

The Rise of Közeron

THE VIKING SHIP KNOWN AS KLÓRA KARFI DISAPPEARED ON ITS journey homeward to the shores of Norway as it traversed the freezing waters of the North Sea with its sister ships, the Skelmir Hlíf and Hjarta Hvassi. It would be the final voyage of all three ships led by the famous Viking raider Kortan Sigurd and myriad pieces of the Skelmir Hlíf and Hjarta Hvassi were said to have washed ashore near Lindisfarne, England, the town that they set out from, after a great storm ravished and destroyed them. The winds and waves that night were responsible for drowning their respective crews and reducing both ships to kindling. Although historical documents from the corresponding time period and region of Britain assume the same fate befell the Klóra Karfi, something very different happened to Kortan Sigurd and the men on that ship.

The raid was said to have been swift and brutal. The Viking warriors led by Sigurd, in documents written by Brother Godric Eadwine (an Anglo-Saxon monk at the Lindisfarne Priory), are described as “a band of savage heathen men whom



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hath once more come ashore, bringing ruin to the holy churches and townships that lie within the countryside's embrace. Three ships did arrive at break of day, one bearing the shape of a giant seashell carved upon its prow, another adorned with a heart, and the final with the visage of a dragon, adorned with fierce clawed talons striking fear. The men aboard these vessels slew all who stood against them, robbing their victims of money, treasures, and even their food. Ere they set their homes ablaze, reducing them to naught but ashes." Brother Godric Eadwine also describes the storm that night, mentioning it the following day in his private diaries: "The tempest that did wreak havoc upon the coast yestereve was terrible and treacherous, verily the work of some evil force. The north tower of our holy monastery was smitten by lightning, causing a great fire in its wrathful strike and taking Abbot Edwulf Oswine from us. Between the dire events of the day and the calamities of the night that followed, the happenstances on the 19th day of June in the 824th year of our Lord shall forever be graven upon my memory."

The histories inscribed by this monk and others of the Lindisfarne Priory claim that, upon finding pieces of wrecked longships mere days after the raids, the Klóra Karfi was destroyed along with its sister ships the Skelmir Hlíf and the Hjarta Hvassi in the storm that ensued after the violent plunder that befell the English coastline. There are, however, conflicting historical documents recorded by the Seākwa people, a Native American tribe settled on the coast of New England in North America during the same time period. This unverified history is quite possibly the true fate of Kortan Sigurd and the Klóra Karfi, for in early 1932, during a ground excavation for a local business, a ship of Viking origin with a dragon's head prow matching Brother Godric Eadwine's description was unearthed from where it was buried near Veil Reef Beach at the southern boundary of Echo Bay. Experts

confirm that the type of wood used as well as the building style of the vessel matches the construction of others built in the time period and location where the Klóra Karfi originated,



EXCAVATION OF SUSPECTED KLÓRA KARFI

lending further credence to the idea that the ship was not destroyed but was instead separated from its sisters during the violent storm, inexplicably finding its way completely undamaged and wholly intact to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

According to Seākwa historians, the tale that follows originated from stories told by the physical manifestation of an oceanic deity named Közeron, who shared his history with the tribe when he encountered them sometime in the 7th century. It has been shared in tribal memory for over 1,200 years via word of mouth, art, canoe carvings and architectural adornments from different time periods in their tribal history and remains a major part of the Seākwa's tribal identity to this day.

After successfully raiding Lindisfarne and the surrounding countryside, Kortan Sigurd and his men returned to their ships, securing their plunder

and setting sail for home. The trio of longships were particularly quick and were thought to have possibly moved at an average speed of 8-12 knots, taking them approximately three days to five days of rowing with breaks and weather factored in, to make the approximate 800 kilometer return trip to their village on the coast of Norway. Typically, Viking longships of this time period sailed within view of the coastline and did not sail directly across open seas causing a journey that would otherwise take approximately two days to take nearly twice as long.

Sigurd was standing at the helm of the Klóra Karfi, adorned with its intricately carved prow, when the sky suddenly darkened and the wind began to howl like a vengeful spirit. A fierce and unexpected storm descended upon the three ships out of nowhere just hours after they set sail. The seas roared and monstrous waves reached their great hands towards the sky, threatening to capsize the raiding party's ships with every gust. The men of the Klóra Karfi watched in horror as a maelstrom opened beneath the Hjarta Hvassi and Skelmir Hlíf, spinning them around and around one another in endless circles as their crews attempted to furiously row their vessels to safety. The men watched as the efforts of those in the other longships were unsuccessful and the whirlpool snapped the oars that competed against its currents one by one, eventually swallowing both ships whole and beginning to pull at the lone Viking longship that remained.

As the Klóra Karfi spun in the very same current that its sisters perished within, a great wave submerged the deck, taking three of the crew overboard and into the watery depths. The remaining men clung to the ship, white-knuckled and fearful, as the maelstrom's grip tightened and their fate seemed set in stone.

When the intense storm finally abated, Kortan Sigurd and his men remained aboard the ship adrift in a dense fog, obscuring their vision of everything past two or three feet in every direction. The mist was so thick that when the men stood at the stern, they were unable to see the bow of the Klóra Karfi at the other end. The sun above them, showing barely through the haze, appeared as an illuminated, ghostly disc and worse still, not a single one of the men could remember how they survived. They could recall the onset of the typhoon, the terrifying whirlpool and watching their sister ships being crushed as they were sucked down to the bottom, but the memory of how they escaped that fate themselves was a blank void—as if it were wiped from their minds.

Amongst Sigurd's men was one woman who went by the name of Aud Olofsdotter; a fierce shield maiden and soothsayer or "völva" as she was known in their native tongue, who claimed to have received a prophetic vision during the storm. Over many years, the men learned to listen to her and listen closely when she shared her visions with them, as she was a skilled storyteller and her prophecies became truths quite often. She spoke of a great kraken; a monstrous spear-headed sea creature with dozens of great, reaching tentacles, emerging from the depths at the very center of the maelstrom and pulling at the Klóra Karfi into the spinning waters. According to her vision, as it began to capsize, instead of allowing the longship to overturn, the great beast held it upright and level for a moment. It raised it up and above the waves for just a moment before it pulled the ship into the maelstrom's center and underwater entirely. Instead of becoming submerged beneath the viciously undulating surface, the crew found themselves traveling through a mystical tunnel beneath the waves—a water-passage that encircled the ship above and below and seemed to stretch endlessly before and behind them. She claimed that this underpass beneath

the surface of the water was a place of unremembering where the passage of time and the movement of the ship became entirely meaningless. The span between the storm and waking in the fog, which seemed to the men to be mere moments, was actually, she claimed, to be over three weeks.



'ARTIST RENDITION OF AUD OLOFSDOTTER

Some of the men who heard her telling of this vision claimed that this simply could not be so and at this, she urged them to check their stores of food and fresh water.

“You will find them nearly depleted.” she said, “I tell you, it has been nigh on a month since we sailed through this otherworldly realm, as guided by some unseen force and in that time, we have consumed nearly all of our provisions.”

Their stores of food, which were mostly stolen during the raid, should have lasted them nearly 20 days and what remained of their supply of fresh water was barely enough for four, although the barrels should have been nearly full for their journey was only meant to last a week or two and no longer. At this revelation, the men were dismayed and disoriented and looked to Kortan for leadership and guidance.

Knowing no other means of escape from their plight, he ordered them back into the hull and to begin rowing in a direction that, unsure of their location and lacking means of navigation through the fog, he chose arbitrarily—desperately hoping it would lead them safely to land and salvation.

For five days they rowed and the thick blankets of mist hanging in the air never lifted. Morale plummeted as hunger and thirst gnawed at their resolve to continue onward and some of the men began to believe and share in whispers that they surely must be dead. Their reasoning was that the maelstrom actually crushed their longship, like it had done to its sisters, and while the other crews made it to Valhalla, they somehow found themselves lost along the way. On the sixth night, shortly after the first of their numbers was found dead of malnutrition and dehydration in his bunk below decks, the waters around the Klóra Karfi were discovered to be glowing with a neon green phosphorescence and illuminating the fog with an eerie light. Both things were interpreted by most of those aboard the ship as a malevolent sign.

No one knew why he chose that night, when the water shimmered with an eerie glow, but even the most rational among the crew could be tempted to drink the seawater at this point, driven by their relentless thirst. Perhaps this man, unlike the others, saw the neon waters as a divine omen. The first

to drink was Vontell Eriksson, who lowered a bucket into the glowing sea and raised it to his lips, swallowing nearly half without even attempting to skim the luminescent algae from the surface. In the waters around Echo Bay, the phosphorescent green glow is a familiar sight and is caused by psykothrix algae. This algae, more abundant before the Bay was settled, is still illegally harvested, dried, and processed for its consumption to this day. Known for its vivid glow and psychedelic properties, psykothrix algae poses a significant risk if not properly prepared. Studies reveal that improper processing can lead to severe irrationality and bouts of inexplicable violence, especially in those with weak or compromised constitutions. Thus, when the six starving and thirsty crew members were convinced by Vontell to drink the water with him, each of them fell into a state of frenzied madness. These seven men became the crew's undoing.

That night, driven by insatiable hunger and the effects of psykothrix, the intoxicated men determined Aud Olofsdotter to be the weakest of the crew on board. They stabbed her to death and cut away strips of her stomach, which they began to eat raw. It wasn't until they began to consume her uterus, intestines and liver that they were witnessed by another crewman who happened upon them in the midst of their gruesome act. Being greatly outnumbered by the madmen, he retreated above deck to alert Kortan Sigurd about what he'd seen happening below.

Most of the men gathered on the deck, drawn by the eerie glow of the eldritch waters. Kortan, rallying his remaining best fighters, descended below deck to confront the madmen-turned-cannibals. A brutal battle ensued, with the intoxicated men holding the advantage; the uncured algae granted them unnatural strength and cunning. In a short time, they

overpowered Sigurd and his fighters, capturing Sigurd and binding him tightly to a beam.

As the remaining crew discovered the mutiny, they attempted to reclaim their ship, descending below deck to attempt to overthrow the mutineers and free their leader. However, the madmen's enhanced abilities led to a bloody slaughter. One by one, Sigurd's men fell until only Kortan remained, shouting at the mutineers and demanding to be released. The madmen taunted him for hours, their eyes gleaming and wild the entire time. Before the night was through, they mutilated their captain, severing his arms at the elbows and cutting off his legs, tossing them into the glowing sea. Kortan was strong and his strength and desire to live never faltered, even at the end when they threw him, still alive, into the freezing neon waters as well.

This marks a pivotal moment in Seākwa tribal history where legend and myth become one, for Kortan Sigurd did not perish. Indeed, what transpired next endowed him with everlasting life. Xaigon, eternal and undying, in this time period was already inhabiting the waters of Echo Bay and was already living there in his dream state for eons. His followers on land were already brewing Cetacean Essence and undergoing the telltale transformations and adaptations necessary to live with him beneath the waves for several hundred years. At this time, the Shining City in the fabled Coral Caves was considerably smaller than its present size. By 824 AD, Depth Departures were occurring in small, unrecorded numbers within the Seākwa tribe, with the Xaigonian Fishpeople beneath the black waves of Echo Bay numbering between 750 and 900 souls.

It is crucial to note that the true scope and size of the Shining City has never been accurately counted or estimated with any degree of success. By the time

of this publication in 1934, it is thought that over 5,000 souls reside in the Shining City. The Xaigonian Fishpeople do not permit outsiders, particularly census takers, to enter their great, secret city, and likely never will, rendering these numbers unverifiable. Experts concur that the population of the Coral Cave's Shining City is at least double that of Echo Bay. However, many argue that this undersea population is easily three times larger than the land-based population.

For more information on *Xaigon*, *Xaigonian Enclave*, *Xaigonian Fishpeople*, *Cetacean Essence* or *Depth Departures*, refer to **CHAPTER 12, "THE LORE AND HISTORY OF XAIGON"** beginning on page 137.

Having been noticed by Xaigonian scouts two days prior, the Klóra Karfi was already being watched closely by the residents of the Shining City and as Kortan Sigurd's body sank beneath the waters, it was collected by three Xaigonian Oracles. Moving hastily and employing the use of their dark magic, the Priestesses dismembered a giant lobster attaching its limbs, tail and legs to Kortan Sigurd's torso, thus saving his life.

When Kortan awoke beneath the sea, his eyes slowly adjusted to the dim, otherworldly light filtering through the water. Confusion gripped him as he took in his strange surroundings; an underwater temple filled with bioluminescent sea creatures and phosphorescent algae. Before him stood the three Oracles, pleasure painted across their scaled faces, satisfied with their work. For a short time, he strained to comprehend the alien environment. When they spoke to him, he did not understand their words and he slowly began to grow agitated.

As realization dawned, this confusion and agitation gave way to a burning

wrath. The annals of Viking mythology are clear: a slain warrior's rightful place is within the hallowed halls of Valhalla, where he would feast and fight for eternity. Yet, by some cruel twist of fate, Kortan found himself denied this glorious afterlife. His resurrection beneath the waves was not a blessing but a curse—a theft of his warrior's reward.



ARTIST RENDITION OF VALHALLA

Fueled by this perceived outrage and denial, Kortan's rage intensified. His once noble visage twisted with fury, he turned on the very Oracles who saved his life. These mystical seers of the deep, revered for their wisdom and power, unwittingly incurred his vengeance. He saw their actions not as a salvation but as a condemnation, a denial of his divine right.

As their mangled bodies began to turn the waters of their sacred temple red,

Kortan breathed heavily of their mystic blood as it commingled with the seawater. In breathing this blood, he was further imbued with the dark magics of the Xaigonian Priestesses.

This act of destruction and desecration within the sacred confines of one of Xaigon's temples, nestled in the secretive Shining City of the Coral Caves, did not escape notice. Xaigon himself, a nightmarish entity with a slick, reflective black form, both squid-like and humanoid, bearing a colossal obsidian shell upon his back, stirred from his eternal slumber. Waking from his dreamstate and rising up from the Abyss, he ascended through the chasmic cliffs of his sleeping crevice, swimming directly to the temple where the massacre transpired. Within moments, his formidable tentacles rent the walls of the sacred sanctuary to rubble, and upon discovering Kortan still within, a titanic clash between the two ensued.

Xaigon found himself facing an evenly matched adversary in the transformed Viking. The battle raged with ferocity, hand-to-tentacle, for nearly an hour. When Xaigon's powerful and whip-like appendages succeeded in tearing the newly attached claws from Kortan's arms, it seemed as though victory was within his grasp. Yet, in a twist neither combatant



'DEPICTION OF XAIGON

anticipated, something extraordinary occurred.

Lobsters possess the remarkable ability to regenerate their claws through a process of molting their exoskeletons. This regeneration process begins immediately upon the loss of a limb, with a bud forming at the site of the wound. In an ordinary lobster, it may take several molts to fully restore a missing claw or limb and depending on the age of the lobster, this may be a process that takes anywhere from a year to five years total for this remarkable ability to allow for eventual regrowth.

However, imbued with the supernatural blood of the Oracles, Kortan's regeneration defied the natural order. To the astonishment of both Xaigon and Kortan, his claws began to regenerate instantaneously. The exoskeleton formed and shed multiple times within mere seconds. In less than a minute, the missing claws were fully regrown from where Xaigon severed them.

Defeated and bewildered, Xaigon retreated into the spiraling abyss of his onyx shell. Once fully ensconced, the ominous sound of stone grinding against stone echoed through the depths as he blocked off the shell's opening and sank slowly to the ocean floor, leaving behind a trail of bioluminescent mucus in his wake. Kortan continued his assault on the impenetrable shell where it lay at rest on the ocean floor for quite some time, his relentless blows failing to make a dent in the unnatural and unholy barrier that shielded the ancient god.

At last, conceding the futility of his efforts, Kortan abandoned the fight. He swam back to the surface, resolute in his determination to attend to other unfinished business that awaited him above the waves.

It did not take long for Kortan to locate the Klóra Karfi, despite the dense fog enshrouding the surface. Finding it was easy for him amidst the eerie, glowing waters. His newly transformed limbs, both dexterous and surefooted, allowed him to scale the side of the longship with ease, and with a mighty heave, he hoisted himself aboard the deck, where the mutineers were still celebrating their ill-gotten victory, their minds still twisted by the hallucinogenic effects of the psykothrix algae.

Kortan cleared his throat, a sound that sliced through their carousing and caused the startled men to turn and face him in horror. The only remaining vestiges of his humanity were the intricate patterns of tattoos on his chest, his furious bearded face, and his long, elaborately braided hair.

With his newfound power, Kortan exacted a brutal revenge on the mutineers, slaughtering them for their betrayal and casting their severed limbs into the sea. Having satisfied his vengeance, Kortan left the ship and ventured into the vast ocean depths. For many months, he explored the underwater realms, encountering many creatures native only to Echo Bay. Creatures both wondrous and terrifying. His journey was marked by continuous clashes with the Xaigonian Fishpeople who still believed they might find a way to best him in battle and earn the glory and recognition of Xaigon. Every Fishperson who attempted to fight him in the sand at the depths of the open waters was repaid for their efforts with death.

Közeron and the Seãkwa Tribe

THE SEÃKWA TRIBE WERE LIVING ALONG THE COAST OF ECHO BAY for generations prior to 825 AD, their existence deeply intertwined with the rhythms of the tides and the whispers of the ocean. They held a profound

belief in the spirits dwelling within the watery depths, chief among them Xaigon himself. Their rituals and traditions were inextricably linked with the natural world of the sea, as they considered themselves the guardians of its enigmatic mysteries.

According to Seākwa tribal historians, Kortan emerged from the waves in Twilight Cove, located on the north side of their village, one sunny afternoon. He was first spotted by a pair of tribesmen who were fishing on the shore. Horrified and awestruck by his appearance, they abandoned their belongings, including a basket containing their substantial catch, and ran back to the village to alert the tribe. Kortan observed these men, picked up their abandoned basket in his claws, and followed them with a curious demeanor.

Upon his arrival at the village, Kortan found it seemingly deserted. The fishermen, known for their serious dispositions and honesty, recounted their encounter to the tribal leaders. The elders, trusting their word, sounded the alarm by blowing three times into a conch shell, prompting the entire tribe, except for one, to flee the small village. The elderly and infirm hid among the high sand dune grasses, while the young and able-bodied quietly and quickly ascended the hidden paths within the Twilight Pass cliffs. Everyone halted where they stood when Kortan arrived, with many crouching in the seagrasses along the rocky path and others watching from the cliffs with shocked amazement.

Kortan briefly surveyed the village before sighing and leaving the basket of fish at what he supposed was the village center. Observing this, the one man who had stayed behind decided to emerge from his hiding place. Talanook, a trusted member of the tribal shaman, approached Kortan with cautious

reverence, sensing an immense power radiating from him. After several minutes of circling Kortan, who stood unmoving, Talanook beckoned to the villagers, signaling that it was safe to return.

No one living on land had ever seen Xaigon, so when Talanook proclaimed that this being was the manifestation of the deity in physical form, the tribe fell to their knees, offering respect and pledging their devotion. Kortan, unable to understand their language, did nothing to correct the misunderstanding and seemed to accept their worship. The tribe celebrated their fortune, believing they were in the presence of a divine entity from the sea.

As days turned into weeks, Kortan remained among the Seākwa, gradually learning their language and lifestyle. His presence became a central part of their daily lives, integrating himself into their customs and routines. Yet, a schism began to form within the tribe, as not all members were wholly convinced of his divinity. A young warrior named Mako, known for his strength and perceptiveness, started to question Kortan's true nature. Over time, Mako's suspicions grew, and he became convinced that this creature was not Xaigon. He began to quietly whisper to others, suggesting that Kortan was a mere usurper seeking to disrupt their sacred traditions. His skepticism resonated with many in the tribe, finding a receptive audience among the doubtful.

The division reached a breaking point when Kortan, struggling with his newfound language, mispronounced words that evoked laughter from a crowd of onlookers. Losing his temper, Kortan destroyed one of the tribe's sacred totems, throwing it into a bonfire before retreating hastily back to the sea. He was not seen nor heard from for many days. This act of desecration

was too much for Mako and his followers. They accused Talanook and the shamanic council of leading the tribe astray, sparking a fierce debate among the Seākwa people. In a matter of days, the once-unified tribe stood on the brink of civil war.

Unable to reconcile their differences, the tribe split into two factions. Mako and his followers, steadfast in their belief that Kortan was not Xaigon, chased Talanook and his supporters out of Twilight Cove. Mako declared Twilight Cove a sacred site, insisting it should belong only to the true believers of Xaigon as the one true sea god. Talanook and his followers, still devoted to Kortan, relocated to Veil Reef Beach, on the southern end of Echo Bay.

When Kortan emerged from the waves once more, the faction remaining in the original village acted as though he were invisible. Using his limited understanding of the Seākwa language, Kortan attempted to apologize, having finally realized that the people worshiping him believed him to be Xaigon. Despite his efforts, they ignored him entirely until one of the elders broke the silence. The elder, using simple words that Kortan mostly understood, explained where those who still loved and followed him had relocated.

Over the following weeks, Kortan learned much more of the language from his devoted followers. He gradually dispelled their misconception, explaining that he was not Xaigon. As his grasp of the language improved further, he recounted to the elders of the exiled faction how he had defeated Xaigon in hand-to-hand combat months earlier. He described how the deity had retreated into his shell to escape him. In recognition of his deeds and

power, Talanook bestowed upon him the name Közeron, solidifying his new identity among the Seākwa.

The two factions of the Seākwa tribe continued their fierce struggle for many months, but the relentless conflict began to take a heavy toll on both sides. Leaders from each faction started to recognize the futility of their strife, and in a rare moment of unity, Talanook and Mako agreed to meet under a banner of truce. They convened at the rocky outcrop known as Spirit's Reach, a neutral ground sacred to both factions. There, they discussed peace and the pressing need to preserve their people and traditions.

After several days of intense negotiation, a tentative peace was established. Both factions agreed to respect each other's territories and cease hostilities. The Közerians would continue to inhabit Veil Reef Beach, while the Xaigonians would remain at Twilight Cove. They decided to share the waters and resources of Echo Bay, cooperating only when absolutely necessary to avoid further bloodshed.

This fragile peace was maintained through a grudging commerce. The Közerian faction, with their access to the groves near Veil Reef Beach and Közeron's knowledge of shipbuilding, excelled in crafting canoes. They traded these canoes to the Xaigonians in exchange for the right to fish the abundant waters of Twilight Cove. Even the Seākwa who had splintered from the faction that remained at Twilight Cove recognized that these waters were the richest fishing grounds in Echo Bay. They remain so to this day, a testament to the continued devotion and sacrifices of the Xaigonian Enclave.

This arrangement, though fraught with tension, allowed both factions to thrive. The Közerians used their shipbuilding skills to explore new waters and expand their trade, while the Xaigonians, with their deep connection to Xaigon, continued their sacred rituals and maintained the fertility of their fishing grounds. The peace forged at Spirit's Reach endured, a delicate balance of mutual respect and necessity, shaping the destiny of the Seākwa people for generations to come.



**°DRAWING FROM SEĀKWA TRIBAL HISTORICAL ARCHIVES
ENTITLED: "TALANOOK & MAKO MAKE PEACE"**