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Fragments of a Happy Decline: By Loring Wirbel, , Tjgrszmk Publishing, 2011, , . An established technical writer's poems that entertainingly and wittily explore the phenomenon of civilizations in decline and finds correspondences between today's events and declines of the past, by borrowing the voices of some famous barbarians..

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I turned 50 in 2007, so I'm practicing curmudgeon-like behavior by stressing, "whatever it is, I'm agin' it!" Call me anarcho-syndicalist or progressive, except I think most anarchists and progressives are as annoying as neocons. I like to point folks to way-outside-the-mainstream literature and music, while grumbling about everything else.

These seven poems from a Barbarian choir were written between mid-October and early November, 2010. They were inspired by two nonfiction works by Peter Turchin: War and Peace and War: The Life Cycles of Imperial Nations and Historical Dynamics: Why States Rise and Fall; as well as by Kim Stanley Robinson's 2002 novel The Years of Rice and Salt. Seven infamous and not-so-infamous tribal successors to Rome, living between 440 AD and 1400 AD, were asked to tell their tales with reference to any suggestions they had for the rapidly-declining coalition of states of the early 21st century. The voices of Totila and Charlemagne are comprised of two simultaneous voices each: the Totila of 552 AD and 2047 AD, and the Charlemagne of 800 AD and an unspecified late 21st-century date.

Ibn Khaldun was the subject of the last poem, for more than just chronological reasons. He is a 14th-century and very early 15th-century mathematician and historian, born in Tunisia and resident scholar in Cairo, who became the chief counselor of Temur the Lame (Tamerlane) during the latter's siege of Turkey and the Middle East, 1396-1404. Ibn Khaldun developed the theory of the asabiya historical cycle, explaining how empires expand, exploit resources, and finally collapse. Turchin is among many modern statisticians who was astonished to find that Khaldun's 600-year-old theories map fairly well into modern theories of chaos and nonlinear cycles. Neither Ibn Khaldun nor Turchin claim that imperial collapse in the Western Hemisphere is imminent, but listen to the choir -- and keep in mind, a post-modern collapse may be more comical than it is tragic or violent.

Of course, in retrospect, Lawrence, Kansas was no place to center the logistics for sustained struggles across a continent, but we were suckers for romance, OK? ‘Bleeding Kansas’ and the maniacal John Steuart Curry painting, the outstretched arms on every T-shirt making you forget Mr. Brown was a bit tetched in the head. Yes, of course they’d say the same of me, victor’s naming rights and all that.

The nom de guerre was from the Ostrogoths, since Totila is not often given credit for being the first successful guerilla, long before Chaleco, Garibaldi, Mao. Had you heard of the man? Do you see

where I was taking this? I mean, three fourths of Italy in the shadow of Belisarius, only a few decades after the big fall, that was no mean feat, and carried out with a lot more grace than Langobards. Because what the chattering gibbons from the directorate forgot is that the name was chosen as much for mercy as audacity. Totila understood what we might call people's democracy better than any emperor;

The first big success, discounting St. Louis, since there was no real directorate infrastructure to worry about, was the Southern Forging Strategy of 47; one solid string through Memphis, Paducah, then the branching at Nashville, with the southern fork taking the old Chickamauga line through Chattanooga and Atlanta, while the northern fork followed the old 40 trail through the Asheville ruins and on north through Virginia. Keep in mind we were too few to make formations, these were insurgencies on Vespa, eCar, anything that worked. Yeah, even an old Segway, did you see the pictures from Blacksburg? Cute.

They'd saved any original documents free of water damage from the K Street ruins, cobbled together an Internet of sorts that might cover mid-Virginia to the New York-Pine Barrens evacuation corridor on a good day, and painted us as the know-nothings, come to impose some weird-ass Christian theocracy, acting out the Left Behind novels and denying the climate-change rules. You know and I know, we'd been directly attacked by the Science Killer tribes in those early days, the late '30s just out of Kansas City.

I'm not going to deny the funds from China or Brazil. Justinian will tell you it's regionalism, splittism in service of a new empire, but why can't they simply be our France? I'm telling you, we would have had our Yorktown by now, if China had kept up in the long-range robotics.

Who believes the Constitution Priests? You might well ask who believes us. It's hard to tell what an individual citizen believes any more, always in motion, another coastal evacuation, lost in an iHelmet world whenever they get a spare moment of downtime in the camps. First you have to ask, can they still think in some linear fashion? Second, is there any visible affect with which to make an emotional appeal? Third, is the attention span long enough for a simple revolutionary slogan? Shit, we've got pictures.

Hard to tell, so hard to tell, there's nothing like polls any more, no clear sense of whether the traveling ones despise you or cheer you on. Quite honestly, we recruit in the older villages, the ones furthest from the corridors, where living in a single place might have preserved some sense of history; no, not historical determinism, forget about that.

Yeah, the Arlington siege is in its fifth month or so, but what does siege really mean any more? It's not the obvious starvation, disease you once saw. Local abundance and bootleg antibiotics make it more subtle than that. It would be nice to think the siege makes a difference in some way, that the revolt can gain its historical footnote. But what counts as an archive in a world defined by false documents? What is a story? A USB thumb drive that can be hacked by the directorate? A printed broadsheet no one will read? A campfire tale, a chanson for a bad pimply folk-singer in a new desert Earth?

The key is in Vortigern's history, post-Roman empire. Narrator might be Vortigern, might be me. Historians like Venerable Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth heaped scorn on Vortigern for inviting in the Saxons, since they took less than a year to take over the country and chase the Britons west, faster than the Romans ever did. Vortigern claimed he had no choice, the Picts were coming over Hadrian's Wall and the Britons had no defenses.

It's autumn, it's a time of imperial collapse, some make their peace with heathens (political campaigners pretending to be dumber than they are to win votes, etc.), some retreat into the shadows. Vortigern left the door open for violence, violence made its winter voice felt very quickly. We were having a chat on the Facebook posting about the jackal image, I told the story about the woman who took the nonviolent-communications class with me who insisted that even satire was a

form of violence. I told her very bluntly that I choose for tactical reasons to take out my jackal voice every now and then. Then I got to thinking about poor Vortigern, took out his jackal voice as the winter approached, maybe he thought it was a temporary necessity too.

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Loring Wirbel is a senior analyst at The Linley Group and senior editor of Networking Report. He has covered the semiconductor industry for more than 25 years and is widely known for his work as director of communications coverage at EE Times. Prior to joining The Linley Group, he managed the FPGA Gurus blog for EDN, the Smartbooks blog for Qualcomm, and the Smart Networks report for Adva Optical. He also worked on independent projects for Vitesse Semiconductor, Verdelogix, Vita, and Venture Online.

Loring spent the much of his career at CMP/United Business Media, where he eventually rose to director of UBM's market-intelligence unit. Prior to that position, he covered the communications,

client-server, and mil-aero markets for EE Times (a CMP publication), writing numerous articles. During this time, he also spoke at industry events including ATM 2000, Communication System Design, DSL.con, and OEM Communications. In 2004, London's Pluto Press published his book "Star Wars: US Tools of Space Supremacy."

Prior to EE Times, Loring covered semiconductors for Electronic News. He started his career writing science and energy articles for the Tucson Citizen, then served as science editor for the Albuquerque Tribune. He studied computer science and electronic engineering at Michigan State University before earning a science journalism BA degree at the University of Arizona.

This work, the first study of the Ostrogoths in almost a century, traces their initial contact with the Roman world in the third century through the dissolution of their kingdom in Italy in 554. It depicts early Ostrogothic society and studies the interactions between these barbarians and the Roman Empire - relations and exchanges which played an important role in the meta...more This work, the first study of the Ostrogoths in almost a century, traces their initial contact with the Roman world in the third century through the dissolution of their kingdom in Italy in 554. It depicts early Ostrogothic society and studies the interactions between these barbarians and the Roman Empire - relations and exchanges which played an important role in the metamorphosis, rise, and fall of Ostrogothic society.

I bought this book from the Indiana University Press website. I well remember the days when actual bookshops were rare and an internet was not even imagined in Science-Fiction so I am alert to the usefulness of the online book retailers but the big ones I find are just boring. I find book buying on them dull. Yes, I get the book I want, but it is a mechanical drudge-like experience.

Somehow, somewhere, I got a link to this university press website and loved it. It was like going to a real book shop in that I could see books about things that I had no idea that people were writing about. I may not want to buy the weird and the wonderful, ok actually I do if I am strictly honest with myself, however there is pleasure in knowing that they are available, sometimes fantastically discounted, those on sale for less than ten United States Dollars I find particularly hard to resist. One of the books I bought was this history of the Ostrogoths.

The Ostrogoths set up a kingdom of sorts in Italy between about 490 and 552ish AD after defeating Odovacar who had been enjoying being king over semi-demi-post-Roman Empire Italy since 476. Both Odovacar and the Ostrogoths were barbarians which is to say not Roman and not Greek and by this time Rome had been sacked twice (in 410 and again in 455) however a Roman way of life continued. Even under these barbarian rulers there was still a Roman Senate complete with senators giving speeches, there were tax farmers who collected Roman taxes, Roman courts were still in session. The last Roman Emperor, who had the good luck to be called Romulus Augustus, in the west had been packed off into retirement by Odovacar but a recognisably Roman way of life continued under these barbarian rulers.

Anyhow Sic transit gloria mundi as those old Romans frequently liked to say. In 535 the Byzantines invaded Italy, fought the Ostrogoths up, down and round Italy until the last of them surrendered, utterly exhausted, in 553. However the Byzantines didn't get to enjoy their victory for long either since in 568 another barbarian people, the Langobards, began to push the Byzantines out. And so it goes.

My problem with this book is that after reading I don't know who it's intended audience is. It neither explains things in a thorough or helpful way to make the subject understandable for somebody coming to the Ostrogoths for the first time, yet nor does it offer particularly interesting insights in the main text (the endnotes are a different matter), an engagement with the historiography or sources to entertain somebody who is already comfortable with the difference between an Ostrogoth and a Visigoth. The book occupies an awkward space between the novice and the reasonably read.

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