

Here's another thought-provoking piece in Uncle River's future history about civilization slowly recovering after a planetary disaster. The protagonist could be a hero—or a monster—depending on your point of view.

The Price of Peace

by Uncle River

“He was the little boy in love with the wind,” said his sister, Evolin. She was a very old woman by then, and only said that much because she was so old.

No one spoke his name. To do so would dishonor his sacrifice.

He thought of the image he did because he was Christian. He said so. But what he did was very Kessian. A Solvene or Puget Christian would not have thought of such a thing, let alone done it.

Kessa and Puget yet barely knew of each other then, and Kessa and Solvene still fought wars over the border on the trail to Five Sun Mountain. But Kessa as Nation was already well established. Most settled Kessians had become part of Kessa as Nation. It attracted because it allowed an end to blood feud. Settled Kessian farmers and herders liked that! Though there *were* still many in those days who knew themselves as Kessian as People, who made their living raiding.

His tale may or may not be the tale of *the last* private war between Kessian villages. It *was one* of the last, and it speaks right to how Kessa came to be Kessa.

To end his little war? The war ended. His sacrifice worked. Who can say if the pain he took on was necessary? To turn the fight he so relished on himself, until exhilaration used up turned to torture, and then to keep right on fighting himself, in honor, until *he* was all used up. That was why his fellow villagers of Prittepaya honored him in *not* remembering his name.

If Prittepaya needed anything so extreme, to end its little local feud with Air Tree, who can say? But to end the need to stake life's flock and bean field by the bitter border of feud: *That* was the peace which not just Prittepaya, but Kessa came to know, to which his sacrifice so spoke.

Perhaps it is fitting that he was Christian. Christianity

already was the respected minority religion known to most Kessians as the ancestor religion of the Church of The Millennium. He was Christian because he lived in Prittepaya, which was one of the villages in a remote area where there was a whole neighborhood of Christian villages. That they were remote may be why they were Christian, but the reason they were so late to join Kessa as Nation was mostly just that the possibility came late. It took a while for enough neighboring villages to join the Nation for *its* border to reach them.

The war, like so many, was about pasture and water; and who could say who was right?

Prittepaya was on the Dry, just above its confluence with the Bell. Air Tree was on the Bell, a bit farther up. Kessian rivers. Both small, but large enough, with well-watered bottom, to sustain the two villages. The Dry actually was the larger river at the confluence, but it really was dry only a mile farther up most of the Time. The Bell, though smaller, was a running stream for miles, with cottonwoods and walnuts and water in the soil for rich grass or a crop. Who had rightful claim to the big pasture at the confluence on the Bell side?

Both villages believed their claim. They had been fighting for generations. They may well have emerged from the Terror fighting. Maybe that's how the conflicting claims happened. Those centuries, following the Change when the Earth tipped over, of unstable climate and horrendous quakes, life was desperate and often unhealthy. No doubt confusing, too. What few records anyone had later from that Time certainly seemed confused, to later scholars, when life again held breathing space for there to be scholars.

However it happened, by the Time he was born, his village of Prittepaya with its perhaps two-hundred souls, had been at war with Air Tree with about the same number of inhabitants if a bit more spread out,

longer than anyone could remember. Vengeance long since had superseded the disputed pasture as prime motive to fight. Classic blood feud...and exceedingly tiresome for anyone not a born fighter.

Which he was. It was an utterly natural way for a boy, who would be a man in the world that he knew, to be. Not mean, mind you. Nor, in a way, did he even care about winning. Though he did care about honor and about his kin and clan. To fight *for them* meant to fight for Prittepaya's cause to win...honorably. But what he really *liked* was the exhilaration of the fight itself.

No one in Prittepaya was literate then, and no one would say anything during his lifetime. By the Time he died, no one who remembered was young. But some of the old people agreed to talk when a Kessian Christian scholar visited.

Tanya Terranegro, whose home village of Terranegro did indeed have exceptionally black, rich bottom soil, was young when she visited Prittepaya. She visited because her mother, Arva, had been called to the Synod the year before.

The Synod was already the Synod of the Church of The Millennium, but it was also the Synod of Kessa. Synod members had determined that Kessian Christians needed more of a voice in the Synod's job of evaluating conditions of Kessa. It thus was because she was Christian, as well as her personal qualifications, that Tanya's mother, Arva Terranegro, had been called to the Synod. Arva had learned of him at the Temple, while attending Council.

Kessa, as policy of Nation, and Kessa as People, respected Christianity. But it also was true that some Kessians saw Christians as a bit backward. Kessian Christians did devote an amazing amount of energy to bickering with each other over which was the correct Lord's Day. Tanya Terranegro wanted to document how a Kessian Christian had contributed something important to Kessa as a whole. It was why she went to Prittepaya, and equally was why the old people of Prittepaya were willing to tell her as much as they did.

Evolin, his sister, wouldn't say much, but there were others old enough to remember. To remember not just the man and his long self-sacrifice, but the child as well, who became that man.

In love with the wind...

Almost as soon as he was old enough to walk, he loved to run. He loved the feel of the air on his chest and legs. Afternoons when most people took shelter if they could, grumbling about endless springtime blast, he only loved to run the more. By the Time he

was eight, he ran all day on the most exposed ridgetops of wind-sculpted piñons and sparse lightning-scarred ponderosas, and came home so exhilarated that he was ready to run all night, too...and sometimes did when the Moon was big.

No one could remember him wearing anything more than a short kilt in any weather at any Time of year, except when propriety required for formal ceremony. But wearing so little in all sorts of weather was more common then. Those who *had* survived the Terror, to become Kessa's ancestors, all too often had been *only* those who *could* survive all but naked and starving. The innumerable severe quakes and the unpredictable extreme weather of the Terror had ended, for life to become wholesome and much easier, only a little longer ago than living memory: The oldest people of his childhood were the first generation who, when they were children, no longer knew anyone old who personally remembered what survival had taken *during* the Terror. Life he knew was wholesome, even abundant most of the Time. But many still took pride to embody strength of Kessa, by which *anyone had* survived the Terror, for Kessians of his day to be descended from.

That very vitality may have had something to do with why there were so many blood feuds among the People who eventually turned themselves into Kessa as Nation at least partly by ending their blood feuds. A problem that bloody side of the vitality to endure, and a problem still not entirely resolved. But he did epitomize the decision that Kessians as People came to, to *be* a Nation, and to do so in ceasing to war among themselves.

The war: Sometimes it blew hot. Sometimes it cooled for years. There were even friendships and an occasional marriage between Prittepaya and Air Tree. They were nearest neighbors after all. But the war was always there...waiting for the next generation to grow up, to avenge the killings and raids of the last.

His father died in the war when he was a toddler. There was an older brother he never knew, and another he knew and lost... Kessians still regarded many children as a sign of welcome health, as had been so chancy not that many generations earlier in the dark depths of the Terror. He always expected to grow up to fight, to honor his fallen kin in avenging them. But he also liked to fight. To strive anyhow. Not that he hesitated to hurt someone if things went that way, but hurting people was not *why* he liked to fight.

The old people of Prittepaya, who recounted what record Tanya Terranegro ever got to make while there was anyone left to recount it, made sure she understood that they were the first generation in either Prittepaya or Air Tree in which there were anywhere near as many