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### *A True Story – Is Your “Kingdom” Next?*<sup>1</sup>

## **ROMORE – The Kingdom that Missed Weak Signals**

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### **A Case Study**

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*by Dabe Stein*

At a time not so long ago, in a land not so far away, there existed a Kingdom. It was just like any other constitutional monarchy in all respects save one – Kings were limited to two-year reigns, after which they were required to abdicate. From the ranks of the His Majesty’s Privy Council, a new King would be selected and coronated. For its part, the Privy Council was comprised of commoners nominally chosen for three-year renewable terms of office. Although the Kingdom’s charter stipulated that these posts be filled by election, this was academic, as there were generally more open positions than subjects willing to fill them. Yet this was no cause for concern, as participation in His Majesty’s monthly evening gatherings was high and enthusiastic – the numerous other competing activities throughout the land notwithstanding. Long forgotten was an earlier demise of the Kingdom, as the Kingdom had somehow come back to life and His Majesty’s subjects were presently too absorbed in the fare, drink, and merriment of the monthly gatherings to remember a bygone era. The Kingdom had another custom of note – upon abdication, former Kings were permitted and often encouraged to remain on the Privy Council. Several did so, often serving as little more than advisors thereafter.

Beyond the monthly festivities, the Kingdom had ambitious goals and launched several campaigns in pursuit of them. Its expansion program called for more subjects, increased participation in the monthly festivities, greater recognition and stature, and more funds in the Royal Treasury. As there were not enough Privy Councillors to labour in support of these goals (especially with some limiting their roles to advisory), Royal Commissions had been established to provide the needed labour force. But alas, these

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<sup>1</sup> Names are veiled and the setting has been altered. The narrative is otherwise based in fact and is published as a case study.

efforts to expand the labour force generally came to naught, as the Commissioners were themselves drawn from the ranks of the Privy Council and most were unsuccessful in recruiting other subjects to work with them. Nonetheless, the festivities went on.

Now it came to pass that as one King was approaching the end of his reign, no heir to the throne had emerged. Constitutionally, His Majesty's reign was not permitted to extend to a third year – but nobody else wanted to be King! Fear and panic gripped the Privy Council and swept far and wide throughout the Realm as the possibility of an interregnum loomed ever larger.

Finally there came a young knight who agreed to be King, and once again all was well throughout the land. As the monthly gatherings continued, the grim possibility of an interregnum receded further and further into memory, and all seemed well.

The festivities went on, and to ensure that members of the younger generation could partake in them, His Majesty decreed that new venues be sought in remote regions of the land. Through various exertions, it was done and for a time appeared successful in attracting new participants – and the monthly revelry went on.

The new King was highly capable and widely respected, but after a year and a half, his reign was cut short by His Majesty's extended sojourn to the Northern Lands. Yet another King arose, but circumstances compelled his own abdication after a mere six months or so. And again, the possibility of an interregnum loomed large as no Privy Councillor wanted to be King.

But once again, a crisis was averted just in the nick of time. As it had once before, the Privy Council finally found a successor who agreed to reign – this time a woman. For the first time in its history, the Kingdom was ruled by a Queen, and all rejoiced! Initially hailed by many as a godsend, she breathed new life into the Kingdom, and the subjects were happy. And the monthly evening gatherings continued with all their revelry, some in new venues – in one case, a museum administered by a prestigious Scientific Academy of another Kingdom. And a series of less-frequent midday gatherings was added, and the Royal Proclamation Page was given a makeover in an effort to interest more subjects and prospective subjects in the affairs of the Kingdom. The population and reputation of the Kingdom grew by leaps and bounds!

By this time, the Privy Council was meeting monthly to discuss intermediate and long term goals for the Kingdom – quite unlike the olde days of quarterly and bimonthly meetings. Although this new meeting schedule was far more taxing than in the past, none complained. Great were the activities throughout the Kingdom – the fare, the drink, the merriment – and greater were the spun and re-spun tales of goals to be achieved, as Her Majesty endeavored to ensure full buy-in by all Privy Councillors. Labourers to implement the ideas were a secondary concern; they would somehow appear later. In time, the Privy Council gatherings were viewed by some as festivities in themselves, occasions for socializing and modest revelry. But outwardly, all seemed well.

As is typical among Kingdoms, various members of the Privy Council who had served long and faithfully through the years began tiring of their duties. Wisely recognizing their inability to reap the fruits of their labours – or in some cases the fruits of the anticipated labours of others – some vacated their posts, one by one, over a period of several months. Others malingered on, ostensibly hoping that new workers would magically appear to implement the Royal agenda. Her Majesty and some remaining members began searching far and wide for new Privy Councillors, in some cases assisted by the recently departed members. A few subjects were persuaded to be candidates for the Privy Council and were elected by acclamation, since as in prior reigns, there were barely enough subjects stepping forth to fill the vacant posts. Most of the Royal Commissions remained understaffed, too, some consisting of only one subject (the respective Commissioner, also a Privy Councillor) or at best two. While the number of subjects willing to serve the Kingdom was dwindling, the Kingdom remained outwardly vibrant, and the midday and evening festivities went on.

Then, came Her Majesty's proclamation that Royal Commission service henceforth be regarded as steppingstones to Privy Council posts, as she sought to build a much-needed labour force for the Kingdom. This method of swelling the ranks made sense and had served other Kingdoms well. But in Her Majesty's Realm, few subjects were interested in election to the Privy Council in the first place, and not surprisingly, there was even less interest in Commission service. Few stepped forth in service to the Kingdom, and fewer were those who regarded this problem as potentially grave. Surprisingly, the weak signals escaped notice even among various Privy Councillors who – by trade, mind you – should have identified them years earlier, and the revelry went on. In the meantime, the Privy Council had morphed into a Trivial Council, and at least one promising Councillor vacated his post after less than a year of service. Some accounts suggest that there were more. But at least for a time, the Kingdom remained outwardly vibrant.

All was not bleak. The monthly festivities continued to command high participation and were earning acclaim. Even on the Trivial Council, two former Kings were actively contributing to the welfare of the Realm. One had already gone on to manage the Royal Treasury (a seemingly thankless job, but one at which he excelled far above his peers). After accepting this post, he founded the Royal Literary Society, which in the months to come would be one of only two surviving remnants of the Kingdom – the other being the Royal Press, which in the meantime had been quietly extending its reach far beyond the Realm's borders – indeed, to other Realms in the larger Federation. Another former King, he who earlier had departed to the Northern Lands, had by now returned to take charge of the monthly festivities. But these were the exceptions, as others remained on the Trivial Council long after they ceased contributing usefully. For their part, most of the Commissioners remained unsuccessful in attracting helpers. Not surprisingly, one of these Commissioners was none other than the Royal Crier, the same former King who on an earlier occasion had experienced difficulty in finding an heir to the throne; some things never change.

In time, the Queen reached the end of her reign and was followed by a new King. A wise and able Ruler, he sought to make the Privy Council once again functional, opting for fewer meetings so that the Councillors would have more time to perform real labour in support of the Kingdom's campaigns. But by this time, only a skeleton labour force remained, and the campaigns were never opened. During the months prior to his coronation, several movers and shakers had already vacated their posts, the exertions of the Trivial Council having been squandered on fruitless endeavors and worse, on non-endeavors. Indeed, the

weak signals were stronger now, and the longstanding failure to heed them was starting to bear its bitter fruits.

Nine months into the King's reign (and on the anniversary of a great historic invasion in a far corner of the world), another Councillor did the unthinkable. After three years on the Trivial Council, he vacated his post thereon, allegedly after having finally lost confidence in it – but retained his other post as Lord of the Royal Press. This was unheard of – and was much to the chagrin of the former Queen, whose assumptions about Kingdom administration rendered it difficult for her to fathom such a possibility. In an unrelated message to the remaining members of the Trivial Council just several days later, the Royal Crier, himself still on the Council after many years, identified the Kingdom as the “best” among all Kingdoms in the greater Federation – apparently oblivious to the fact that at least some of the other Kingdoms were far more vibrant, commanded greater stature at home and abroad, and had more than enough subjects stepping forth in service. In light of such pomposity, perhaps the general failure to heed weak signals should not have been surprising.

But alas, as the ranks of the Trivial Council (or at least those members actively serving the Kingdom) dwindled, and with the ranks at the Commission level never having been large in the first place, there remained too few even to arrange and publicize the monthly evening festivities, let alone pursue the lofty Royal ambitions that had been so painstakingly recorded – and re-recorded, and re-recorded, and re-recorded – in the Royal Archives during the reign of Her Majesty the Queen. Some of the planned festivities were cancelled, and then there came a period during which none were scheduled; only the Royal Literary Society remained, along with the Royal Press that had by now expanded far beyond the Realm. Less than five months into his second year, this latest King, too, abdicated. The dreaded interregnum had finally come, and there was great sadness throughout the land.

In one month's time, the former King who had returned from the Northern Lands once again ascended to the throne, ending the interregnum. A gifted leader was he, but he was without labourers, as the Kingdom's labour force had by now dwindled to near naught. Festivities did resume, at first only on an intermittent basis, as by now there remained almost none to arrange them.

Some loyal subjects cling to the nostalgic hope that the Kingdom will return to its former glory and perhaps advance to a greater one. Like the legendary phoenix of olde, the Kingdom arose from its ashes once before, and there are encouraging signs that it is stirring to life again. But measured against its glory of times past, the Kingdom is no more.