee ballot). But the letter charged that Jahn had somehow "controllingly" forged Brook's vote! Talossa was stunned. Would the election results have to be changed? A flurry of phone calls revealed that Jahn was livid, Lorentz confused, Buffone bloodthirsty, Kovac perturbed, and Madison perplexed. Only the Cort could untangle the mess.

Kovac threatened to pull out of the coalition. He conceded the PC had been "perfectly legal" in swearing Jahn in as soon as the election was over, but blamed the King for moving so quickly, as if somehow Brook's bolt from the blue could be anticipated. Tom Buffone, meanwhile, declared Jahn guilty, refused to take his own Cosâ seats, claimed he was still PM, and ended up abandoned by Dan Lorentz who condemned "the vindictism of people like Tom and Jack" and made it quite clear that Jahn was the country's legal PM. Jahn denounced Buffone's "ridiculous shenanigans" as "absurd and peevish."

Both Jahn and Madison filed chronologies of events to show how Jahn could not possibly have forged a ballot. Jahn suggested Gläfke be committed to "the Robert Dobberpuhl Home for the Insane," and wrote a psychoanalysis of his erstwhile friend; Madison focused on legal issues and assumed the rôle of Defence Attorney for Jahn in the expected Cort case.

In an unrelated move, Madison quit the Uppermost Cort and Nick Kovac was named his successor. It was Kovac's only bright spot all year. With the UP refusing to take seats, the PC dominated the "rump" Cosâ. Kovac's power broker rôle was nullified since there was no live opposition he could threaten to join. The Left collapsed in an orgy of self-recrimination while Kovac, in true RT Leftist style, blamed it all on the PC. The PC eventually tired of his carping and passed a law—with the MP's witless approval—abolishing the need for a quorum in the Cosâ, which rendered Kovac completely irrelevant.

Equally baffling was what *TNN* called "The case of the missing case." The "hang 'em high" Leftists proved utterly incapable of bringing Jahn to trial in the Brook ballot case, beyond, as *TNN* put it, "ranting to third parties about vague threats of illegitimacy, lies and deceit." The statute of limitations would expire on 14 April, after which Jahn could not be prosecuted. As everyone predicted, the Left never got their act together; the deadline passed with no trial. The issue that convulsed Talossa for months was quietly buried. *Stotanneu* gave it only the briefest mention: "Tom, Jack: You blew it. End of story." Leftists managed to blame Ben Madison, who was neither judge, jury, defendant, or plaintiff, for the collapse of their case! Apparently it was "Ben's responsibility" as founder of Talossa to make sure they prosecuted his client.

With abject rule of the Cosâ insured by the refusal of 87 UP seats to vote, the Tory Juggernaut rolled its big guns onto the May 1993 Clark. They gave the King a limitless Wisconsin-style line item veto, insured automatic succession to the Throne with no approval of an heir by referendum, and passed a law to expel apathetic citizens if they refused to vote in three consecutive elections. They created a national police and even approved a tongue-in-cheek holiday to honour Mussolini! This proved too much for Kovac and Worm, who bolted from the coalition and never returned to RT politics in any significant sense.

Jack Schneider—subject of *TNN* exposés for his rabbit-killing frenzies, communism, and bizarre eating habits—also lashed out at the country's leaders in a withering diatribe. He cursed the PC as a cabal of "Nazis and Fascists," and vowed to throw away any RT newspapers coming to his door. Next he vowed to gum up the business of the Cort by not participating. The Cosâ booted him off the Cort in June by a vote of 102-10—replacing him with his arch-enemy John Jahn.

For a moment it looked like the Left would revive. Dan Lorentz warned that Talossa was in a "serious wane" and announced a "Grain of Salt Party" for the upcoming election. But Lorentz and Kovac each lazily begged

the other to run; in the end, neither bothered to vote. The Left next sabotaged the 1993 TalossaFest by scheduling a rival party at the other end of the park; Jahn's "relatively tranquil" government ended its term in August with a blaze of insignificance enlivened only by the naturalization of **Gary Schwichtenberg**, a friend of the King's.

The election of 14 October 1993 was utterly pointless. The paranoid PC warned about a last-minute Leftist surge, but there was no surge. Leftists refused to vote. Only Brook turned out to vote against the PC (and for his own **Atheist Pantheist Party**) after the King publicly begged him to run to maintain a veneer of opposition. With Brook's ballot physically confirmed, voting ended with the lowest turnout in history: only 31% of voters voted for parties. The PC won an embarrassing 178 seats (89% of the vote) to Gläfke's 22. *TNN* called it "The Tunguska Event." Voters also lopsidedly passed referenda scrapping the Vague Principles (the last vestige of Leftism in the *Constituizun*) and officially defining Talossa the way the King had wanted before Vuode's 'secession' the previous year.

But the big news was the horrid turnout: only 11 voters. 23 had voted in the election before. *TNN*—ever the doomsayer to *Stotanneu*'s forced glee—wondered whether anyone would ever rise "to challenge the massive PC power machine. Whether this is good or bad for our nationette remains to be seen."

## PART TWENTY-TWO: DAVE GETS THE PARTY.

*"I was determined not to be Talossa's last Prime Minister."*

Things were gloomy. Not even the Great Depression of 1990 saw voter turnout so abysmal. The victorious PC had a near-record 38 vacant Cosâ seats for want of warm bodies to fill them, but by the time November's Cosâ business began the PC had dragooned John Eiffler into most of the empty seats. Eiffler soon replaced the inactive Kovac on the Uppermost Court.

In an ingenious move to keep some folks active and to provide headlines for the papers, Ben Madison gave up his infallible *Duce*-hood of the PC and invited John Jahn and Wes Erni to become equal partners in Talossa's oldest party. On 23 November the three held an official *Siança* (meeting) and a week later they adopted party Bylaws. Involvement was also stressed in the King's annual Speech, given at a moderately-attended 14th Anniversary Party on 11 December 1993:

*Let's face it: You're not all here because you want to be here; you're here because you want Talossa to be here. People should wake up in the middle of the night screaming about Talossa. Talossa is a place where we grownups can pretend to be children who are pretending to be grownups. But the game is not for everyone at every moment. While it's been a strain on friendships over the years, Talossa has also been a catalyst for friendship—would we all be together tonight if it were not for Talossa? This is one more affirmation for all of us here and for those not here who wish us well, that we are a people whose lives would be less bright were it not for this thing in our midst that draws us together called Talossa.*

Meanwhile, old faces reappeared. In January 1994, Nick Kovac and Andrew Worm sent *Stotannu* some bizarre letters about groping each other in caves. Five days later, Davron returned, declaring incidentally to the King that rape was normal male behaviour. "I heard it from Davron, and they heard it from feminists, so it must be true," muttered the King, who suspected the next election might be more lively than the last.

In February the Cosâ made Ben's attic computer room, "Electrabase," the nation's capital. It also formally "killed off" five citizens not heard from in years--the first in a slew of absent or inactive citizens to be officially "beheaded." **John McGarry**, the newest citizen, offered a bill on "Cool Space Stuff," which made him look goofy. And PM Jahn decided to step down from the post he had held so long and let the burdens of state be shouldered by the moderate and quiet Gary Schwichtenberg. A Living Cosâ was scheduled for 26 March at which the transition would be accomplished.

In the Cosâ everything was hunky-dory for the PC, but outside, Davron's return was having predictable results. The King handed them Atatürk Province in a generous offer; they responded by blasting him for *Stotannu*'s report on their rape endorsement.

The Living Cosâ of 26 March was full of all manner of constitutional arcana, easily outclassed by the resignation of Prime Minister John Jahn. He and the King gave speeches to extol Jahn's virtues and service. "I knew that this community had to be rebuilt," Jahn said, of his first days in office: "I never cared who was active, as long as someone was saying something to someone else about something. I was determined not to be Talossa's last Prime Minister." And the King, noting that Jahn helped "re-energize" Talossa and save her from oblivion in 1991, awarded him the Order of *Për la Nazijn*, the RT's highest decoration. Gary Schwichtenberg was sworn in as his successor, and passed the Vote of Confidence, 176 to zero.

The transition was marred only by Leftists refusing to attend the "Jahn Resigns" party. The King fretted over their moroseness, and warned the next election might see the PC brushing off only the ludicrous Davron in "a boring, chilly campaign." Lorentz and Murphy openly refused to run for office, but Kovac and Worm stepped in with a **Liberal Party** to preserve the Left's slim hopes. Davron ran a **War Party**.

On 15 May 1994 elections began for the 18th Cosâ, and the lines seemed clearly drawn. The PC ran as the party of activity, Liberals urged an end to the PC "monopoly," and the War Party opposed "immorality, irresponsibility, and weakness." June began with the PC expecting to win the election handily. Indeed, the King

was so eager to help poor Nick and Andy out, he jaunted off to give ballots to Dan Lorentz and Antonio Riley, who both enthusiastically voted Liberal.

Meanwhile a devious deal was struck. Dave Kuenn, who sought help against the PC, called Nick Kovac to talk coalitions. The bored Kovac instead secretly gave Kuenn control of the Liberal Party, with all its votes! The right-wing fecal-obsessed Kuenn forged advertisements from 'Andrew Worm' touting the "left-of-centre" Liberals. The PC snoozed, unaware a Liberal media blitz was peppering swing-voters with letters. But two days before the votes were counted, bubble-headed Nick broke his silence and sent Ben a note: "Dave gets the party." Madison sprang out of bed onto the campaign trail and changed enough minds to avert disaster. Brook Gläfke voted Liberal but sent his ballot a day late. Had he and Kovac been a bit more coordinated, the Liberals would have won and Dave Kuenn would have become Prime Minister of Talossa.

In the end the PC barely held a majority of 105 seats. The Liberals got 74. Florence Yarney's protesting **Dan Party**, which urged the destruction of Talossa, won an alarming 21 seats. Turnout surged back from October's dismal 38% to a very impressive 73%. Schwichtenberg became PM but the PC only controlled a tiny majority over a huffing and puffing opposition. *Stotannen*'s forecast for the rest of 1994 was "thunderstorms."

## PART TWENTY-THREE: SECRETS.

*"[I]f campaigning for votes is not a public act, I don't know what is."*

In the days following the election, the PC's micromargin of victory grew into a comfortable lead, thanks again to the Left. Florence Yarney, whose "Dan Party" sought to destroy Talossa, lost heart and handed over her 21 Cosâ seats not to Dan, but to King Robert, her ideological opposite. The King gave some to Lorentz and Prachel, but kept a cushion for the PC. PM Schwichtenberg, meanwhile, gave his first Speech to the Nation on 5 July, outlining his government's goals: curb Davron's "excessive attitudes," boost the RT population, and revive a spirit of convivial, participatory partisanship.

Opposition Leader Kuenn was also making headlines, with a convoluted and unsuccessful "Momgate" scandal: an attempt to sneak his own mother past the Cort to have her become a citizen: a loyal pocket voter who didn't have to be lied to to vote for him. But he was unwilling to have any Talossans actually meet her, so the plan fizzled.

King Robert was vowing not to let Kuenn's trickery in the election campaign go unpunished. His "Andrew Worm" forgery had still not been presented for public view, a violation of the "You Can Run But You Can't Hide" law, passed earlier by the Cosâ to let all parties scrutinize each other's campaign adverts to minimize lies and fraud. But Kuenn refused to comply—he handed over a copy with the important parts blacked out—so Madison sued him in the Cort on 30 July.

Kuenn's "Momgate" antics lulled the King into expecting easy victory. Kuenn cited the Constituziun's 7<sup>th</sup> Covenant, guaranteeing a right to privacy in the mail, subject only to what it called "reasonable" restrictions. So, he argued, he could not be compelled to make his advertisements public. Ben argued that "if campaigning for votes is not a public act, I don't know what is," and urged the Cort to uphold this "reasonable" view. The Cort took only minutes to render a unanimous verdict: They ruled that Kuenn's advertising was indeed a "private" matter, and threw out Ben's "You Can Run" law as unconstitutional!

Jahn's *TNN* defended Jahn's Cort decision, largely on the grounds that Ben's legal presentation had been "boring." *Stotanneu*, of course, ridiculed it; Lorentz blasted the Cort as a "Black Box" which magically produced unjustifiable decisions without regard for "rational arguments" or documents or Talossan tradition. After spending about 24 hours fuming and plotting a rematch in court, Madison decided to fight fire with fire. The Cort ruled that all written documents were "private correspondence." So, Madison got PM Schwichtenberg to authorize a referendum in August, to amend the 7th Covenant. And since referendum ballots were written documents, they were "private correspondence," and he was under no obligation to send any to Davron, or even tell them there was a referendum going on at all! When the votes were counted at the end of August, they unanimously enacted Ben's position into law.

When Kuenn found out in September what had happened, he was predictably, if inconsistently, livid. He threatened to sue the Cort and vowed revenge on everyone who voted "yes" in the "secret" referendum. The Cort told him to put it in writing. He refused, and ranted for weeks while the PC chortled at him.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Party in the Cosâ was evaporating. Secretary of State Jahn received no Clark votes from Liberal MC Ron Rosalez in July or August, and his 24 seats were therefore put up for "by-election" at the behest of a new law. Kuenn claimed Rosalez had voted, only Jahn was lying about it. Voters transformed the 24 Liberal seats into 21 PC and 3 Peculiar Way (Lorentz) seats. Kuenn kept whining while *TNN* lampooned his long history of "bungling miscues."

The PC, too, had begun to bungle. PM Schwichtenberg had dropped out of sight, failing to vote at all on the November Clark. Jahn and Madison blasted him in the press and began to front **John McGarry**, an irreverent Irish speech pathologist, as a new PM. On the December Vote of Confidence, Schwichtenberg was pummeled



by a vote of 25 to 130, and while it had no legal significance—the VOC in the last month before elections is cosmetic—it sealed his doom within the PC party. *TNN* ran the obligatory Schwichtenberg-is-a-failure articles; McGarry proclaimed himself the energetic new leader who would "wake up the potential that is Talossa" from slumber and dormancy.

Talossans partied on 11 December to celebrate 15 years of Talossan nationhood. The King, now age 29, gave an upbeat Speech from the Throne in which he hoisted a mirror behind his head to exclaim, "I'm losing my hair! Is Talossa responsible for this?" Yes, he concluded, but it was worth it because "friendship is worth more than hair." But the King was not the only star: Dan Lorentz and John Eiffler sank their tons of differences and set up a **Vacillation Party**, the first serious Leftist challenge to the PC for almost two years. The King, as usual, panicked, proclaiming that the revitalized Vacillators would trounce his PC by almost two-to-one.

Voters went to the polls in February, faced with the PC, Vacillation, and Davron's "Party of Death," which ended up with 27 seats, or so everyone thought. As usual, it would have been close had the Left shown some competence, but instead the PC ran away with 120 seats, creaming the poor Vacillators who got only 40. Lorentz forgot to vote; Eiffler left his ballot at the wrong house. Tom Buffone was so put off by their bumbling that he ran an "Anarchist Party" against them and got 13 seats. Arch-Leftist Melanie Freeman was swayed by a garish PC "Contract with Melanie" ad campaign. "STUPID TWITS!" cried *TNN*, as the PC gloated; John McGarry was sworn in on 19 February 1995 with a solid, enthusiastic majority behind him. They would not be there for long.

#### **IV. 1995 – 1999: THE RENAISSANCE**

*"Even governments officially committed to apathy cannot destroy it."*

## PART TWENTY-FOUR: TOUMAYAN THE WORLD.

*"Ben and I are probably too inept at this stuff to get much accomplished."*

John McGarry took office as Prime Minister just in time to witness the end of Dave Kuenn. On 13 February 1995, the Cort convicted Kuenn of violating the "You Can Run But You Can't Hide" act and tore up his February election ballot. Worse yet, careful analysis showed Kuenn had also forged Andrew Worm's ballot. Madison and Jahn made strenuous attempts to contact Worm and verify this, but Worm was not to be found.

In March the country was momentarily distracted by its King's turbulent and inexplicable marriage to a Chinese princess named Jenny, and by diplomatic recognition from Hutt River Province, an Australian microstate which sought to sell us stamps. But when the Cosâ got back to business it voted to expel Dave Kuenn for his latest crimes. Kuenn responded by dropping out of politics and, in the spring of 1996, failed to vote in his third consecutive election. Kuenn was officially declared "dead," thus ending his smarmy and decadent career.

Political death, in fact, stalked the Kingdom in 1995. Talossans waited impatiently for McGarry's mandatory Speech to the Nation, but McGarry alternately quit returning calls and promised the speech was "in the mail." "Imagine your government being described as 'Schwichtenberg Lite,'" *Stotanneu* opined, while *TNN* blasted the PM as an "inconsiderate, incommunicado incompetent," and went on to quote Pushkin. The Vacillation Party also drifted into inactivity. Josh Macht and Sandee Prachel lost most of their 20 Cosâ seats in a May by-election. The King offered the PM-ship to John Eiffler of the Vacillators, but Eiffler was too smart to take it.

Since Jahn's resignation in 1994, the PC had fallen into much the same slump as the Left: an endless casting about for "new blood" to lead the party. First Gary, then McGarry, had failed the test. The latest Great Bearded Hope arrived in May, when Wes Erni's old friend **Geoff Toumayan**, a hairy half-Jewish, half-Palestinian wargamer, applied for citizenship. He was quickly approved, due in part to Senior Justice Jahn of the Uppermost Cort failing to invite Justice Eiffler to Geoff's formal interview, a fiasco which ended with angry letters in the press and Jahn promising to behave himself next time.

With Toumayan browbeaten into accepting the Tory "invitation" to become PM, the McGarry charade came to an end. In June the Tories unsheathed their daggers and, for the first time ever, consigned their own PM to political outer darkness by voting him out on the Vote of Confidence.

Elections began two months early. The Vacillators charged out of the gate; Lorentz drew up complex plans for victory and Eiffler advertised them in *Stotanneu*. But they forgot to get on the ballot and had to rely on write-ins. Only Sandee Prachel and Josh Macht voted for them; Lorentz and Eiffler got involved in a Keystone Cops routine involving fax machines and (to make a long story short) didn't vote. They won only 36 seats compared to 164 for the PC. The PC would have won even more seats, since a new law penalized Josh and Sandee for not voting fast enough! Fortunately, the PC had failed to notify them about the law. To avoid a scandal, John Jahn acted in his authority as a Cort Justice and quietly "injected" it out of existence.

Geoff Toumayan was sworn in as Talossa's 23rd PM on 15 September. He quickly addressed the nation—chivalrously not mentioning the fact McGarry had failed to do so—and put forth his government's main goal: a Talossan computer revolution. While he warned that "Ben and I are probably too inept at this stuff to get much accomplished," Geoff announced plans for Talossa to establish a presence on the rapidly growing (or as Jurassic Jahn termed it, 'faddish') Internet.

The drive for Talossa to put itself on the Internet went back to September 1994, when Dan Lorentz had first suggested the idea. The Cosâ urged him to look into the matter, and of course he failed to do so. Backed by Ben Madison and Sandee Prachel, Toumayan's new initiative grew largely out of Talossa's social doldrums, typified by the failure of the 1995 TalossaFest due to lack of responses. Busy with work and school—*Stotanneu* and *TNN* had to merge temporarily in September—the country suffered from what Dan termed "adultification syndrome." The Internet seemed to offer Talossa a less time-consuming format for its newspapers and government. On 21 October 1995, the RT officially went "online" with its own e-mail address (actually the

King's) and began advertising itself on Usenet newsgroups.

By the time Talossans celebrated the RT's annual birthday party on 9 December 1995, they were joyous. Cort and Cosâ approved three new citizens: **Brendan Duddy**, **Matthias Muth**, and **Nathan Freeburg**, all Marquette University grad students (hence their collective nickname: "Mugrads"). The trio rapidly unveiled a right-wingish **Clockwork Orange Party** (COP) complete with by-laws, armbands, and boundless energy that startled the PC and washed away any lingering talk of an apathy threat to the Kingdom in the near future. Mugrads soon took control of Mussolini Province and Brendan Duddy supplanted the inert Wes Erni as Secretary of State.

Conversation turned back to a favourite Talossan obsession: national identity. Talossa's foray onto the Internet began poorly. For months there was no response to the RT's meagre newsgroup adverts. This suited some just fine. Massive immigration by faceless, unverifiable people worried many Talossans, and in December 1995, the Cosâ voted to restore the defunct Senäts, the King-appointed upper house of Parliament, to give Old Growth Talossans living in and around the Kingdom the upper hand just in case. But the lack of response lulled Talossans into thinking their Internet experiment had failed. Nobody expected the roller-coaster ride that was to follow.

## PART TWENTY-FIVE: HTTP://WWW.EXECPC.COM/~TALOSSA.

*"...arrogant attitudes..."*

The country's traditional paranoia about "national identity" was out in full force in early 1996, as Madison, Jahn, and even Dan Lorentz—active once again in the press for the first time since 1990—wrote feverish editorials in the country's Internet debate. Jahn let it be known he despised computers and all they stood for, including potential "Cybercits." Talk of new faces in far places put Jahn on edge—he even proposed a bill banning them from the country, which failed miserably.

On 15 January 1996 the country launched its official home page on the World Wide Web. It received a handful of lukewarm responses, most asking about the Talossan language. By the end of the month Jahn had given his grumbling blessing to a new citizenship law applying stringent requirements for all potential Cybercits, and as it turned out, it was just in time.

**Chris Collins**, a 14-year-old Esperantist from Virginia, applied for citizenship in February as the country's first Cybercit, whom the RT would have to admit without a face-to-face meeting. As Talossans wondered if Talossa would colonize the Internet or if the Internet would colonize Talossa, the folks at Netscape added Talossa's home page to their list of the world's most interesting web sites. Suddenly Talossa was the focus of worldwide publicity, including an article in the *Montréal Gazette*. The King was deluged with e-mail; in the next month, more than 25,000 people visited the home page—and more than 2,000 of them sought information on citizenship in Talossa (population: 30)!

Nearly all were put off by the country's immigration laws, requiring book purchases and a Cort interview. But by the time the delirium ended in March, there were five serious applications: **Sean Hert**, a curmudgeonly, conservative hacker; **Marc-André Dowd**, a Québec separatist; **Gjermund Higrapp**, a Norwegian leftist; **Alberto Manassero**, a right-wing Italian political operative; and **Ken Oplinger**, head of the Chamber of Commerce in Fremont, California.

The Cybercit surge led to profound changes. On 10 April 1996, *Stotannen* abandoned ten years as a photocopied newspaper and went over to an online format. The handful of active citizens not on the Internet (admittedly a crucial handful, including the whole Uppermost Cort: Jahn, Erni and Eiffler) were suddenly at a disadvantage and were often shut out of the information loop. For weeks, till Ben figured out his printing software, Old Growthers had to rely on ugly HTML printouts of his paper rather than the gorgeous version they were used to. No one reacted to the new order with more vehemence than Jahn, self-proclaimed fan of manual typewriters, who snarled for months about the "arrogant attitudes" of Internet-addicted Talossans while blasting the whole thing as a cold and smarmy distraction from "real" personal interaction. He missed the whole point that Talossa had embraced the Internet precisely because there was very little personal interaction left among the country's apathetic, in-bred East Side core.

Soon Oplinger, Higrapp and Dowd had formed their own "new left" party, the **ZPT** ("Defenders of the Land of Talossa," in Talossan) and set up an online newspaper, *L'Avintguárd*, just in time to cover the country's national elections that they couldn't vote in yet. PM Toumayan's unexpectedly brilliant first term ended and elections began in March. Lorentz ran a tiny pro-Internet **Third Wave Party** (3WP) that gathered no attention. Soilitarians Eiffler and Prachel fielded their Vacillation Party while the PC licked the gooey caramel centre.

Nathan Freeburg's right-wing **Clockwork Orange Party** (COP) proved to be the most active party of the four. Pretending to be left-wing and reaching out to the ZPT, Freeburg managed to forge a "United Front" of all the non-PC parties, in a grand anti-Tory alliance to make Freeburg Prime Minister. The COP campaigned hard for votes and nearly ended the PC's three-year reign. Bizarrely, it all fell apart when Freeburg tried to reinflate Davron and bring them back to RT politics as COP voters. Not only did Freeburg fail, but he blamed the attempt on someone who wasn't even a citizen! His antics, and the mere whiff of Davron in the air, stained the COP's reputation just enough to send swing-voter Gary Schwichtenberg scurrying back to his second choice, the PC. Stunningly, even Tom Buffone voted PC, for the first time since 1989, after hearing of Freeburg's attempted necrophilic acts with the dying Davron.

Things got even sillier when Freeburg secretly proposed to the King that Cybercits be banned from holding the office of Prime Minister. *Stotanneu* revealed this latest plot, and the "United Front" collapsed at once. Freeburg's party were condemned as right-wing extremists but they expelled him from the party; it split into three chunks. He denounced the new COP leader, Matthias Muth, as a "fascist," and warned that the COP sought to "wreck Talossa" for fun. This was followed by more grand guignol scandals, such as Brendan Duddy stealing a letter that Muth had signed, which implied that Muth too had quit the COP, thus leaving the party with no members. All this left the COP the laughing-stock of the country, a fitting heir to Davron. Muth, miffed, set about quietly rebuilding its fortunes.

Uncertainty over the massive Cybercit influx and revulsion at what Muth called the COP's "nathantics" led to an election made in heaven for the gloating PC. On 14 April they secured a massive win in the face of credible and incredible opposition parties, capturing 118 Cosâ seats, to 12 for the 3WP and 35 each for the COP and the Vacillators. Schwichtenberg, surveying the damage, said the Tories deserved to win since they were a "steady hand" guiding the country through uncharted cyberspace. But whether Geoff Toumayan—or anyone—could really handle the country's unprecedented growth remained to be seen.

## PART TWENTY-SIX: AMISH, NAZIS & POCKET VOTES.

*"How can you help us rule?"*

During 1996, more people joined Talossa than in the ten previous years combined. Not only did this generate a vast amount of news, but it means that *Ar Päts* can no longer name every new immigrant except when they do 'important' things.

Ken Oplinger's ZPT, whose members weren't citizens yet, asked all parties for a few Cosâ seats so they could join political life. To their shock, the Opposition refused to part with a single seat, so the PC was left to hand one over to each ZPT member. The King named Oplinger, the most active Opposition figure, and publisher of *L'Avintguárd*, to serve as Opposition Leader. Old Growth Leftists denounced this as a fiendish plot; Sandee Prachel called it "a definite chess move to factionalize the Left," while Lorentz ranted about it being "an attempt by the King to make Talossa into a one party state"! Apparently the ZPT was not sufficiently insane; the Left wrote them off as PC collaborators. The King finally yanked Oplinger's nomination in the face of Left-wing blandishments. Lorentz then flip-flopped and joined the ZPT.

Not that the Government was any more united. On 8 May, cybercritics Jahn and Nathan Freeburg teamed up to create a "Talossa For Talossans Front" (TFTF) that warned "it's all over" for Talossa if Cybercits were allowed equal rights; Jahn warned that they would somehow impede TalossaFests or other local RT social functions. He blasted Cybercits, and the King, for their "seemingly unbridled arrogance" (citing the term "snail-mail"). Chris Collins laughed at the non-Cybers, calling them "Amish," but the ZPT reacted with horror, calling the TFTF "Nazis" for discriminating against legitimate Talossans, and warning Jahn might try exterminating the Cybercits. Madison as always positioned himself in the middle, denouncing Jahn for pinning "little yellow computers" on their coats but criticizing the "rampant paranoia at both extremes."

PM Toumayan saw Jahn's antics as a direct affront to his government, in which Jahn held several portfolios. He suspended Jahn from his posts on 13 May. Jahn responded by moderating and booted Freeburg out of his own TFTF. At PC HQ, Jahn and Madison hammered out a set of vague compromises and Jahn was restored to office, but he was soon attacking Ben's *Berber Project*, a "scholarly" defence of the idea that ancient Berbers settled Talossa. Like a decade earlier, Jahn blasted this "bald-faced Berber balderdash." Jahn soon wrote a triumphalist history of the old TNP, plotted with the COP's Matthias Muth to oppose Madison and Toumayan on Cybercits and Berbers, and even encouraged Muth's abortive scheme to toss Justice Wes Erni off the Uppermost Cort so Muth could attain his life's ambition: a seat on the Cort.

Meanwhile, Madison and Jahn were both getting fed up with Geoff Toumayan for having done little since his April re-election (beyond reacting to Jahn crises). When they began hunting for a new PM, however, this changed. Geoff issued a long speech on 17 July, blasting Jahn's glib dismissal of the *Berber Project*, and he let Talossa know he was upset that Jahn, Culture Minister in a PC cabinet, was thwarting the King's efforts to promote RT culture. He even asked Jahn to quit the PC. *Stötannen* reported all this, the ZPT took good advantage of it, painting Toumayan falsely as "Ben's puppet" and attacking Madison personally in an effort to prove itself to the Talossan Left. All this convinced the Tories that whatever else, they really did want to win. Their emergency party séance of 23 July 1996 was, as *L'Avintguárd* proclaimed, a "love-fest." Jahn, who found he couldn't trust the opposition any more than he could the PC, returned to the fold. "It's much more fun to crush the opposition," Toumayan declared.

On 17 August ten Talossans gathered for TalossaFest and a Living Cosâ, including Secretary of State Sean Hert, who drove more than 500 km to join the festivities. Oplinger participated by phone from California; the social wall between Cybercits and Old Growth Talossans seemed to fade away, and everyone felt positive. Talossa soon welcomed its first Cybercit from Australia, graphics whiz **Evan Gallagher**, who quickly made all the right friends and rose to become Secretary of State (SoS) in an amazingly short time. Gallagher admitted publicly that he was motivated by "raw Machiavellianism," but no one realized: a new Davron had entered the fold.

The positive spirit faded rapidly in September when a committee led by Matthias Muth began modestly

rewriting the 1988 Constituziun in light of the country's recent changes. The ZPT denounced every minor change backed by the PC (or the status quo, if the PC endorsed that) as a plot to "give Ben more power." Nathan Freeburg used the occasion to demand the PC form a coalition with his COP, proclaiming himself an "authoritarian conservative" seeking to "legislate life and rule it! How can you help us rule?" Toumayan laughed him off and a firestorm of bad press forced Freeburg to quit Talossa (temporarily). COP member Brendan Duddy quit for good.

In November the RT began its first election in Cyberspace, run by Gallagher. The whole Opposition blasted the King's sister and other less active Talossans as "PC pocket votes," urging their removal from Talossa for the crime of "inactivity" in a letter written by Muth which Ben called "almost racist." Tom Buffone called the PC "the only liberal party left in Talossa" and called the letter's ZPT co-signatories "Nazis" for discriminating against legitimate Talossans. Oplinger then flip-flopped and vowed to pack Talossa with his own pocket votes recruited to "give the ZPT the votes it needs" to win future elections! In the resulting furor, Oplinger quit as head of the ZPT; the untried **Mark Pendl** became ZPT leader but not in time to rescue the Opposition's sizzling chestnuts. Unbelievably the PC was re-elected on 14 December 1996 with 56% of the vote over 5 frustrated minor parties, and Geoff Toumayan became the first PM in RT history to win 3 successive mandates—thanks to voter backlash over the "pocket votes letter." The COP had blown its second election in a row.



## PART TWENTY-SEVEN: INJURIOUS IMPUTATIONS.

*"What the hell is going on?"*

The votes were barely counted before Vacillation Party ineptitude sparked a constitutional crisis. Having left all its Cosâ seats vacant (!), the party headed for a huge by-election, and the PC expected to win the lion's share of seats. But SoS Evan Gallagher announced that by-elections were somehow 'unfair': so he simply refused to hold them. Heated exchanges with PM Toumayan followed. Finally the King "pardoned" the Vacillators, who took their seats, but Talossans were floored by Gallagher's self-righteous contempt for the law.

Meanwhile the chagrined COP merged with Gallagher's Whigs to form the "Silver Phoenix Party" (SPP), insisting that it—not the PC—represented the "balanced centre." To the PC, SPP ideas were "extremist" (like abolishing PDs and the veto) and the SPP was hiding its "real right-wing agenda." Calling the SPP a "party of prevaricators," *Stotannen* likened it to Davron's 1994 "Liberal Party" scam, claiming Gallagher had misled the Cosâ in his 1996 application for citizenship. So in March, 1997, Gallagher fired a landmark "libel suit" at *Stotannen* in the Cort, charging Ben with "injurious imputations."

The Cort itself had changed. Justice Erni had retired, to the dismay of Justice Eiffler; Jahn sneered, "Don't let the door hit you on the way out." The King chose Geoff Toumayan over Matthias Muth to replace Erni, but public outrage at the idea of Geoff being both PM and Cort Justice forced the PC into a "leadership campaign" to pick a new PM. The candidates—Jahn, Alberto Manassero, and **Dale Morris**, a teenage Texan Talossan-enthusiast—made a convoluted deal, and as Geoff joined the Cort, Manassero was sworn in as PM on 6 March.

The libel suit that Eiffler dubbed "the O.J. Trial" rattled on for weeks. Madison hurled barbs and subpoenas, mainly at the Cort, and blamed Gallagher for trying to "censor" the press. Manassero vowed to defend free speech "even on the sex of angels." The SPP's **J.P. Griffin** took the escalating verbiage as an opportunity to launch savage attacks at Ben—threatening at one point to e-mail bomb him—and vowed to recruit "College Republicans" to bolster a rightist seizure of Talossa. At that, SPP members scurried for cover; Gallagher abandoned the party and his lawsuit, his reputation in rubble.

PM Manassero retired on 22 April to move "to Venezia—no, not the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia." Deputy PM Dale Morris took over at once and appointed John Jahn to head an "immigration commission" (his part of the PC leadership deal). Talossans backed the PC's vague immigration policies, but debated how large the country should grow.

The issue was sidetracked when Ben Madison announced a reform package called the "Real Cosâ," which became the keystone of the "Organic Law," designed to replace the clunky 1988 Constituziun. A committee led by Muth had been writing it for nine months. It would turn what some called the "D&D Talossa" system of a 200-seat 'fake' Cosâ into a 'real' Cosâ of 20 elected people—plus an elected Senäts with 1 Senator from each of the seven Provinces. Remarkable consensus with Madison on several 'OrgLaw' issues helped convince both Muth and Gallagher to join the PC! PC President Jahn was ecstatic; he'd tried to win Muth over for months. PM Morris stunned the RT by naming Gallagher Deputy PM; the switcheroo left the Opposition dizzy and demoralized. "What the hell is going on?" lamented the ZPT's leader, Mark Pendl.

The PC's bragging didn't last long. In April the Cosâ approved a ZPT bill to oust Gloria Estefan as "National Entertainer," a status she'd held since 1991 thanks to then-PM Wes Erni's unhealthy fixation. Jahn, again, was the crucial anti-Erni vote; Erni quit the PC. Another PC MC, **Ryan Hughes**, bolted to the ZPT after setting up an online "Discussion Group" that helped them air their attacks on Madison and Jahn, but the PC learned to hold its own in the new forum. Tempers flared when J.P. Griffin joined the left-wing ZPT and set up a quasi-official "Talossa" website without Talossa's consent; Justice Eiffler injuncted it and Morris formed a committee to study it. All the while, online Talossans fought the "Great Bug Nations War" against a consortium of pesky spam-flinging "micronations", online Talossa-clones egged on by a pseudonymous Brazilian teenager obsessed with getting Talossa to 'recognize' them.

Voters approved the OrgLaw by a giddy 94% majority in a July referendum, but controversy soon followed when the Cort forced two provinces to elect their own Senators after local voters failed to do so. The decision seemed to violate the OrgLaw's provincial autonomy rules—so SoS Gallagher once again defied the law and refused to hold the elections. An agitated Cort caved in in the face of "Evan's Rebellion," but all around Talossa people began to turn against "above the law Evan"—including Ben, who'd thanklessly backed his actions.

Meanwhile Talossa's general election lumbered on pointlessly with the parties taking online potshots on Ryan Hughes' 'Disco Group.' But on 2 August 1997 its moderator plunged the RT into darkness when he shut the Group down to protest *Stotannen* 's whining about his posting "anonymous personal attacks." Mark Pendl and the ZPT went postal with an e-mail flame war calling Madison "a bastard, a nut, and an asshole." Morris politely asked Hughes to put the Group back up.

Pendl looked unstable while Morris looked 'presidential'; voters reacted accordingly. On 14 August 1997 Morris' PC captured 12 of 20 Cosâ seats and 5 of 6 contested Senatorships. The ZPT took 6 Cosâ seats; minor parties got 2. Sandee Prachel and Josh Macht, co-heads of the incalculable Vacillators, were busy getting married and didn't vote. Vacillator John Eiffler, furious at Madison for not 'making' him vote, quit politics (again). He was soon followed into retirement by Geoff Toumayan, who was tired of colliding with Gallagher over legal issues. The King had two Cort vacancies to fill, putting the intricate new OrgLaw to an unexpected test.

## PART TWENTY-EIGHT: TALOSSA'S VIETNAM.

*"Make sure none of this gets back to Talossa."*

After weeks of Hamlet-like flip-flopping, King Robert named Matthias Muth and Tom Buffone to the Cort vacancies on 31 August 1997. But his decision to appoint Muth over the jealous runner-up, Evan Gallagher, lit a long, long fuse.

Gallagher was serving as Governor of Pengöpäts—the RT's flimsy claim to a chunk of Antarctica, which had lately become a symbol for a Cybercit clique he had set up, known alluringly as "cultural democracy." Their plans were foggy, but they warned that if their "true intentions" became public, "Ben" would (somehow) throw them out of Talossa! Gallagher declared the Talossan language "boring" and concocted a rival "language" and "culture" in Pengöpäts, complete with (extinct) imaginary friends as "natives." Stridently calling all criticism of his fakery "fascist," he calculated that with Toumayan, Erni, and Eiffler gone, and Jahn not on the 'net, the "Old Growth" was headed for the saw mill: and it was his turn to be Talossa's next Ben Madison. And if he failed, he would wreck Talossa.

In the inevitable *mêlée*, Gallagher's plans to dictate every line of RT law and culture were easily out-argued. Like mad old Dobberpuhl, he chose to quit the RT, but with a twist: he'd secretly use Talossa as a recruiting office for his own micronation! Prospective citizen **Anthony Lawless**, a dope-smoking "anarchist witch" from New Zealand, joined him in a laughable 'suicide pact' to set up a 'we-hate-Talossa-club' along with perennial misfit Ryan Hughes. Eager to provoke a reaction that would "force" them to quit Talossa, they cranked up the rhetoric. Lawless called his putative Talossan homeland "fake; some suburb of Milwaukee that we'll probably never go to." Still, the Cort could only manage a 3-way tie on Lawless' citizenship in September, but it was enough. On cue, the shocked (shocked!) trio declared themselves victims of RT "lies and hatred" and stormed out. The unbalanced **Charles Sauls** took over as SoS after first siding with the traitors. The King wrote Evan off as "Transdavronian" and everyone hoped they'd finally heard the last of him.

The losses barely notched the graph as the Ziu (Cosâ and Senäts together) approved new citizens from as far away as Cyprus and Brazil, boosting the population. The Old Growth made a startling comeback as Tom Buffone, Gary Schwichtenberg, and John Jahn—yes, *that* John Jahn—got on the 'net. The end of the Cyber vs. Amish issue turned Talossa into a hotbed of social rest, disturbed only by a goofy scheme by J.P. Griffin to sell his "Talossa" web domain to a porno company. Others poured time into the Talossan language and took Talossan names, like **Tomás Gariçêir**, who set up his own website in fluent Talossan and even learned to speak the language. The RT's rejection of cultural phoniness—what *TNN* called "hare-brained Gallagherism"—was complete.

On 6 December 1997 the fabled Gary Cone—who came 'home' to join Talossa—hosted Talossa's 18th annual fête of sovereignty. Present were a revived Wes Erni, who rejoined the PC and got his old job back as Governor of Pengöpäts; and John Eiffler, who replaced decadent Dan Lorentz as Senator from Florencia Province. 16 new citizens had joined in 1997, and King Robert—now 32—quoted one in his Throne Speech: "Talossa has passed the test of adulthood. It cannot be outgrown. Even governments officially committed to apathy cannot destroy it." He was pelted with Nerf balls amid peals of laughter. Tomás Gariçêir made the *haxb* ('pilgrimage') from far-off Scotland, Talossans began to videotape a documentary on Talossa, and silly Brook Gläfke had his citizenship restored.

All the success and happiness grated on the Gallagher cult (which *Stotannen* unhelpfully called "Lawlessland"). On the RT's birthday, they hit Wittenberg (the RT's new disco group) with a barrage of posts calling Talossa "corrupt and quasi-fascist," and sent anti-Talossan spam to prospective citizens. *Stotannen* beat the war drums, calling it "Talossa's Vietnam"; but as the harassment intensified, the voice heard least often was PM Dale Morris, who had come—in typical Tory fashion—to rely too much on Jahn and Madison to run the country. So on 19 January 1998 the PC leaped over a whole generation to pick middle-aged San Francisco professor **Dan Wardlow** to carry the torch—the fourth PM in 11 months.

The insecure, authoritarian Wardlow proved to be one of the worst catastrophes in RT history. Soon after

taking office, he opened secret "peace talks" with the traitors. "Make sure none of this gets back to Talossa," he e-mailed them. With the King's blessing, Wardlow began open negotiations, but had no idea how to negotiate. The resulting vague, rhetorical "peace treaty" only emboldened the splitters, who widened their campaign of intimidation. When Madison suggested that both sides agree not to "poach" the other's citizens, Wardlow hysterically and boisterously refused to discuss specifics—it was his treaty; and Ben was "an obstacle to peace" and a "Stalinist" for butting in. Despite all this, the King assured the PM that he would sign the "peace treaty" into law if asked to.

Ben also offered to quit the PC, revive the "Black Hand" as his own xenophobic fringe party, and let Wardlow run the country since they agreed on most other issues. But Wardlow could not allow any dissent; he split off instead, spurning Jahn's pleas for Tory unity. With Mark Pendl he set up a left-wing "Peace and Freedom Party"—named by Anthony Lawless! Its actual agenda was only clear in private; Wardlow ranted behind his supporters' backs about his thirst to "marginalize Ben" and ordered disobedient Talossans to "suck my dick." "Gallagher is calling the shots in this government," Madison warned.

While staking his reputation on "peace" with the Talossa-haters, Wardlow refused to PD his treaty into law, despite requests from the "obstacle to peace" King. Talossans grew ever more mystified by Wardlow's erratic conduct and mad monologues. Finally, before the election could even begin on 15 March 1998, Wardlow renounced his citizenship, leaving his devotees fuming at Ben for somehow "making" him go.

## PART TWENTY-NINE: THE BIG DABROWSKI.

*"...vicious, sycophantic, homophobic thug."*

The rest of 1998 was dominated by the frustrating issue of "bug nations." It began with the crowning absurdity of the Wardlow era taking place as soon as he quit as PM: his successor was the morbidly indecisive, easily traumatized Charles Sauls—who had just declared himself a "dual citizen" of the Talossa-haters' clique. In the most sadistic exploit ever perpetrated against a Talossan, the quitters threatened Sauls that unless he left Talossa to join their bug nation, they would cut off their "friendships" with him. So Sauls defected, after swearing, in tears, that he would never do any such thing.

With the Government constitutionally unable to function thanks to defections in the ruling PFPT, the normally inactive King Robert I launched a "coup" on 29 March 1998 and plopped **Christopher C. Gruber**, the PC's candidate, behind the PM's desk even before the votes were counted. The new PFPT chief, Mark Pendl, showered Gruber with a hail of invective (calling the tolerant, leftish Gruber a Gay-basher, much to Jahn's amusement) but the Tories crushed everything in their path, winning a whopping 25 votes to the PFPT's 11, the PC's best total ever. The purely 'net-based PFPT had refused to campaign among off-line Talossans and blew up into five chunks as soon as the election was over, blowing an exasperated John Eiffler off the Opposition benches and back into the eager arms of the Progressive Conservatives.

The country's rapturous welcome for Gruber—a radio DJ from Florida who'd been a citizen all of six weeks—was not shared among the traitors, who denounced him as a "vicious, sycophantic, homophobic thug." Gruber responded by doing what Wardlow and Sauls had refused: he signed into law the proposed Peace Treaty! If that shocked most Talossans, so did the clique's refusal to sign its own treaty; they kept heaping denunciations on Talossa and "King Bobby." After a month and a half of this, the group's "Lord Protector" finally signed the Treaty in a legalistic manoeuvre of no significance, declaring that it only bound him personally—while his three trained seals carried on their campaign of yelping and barking. A few weeks later they "repealed" the Treaty, blaming it all on Talossa. Most Talossans were sick of the whole debate and learned to ignore the trolls, sociopathic adolescents who found meaning for their lives in badmouthing Talossan success.

In May, Mark Pendl fired off domestic fireworks in the form of angry outbursts about PC "illegality" and "corruption." Refusing to take a seat in the Cosâ, Pendl noted that the Tories had won so many Cosâ seats, they had to give a couple to PC members who were already sitting in the Senäts—which the Organic Law allowed them to do. But Pendl claimed this was all part of a vast right-wing conspiracy to "exclude" inactive off-line citizens from the Cosâ—despite the fact that 100% of these off-liners voted PC. Mostly unmoved by Pendl's antics, the Opposition began to regroup under the old ZPT banner and wisely chose Ken Oplinger as its new leader—a wiser, more moderate Oplinger, who outshone all other oppositionists in his irritation at the traitorous quitters. The King was so impressed that he nominated Oplinger to fill a vacancy on the Cort that opened up when the Ziu booted out the inactive Tom Buffone.

In spite of the "Bug Nations War" of 1997 and the tiring experience with the traitors, some Talossans still held out hope that Talossa could somehow "influence" the cloud of gnat-like "bug nations" springing up on the Internet in plagiaristic imitation of Talossa. In July PM Gruber got the Ziu to establish "diplomatic relations" with several of these groups, leading to a loud debate about Talossa's national identity with the King's nationalistic xenophobia momentarily eclipsed. This openness to copycat groups was tempered by the Ziu's prohibition of "dual citizenships" in Talossa and bugs.

The greatest social event in the country's history made clear how un-buglike Talossa was. TalossaFest '98, held on Saturday, 1 August 1998, saw 20 Talossans and guests from as far away as Sweden and Massachusetts, in person or over the phone. One major draw was a Living Cosâ (only the second of the "Cybercit" era), but this was marred as a united Opposition voted down the citizenship of teenage prospective **Matt Dabrowski**—the first refusal in 18 years of anyone who really wanted to join Talossa. The ZPT claimed Matt had a short temper, or had been in two "bug nations" before deciding to join the RT. But Dabrowski, no more hot-tempered than Mark Pendl or many other RT loominaries, had (unwisely) declared himself a possible PC voter, so the ZPT's

J.P. Griffin led the charge to have him defeated. (Griffin, taking advantage of the country's secret vote on citizens, tried to blame the defeat on a couple of PC defectors!) *Stotanneu* asserted Matt was voted down to prevent him from voting in the next election, which the King called "disgusting." Even many of Matt's nay-sayers reversed their votes after they saw what they had done.

The PC nearly collapsed over what *TNN* dubbed "Mattgate." PC Leader John Jahn defended two Tory Senators (Schwichtenberg and Eiffler) who broke with him to vote Matt down. Madison was furious, claiming the PC stood for nothing but a desire to stay in power. He negotiated with a whole host of people—including Oplinger and the mercurial, incomprehensible Quebecker **Maxime Charbonneau**—looking for an electable alternative to the Tories. After no one fell for his strident 'Dabrowski Yes, Bugs No' programme, Madison went back to the PC as a muted voice. Exhausted by the fight, he gave up editorship of *Stotanneu* to Chris Gruber. For the first time in RT history the King now had no official voice.

Madison's choice to stick with the Tories—in exchange for a vague promise of "citizenship reform" from Jahn and the party establishment—meant that the campaign which followed was relatively bland and lacking in themes. Turnout was amazing—42 voters—and it was unexpected PC votes that kept the ZPT and a surging new Liberal Party from taking control of the Cosâ on 14 December 1998. Gruber and the PC were back in office, but with a majority of only one seat.

## PART THIRTY: NO MORE BUGS!

*"...disdain for the political process..."*

Despite winning such a small majority, PM Chris Gruber's PC government strode back into office with confidence. No screwy foreign plots had disrupted the vote this time, and the Government rallied to undo what it saw as the mistakes of 1998. One of these was that year's dismal citizenship record. Compared with 1997's 16 new citizens, 1998 saw only seven, which many blamed on PFPT-sponsored infighting and the country's Byzantine naturalization laws. Gruber laid down a radical "decoupling act" to make citizenship law amendable by a majority vote of the Ziu rather than cumbersome OrgLaw amendments. All were stunned when the bill failed—blocked by the ZPT in the Senäts, where the PC was rapidly losing its majority through the disappearance of Sean Hert, the loss of the Florencia seat to Maxime Charbonneau, and the defection to the ZPT of ex-PM Gary Schwichtenberg, still fighting vainly to keep Matt Dabrowski out of Talossa.

But the Tories quickly showed their mettle once again. The Ziu voted Dabrowski in as a citizen with the full backing of the PC, and after some concerted sweet talk, Gruber won ZPT support for his "decoupling act" on citizenship reform. The PC acted quickly to abolish the "secret vote" on incoming citizens. Bewilderingly this was a controversial move; one ZPT MC declared that he'd refuse to vote on any citizens till the "secret vote" was restored, while OpLeader Jay Shorten, head of the Liberals, ridiculed the PC for thinking voters actually had a right to know what their elected representatives were up to.

Matt Dabrowski became, as everyone expected, a highly visible figure on the RT political stage. Installed as Premier of Vuode after a snap election there backed by the King, Matt was granted a Cosà seat by the PC and horrified everyone by proposing literally scores of bills, denouncing "fascist" Wal-Mart and praising Slovenia as a beacon of democracy. Matt's shining moment came in January as he helped drive away one pugnacious prospective who had been ferrying internal RT memos to the country's self-proclaimed "enemies" abroad.

Dabrowski was just as active in his other post, as the RT's "Ambassador" to a pact of online "micronations," most of whom were nothing more than dead links on the organization's website. But Matt's jockeying for power within the group led to flame-wars with micro-nerds whom Senator Charbonneau called "people with titles and nothing else, fans of D&D and more stupidity." The controversy sapped what little enthusiasm Gruber had for "bug nations" and their U.N.-esque antics, and in March he issued a well-intentioned but ill-advised PD cutting off all Talossan "diplomatic contact" with the swarms of online Talossa-clones—but keeping Dabrowski in as envoy to the online micros' group. The PD, widely seen as something engineered by Dabrowski, was extremely unpopular and the ZPT's Ken Oplinger denounced it for its "disdain for the political process" since the PD ran counter to several bills on that month's Clark. The King finally vetoed the PD and the Ziu went along with the ZPT's moderate if somewhat disingenuous alternative, which cut off all "official" contact with the "bug nations" while encouraging "informal" contact with them, even with ones that were openly bashing Talossa. On 21 March the King signed this Semi-Permeable Wall Act, finally ending the RT's unhappy relationship with its cretinous copycats.

The flap over the "bug nations" PD proved to be Gruber's swan song and accelerated his intention to resign after more than a year in office, due mostly to pressures from a new job. Gruber's resignation was delayed by a not totally frivolous lawsuit relating to some trivial appointments which he had put off for months; but when he finally did resign in May, the torch was passed effortlessly to Deputy PM **Michael Pope**, best known for his anti-Clinton-inspired doubts about Talossa's newest declaration of war on genocidal, Marxist Serbia.

The most un-Talossan thing about all these events was that they weren't reported in any newspaper. The biggest social change in the country during this period was the disappearance of "the press" as an institution. The culprit was Wittenberg, Talossa's online discussion group, which meant communication was no longer monopolized by those with the time and money to put out a paper. *TNN* had folded in 1998, and an effort by Ben Madison to resuscitate *Stotanneu* in January in an online format died from lack of interest. A alliance of concerned Talossans succeeded, in August of 1999, in reviving the old, snail-mail *Stotanneu*, but it only lasted one issue; public apathy and the WWW won out in the end.

The parties were also gearing up for a crucial election. The PC regained its Senäts majority when ex-Tory Tomás Gariçéir rejoined the PC, as the voter roll continued to swell, reaching 59 by the time elections began in July. Both Frédéric Maugey and Andrew Worm had rediscovered Talossa online and had their Talossanity restored by the Uppermost Cort; an additional 8 new citizens had also been voted in since January.

When the campaign began, it was the ugliest the country had seen in years. The two leading Opposition parties, the ZPT and the Liberals, fired off a massive assault on the ruling PC. The ZPT charged the PC with "pushing" to limit Talossans' freedoms, a charge which stemmed only from the PC's bad attitude about ZPT members fraternizing with Talossa-hating "bug nations." Meanwhile, **Jay Shorten's** Liberal Party claimed that PM Gruber's resignation was all some sort of lame PC plot to dupe the voters. The one beneficiary of the escalating flame war was the charming and unassuming Raßemblamáintsch dels Citaxhiéns Talossáes (RCT), a splinter formed much earlier by Charbonneau but which began to pick up mainstream supporters bored by yet another PC majority but turned off by more ZPT/Liberal saturnalia.

Despite furious coalition talks between the PC, RCT, and even the ZPT, the voters shocked everyone by handing the PC a convincing majority of 11 of 20 seats, thanks in part to a highly improbable die roll which gave them the 11th seat.



## **V. 1999 – PRESENT: THE MODERN AGE**

*"If betraying the nation that entrusted you with all they have isn't  
worth getting excited over, what is?"*

## PART THIRTY-ONE: MR ANGLEMARK, TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

*"...the rape of our last innocence..."*

In the waning days of the August, 1999 election campaign, both the PC and Ken Oplinger's ZPT had put out feelers to each other over a possible coalition which, till the last day of the vote, was a live option. As it turned out the PC won its majority and the ZPT returned to the Opposition as the largest party on that side of the aisle. The ZPT fielded the controversial but increasingly well-liked J.P. Griffin as its candidate for Opposition Leader, and lobbied heavily for him behind the scenes in the Cosà. However, the strident Liberal Party, now headed by the clever Dan Rogerson following the ignominious resignation of the gladiatorial Jay Shorten, teamed up with the RCT, the smallest party in the Cosà, to block Griffin's nomination; **Davio Foctéir**, head of the **RCT**, a left-wing protest party, was made Opposition Leader. The ZPT were furious and drew closer still to the ruling PC.

Michael Pope and his PC team took power with renewed confidence, and a 1 seat majority. But with tempers still hot following the campaign the PM declared a month of recess and the new Cosà was not actually seated until 1 October 1999. Pope used the extra time to put together a new cabinet including the Liberals' **Johan Anglemark** as Minister for Micronational Affairs, to put up with (or put off) the swarms of gnat-like bug nations that continued to pester and harass Talossans. His appointment, made as an effort to 'reach out' in a bipartisan manner, was debatable given his ongoing ties to RT-hating traitors, and his unapologetic participation in "bug nation" forums where Talossans were routinely attacked. Anglemark—who had called Talossa a "hate cult" over the King's refusal to ignore numerous foreign slights—soon drew fire over his perceived softball responses to hostile bug nations. What followed was a spectacular personal blow-up on Wittenberg.

Anglemark complained that bug nations were having their posts deleted on Wittenberg (true enough!) and his answer was to invent a rival BBS to compete with it, vowing to delete anything the Liberals interpreted as "personal attacks" or "partisan politics." The move was widely viewed as a clumsy power-play for the votes of people like the embittered Gary Schwichtenberg, who had broken with the Tories after the Matt Dabrowski fiasco and descended into a silent, scowling, Ben-hating funk. But one respected Talossan after another—Pope, Jahn, Oplinger, and Eiffler among them—denounced it as "balkanizing" the RT into rival groups that didn't talk to each other. Worse yet, the new group sought to monopolize the field of "culture" to its own partisan advantage—suggesting, for instance, that the Liberal Party discussion board was the proper place to talk about the Talossan language.

Backed by virtually the entire political establishment, King Robert I made a major fuss about it in his Speech from the Throne ("Mr Anglemark, tear down this wall!") which was otherwise a lengthy and thoughtful address on the significance of Talossa's independence, delivered on 26 December 1999, the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Talossan state. Drawing upon his own impending divorce as a metaphor, the King excoriated this latest effort to divide Talossans into two embittered camps. Public outcry and a very active boycott helped collapse the rival discussion group, so Anglemark responded by continuing the long tradition of quitting the Secretary of State's office in a huff. After a brief tussle with Dabrowski, Chris Gruber emerged in January as the 8th Secretary of State since the office was created in 1987, despite worries about his commitment to the job; sure enough, he resigned shortly thereafter and Foctéir took up the responsibility.

The first Clark of the year 2000 saw an absurd debate over whether Talossa should retain the Metric system, which revealed a serious rift between a few Liberal Cybercits who didn't care what measurements Talossans in Talossa really used—and the Old Growthers and their Cyber allies, who saw English measures as a historic part of real life in a Milwaukee-based nation. Both sides claimed the other was being un-Talossan, but Gruber had the last word: "For crying out loud, those Milwaukeeans built their town on our country! They're bound to co-opt some of our stuff!" Both houses of the Ziu rejected Metric by a wide margin.

Alarming, this Cyber/non-Cyber debate was followed immediately by a third Liberal-inspired crisis, after it was realized that Talossa's law, assigning Cybercits to provinces based on their geographical location, gave the one European-based province of Cézembre a potential 'gene pool' fifteen times as large as any other province! So when Ben suggested giving all provinces an equal share of likely citizens, it was again Swedish Cybercit Anglemark who went berserk, accusing Ben of somehow scheming to "abolish Cézembre," a charge Ben called "loony" and which ignored the fact that Ben's plan still left Cézembre—the country's fastest-growing province—with twice as many potential citizens as any other province.

All these 'incidents' were swept under the rug with surprising speed as the March-April 2000 General Election began. Basking in the glow of worldwide publicity thanks to a feature piece on Talossa in *Wried* magazine, a feeling of civility descended across the nation. Especially once it became clear that the Progressive Conservatives were actually running a "positive" campaign. Very little was said about opposing parties—and as Tory insiders suspected, that was a massive blunder. The Liberals swept up the middle with a direct mail campaign accusing the Tories of "corruption," ignoring their own record of confrontation and backstabbing, and claiming that they—the heirs of Dan Wardlow, and the only party with active members encouraging 'bug nations' to harass and denounce Talossans—were the patriots who would lead Talossa in the next Government. The Liberals swept the vote of people who paid no attention to RT politics, while the Tories sat by and let them pass without a response. While the PC got respectable totals among the new Cybercit voters, it did not keep pace with the new opposition parties, leading to acrimonious debates on the Tory side about whether or not Talossa was being taken over by colonists who (to put it mildly) didn't identify with the traditional institutions of the Kingdom.

Even before voting began, analysts predicted the PC Party in its current incarnation was at the end of its unprecedented string of majority wins: ten straight, starting in October 1993. Put another way, some 3/4 of eligible voters in April of 2000 had been naturalized since the PC winning streak began six and a half years earlier. But when the last vote was counted, and (as per a new OrgLaw amendment) the last divided Cosâ seat rounded to its nearest owner, the PC had—on the strength of a Herculean re-election effort which involved long-distance calls all over the globe—won 11 seats, an absolute majority. The ZPT had a disappointing 3 seats, as the Ben-haters flocked away to the Liberal banner. Also battered by defections to the Liberals, the RCT—a party best described as nice—won a paltry two seats, a defeat which Madison verbosely called "the rape of our last innocence." The Liberals, after spending seven months annoying all the other parties, emerged as a true Opposition — and with four seats, the second largest party in the state.

## PART THIRTY-TWO: ZEUS, THE CATECHISM, AND SECRET E-MAILS

*"...a power that belongs only to God."*

Talossans of all stripes—except of course the Liberals—reacted with amazingly consistent horror at the sudden rise of the new party. The PC, secure in its narrow majority, viewed the battered ZPT and RCT as potential partners, suggesting the three parties pool their resources.

Albrec'ht Stolfi of the RCT claimed that the Libs had triumphed simply on account of their name; other RT parties used Talossan-language names (RCT, ZPT) which were meaningless to the unassimilated, culturally half-digested Lumpenproletariat that had congealed behind the Libs. But in a ham-fisted attempt to unite the opposition parties against the PC, the Libs this time backed the ZPT candidate for OpLeader, Gary Cone, rather than their own leader, the monotonously diplomatic Dan Rogerson.

Meanwhile **J. Kelley**, an otherwise nice enough guy, applied for citizenship, then off-handedly announced that he worshipped Zeus and Poseidon. This drew light-hearted ribbing from Talossans of a more conventional religious bent; Kelley denounced them as "fundamentalist bigots" and quit! It turned political when the Libs asked Kelley to reapply. He did so, with their blessing, declaring that "true" Talossans were on his side and the rest of the country could go to hell. The PC saw Kelley as an argumentative weirdo and also as a sure Lib voter. Still, only after much arm-twisting did the Ziu vote down his second citizenship application.

The Libs retaliated in September 2000 with one of the most bizarre scandals Talossa has ever seen. King Robert submitted a bill formally annulling previous RT law on his marriage to Queen Jenny (his divorce was also moving through the US courts, the result of his wife's abuse and unfaithfulness). The Libs' Jay Shorten, known for his earlier insistence on his "right" to vote down all Gay prospectives, rose in the Cosâ to denounce the divorce as "revolting and disgusting... [it] manages to offend God, justice, and decency at the same time." He explained that "the Catholic catechism" (misread, other RT Catholics noted) ordered him to "positively forbid" any Talossan from divorcing. He said the OrgLaw, which allows divorce, "abrogates" [sic] to Talossans "a power that belongs only to God." He urged "all Roman Catholics" to support the Libs, claimed the divorce arose from Ben's "distressing, revolting, and unreasoning hatred," and savaged Ben personally, urging he be ousted from his church (which had already reviewed the issue and found him blameless).

Shorten, of course, represented no right-wing faction, but the Liberal Party which claimed to have been founded on "liberal principles" like separation of church and state. To nobody's surprise, the "Liberals" pooh-poohed their loyal voter's ravings, rallying 'round his "expression of conscience" when the King called him a "clerico-fascist nitwit." Libs voted *en bloc* against granting the King a divorce, but were defeated thanks largely to Gary Cone, who led the charge to approve the bill, challenging the hardly "liberal" nature of the Liberal Party. Shorten quietly resigned his seat in a black fog of scandal. An RCT spokesman described the whole affair as "nutso out the wazoo."

The debate raised, again, the Libs' past support for the traitors' clique (which had recently collapsed, to Tory glee) and for Dan Wardlow's 1998 PFPT government. Lib spokesman Johan Anglemark continued to praise Wardlow and denounced Talossa for "trying to actively slander and hurt" the poor traitors who had quit. This drove Wardlow's executioner, ex-PM Chris Gruber, over the brink. Gruber published a file of secret e-mails between Wardlow and the traitors' clique which showed "an almost Watergate-like secret planning" on Wardlow's part. The revelation was a national catharsis. Many who had joined Talossa since 1998, and never quite saw what all the fuss was about, were shocked by the depth of PFPT betrayal. New Tories like PM Michael Pope and Defence Minister Phil Ledgerwood grilled the Libs on their soft line on treason: "If betraying the nation that entrusted you with all they have isn't worth getting excited over, what is?" There was, of course, no answer, except for personal attacks.

As the General Election drew near, the Opposition was enlarged by Maxime Charbonneau, the Florencia senator lately expelled from the PC for remarks about "Jewish domination" of US politics during a spate of riots in Israel; he joined the normally fun-loving RCT, who were further embarrassed by his outbursts as the vote began. The Libs too hailed Yasser Arafat as an "ex-terrorist" and played down the brutal murder of four unarmed Jews by a Palestinian mob; the PC and ZPT worked together to draft a compromise statement which condemned the violence.

When RT voters went to the polls on 14 December 2000, Pope was in high spirits and predicted an easy win, after Anglemark smeared Talossa's whole 21 year history as "Ben Madison's continuous search for someone to attack" and Rogerson made silly insinuations about Ben's sex life. The controversy took its toll: the Libs fell from 4 to 3 Cosâ seats and lost nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  of their support. The ZPT dwindled further to an all-time low of 2 seats; the RCT gained a seat, to 3; a mysterious and controversial protest party, the TLFN, fielded by Tom Buffone and/or **Greg Aldous**, won a seat. The Tories held steady at 11 seats, a clear majority, with 52.94% of the popular vote, despite the failure of several Tory "pocket votes" to cast ballots. PM Michael Pope had been elected to a third straight term, and the PC continued to govern Talossa—as it had since 1993.

## PART THIRTY-THREE: THE RENUNCIATORS

*"...a ham-fisted, third-world attempt [to] poke Talossa in the eye  
with a sharp stick."*

The millennium began strangely with ex-Talossan Ron Rosalez returning from 'exile.' The more balanced member of the defunct Davron duo, he rediscovered the RT on the Web. The Cort, with unanimity and enthusiasm, approved his return, despite efforts by Leftists to lure him into arguments, in hopes of causing some sort of angry blow-up that would convince the Cort to vote him down.

Meanwhile **Cody Williams**, a US bug nation enthusiast, got a friendly Talossan e-mail since he was on an outdated mailing list. Williams, who refused to join the RT because it didn't indulge his wish for 'diplomacy' with plagiarist 'bugs,' stormed onto Wittenberg hurling phlegm at the RT for "spamming" him. King Robert, predictably, hurled back, urging this "bug-sucking ooze- bag" to go away. Johan Anglemark sprang to Cody's defence and of course, cursed Talossa: "What stinks most about Talossa is the behaviour we show against those we think are beneath us. Why does behaving like a jerk have to be a Talossan national trait?" The King muttered that Libs would replace the Ministry of Defence with a "Ministry of Apologies."

The real Defence Ministry, led by Calvinist computer whiz **Phil Ledgerwood**, was expanding its website, citing several examples where Ledgerwood got foreign police forces to clamp down on bug nations harassing Talossans online. But in an odd twist of fate, one bug nation actually paid Talossa the ultimate complement. Of all the bugs that had harassed the RT, the worst was of course the Australia-based traitors' clique set up in 1997 by Evan Gallagher. Talossans were joyous when Gallagher himself reappeared on Wittenberg to offer a full and complete apology for all the harm he had done to Talossa. His 'country' had long since collapsed under the weight of its own loathing and Gallagher expressed his remorse for his misguided attacks on Talossa. He declared that the RT only worked thanks to the "unifying vision" of the very leaders against whom he had fought so bitterly, a statement the PC took as the ultimate vindication of its foreign policy of non-involvement with micronations.

Gallagher's apology was a slap in the face to the Libs, still pining for the halcyon, hippy days of Dan Wardlow and the 'peace treaty.' So Lib leader **Dan Rogerson** decided it was time to bash *Ar Päts*, calling it "totalitarian propaganda." This had escaped the multi-party OrgLaw Convention of 1996-97, which had voted to make passing a quiz based on *Ar Päts* a requirement for RT citizenship.

As Rogerson denounced *Ar Päts*, the King announced that he would refuse to appoint a Liberal government unless voters actually elected one. The Libs were so put out by this, that on 16 March they resigned from the Cosâ en masse, declaring a boycott of RT politics for no visible purpose, vowing to return "if Talossa becomes a true democracy," i.e. one ruled by them. The King gave all three vacant Lib Cosâ seats to various Opposition members. The Libs poisoned the well by announcing that they would sit outside the Cosâ as a kind of pressure group, cheerfully selling their votes to the highest bidder. "There is no prospect of our voice being heard," they declared—in a country where talk was all handled via the anarchic and uncensorable Internet. PM Pope denounced their latest snit-fit as "a ham-fisted, third-world attempt" to "poke Talossa in the eye with a sharp stick." The Libs responded by attacking the ZPT and the RCT, their only possible coalition partners, for "a certain complicity in undermining democracy" since these parties didn't particularly hate the King or the PC. Anglemark called the Talossan nation "stupid" for having its own culture, language, and politics instead of having 'relations' with bug nations. The Libs retreated into a largely inactive funk, claiming that "we are, in effect, a banned party."

The result was a couple of calm and beautiful months, in which Talossans were free to discuss issues like Talossan language vocabulary and the creation of new and innovative websites—including Deputy Secretary of State **Martin-Pierre Frenette's** "Talossa.net"—to promote the Kingdom.

With the Libs shut out of the Ziu by their own choice, Ron Rosalez set up a **Talossan Libertarian Party** to try for the votes of the self-banned TLP. Trotting out old Leftist demagoguery about how the PC "controlled" Talossa through "pocket votes," he demanded a special ministry be set up to 'monitor' Ben, whom he blamed

for the fact that Talossans found unpopular views unpopular. But the rôle of foil to the King was temporarily usurped during the spring by some bug nation “trolls” besieging Wittenberg, posting really vicious personal attacks against Ben over the signatures of several inactive Liberal voters, and fooling even Anglemark. Talossans responded by requiring a password to post on Witt. The King claimed with satisfaction that these angry, pseudonymous posts “confirmed the character of the people who get fed up with me in Talossa.”

As another election drew near, speculation raged about whom the ex-Libs would back. Nobody seemed interested in their votes but the half-hearted RCT. Their only legacy was in denouncing every party but theirs as “undermining democracy,” giving the PC, RCT and ZPT a shared sense of hurt. By June it was clear they had burned all their bridges. One by one they dropped like flies, renouncing their citizenship at the behest of Shorten, Rogerson and Anglemark. Days later “the Renunciators” were forgotten. PM Pope wished them all a statesmanlike farewell, while Deputy PM Jahn dismissed them with the catch-phrase *du jour*: “You are the weakest link. Goodbye.”

## PART THIRTY-FOUR: SEPTEMBER ELEVENTH

*"...under Talossan law..."*

Nobody was surprised by the results of the 15 August 2001 General Election, which saw the death of the old Liberal Party. The RCT gained the lion's share of their old supporters, winning five seats in the Cosâ (up two); the Tories gained a seat, winning 12. The ZPT's long slide downward stopped, and they held their three seats. Voter turnout sank from 51 to 40 voters, with the five Libs gone and several long-time online citizens drifting slowly away from contact with the homeland.

The nation rallied around its traditional strength, namely Talossan camaraderie and friendship. In August, 2001, a greatly successful TalossaFest was held at John Jahn's house. With the King and his consort, Princess Amy, scheduled to leave for Europe in September, John Jahn was sworn in at TalossaFest as Regent, to hold the royal powers in the King's absence. This was all technically illegal since the law authorizing a regency wasn't voted on till September, but when King Robert and Princess Amy left for Europe on 4 September, Talossa was in the firm and steady hands of Regent Jahn and Prime Minister Michael Pope. Arriving in Europe, the Royal couple visited Toulouse, home of their (distant) royal ancestors. The Royal visit was a major Talossan event, as the King and Amy made a point of visiting every Talossan citizen in Europe that would have them, namely, **Francesco Felici** in Italy, Frédéric Maugey in France, **Ughán Cruceatúl** in Bruxelles, and Gjermund Higræff in Norway.

On 11 September, The King and his consort had barely set foot in exotic Sardinia, home to prehistoric Berbers, and the closest to North Africa the Talossan monarch figured he was ever likely to get, before Arab terrorists half a world away crashed three hijacked jetliners into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. The King was blissfully unaware of the tragedy for nearly 24 hours, while back in Talossa, life ground to a standstill as in the rest of North America. Prime Minister Pope and Regent Jahn immediately issued eloquent statements expressing Talossa's horror at the terrorists. These sentiments were shared across the Talossan political spectrum, with the exception of the increasingly marginal Maxime Charbonneau, who denounced the Arab terrorists and the American victims with equal vigour. The Prime Minister won plaudits from the rest of the citizenry, although the stridently anti-PC J.P. Griffin of the ZPT was the only Member of the Cosâ to vote "no" on his Vote of Confidence in September. **Jeff Ragsdale**, a core member of the RCT, and a Member of the Cosâ for the Province of Maricopa, was so impressed by Pope, and so disappointed by the rest of the Opposition, that he crossed the aisle and joined the PC caucus. An "Anti-Terrorism Act" was quickly passed by the Ziu in October, as the King and his entourage returned from Europe and he reassumed his Royal powers.

During November, the fallout from the terrorist attack continued as the King feuded with Cruceatúl in the Ziu over the former's declaration that anti-war protestors ought to be violently attacked, to see if they were hypocritical enough to defend themselves. Ron Rosalez of the RCT, whose military and computer background proved to be a valuable service to Prime Minister Pope, organized a Primary Intelligence Group with the Ziu's blessing, as a sort of Talossan CIA.

By December, Talossans were in a reasonably festive mood, and Jahn hosted the country's first formal Anniversary Party in several years. The highlight of the event was the official Royal Wedding, "under Talossan law," of King Robert and (now) Queen Amy, who linked arms in Talossa's Albanian-inspired "Zog Salute" and recited oaths in the Talossan language in a ceremony designed and presided over by Justice John Eiffler and Tomás Gariçéir. The King offered no Throne Speech, but published "notes" on one on Wittenberg, where he expressed his amazement at how comfortable Talossa felt after the demise of the traitorous Liberals. Finally, the last remnants of the old Gallagher schism had been dispensed with, and the King announced that he could easily accept an RCT or a ZPT government. The Opposition was now completely patriotic. However, the King warned that immigration to Talossa had fallen off to practically nothing, and cited this as an ominous warning for the future. But nobody else seemed interested in that argument, as most Talossans were too busy enjoying the country's more peaceful, post-Liberal atmosphere.

The country's political stability (or doldrums, depending on how you looked at it) ended abruptly in February of 2002 when Florencia Senator Maxime Charbonneau declared his candidacy for re-election. He was



challenged straightaway by the province's long-time governor and founder, John Eiffler of the PC. While Florencia was traditionally an opposition stronghold, many felt Eiffler had a chance to unseat the increasingly isolated Charbonneau until from way out in left (or maybe right) field, J.P. Griffin of the ZPT announced his own candidacy and picked up a key endorsement from the local RCT. Griffin, hearkening back to the tactics of the defunct Liberal Party, called on all Talossans to "throttle" Ben Madison, who had dared to criticize what he called Griffin's "joke" campaign. Griffin made the suppression of Madison's right to speak, a cornerstone of his campaign, and the election ended in a three-way split with Eiffler and Griffin tied. Charbonneau threw his support behind Eiffler, but before the election could end up in the Uppermost Cort of Talossa, Griffin withdrew as mysteriously as he had entered, and everyone agreed that Eiffler had won the seat.

The contested Senate race exposed numerous flaws in the Organic Law (whose chapter on the Senate had been written, almost single-handedly, by Evan Gallagher) and Martin-Pierre Frenette began a one-man crusade for OrgLaw Reform. The King, for his part, busied himself with the name and arms of the Royal Family, named "The House and Dynasty of Rouergue" to reflect his Toulousian ancestors some nine centuries earlier.

In April the Progressive Conservatives won re-election yet again, gaining a seat against the divided and demoralized Opposition parties. The ZPT finally collapsed, leaving the RCT the main opposition party along with a couple of bizarre "Star Wars" parties bringing up the distant rear. The only implication for the future was the elevation of Jeff Ragsdale, late of the RCT, as Michael Pope's running-mate and as the new Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Talossa.

## PART THIRTY-FIVE: THE POT-PIE BLOB

*"... ever honoured to put heavy patriotic objects on my head."*

After the April 2002 Election, Secretary of State Daviu Foctéir resigned in favour of Martin-Pierre Frenette. As Deputy SoS, Frenette had phoned Talossans around the globe to get their votes, bypassing normal party channels. Voter turnout bounded back from 43% to 63%, but ten Talossans lost their heads due to apathy, including three ex-PMs and the fabled Dan Lorentz.

Frenette was not only running Talossa's bureaucracy, but running his own business and awaiting the birth of his first child. The June Clark was delayed again and again, till finally Chris Gruber sued Frenette in the Cort to force him to publish it. His harsh rhetoric accusing Frenette of erecting a "fascist state" went over badly with the Cort, who reminded him sternly that all work in Talossa is done by busy, unpaid volunteers. As was the Cort; for a long time John Eiffler was the only Justice involved with Talossa's daily life. This led to efforts—above all from John Jahn, who dreamed about returning to the Cort—to either reactivate or sack Justices Oplinger and, especially, Muth. The star of this show proved to be Deputy PM Jeffrey Ragsdale, who defended the Cort and looked statesmanly.

His boss, PM Michael Pope, had been in office three years (the longest tenure in RT history) and was looking to take over as National Archivist. When Ragsdale visited Talossa in June—Ben met him at the airport waving the RT flag—the PM chose to retire with grace, advising Ragsdale to "take care of our Kingdom." All parties heaped praise on Pope, whom Eiffler welcomed to the ranks of "Talossa's elder statesmen." At the Mussolini Province gyros shop where most of the OrgLaw was written, Jeff Ragsdale was sworn in as Talossa's 26th Seneschál on the evening of 25 June 2002 with Gary Cone, de facto Opposition Leader, holding *The Loom of Language*, on which PMs had traditionally taken their oaths since 1981. As Gjermund Higräff pointed out, it had been seven years since a PM was actually sworn in on Talossan soil.

Constantly chatting on Witt, setting up *L'Oraclá* (an online paper) and issuing a barrage of PDs, Jeff kept up the "official" side of the office; his policy of phoning Talossans worldwide, just to keep in touch, was a masterstroke. Yet his government was rocked by a burst of premarital jitters when Queen Amy announced she was calling off the Royal Marriage "under American law," set for August, and on 29 June abdicated her Queenly duties. Luckily for all, after encouragement from the King and other Talossans, Amy soon announced that she would "be ever honoured to put heavy patriotic objects on my head." More serious for Talossa's future was Attorney General John Minot's angry renunciation of his citizenship on 1 July. He denounced RT inactivity, the lack of credible opposition to the PC, and Talossans' monotonous commentary on US politics on Witt.

Talossans barely noticed; with the government on holiday, the King and Queen were married, "under American law," outdoors in Vuode Province on 24 August. In attendance were more than a dozen Talossans, including Higräff. TalossaFest 2002, held the next day, was a huge success; the Royal couple then left for their honeymoon on the US East Coast where they met Michael Pope.

The cultural renaissance that began with the departure of the traitorous Liberals continued that autumn when Tomás Gariçéir placed the entire *Treisoûr*—the Talossan language Dictionary—online. Several citizens were now updating the *Treisoûr*, and chats about grammar and vocabulary peppered Witt with welcome Talossa-centric discussion. Chris Gruber was working on .pdf files of many of Talossa's classic books. Greater still, all this was being reported in Stötanneu, the Kingdom's oldest newspaper, revived online by Gariçéir.

The US election was also approaching, filling Witt with bitter US partisan bickering. In that context, Ben Madison returned to familiar themes, in an impassioned speech on 9 October. Denouncing "massive, widespread apathy," he claimed that the PC was built not to fight apathy but to fight "monsters like Gallagher and Anglemark." Blasting the PC's cautious stance on immigration, he noted that our stringent laws had turned away good prospectives while failing to keep out the "monsters." He even declared the PC's "monolithic unity and political dominance serves no purpose" any more. Only Ragsdale bothered to respond, joining Frenette in tinkering with immigration reform. Few in the PC were keen on bold initiatives.

After Republicans won the US election, Tories turned on each other against the advice of Ragsdale and Eiffler. Chris Gruber shouted “fuck America!” and called Bush supporters “greedy, selfish fucks.” Jahn fell to the occasion, denouncing Democrats as “pukely” and “dumbass,” and crowing “F\*ck you, assholes!” PC unity tottered as Jahn declared he was “sick of the idiocy spewed over and over again against the US Republican Party within the PC Party.” Questioning why he was in the same RT party as Gruber to begin with, he quoted Wes Erni’s 1989 warning that the PC had again become an agendaless “pot-pie blob,” existing only to shut the Opposition out of power.

Gruber and Gariçéir soon launched a rather creepy advert blitz showing their own heads mounted onto Italian uniforms in an oddball parody of Talossa’s fascistic ancient past; on 3 December they quit the PC and set up a *Parti del Congreßen Grischn* (**Grey Congress Party**) emphasizing nativist Talossan issues like language and Berber mythology. A bigger shock came the next day when Ben Madison and Wes Erni, only dimly aware of the PCG, declared their own “xenophobic rabble-rousing” schism, resurrecting Erni’s *La Mhà Nheagrà* or Black Hand (MN). Its ethos resembled the PCG’s, but its more detailed programme called for radical immigration reform and a revival of the old 200 seat Cosâ.

The January 2003 election was a frenzied, hilarious supernova of debate on RT affairs between the PC, PCG, MN, RCT, and a revived ZPT led by a revived Ken Oplinger. Issues included the PCG stuffing the online advertising rotation with 60 ads, which had the effect of squeezing out competition; critics responded by mocking and defacing their ads, and Gruber’s temper became a campaign issue as the PCG feuded with the other parties and rewrote portions of its platform after others criticized it. The MN, buoyed by surprising left-wing support, took second at nearly 29% of the vote. The ZPT finished a solid third; other minor parties fared worse. Ragsdale’s PC, staying above the frenzy of charges, emerged as the single largest party, but at barely 31% well short of a majority. Prime Minister Ragsdale began to cobble together Talossa’s first coalition government since 1993.

## PART THIRTY-SIX: EM200

*‘I’m in favour of rattling the cage, and of course in dramatic fashion.’*

The ostrichistic opposition made coalition-building easier by pretending the PC, MN, and PCG were all still the same party, forcing them to talk to each other about forming the next government. Still, Jeff put the first Clark of 2003 off till March to give him time to calm the PCG, who were fuming over criticism from the MN and expected the Deputy PMship even though the MN won more votes. Eventually they backed down—the MN made a point of not backing down—and Florencia’s **Quedéir Castighâ**, one of the MN’s new moderate-left supporters, became Distáin in the PC-MN-PCG “Ragsdale Coalition.”

The ZPT, trying desperately to resurge, picked on “pocket votes” (again) and launched a campaign calling on Talossans to “fight” and “get rid of” Talossa’s less active citizens. Gary Cone’s Vuode ZPT quietly suggested to the Cort that it could disqualify Ben’s wife from running for Senate on the grounds that her husband couldn’t be a Senator. Voters elected Amy to the Senate, for the MN, in January. “Pocket votes” soon collided with the year’s dominant issue, the Erni/Madison two hundred-seat Cosâ proposal, dubbed “EM200” by Chris Gruber. The MN and PCG pushed EM200, while the ZPT and RCT, which seemed to do better under the status quo, savaged it as “buglike” and “fake,” since it allowed each MC to hold up to thirty Cosâ seats. Proponents noted that no “bug nation” actually used such a system, while corporations and city councils do use these types of weighted voting. Opponents also claimed that EM200 would help “pocket votes” by allowing less active voters to vote for candidates without having to *be* candidates—a situation that proponents noted was the very definition of representative democracy itself.

On 28 January 2003, the Cort announced without warning that it had restored RT citizenship to traitor Johan Anglemark. Naïvely expecting to be received as some kind of Messiah, Anglemark stormed back denouncing the King’s “ranting, bickering, and ceaseless attacks.” Wittenberg shook to its foundations while the King twisted an obscure clause in the OrgLaw to veto the Cort’s action, while the MN demanded an investigation. The PM appointed the “Gruber Commission,” chaired by that respected ex-PM, to find out how the Cort could so blithely restore such a notorious dropout. Gruber flung subpoenas in all directions, demanding private e-mails from anyone who might have information. The RCT (which denied any contact with Anglemark) denounced these “McCarthy-esque demands” and both the Cort and the PM quickly quashed Gruber’s overzealous subpoenas. Gruber’s gigantic report absolved everyone of wrongdoing but proved that the Cort had become hopelessly out of touch with RT politics. The issue of tossing out Justices Ken Oplinger and Matthias Muth (the PC’s Michael Pope called them Talossa’s “aloof mandarins”) would simmer for the rest of 2003.

Muth, meanwhile, was making enemies among the “pocket votes” back home as Senator from Mussolini Province. “It is shameful! It is an embarrassment!” he railed, siding with the ZPT against his own voters in one January debate. Lighting a match under long-inactive ex-PM Tom Buffone, Ben Madison convinced Buffone to run against Muth for the Senate. The result, in February, was a landslide; the new MN had picked up a second senatorship.

Ragsdale’s second government was a great period for Talossan culture, as Archivist Pope reorganized and indexed the country’s bulging 24-year-old files, while Madison rewrote his epic “2212” to become “Descüt,” the first chapter in a novel taking place in prehistoric Talossa. Talossans debated the future of their national anthem, whether to keep Fleetwood Mac’s *Tusk*, revive John Jahn’s never-quite-finished orchestral hymn, or adopt a decade-old royal paeon to the Talossan language that Ben had rewritten as a broader patriotic anthem, *Stand Tall, Talossans*.

But the anthem debate was drowned out that spring by the drums of war, as the RT’s traditional US ally moved closer to war on Iraq. Debates kept Wittenberg busy for weeks. Finally, on 18 March, PM Ragsdale, backed by most Talossans, issued a declaration of war against Saddam Hussein (the RT still quaintly does such things). “War is not something this government wants,” declared the Prime Minister, “nor does any sane person, but it is something that needs to be done.”

Rogue MN MC Pete Hottelet breathed new life into the EM200 debate that month by voting ‘no’ on the Vote of Confidence, thus highlighting “cadre parties” like the PC and MN, which had trouble under the 20-seat system because they had small active memberships but large blocs of public support, a combination which meant having to appoint unpredictable or apathetic supporters just to fill seats. Such parties would do better under EM200, since each member could fill up to 30 seats. So in May the MN formally proposed EM200 to the Ziu, arguing that EM200 would also help small “activist parties” like the ZPT, since the ZPT didn’t win enough seats in a 20-seat Cosâ to allow all its members to participate. The MN took its argument a step further, threatening to quit the ruling coalition if EM200 were defeated. “I’m in favour of rattling the cage, and of course in dramatic fashion,” Castiglîhâ told Stötanneu. Amid hints of compromise, however, the MN stuck with the coalition even though EM200 was defeated in the Senäts. The RCT’s Maxime Charbonneau then declared his support not only for EM200, but for the MN.

The PC surged back into the Senäts in June, when Jeff Ragsdale’s fellow Maricopans got him to run for the seat vacated by Albrec’ht Stolfi (RCT). There was no June Clark, the PM having declared a “month of recess” to gear up for a Living Cosâ scheduled for July. But a noisy backbench revolt made fun of Ragsdale’s ‘abuse’ of the Prime Dictate. He had overloaded people’s imaginations by issuing at least fifty, mostly eulogizing dead Americans like David Brinkley, Buddy Ebsen, and even segregationist US Senator Strom Thurmond—a controversy Madison called “Strom und Drang.”

On 12 July 2003, a record number of out-of-town visitors including PM Jeff Ragsdale, Tomás Gariçêir (who brought big Talossan flags for purchase), **Andy Lowry**, Chris Gruber, and his new Talossan girlfriend **Rischâ Scuvâglh**, gathered for TalossaFest in Vuode Province. At the first Living Cosâ since 2000, Ben made couscous. MCs voted to repeal Ragsdale’s PD lionizing Thurmond; his Americo-Talossan supporters claimed he was being persecuted just because he eventually became a Republican. Legislators then turned to EM200. The RCT claimed EM200 violated the “one man, one vote” principle since, for the first time, it let voters in each province elect their own MCs, rather than treating the whole kingdom as a single constituency. Florencia Senator John Eiffler (PC) warned that under EM200, the King might personally hold enough Cosâ seats to effectively sustain his own vetoes. But Eiffler and King Robert announced a compromise, under which the King could still sit in the Cosâ, but gave up his right to vote on his own vetoes. Now most PC and ZPT objectors concurred that EM200 might revitalize Talossa, and both houses passed it by an overwhelming majority.

The King unveiled new oval “RT” bumper stickers, a lengthy project funded by Lowry, Eiffler, Madison, and Frenette—though getting contributions was like squeezing blood from a stone. Not long thereafter, the King and Queen made a Talossan state visit to Canada where they met with Frenette, Charbonneau, and Daviu Foctêir. At about the same time, the immigration of new Canadian-Talossan **Marc Moisan** exposed what a dilapidated and confusing mess Talossa’s online immigration system had become, leading to demands for reform which Immigration Minister Pope set out to implement, and revealing why immigration had dwindled to almost nothing in 2003.

Strained by the breakup of the PC and the adoption of a revolutionary electoral system, traditional RT politics continued to break down as the fall election approached. The RCT dramatically dissolved, its leader Uglhân Cruceatûl saying the party could no longer find a clear identity in an environment dominated by three viable, rival ex-PC chunks. And when the ZPT failed to register at all, Talossans realized they were headed for an election of extraordinary significance and excitement.