

The Letters and Diaries of Queen Chipsa

Part Two: The Quest of the Ten Coins

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End of Part Two

Chronology of the Second Magic War Year 605 After Plague Cusp (1995 AD or CE)

Week	Date	The War	The Quest
1	Sept 13 Sept 14	Chipsa & the mob Conversation at the shrine	
2	Sept 21 Sept 22 Sept 23	Festival: grand outdoor feast Koshter at the campfire Ambush of the spears	Meeting on the Far Waste
3	Sept 26 Sept 27 Sept 28 Sept 30 Oct 2	Castle repaired, Armories open Defection of the boarhounds	SP & BW captured Roswitha captured Escape from Pikorro's HQ Meet Raj the Sailor Muskrat Parliament
4	Oct 7		They sail north
5	Oct 12		Arrive at Castra Sarah
6			
7	Nov 1	Essay published	
8	Nov 4	Chistar captured	

Week	Date	The War	The Quest
9			
10	Nov 22	Essay arrives at the Castle	
11	Nov 24 Nov 25 Nov 29 Nov 30	Chistar's speech White Flag Delegation Treaty language finalized Treaty goes to Scriptorium	
12	Dec 5	Ratification votes begin	
13			
14	Dec 14 Dec 15 Dec 16 Dec 18	Walt & Alf go north Walt goes to Bearsgard	Blue Wizard falls Meeting at Castra Sarah Meeting with the Wolves
15	Dec 20 Dec 21 Dec 26	Alf goes to Bearsgard Alf & Polara with King & Queen Ratification votes concluded	
16	Dec 28 Dec 31	Pikorro & Kalko depart Signing Ceremony for Treaty	

Introduction to Part Two by Chipsa

This is the second and last part of *A History of the Second Magic War* that brings the Quest and the War to their conclusions.

It also includes part of the story of the Journey of Testing, which was cancelled by Polara during the Second Magic War.

At the conclusion of Part One, my readers will be wondering about The Third Wolf. There were hints that The Third Wolf was on the loose, but no-one knew who it was. There were three Wolves re-incarnated in human form: Orontius the Alchemist was one, his brother Elhanon was another, and there is also a third. At the time, we had a sense of impending doom as the mysterious Third Wolf haunted our councils. None of our White Magic or High Magic spells could reveal who it was. Where is he or she? What will he or she do next?

This section of the tale introduces a new character: **The Count of the Western Marches**, who came to the Land of Nye in 235 APC, almost one hundred years before the beginning of the Dark Ages.

The Count is an immortal who was previously a Seneca herbalist — famous for his herbal remedies, a cure for scurvy, and amulets. His accomplishments included being renowned as a lacrosse champion. He was shot by a Dutch explorer in the Mohawk River Valley in the year 1625 AD or CE.

It was at that time that he came to the Land of Nye as an immortal, the year being 235 in our reckoning (After Plague Cusp). That was about the time that the twelve castles of Camulodunum were completed. The Count lives by himself in the Far Waste.

Pikorro, the elder son of Orontius the Alchemist, has been mentioned previously, but now you will see him in action.

Another new character is the young Muskrat **Tilia Finn**, whom you will meet in the first chapter of this tale.

Read on!

Other new characters (for easy reference)
See also the Introduction to Part One

Raj the Sailor: a Muskrat and a spy for the Council of Finns and Friends.

Walt, the Eldest Raven: a good raven who is skilled in White Magic.

Alf, an Evil Raven: he is an affable and garrulous character who is not deeply into evil.

The Peace Academy: The Emerald Wizard, the Opal Wizard, the Garnet Wizard, and the Topaz Wizard. The Sapphire Wizard took over the Blue Wizard's role in the Bearsgard Academy but also has a dual appointment to the Peace Academy. With the founding of the Peace Academy, the Land of Nye has female wizards for the first time.

QC 5 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter from Tilia Finn.

Dear Chipsa,

You have requested my recollections of September 26 in the year 605. I do not willingly recall that day, but for the sake of posterity it must be done. I hope that your *History* will help safeguard our world from future calamities. I admire your courage and persistence. These events happened when I was only twelve, but I saw them all in my mind.

First, I must introduce myself to your readers. I now step back in time to the year 605, when the Second Magic War was brewing:

My name is Tilia Finn and I am the narrator for this tale, which I will relate in present tense. I am a twelve-year-old Muskrat and heir to the magical powers of my great-great-grandmother Erika Finn and my grandmother Philomena Finn. I live in the far south of our land and I have never met a human in person. This story begins two days after Polara brings Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard back to Derbyville from the Far Waste. The two travelers are staying with their father for two days, and are prepared to leave this morning to begin their quest. Their first task is to meet with my kinswoman Freya Finn, who will give them their instructions.

When Polara first gave speech to the Muskrats, the Finn clan was delegated to be liaison with the Ancient Unicorns (and later with human beings) and protect the Muskrats from Black Magic. Any Muskrat who volunteers to help in this effort takes the surname “Finn” (Muskrat offspring always take the family name of the mother).

Because I have the gift of High Magic, I can see all the actions of Sir Patrick, the Blue Wizard, Taspel, and Chipsa. In the Land of Nye, there are three practitioners of High Magic – Polara is one, I am another, and there is a third that you will meet in the course of this tale.

What is High Magic? If White Magic is the sun, then High Magic is a galaxy of stars. If White Magic is a dry wishbone, then High Magic is a flock of live turkeys. If White Magic is a cup of maple syrup, then High Magic is a grove of maple trees. You get the idea.

Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard awaken before dawn to find their father shaking them. The action begins.

Darian: “Wake up! You must leave at once. A Messenger has come with a letter from the King and the Queen.”

Patrick: “The sun is not up. What is so urgent?”

Darian: "The Black Magic Army has invaded the Lindenwood Forest. Get dressed, both of you, while I read the letter. The letter comes from the King, the Queen, the Brown Wizard, the Green Wizard, and Thea, head of the Bearsgard Academy."

Darian begins to read:

To: Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard, greeting.

Our original plan will need to be changed. As you recall, the plan was for the two of you to head north after a visit to Bearsgard. It is now too dangerous to visit Bearsgard and you must head north right away. The research that you were going to do in Olaf's archives we will do for you and send you the results via Raven during your voyage to Aelfric's Vale on the coast in the far north. You have already studied Darian's maps, which will prove valuable.

You must travel south to the Land of the Talking Muskrats and meet a Muskrat named Raj who is waiting with a sailboat to take you north right away. Soon after you cross the border, you will meet with Freya Finn who will guide you to Raj.

The Eldest Raven, named Walt, will meet you when you arrive at Aelfric's Vale. He will give instructions about finding the ten coins and taking them to Castra Sarah. After you leave Castra Sarah, you will proceed to the Far Waste and meet Chipsa and Taspel on the autumnal equinox as planned.

When Raj leaves you at Aelfric's Vale, he will give you a supply of food before he sails back south to the Land of the Talking Muskrats. Walt will give you special passwords for the network of Ravens who will help you in your quest.

We cannot write more at present because time is pressing.

Good luck and Olaf guide you.

From:

The King and the Queen on behalf of the Kingdom of Men
The Brown Wizard and the Green Wizard on behalf of the Order of Wizards
Thea, on behalf of the Bearsgard Academy and the Sisters of the Green Leaf

Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard have now finished dressing.

Patrick: "Castra Sarah? What could that be?"

There is a knock on the door and Darian opens it.

Linnea hurries in and says, "Shut the door quickly, there is no time to lose."

“Look at this,” she continues, “these notices are posted all over the Lindenwood Forest, nailed to some of the trees.”

Darian takes the notice and reads aloud.

Darian: “Good heavens! Listen to this:

The Black Magic Kingdom

**Elhanon the Black Magician, Ambassador to the Wolves
King Krizzen, Trainer of the Boarhounds who communicate with the
Wolves**

**Queen Zaisa the Alchemist, Brewer of Poisons and Explosives
Zorso, Deputy Black Magician, Co-Ambassador to the Wolves, Army
High Commander**

**Pikorro, Chief of the Black Magic Secret Police and Assistant
Alchemist**

Kalko, Deputy Commander of the Black Magic Army

They sit in silence for a minute.

The Blue Wizard: “Zaisa is the widow of Orontius and the mother of Pikorro and Zorso. Zorso is the younger brother but seems to have a higher rank.”

“Has Zorso been found?” asks Patrick.

Darian shakes his head and says, “We do not know for sure – it could be just a bluff.”

“Zorso’s rank is quite high in the Black Magic Kingdom,” continues Patrick.

Linnea chimes in. “The White Magic spies have been unable to locate Zorso. The Black Magicians have also failed to find him, at least so far.”

Darian turns to Linnea and says, “These notices are all over Lindenwood Forest?”

“Yes,” she replies.

The Blue Wizard is concerned. “Zorso could be the Third Wolf we are all so worried about. His absence from the scene could mean that he is cooking up something really nasty.”

“We know that Elhanon and Orontius are the other two wolves,” says Darian, “and I see that Elhanon is Ambassador to the Wolves.”

Linnea has spoken with the Grey Wizard on this topic. She explains, “He cannot communicate with the Wolves, however – the six boarhounds take care of that. The boarhounds do not use words, of course, but Krizzen has trained them to make themselves understood. The Wolves accept them.”

Patrick has a sudden thought: “What about the Evil Ravens?”

“The Black Magicians and the Evil Ravens are as thick as thieves,” replies Darian, “beware of Raven spies. The Wolves, however, have refused to listen to the Ravens ever since Ingmar’s time. They are still angry even now. Elhanon will have his work cut out for him to re-forge the alliance between the Black Magicians and the Wolves. It did not end happily the last time.”

The Blue Wizard stands up and says, “We must leave at once.”

Darian: “There is no time to lose. Linnea, look at this letter from Bearsgard while Patrick and the Blue Wizard prepare to depart. The letter came by Messenger just a quarter of an hour ago. We must move quickly.”

“Yes, I see that the two knights errant are dressed as rag-pickers according to the plan,” says Linnea. “Damrod would be pleased to see them in such genuine garb. I believe that your orders are to carry no concealed weapons?”

“Yes,” replies Patrick, “that order came from Polara herself.”

Linnea: “Very wise. You have nothing with you – no letters, no maps, no coins?”

The Blue Wizard: “Nothing.”

The Blue Wizard and Patrick are now ready to go. Darian has some last-minute instructions: “Remember to go due south as quickly as you can. Freya Finn is a skilled woodswoman and will find you right after you cross the border. The path you will be following will take you to a ford over the Lindenwater, and then you will be in the Land of the Talking Muskrats. If you lose the path, you can still find the ford because it is right where the Lindenwood Forest meets the West Meadows. If you go quickly you can be out of Derbyville before the sun comes up. You stand at a fork in the road – on the one hand lies peace and on the other the depths of darkness and despair.”

Patrick takes a deep breath. “Yes, it is time to go.”

Darian: “Here is some bread and water for the morning’s hike. Farewell and Godspeed.”

Patrick: “Godspeed?”

Darian: “It is something that Brother Bede used to say. I don’t know what it means. Farewell and Olaf guide you.”

The End.

Postscript by Tilia:

Let me explain a bit about the quest being undertaken in the garb of rag-pickers.

Darian and his wife Elena, Chistar and his wife Linnea, and Damrod and his wife Maia were all friends throughout their childhood in Derbyville. Their three children Patrick, Chipsa, and Roswitha also grew up as friends.

Damrod and his brother the Green Wizard operate a network of human White Magic spies that work closely with the Muskrat spies. The Black Magicians are not aware of this network. Damrod's profession is that of paper-maker, at least that is the cover for his spy work. He collects linen rags to be made into paper, and his rag-pickers are really spies for White Magic. They travel throughout the Kingdom of Men collecting rags and conducting espionage. The Green Wizard teaches at the Bearsgard Academy and communicates with the spies secretly. The Green Wizard is responsible for preserving the knowledge that Brother Bede brought from the Other World – the quadrivium and the trivium.

Since Patrick and the Blue Wizard are dressed as rag-pickers, they will be known to White Magic friends but not to Black Magic enemies. They have also disguised their faces with charcoal and they have cut their hair. The plan is not foolproof, however -- if their secret journey were betrayed to the Black Magic Secret Police, they would be defenseless. In that case, their only hope would be the High Magic.

From your friend, Tilia Finn.

QD 3 pages. Year 655 APC. Diary entry by Chipsa.

Dear Diary,

Now we come to further events of September 26, a sad day for our world and a close call for the powers of good versus evil. This scene took place on the same day that Patrick and the Blue Wizard left Derbyville. It was noontime on the Far Waste. Taspel and I were hiking westward toward the New Kingdom, on the Journey of Testing. We will be given tasks to do and riddles to solve as part of this Journey which leads to the founding of the New Kingdom. We were planning to serve as King and Queen once the New Kingdom was founded on the autumnal equinox one year from this day.

Taspel and I hiked up to the top of a ridge and stopped to talk. The surrounding country was grass and large stones.

“Beyond the crest of this ridge is the home of the Count of the Western Marches,” I said. “He will give us three Riddles and two Tasks. That will be the first test of the Journey of Testing.”

Taspel: “Let’s rest here for a minute and have some bread and dried fruit.”

“Yes,” I said, “let’s do that. There is something I wonder about. Many of the people who are now rebuilding Wentwood Castle and forging weapons of war are the same ones who threw stones at Orontius the Alchemist thirteen years ago. How do you read this riddle? Was there some increase in the power of evil, or did people become weary of peace?”

“I think it is both, in equal measures,” answered Taspel. “I once had a long talk with Darian about the Anatomy Club. I was telling him about my dreams of progress and inventions. Darian replied that he had read some of the documents that Brother Bede brought from that Other World. He said that we humans have freedom of choice, and evil can result from that. Our voluntary guidelines, the Bans of Olaf, will steer us away from some of the bad choices.”

“I agree with Darian’s view on that,” I said.

Suddenly Taspel was alarmed and said, “Be still a moment and listen. Do you feel strange vibrations in Polara’s magic?”

“Yes, I do,” I replied. “Something has gone wrong. I feel that the power of evil has suddenly increased tenfold.”

Taspel: “I agree. But the evil will not endure. It is the thrashing death-throes of an evil that is losing its grip on the Land of Nye.”

I was not so sure. "I hope you are right, but we can't count on it. In my experience, evil can only be defeated by courage and fidelity – it does not go away by itself."

"I agree completely," he continued. "What I am saying is that we have a window of opportunity. Evil has put everything on a single roll of the dice – if we can produce an upwelling of courage and fidelity to meet it, we have a chance to win."

"A chance, yes, but not a sure thing," I said. "Remember that Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard have a tremendous task and little preparation. We are counting on beginner's luck and a spirit of perseverance."

Taspel: "What about the High Magic?"

"Hush," I cautioned, "we cannot speak of that openly here. Keep the High Magic locked in your heart as a secret hope."

Taspel: "There! I felt it again! Did you?"

I was terrified. "Yes, stronger than ever. *Polara's magic has been torn – our plight is dire.* You spoke of a roll of the dice, but it is more like the smash of a hammer."

"Yes, or an axe chopping at the very root of Thor's Oak," he whispered.

"That is exactly it," I said. "Wait – Polara's thought is coming through: *Forget the Journey of Testing, forget the next autumnal equinox, emergency, emergency. All hands on deck.* Now we are in real trouble!"

Taspel: "Yes, I heard Polara's thought, too. How can we get a message to Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard? The good ravens do not come to the Far Waste."

I looked up and something caught my eye. "Look, there is a pigeon coming towards us out of the west. A tame pigeon – here it is, landing on my wrist."

Taspel: "I will give it something to eat and untie the little bag on its leg."

"There are three things in the bag," I said, "two short letters and a wooden whistle. There is a message to us from the Count of the Western Marches that reads as follows:

To Taspel and Chipsa: Send this note and the whistle to Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard with this pigeon. The pigeon will know how to find them. After you send the pigeon away, come to my lodge in the Hickory Copse at the headwaters of the Silver Doe Brook. From the Count of the Western Marches.

"The note to Sir Patrick and Blue Wizard reads as follows:

To Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard: Blow the whistle. Good luck. From a friend.

That's all there is."

Taspel: "We should do as he directs. I will re-tie the leather bag and then we will send the pigeon on its way."

The pigeon flew away to the east after we had re-tied the little bag. "Farewell pigeon, Olaf guide you."

Taspel: "Now we must be off westward. There are no maps of this country, but a stand of hickory trees will be easy to spot."

Then we hiked down the other side of the ridge and continued our Journey.

The End

Good-night, dear diary, good-night.

QE 2 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter to Chipsa from Sir Patrick

Dear Chipsa,

Thank you for sending me the text of your *History of the Second Magic War* up to this point. I see that Tilia has given an account of our departure from Derbyville, and your diary entry describes meeting the pigeon on the Far Waste.

Now it falls to me to conclude the events of September 26. It is a day I would rather forget! Well, best to get it over with. Here goes.

The Blue Wizard and I had to move south swiftly in order to avoid the Black Magic Army. The events described below also take place at noon — at the same time that you and Taspel met the pigeon on the Far Waste. Perhaps Polara's magic sensed our anguish. In any event, it was a fateful day and we were almost undone for all time.

We had made good time after leaving Derbyville and we had not lost the path.

Not far from the river that divides the Kingdom of Men from the Land of the Muskrats, the two of us were ambushed by two Black Magic Warriors who pointed their spears at us.

The large burly one with a scar on his cheek said, "Halt. You are under arrest."

The Blue Wizard: "On what charge?"

"High treason against the Black Magic Kingdom," came the reply.

"Your Kingdom has no authority in this forest," I said with foolhardy bravado.

"We serve the true King, Scarcheck."

The short one with the red beard said, "What, as rag-pickers?"

I continued: "Our rags are made into paper that carries fine thoughts and lofty purposes. What do you have to say for yourself, Redbeard?"

Scarcheck: "Rags, ha! We know you are White Magic spies."

Redbeard: "We serve the highest purpose of all – immortality! Your fine manuscripts and White Sorcery cannot compete with that!"

Scarcheck: "Drop your weapons."

The Blue Wizard: "We have none."

Scarcheck sneered at us: "Smart move. For traitors, weapons are just more nails in your coffin."

Redbeard: "Wait – these prisoners are wanted alive!"

Scarcheck: "Yes, for torture and slow death."

Redbeard was sure of himself: "Not these two – they are Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard."

Scarcheck was delighted: "Aha! That means a bonus and a promotion for each of us. Tie their hands."

Scarcheck held a spear pointed at us while Redbeard went behind us to tie our hands.

Scarcheck gloated over us: "Your mission has failed. White Magic has failed. Taste the ashes of despair." Speaking to Redbeard, he continued: "Put blindfolds on them and halters around their necks – we will lead them through the forest."

The Blue Wizard was alarmed. "We cannot walk all the way to Wentwood Castle blindfolded – it is a two-day journey."

Scarcheck laughed. "We are not going to Wentwood Castle. Pikorro has established the headquarters of the Secret Police in a cottage an hour's march from here. You will be kept in the root cellar."

Redbeard wanted to twist the knife in our wounds: "Your fellow prisoner will be the Muskrat Freya Finn."

The Blue Wizard: "What?"

"Oh, no!" I said. Looking back on this event later, I realize that we were inexperienced spies and failed to conceal our dismay. We lived in an innocent and trusting world and were out of our element with the Black Magic Warriors.

Scarcheck laughed again. "You see, we have won the war. Once we have captured two more Muskrats, Elhanon can do his study. Then we have a Muskrat Feast and we all become immortal."

I said the first thing that came to mind. "That means you will have all eternity to reflect upon your noble deeds."

Redbeard was not impressed with my snappy comeback. He gave each of us a cruel shove forward and yelled: "Shut up and march."

The End

With warmest regards from your friend Patrick.

QF 3 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter from Tilia Finn.

Dear Chipsa,

Greetings. I have in front of me Patrick's recent letter about being captured in the Lindenwood Forest. I will pick up the story from there, continuing in the present tense as before.

Elhanon the Black Magician and King Krizzen have carried out their war plans after rebuilding Wentwood Castle with magic spells. The Treaty of Alliance with the Wolves is almost finished, and in two days' time the six boarhounds and Elhanon will march north to bring back with them the Wolf Army.

The Black Magic Army has received a flood of recruits in the past two days – including men of all trades from Albantown and various malcontents and ruffians. Elhanon has opened up the dungeons of Wentwood Castle and distributed a store of weapons that were preserved by magic from the Dark Ages. The forces of White Magic never unlocked these armories because of the powerful spells that protected them. Queen Zaisa the Alchemist has made a supply of poisons and plenty of incendiary and explosive weapons to use in sieges.

The forces of Black Magic and White Magic face each other across the Westwater, the river that flows eastward north of Derbyville and Arnoldsdorf and joins the Bear River at Albantown. The White Magicians hold the only bridge – Olaf's Bridge, where the road to Wentwood Castle crosses the Westwater. Chistar holds the bridge for the forces of White Magic, and since he is immortal the weapons of Black Magic cannot dislodge him.

The forces of White Magic include the 80 Cudgelwielders, the 12 Knights of the Realm, the 20 Bearsgard Men-at-Arms, the 60 Watchmen of the Royal Treasury, the Royal Armory, and the Royal Lock-Up, the 5 Harbormasters, and several dozen volunteers. There are also ten deer hunters from the North Country who serve as archers.

It is now the morning of the next day after Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard were captured. They have spent the night in the root cellar of a cottage that is being used by Pikorro as his headquarters. The other prisoner is Freya Finn. When the prisoners arrived at the cottage, Pikorro was away meeting with his scouts and spies. It is now the third hour of the day and he is just returning from a night's journey with his scouts.

The scene is the parlor of the former head forester's cottage, which has been deserted for several years. Pikorro has made the parlor into his command center. We return to the action.

The parlor is empty and Pikorro and two Black Magic Warriors enter from the right. Pikorro strides into the parlor, taking off his gloves.

Pikorro: "Well done, gentlemen, our superiors will be very pleased. I will send a message to King Krizzen, Queen Zaisa, and Elhanon that the Secret Police will be able to stage an attack against Derbyville without help from the main Army. We have plans in place for capturing two more Muskrats. The forces of White Magic have held their lines at the river, but they did not secure the Lindenwood Forest. We have been able to operate freely."

Redbeard enters from the left: "Welcome back, sir. Would you like to see the prisoners now?"

Pikorro: "Yes, immediately. Bring them in."

Redbeard leaves to fetch the prisoners, and Pikorro turns to the two warriors. "If what the Ravens told me was true," he says, "we are in for a treat. You are about to see the best that White Magic can send against us. What do you think of that, Sergeant?"

Sergeant: "That will be a laugh."

There is a knock on the door.

Pikorro: "Come in."

Scarceek and Redbeard enter with Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard, the latter two with their hands tied behind them and blindfolds over their eyes.

Pikorro sits behind his large desk and says: "Remove the blindfolds."

Scarceek and Redbeard remove the blindfolds.

Pikorro suddenly jumps from his chair and shouts. "You – Blue Wizard or whatever you call yourself – where were you born?"

The Blue Wizard: "I don't know."

Pikorro turns to one of the warriors and says, "Corporal, send a Raven to me, immediately."

Corporal says "Yes, sir" and exits.

Pikorro leans back and puts his feet on his desk. "So you are the great Sir Patrick," he says with a twinkle in his eye, "are you old enough to shave?"

Sergeant, Redbeard, and Scarceek guffaw with laughter.

Corporal returns and says, "The Ravens are on strike."

Pikorro: "Do you want a sword in your throat? I said send me a Raven."

Corporal: "The Ravens refuse to do our bidding."

Pikorro is impatient. "I will write a message," he says. He scribbles a few words on a piece of paper and says to the Corporal, "Here, take this to Elhanon and King Krizzen and Queen Zaisa at Wentwood Castle. Do not stop to rest and only have enough food and drink to continue running. Understood?"

Corporal: "Yes, sir".

Pikorro: "Then go."

Once the Corporal has left, Pikorro relaxes and looks pleased. He says to the warriors, "Take these ragamuffins back to the root cellar and double the watch. Double the grog ration, too – tonight is a time for celebration."

The End.

With loving thoughts from your friend Tilia.

QG 4 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter from Sir Patrick.

Dear Chipsa,

Greetings. Tilia's account of the encounter in Pikorro's parlor is fresh in my mind and I can pick up the story from there.

It was the evening of the same day (September 27), and this scene took place in the root cellar of Pikorro's headquarters. The prisoners were expecting their evening meal soon. Bad news for White Magic had been multiplying rapidly. The Blue Wizard and I had spent the day talking with fellow prisoner Freya Finn – it turns out that the claim that Freya had been captured was not just a bluff. Freya was meant to be our guide to meet up with Raj the Sailor. Now there was no hope of completing the Quest of the Ten Coins.

The Blue Wizard, Freya Finn, and I were sitting with our backs to the wall of the root cellar. Our hands and ankles were tied with rope. To ventilate the prison, the Black Magic Warriors had cut a window in the earthen wall of the root cellar and blocked it with iron bars. The forest floor outside the cottage could be seen through the window, and the space between the bars was open to allow air to flow in.

We return to the action.

Freya Finn: "Do not despair comrades, we have a few tricks up our sleeves."

The Blue Wizard: "I certainly hope so. A dark hour has come upon us. I never dreamed that Black Magic would advance so rapidly."

Redbeard opened the door and shoved in a fourth prisoner. My heart stopped. The fourth prisoner was Roswitha! Now we were truly doomed.

To Redbeard, Roswitha was just another prisoner. He said to her, "Stay there until the master calls for you. Behold the team of three that was supposed to save White Magic. You can gnaw the old ends of your plots if you wish. Your supper will be brought to you shortly."

Redbeard slammed and locked the door. We sat in stunned silence.

I finally found my voice and whispered, "Roswitha!"

"Hush," she whispered back, "we cannot speak openly."

"But how?" I continued.

Roswitha took a deep breath. "I was captured on the edge of Arnoldsdorf."

I was dismayed and said, "Is there no end to our misfortunes?"

Freya: "Hush. Here comes the guard."

The door opened and Redbeard entered with a tray of food.

Redbeard: "I will untie your hands for your evening meal. You are in luck today — Pikorro's staff voted three to two to give you food. Victorious armies always have plenty of good food, but whether or not they share it with traitors is another question. I will come back to clear the dishes away and re-tie your hands."

Redbeard slammed and locked the door again and I said, "Be careful of poisoned food."

The Blue Wizard: "We are not familiar with this Black Magic food."

The Blue Wizard reached for a cup of liquid and Roswitha knocked it out of his hand.

The Blue Wizard: "Poison?"

Roswitha: "Hush. Wait until the guards are asleep."

Freya looked over the food and said, "I don't think we should eat anything except the bread. I recognize this bread as being captured from a bakery near Arnoldsdorf."

"The water tastes okay," I said.

Freya: "Yes, we can drink the water."

Roswitha was also examining the food. "We should empty these mugs on the earthen floor," she said, "that way they will think we drank the broth."

The Blue Wizard: "Look, there is a pigeon at the window."

Freya: "It has a tiny leather bag tied to its leg. Grab it quickly before our hands are tied again."

The Blue Wizard hopped to the window as well as he could with his legs tied together. He untied the bag from the pigeon and opened the bag. He hopped back to his place and sat with his back against the wall as before.

The Blue Wizard: "The bag contains a letter and a wooden whistle. The letter says:

To Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard. Blow the whistle. From a friend.

Freya: "Quick, hide the whistle. The guard is coming."

I could also hear the guard coming. "Look, the pigeon is flying away," I said.

The Blue Wizard hid the letter and the whistle. The door opened and Redbeard came in.

Redbeard spoke to us while he cleared away the dishes and re-tied our hands: "The sun is setting now and you will have a long night to ponder your misdeeds. Your interrogation will begin at noon tomorrow after the master has taken care of important business. In order to inspire your stories to the master, you will not be getting any breakfast. You will be more cooperative on an empty stomach." He slammed and locked the door.

Freya: "I don't think the guards will return until morning."

Roswitha: "Let's blow the wooden whistle."

I wasn't so sure about that. "Can we trust the friend who sent it?" I asked.

Roswitha: "Yes, we can. I know who sent it and why."

The Blue Wizard blew the whistle and two dozen field mice came in through the open window. Freya could communicate with the mice in rodent language. She served as interpreter. She told the mice to chew through the ropes that held our hands and feet.

Roswitha: "I have an idea of how we can escape."

Throughout this conversation I had the impression that Freya and Roswitha were reading each other's minds. I did not give it a second thought at the time because of the crisis situation. I did remember this incident later when I had leisure to investigate.

Freya: "I have been observing the routine at the cottage here. During the night there is a watchman at the front door all night and the back door is locked. At dawn, one of the warriors unlocks the back door and goes out with the chamber-pots to dump them in the forest."

Roswitha seemed to pick up the same thought in the next breath. "Next to the back door there is an old pruning-hook that the forester had. We can use the hook to trip the warrior and he will land in a heap on top of the chamber-pots."

Back to Freya again: "Then we can dash off into the forest before he can raise the alarm."

To me, there seemed to be something missing. "But how do we get out of the root cellar?" I asked.

Freya: "The floor is earth. We can dig our way under the door. Remember that I am a Muskrat."

The Blue Wizard: "Of course. That is brilliant. We can be ready to make our dash at daybreak."

Freya had been quickly thinking up a scheme. "We will not trust totally to luck," she said. "My sister Freda is stationed about one hour away to the east with the Good Raven Lisa. I will send four of the mice with a message to Freda and she can send the Raven to Darian. He can send some Cudgelwielders and Knights of the Realm to help us fight off our pursuers. Of course, for the mice the one hour will be more like three hours. Our rescuers will come just in the nick of time."

Roswitha: "During the night, Freya can dig under the door and the three of us will take turns helping her. Before I was captured today, I heard some important news of the war. Listen while I tell you quickly. Keep your voices down. Today at noon when King Krizzen's six boarhounds were out taking their exercise, they ran away from the Black Magicians and went to the Mayor of Albantown. They had seen King Krizzen kill an Evil Raven an hour before that. The Evil Ravens went on strike at dawn this morning, demanding a larger share of the spoils from the Black Magicians."

Then I chimed in. "Yes, when Pikorro found out he was furious. He had an urgent message to send to Krizzen, Zaisa and Elhanon. He sent a warrior with the message on foot."

Roswitha had more information to relate: "I am aware of what Pikorro was up to. The delay due to the Ravens' strike may just be the saving of us all. I was not captured due to the skill of the Black Magic Warriors, I allowed myself to be captured deliberately. Pikorro does not see me as someone significant to White Magic, but he is demanding thirty gold pieces for my release. He wants to line his pockets a bit so that what he calls the *Lindenwood Forest Campaign* will not be a waste of time. He spoke with me briefly before leaving for a night's journey with his scouts."

Freya: "Time to start digging."

The End.

Postscript by Patrick:

Do you see what I mean about Roswitha and Freya reading each other's minds? As I write this letter fifty years later, it is quite obvious. But, then again, now I know why.

From your old friend Patrick.

QH 3 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter from Roswitha.

Dear Chipsa,

Your *History* is coming along well. I have your draft in front of me. Now it is time for my contribution, which I will relate in present tense.

Never underestimate a Muskrat, especially Freya Finn. She is a marvel. She sends the four mice with the message to Freda and then starts to dig under the door. Her message includes special instructions to the Raven Lisa. When the rescue party of Cudgelwielders and Knights is in place in the forest nearby, and the warrior with the chamber-pots opens the back door, Lisa will come to the window of the root cellar and give the signal for the escape. When the White Magicians heard that the Secret Police were planning an attack on Derbyville, they sent some Cudgelwielders and Knights from the battle lines at the river to protect Derbyville. When Darian gets the message, he will have some forces available for a small rescue party.

The September night is warm and we are comfortable even with the window open to the night air. Inside the root cellar it is very dark. It is now several hours past midnight and the tunnel under the door has been completed. Freya Finn and Sir Patrick are asleep, and the Blue Wizard and I are awake. We return to the action.

I can hear Freya and Patrick sleeping soundly — between the effort of digging and the acute anxiety they are worn out. I lean toward the others and whisper, “Blue Wizard, are you awake?”

The Blue Wizard: “Yes.”

“Speak softly, the others are asleep,” I say. “I can tell you who the Third Wolf is. The Third Wolf is Zorso, the younger son of Orontius the Alchemist.”

The Blue Wizard: “That is just as we suspected.”

“But there is another thing you do not know,” I continue. “Where is Zorso?”

The Blue Wizard: “I don’t know. Nobody knows.”

The time has come to tell him the truth, and I do not know how to break it to him. I take a deep breath and say, “You are Zorso.”

“What?” he says.

“Hush,” I reply.

The Blue Wizard: “I am Zorso? How can that be? How can I be the reincarnation of a Wolf?”

I feel bad about giving him such a shock. “It is true,” I explain. “If you had tasted any meat past the age of puberty, your wolf personality would have come to the fore and you would have been a great power for evil.”

The Blue Wizard: “I don’t FEEL like a Wolf.”

“Your vegan discipline and study of White Magic have defeated your Wolf nature,” I continue gently. “You have won the battle inside you.”

A new thought strikes him and he asks, “Does that mean that Black Magic is weaker because of my defection?”

“Yes,” I assure him. “In fact, that is just the thing that tipped the scales toward the defeat of Black Magic that is happening right now.”

The Blue Wizard: “But, if I am Zorso, how did I come to be found at the Royal Granary in Albantown?”

I have my explanation ready. “When your father took the oxcart of blasting powder to Albantown, you hid in the back of the cart. When Orontius unhitched the ox, you slipped away and hid nearby. You were only twelve feet away and you almost died.”

He thinks for a moment and says, “But my brother Pikorro also disappeared for many years.”

I have the answer to that as well. “When Pikorro found that he was alone at the campsite and you were nowhere to be found, he was afraid his father would kill him. He ran away to the south and found work in the harbor at Bearsgard under a different name. It was only recently that he was reconciled with his mother Zaisa and his uncle Elhanon. In fact, the theft of the spears from the Bearsgard Academy Museum occurred immediately after that reconciliation. Elhanon gave him the keys.”

After a few more moments of silence, he suddenly whispers “Wait a minute! When Pikorro first saw me as a prisoner he recognized who I was! That explains everything!”

“He wanted to send a Raven to Zaisa and Elhanon,” I reply.

The Blue Wizard: “And that is why he gave me the beef broth.”

“And that is why I knocked it out of your hand,” I continue.

The Blue Wizard: “That was a close call.”

It is a great relief to tell him the truth at last. “You have no idea how close. The entire future of the Land of Nye was on a knife’s edge. The power of the High Magic was stretched to its limit.”

The Blue Wizard: "High Magic?"

"Hush, we cannot speak of it here," I caution him.

The Blue Wizard: "How do you know so much about me?"

I am ready for that question as well. "You have known me all my life, but there is something about me you do not know. I am a friend of Polara's and my power is equal to hers. We cannot speak of it here. Get some sleep. At daybreak we escape."

The End.

Postscript by Roswitha:

Note to Chipsa: With the advantage of hindsight, I can tell your readers exactly what happens the next morning. Here goes.

As it turns out, the escape is successful as planned. The warrior carrying the chamber-pots is dismayed to find himself flat on his stomach with his nose in the slops. He looks up to see the prisoners running away from him and the Cudgelwielders and Knights running towards him. Between having the breath knocked out of him and being astounded, it takes him a few moments to raise the alarm. The night watchman comes running from the front door, but it is too late to stop the escape. Pikorro's warriors dress and grab their weapons, but their pursuit is too far behind the prisoners and their armed escort so they give up. Pikorro himself had been away since the previous afternoon, visiting his scouts on the road to Bearsgard. In his absence the Corporal in charge tripled the grog ration, which proves to be unwise as events turn out. The Black Magic Warriors are worried about what Pikorro will do when he returns and finds the prisoners gone. They take all of the food, weapons, and money that they can find in the cottage and head west toward the uninhabited lands around the ruins of Hayport. They elect to take their chances as brigands in the wild and hope for pardon after Black Magic has been victorious.

About half an hour after the escape, the prisoners and their escort rendezvous with Freda and three good ravens in the forest. Freya and Freda send the three ravens with news of the escape. One raven goes to the King, the Queen, Thea, and the Brown Wizard in Bearsgard. Another goes to Sir Graham, Chistar, the Grey Wizard, and the Green Wizard at the Battle of Olaf's Bridge. The third raven goes to the Queen of the Muskrats. The Raven Lisa goes to Darian in Derbyville to alert him that they are on their way. Freda says farewell to them all and heads south to her own land to meet with Raj the Sailor on the coast.

With warmest regards, Roswitha

QI 3 pages. Year 655 APC. Diary entry by Chipisa.

Dear Diary,

Now it is my turn again. I encourage my readers to take a break and eat an apple or perhaps some oatmeal and maple syrup. The worst is over. Fortune finally smiled on our undertakings.

Taspel and I had been hiking westward to find the hickory wood and brook we were instructed to seek. We arrived at the hickory trees and followed a path through them. We saw some deer skins spread to dry and large piles of firewood. We approached a lodge made of branches and bark. It was several hours later the same day of the escape from Pikorro's headquarters. The time was late morning on September 28. We return to the action.

Taspel: "This must be the home of the Count of the Western Marches. They say that he came from the same world that Brother Bede and our ancestors came from, but from a very different place and time. Be prepared for a shock."

I felt both eagerness and dread. "They also say that he is skilled in herb-lore and hates Black Magic."

We heard a voice call to us, "Hail and well met!"

Taspel: "There he is. He was fishing in the brook over there. Hail Count of the Western Marches!"

I was alarmed at the Count's appearance. In the years since that day I have learned about the Seneca Nation and the traditional dress of their warriors. At the time, though, it was a bit of a shock.

The Count spoke in a kindly manner and his words were re-assuring. He spoke our language, but in an accent I had not heard before. "I will set my trout aside to cook later," he said. "Our business is urgent. I can see things far off and your cause has just barely escaped disaster."

Taspel: "Can you help us?"

"Do you have news of our friends?" I added.

The Count: "Yes and yes. I do not need to tell you news of your friends because I can send you to them and they can tell you themselves. They are safe in Derbyville and await you there."

I was alarmed. "Do you mean that Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard have not left Derbyville yet?"

The Count: "They left Derbyville, were captured, and escaped. You will hear the whole story. Now they are preparing to leave Derbyville again. This time,

however, they will find no enemies in the Lindenwood Forest. Pikorro has gone back to Wentwood Castle with his tail between his legs. The alliance between the Wolves and the Black Magicians is now broken due to the defection of the boarhounds. The news is finally good for a change.”

Taspel: “What about the Quest of the Ten Coins?”

The Count: “Sir Patrick, the Blue Wizard and Freya Finn will hike south at daybreak tomorrow to meet with Raj the Sailor on the coast. Also tomorrow at daybreak you will return here to start the riddles and tasks that I have for you.”

I was puzzled and said, “You speak of going and returning. How is that to be done?”

The Count: “My magic is equal to the task. You will hold hands and step into the Silver Doe Brook. A moment later you will step out of the water and it will be the Lindera Brook in the Lindenwood Forest. From there you know the way to Darian’s cottage where the others await you. I caution you that the Lindenwood Forest has changed a bit since you last saw it -- the Black Magic Warriors destroyed the hermit’s cabin and the Shrine to Philomena Finn.”

A quick way to get to the Lindenwood Forest. Wow. This was better than anything we could have hoped for. “Thank you for helping us,” I said.

The Count: “When you return I will tell you the Legend of the Silver Doe and other tales from my youth. The emergency that Polara warned you of is now over. We will have time for half-a-dozen legends. The autumn is progressing and we can make a nice fire outside my lodge to keep us warm. Over the summer I laid in a supply of firewood to prepare for your visit. I can also make you a batch of my Slippery Elm bark tea. That tree does not grow naturally here in the Land of Nye, but Polara allowed me to get some seeds from the Other World.”

I was curious and asked, “Are you able to go back and forth like that?”

“Polara has only permitted me to do it once,” he replied.

Taspel: “We are greatly indebted to Polara’s magic.”

The Count: “It is not just Polara alone who works the High Magic. There are two others who assist her in this task. You will meet one of them at Darian’s cottage shortly. You may be sorry to learn, friend Taspel, that the three High Magicians are all female – two humans and one Muskrat, but all female. Here, follow me over to the trout pool in the brook.”

We started to walk and continued talking.

Taspel laughed and said, "Don't forget that I was also a Unicorn. Among the Unicorns, there was no battle of the sexes. We had to focus all our strength on the battles with the Wolves."

The Count: "Where I grew up in the Mohawk River Valley, women were highly valued. Brother Bede was a man but also a champion for women, and much nonsense of the Other World was left behind. We can speak further when you return -- here we are at the brook."

I took Taspel's hand and asked, "Then what?"

The Count: "Jump in -- it will be about knee deep. Then the magic will work."

I took a deep breath. "One, two, three -- jump."

Good night, dear diary, good night.

QJ 6 pages. Year 655 APC. Letter from Tilia Finn.

Dear Chipsa,

Now we come to my favorite part of the story. I am glad that your readers have something to look forward to after all that storm and stress. I continue in present tense.

Believe it or not, it is still September 28 (it was a very long day for those who lived through it).

I am far away in my own homeland, but I follow every word of this gathering. In later years, I got to meet these people, but I felt that I already knew them. That is how High Magic works.

Sir Patrick, the Blue Wizard, Roswitha, and Freya Finn are arriving at Darian's cottage. The four Cudgelwielders and the four Knights have returned to their posts watching the roads from Arnoldsdorf and Bearsgard. It is now a little past noon – they have been hiking through the forest from Pikorro's headquarters with several rests along the way. The Cudgelwielders brought them some bread and cheese for a light breakfast during their hike, but they are still very hungry.

Darian is bringing some squash and beans from his garden toward his cottage when he hears greetings called to him. We return to the action.

Patrick calls out, "Father! We're here!"

Darian: "Thanks be to Olaf!"

Darian puts down the veggies and runs to greet them. "Roswitha! Do your parents know where you are?"

Roswitha: "Yes, they are coming here to meet me at your place."

Darian: "The Good Raven Lisa has been busy these two days – we should prepare a special treat for her. We must thank the Count's pigeon, too."

Freya: "I can speak for Lisa. Seeing all of us safe and sound is the greatest treat she could receive. Lisa will bring the pigeon here this evening – the pigeon's name is Sacandaga."

Darian: "Lisa told me of your secret, Roswitha. We are grateful for your courage in putting yourself at risk like that."

Roswitha laughs and says, "The risk was worth it. I am going to tell my secret to all this company here assembled, at least I will do so after Chipsa and Taspel arrive."

Patrick: "But Chipsa and Taspel are on the Far Waste."

Roswitha: “They were until recently, but right now they are in the Lindenwood Forest on their way here.”

Patrick: “I’m not used to so much magic.”

Freya: “The Count of the Western Marches is great in magic. It was he who sent us the wooden whistle.”

Roswitha turns to Darian and says, “You will be pleased to know that both of your sons were very brave. They stood face to face with that horrible Pikorro and said not one word. They helped to dig out of the prison and tripped the guard with a pruning hook. We could not have escaped without their help.”

Darian: “The Raven Lisa told me that Pikorro’s warriors fled into the wild country in the west, fearing his wrath. We could have done no better if we had stormed Pikorro’s headquarters with a dozen men. We have defeated them with no casualties of our own.”

Freya: “That is what happens when White Magic and the High Magic are in perfect harmony.”

Darian picks up his veggies again and says, “Come, friends, let us break bread together. I have not had my midday meal yet. We will eat in the outdoor kitchen today — Patrick can stoke up the fire while the Blue Wizard and I prepare some victuals.”

Freya says, “I will fetch my dinner at the edge of the forest and return in a few moments.” She disappears in the direction from which they had come.

Roswitha: “I will go to meet my parents on the road. The three of us will join your feast. My parents have brought some food of their own to contribute to the victory celebration.” Then she departs in the direction of the road to Arnoldsdorf.

Half an hour later, while Darian, Patrick, and the Blue Wizard are working on the preparations, who shows up but Taspel and Chipsa!

Patrick bursts out laughing and says “Taspel – I remember your words – *as long as the four of us remain true, there is hope.*”

Then they exchange hugs and all start talking at once.

The four adventurers tell each other their stories while they all work together to prepare the midday meal. Freya returns with some tasty branches of speckled alder, hazel, and spicebush, and Roswitha arrives with her parents and more food. As a surprise for Chipsa, her mother Linnea has come along from Arnoldsdorf with Roswitha’s parents. The adults from Arnoldsdorf have brought with them Chipsa’s guitar and Roswitha’s tenor recorder. Before eating, they say a poem for the victory of White Magic and the safety of Chistar. They also bind

themselves to a pledge to re-build the Shrine of Philomena Finn. Roswitha tells everyone about the High Magic. She also tells the story of the Blue Wizard's life up until the time he was adopted by Darian at the age of six.

When the washing up is finished, Damrod, Maia, and Linnea leave for Arnoldsdorf. Roswitha will go home in the morning after saying farewell to Patrick, the Blue Wizard, Taspel, and Chipsa. She will take the guitar and recorder back to Arnoldsdorf. The young people spend the afternoon helping Darian with his work, and they also spend a couple of hours preparing medicines and bandages for the Battle of Olaf's Bridge. They all work together to prepare a simple supper.

Darian and Patrick pitch a tent next to the cottage where the visitors can sleep. The Raven Lisa arrives with the pigeon Sacandaga and they receive everyone's thanks.

After an evening of conversation and planning, Freya gives some instructions to Lisa for the next day and goes to sleep in the tent. Darian says good-night to everyone and goes to sleep in his cottage.

The fire is starting to burn low and the five young people sit and talk. The firewood of maple, birch, and oak makes a bed of coals ready to be revived in the morning for cooking breakfast oatmeal. The sky is cloudy and the glow of the fire is the only source of light. Lisa and Sacandaga listen on the edge of the conversation. Chipsa tunes her guitar and Roswitha warms up her recorder with a few scales and melodies. We return to the action.

Patrick: "We still have a long way to go. We have not yet started the Quest. When we get to Aelfric's Vale we will have autumn and winter ahead of us. I can't count the number of times we have been warned about the lack of food in that region, and we still don't know what Castra Sarah is. There are many months between now and the next autumnal equinox, and we do not yet have our instructions. Also, the Second Magic War and the Battle of Olaf's Bridge have not been won. The worst is yet to come."

The Blue Wizard: "The Black Magicians will be strengthened by sullenness and bitterness. They have nothing to lose, and we have everything to lose."

Roswitha: "There are two problems we need to solve. The first one is a sudden upwelling of the power of evil. Once we have the twelve coins in hand, we can solve that problem. The second problem is one that does not involve magic at all. It is a problem that we brought with us from that Other World – the one that Brother Bede and our ancestors came from."

Chipsa: "And the Count of the Western Marches."

Roswitha: “Yes, and the Count. Several times over the past six centuries our citizens have become bored with peace and actively desired and created evil. There is no easy solution to this. I recommend founding a Peace Academy and inventing more exciting games and contests. High Magic does not have much to say about this topic, I am just speaking as a fellow citizen. The four of you can be leaders in the peace movement if you wish.”

Patrick: “I have some friends who are good at inventing games.”

The Blue Wizard: “How can we teach people to love peace?”

Roswitha laughs. “We have the rest of our lives to figure that out.”

Taspel changes the subject. “I am eager to learn more from the Count of the Western Marches; perhaps he can teach us some of his language.

“I wonder what it is like to live in a large world – our world is so small. The Count comes from a continent that Brother Bede did not even know about. Imagine a world that huge! It boggles the mind.”

Patrick stands up and says, “I will put more logs on the fire and then we will have some songs. Let’s teach Taspel and Chipsa the Muskrat song that Freya taught us while we were imprisoned.”

The Blue Wizard: “Yes, that is a lovely song. The guards finally told us to shut up.”

Roswitha: “Let’s sing it once through so Chipsa and Taspel can join in the second time.”

Roswitha plays the tune once on her recorder, and then Roswitha, Patrick, and the Blue Wizard sing this traditional Muskrat song called *The Willow Root*.

O willow root, my faithful friend, the lintel of my door,
Please guard the home, please guard the clan, be safe for evermore.
O Salix friend, O ancient root, you hold in soil below:
You reach above, your leaf and twig, so ageless as you grow.

They sing this three times, and the third time Chipsa joins in with an improvised guitar part. Taspel and Chipsa learn the words for the second and third run-through.

Chipsa: “We should sing one of Queen Sarah’s songs. Of all White Magicians, she was the most prolific composer.”

Sir Patrick: “How about *Sarah’s Blessing*?”

Chipsa: “We all know that one, and the guitar part is not difficult.”

They sing together:

Peace and calm be with you,
Please do not lose heart;
Heed not strife and sorrow,
You can play your part.
When your path is darkest,
I will be with you;
When all else fails...
To yourself be true.

Patrick: "I will refill our mugs from this fresh batch of chamomile tea while we select the last song for the night."

The Blue Wizard: "For the last song, let's sing *Brother Bede's Plainsong*."

Roswitha: "Yes, that is perfect. That is our oldest White Magic song."

They sing together:

Let me tell you of a dream I had,
Of the world that is to be,
Walking down a road in springtime
Looking at the sights to see:
In a ditch were sharp spears cast away,
Rusting for eternity,
Evermore and evermore.

A boy came up and said to me
"I will live four score and five
See my father's farm fair and free
And each goodly beast alive;
My mother will not weep for me,
For her son's life will thrive,"
Evermore and evermore.

Chipsa: "We should say goodnight and make use of Darian's tent. At daybreak we all go our various ways. The pigeon Sacandaga will return with us to the Count."

Patrick: "We will be hard pressed to keep pace with Freya. She has been asleep for an hour already."

Taspel: "I hope your second journey is better than the first."

Chipsa: “All of us have many miles to go.”

Roswitha: “Let’s drink a toast to the next autumnal equinox before we turn in.”

The End.

Postscript by Tilia:

The story of how the Battle of Olaf’s Bridge and the Second Magic War were brought to an end comes into another tale. In the succeeding tales, you will learn about the new Peace Academy and its faculty, including the Sapphire Wizard, the Emerald Wizard, the Opal Wizard, the Garnet Wizard, and the Topaz Wizard. The Land of Nye will have female wizards for the first time. You will also learn what is meant by the name “Castra Sarah.”

After the end of the Second Magic War, families move to the New Kingdom and start building homes and farms. The people of the New Kingdom elect a Mayor and council of elders, similar to the ancient government of Hayport. Polara serves as Regent while Chipsa and Taspel finish school, perform their three years of voluntary service, and study Philosophy at the Bearsgard Academy.

During his travels in the far north, the Blue Wizard sustains a head injury during a bad fall. After the end of the Second Magic War, he resigns as Blue Wizard and returns to the Lindenwood Forest as a hermit and herbalist. Since he has no name of his own, he keeps the name “Blue Wizard” and his successor takes the name “Sapphire Wizard.” He comes out of retirement once a year at the Spring Festival to perform a comedy routine with the Sapphire Wizard called “Black and Blue.” It is about two Black Magicians who are so eager to double-cross each other that they can’t even collaborate on cooking breakfast.

There is one thing I am sure many of you are wondering. In the story about the “Plague Cusp,” the villagers of Cheddar, England are magically transported to the Land of Nye. What about their friends and families that were left behind? Would Polara’s magic be so cruel as to leave the relatives bereft? Polara explained this to me and said that the villagers woke up the next morning in BOTH places – they were in the Land of Nye and their doubles continued their normal lives in England. Polara’s magic is never cruel. Polara says that this was a “Quantum Multiverse Divergence.” I have no idea what that means – you will have to ask her.

With warmest regards, Tilia

QK 3 pages. Year 656 APC. Letter from Chipsa to Corylus.

Dear Corylus,

I can tell you the details of what happened after your grandfather Escalus published his essay entitled “The Legitimate Claims of Black Magic.” As you know, he was a Professor of History at the Bearsgard Academy at the time, and his essay caused great controversy and consternation in all circles. In the first paragraphs of the essay he mentions that the idea came to him during a lengthy conversation with the Grey Wizard about the fragmentary writings left behind by Ingmar the Black Magician and Rhus the Necromancer.

The Second Magic War was in its second month when the essay appeared. The “Battle of Olaf’s Bridge” was dragging on and winter was approaching with both sides in stalemate. The Black Magicians had just re-stocked their food supplies and built a catapult for firing incendiary bombs across the river.

A few days later my father, the White Magician Chistar, was captured by means of a diabolical gladiator’s net made of steel cables.

During the time that Chistar was imprisoned in the dungeons of Wentwood Castle, he often conversed with the leading minds of the Black Magic Kingdom. He discovered that the Black Magicians wanted to colonize the foothills of the mountains that encircle the perimeter of our flat world. He began to devise a compromise by which they would be permitted to do so.

When your grandfather’s essay reached Wentwood Castle, Chistar was taken to a Black Magic Kingdom Strategic Summit. King Krizzen, Queen Zaisa, and Elhanon asked Chistar about the essay and whether or not it would receive a favorable hearing among the White Magicians.

Chistar saw that the Black Magic Kingdom was getting stronger every day, and he was concerned about the casualties that his friends and family would suffer. He saw the discussion about the essay as an opening for a path to peace.

Also during this time, Chistar and Elhanon reviewed topics that they had discussed years earlier. You are too young to recall that both Chistar and Elhanon were imprisoned in the Royal Lock-Up in Bearsgard for about three weeks (I was only three years old at the time but my father told me the story later). They had adjoining cells and conducted lengthy and earnest discussions about their primary concerns. It was at this time that Chistar came up with the idea of permitting Elhanon to dissect three Muskrats that had died of natural causes. He also formed the concept of separating White Magic and civil authority, which was included in your grandfather’s essay as well. Both of these items were key features of the Treaty, and the latter was enacted as part of The Tenth Reform. Chistar had discussed Elhanon’s conversations on several occasions – he met with your grandfather, Robert Roy, and the Grey Wizard for

that purpose after he had been banished to the North Country. They would meet at *The Wandering Bullfrog* and debate the past and future of Black Magic and the Anatomy Club.

My father was in the Lock-Up because he had turned himself in for accidentally eating Muskrat flesh. Elhanon had been caught plotting against the Muskrats with his brother Orontius the Alchemist, who perished in the course of his schemes as you know from your history lessons. These discussions and your grandfather's essay were the underpinnings of the Treaty.

At the conclusion of the Summit Meeting, Chistar proposed to King Krizzen, Queen Zaisa, and Elhanon that they ask for a White Flag Delegation to come and parley with them. The Black Magicians huddled for a while and then announced that they would accept only four individuals for the parley delegation – Chistar, who was already in attendance, plus three others who would be guaranteed safe conduct: the Queen, Polara, and Walt, the Eldest Raven.

You already know that the strike by the Evil Ravens had lasted only one week, and by the time of this conference the Evil Ravens had an extensive spy network and signal corps.

An Evil Raven by the name of Alf was present in the hall and was delegated to take a message to the White Magicians. Chistar and the Black Magicians carefully crafted a message that referred to the famous essay and outlined what the Black Magicians would demand in exchange for an end to the conflict.

This was the beginning of the Treaty of Olaf's Bridge. You know, of course, that the Second Magic War ended twenty-seven days later after around-the-clock negotiations and numerous ratification votes.

During the time that they were waiting for the White Flag Delegation, my father gave his famous speech to the Black Magicians, which was later relayed to the Wolves and Evil Ravens as well. This speech is known to you so I will not repeat it here.

Polara represented the High Magic, the Queen represented the White Magicians and the Kingdom of Men, and Walt represented the good ravens and the Muskrats.

Walt was a brilliant negotiator and as it turned out the Evil Raven Alf was a first cousin of his. Walt was particularly eager to prevent loss of life among Ravens and Muskrats. The Queen was sometimes alarmed at the sweeping concessions that Polara and Chistar were willing to make, but when the negotiators held their caucus meeting she acknowledged their superior magical powers and vision of things to come. When the Treaty was finally completed, the Queen was confident in Polara's and Walt's leadership and helped to sell it to the Kingdom at large.

The Muskrats and the good ravens did not question Walt's promises and ratified the Treaty immediately.

The King and the Queen were united in their support of the Treaty, as were key White Magicians such as the Knights of the Realm, the Order of Wizards, the Sisters of the Green Leaf, the Cudgelwielders, the Bearsgard Academy, and the Council of Finns and Friends.

Your grandfather who wrote the essay campaigned in favor of the Treaty and was later promoted to Provost of the Bearsgard Academy and Curator of the Museum.

The voting took three weeks and many public meetings.

During this time, a raven came from Castra Sarah saying that the Blue Wizard had been injured during a bad fall and that the Quest of the Ten Coins would have to be abandoned.

A week later, in between events of the Winter Solstice Festival, Polara met with the King and the Queen to discuss the situation. The ravens Walt and Alf were also invited to attend this meeting since they had arrived separately from the North Country bringing the latest news from Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard. Polara stated that the Treaty was the best option if the Ten Coins could not be obtained. The only other hope was aid from the archers of the New Kingdom, but that would mean more years of war and more casualties. By this time, the ratification votes were almost concluded.

The Evil Ravens and the Wolves were the last to ratify the Treaty, and Pikorro and Kalko said that they would sail away to a new colony right away without suffering the disgrace of voting for the Treaty. They took two sloops and twenty men and left the Bearsgard harbor three days before the signing ceremony. Pikorro's sloop *The Bane of Ignorance* had been confiscated during the hostilities, and the Chief Harbormaster made Pikorro buy it back again. Pikorro grumbled but complied – he was eager to get away from all this in the new colony.

The text of the Treaty itself is well-known to you. I hope that these words give you some assurance of your grandfather's place in our history. My father Chistar had been a friend of your grandfather's for many years, and following these events I came to know and love him as well.

May Olaf guide you,

Chipsa, Queen of the New Kingdom

QL 10 pages. Year 657 APC. Diary entry by Queen Chipsa.

Dear diary,

I now set down some recollections from my youth.

After the end of the Second Magic War, the schools of Nye re-opened shortly before my birthday in January. I celebrated my seventeenth birthday and then completed my junior year of secondary school.

In June of that year I said goodbye to Taspel and my school friends and set off on a month-long quest to answer some questions. They were as follows:

1. After the end of the First Magic War, Albantown was settled by the widows and children of the Black Magicians. How could such a lopsided town survive and become a successful town? That was my first question.
2. The second question related to both the First Magic War and the Second Magic War. When the brigands set their ambush for the Cudgelwielders at the bridge, the women from Albantown brought the arrow poison recipe with them. How did they happen to have it? And, for that matter, how did the arrow poison recipe come back to life in the Second Magic War? It was thought to have been destroyed. How did that come about?
3. The third question is this. How did the innkeeper Krizzen, later King Krizzen of the Second Black Magic Kingdom, learn how to train the boarhounds to communicate with the Wolves? What was the secret, and how did Krizzen learn it?

I asked Polara these questions -- she laughed and said, "Try to find the answers. It will be a good learning experience."

So, after the end of the school year, I set out to speak with some key individuals.

The first person I sought out was the Grey Wizard in Albantown. When I asked him my questions about the original settling of Albantown and the surplus of widows, he laughed and said, "There is a story about that." Then he told the story as follows:

"The widows were angry at the fall of Ingmar's Black Magic Kingdom and did not readily take to charity from the rest of the Kingdom of Men. As you recall, there were fifty-four brigands taken prisoner after the battle at the bridge and the death of Olaf. These brigands were held in the Royal Lock-Up in Bearsgard for one year and then permitted to return to their wives and sweethearts in Albantown. The women were self-sufficient but glad to have some of their own menfolk back in order to propagate future generations for Albantown.

“There were also a number of bachelors from Derbyville, Arnoldsdorf, and Bearsgard who were fascinated by these formidable womenfolk and married some of them. That was another stroke in favor of Albantown.

“As time went by, the boys and girls of Albantown grew up and the surplus widows died of old age. After two generations, the population of Albantown was just like any other town, except for the remarkable legends that circulated among its people. The center of nostalgia for Black Magic was the inn called *The Happy Wolf* and its unusual first innkeeper named Grimm.”

Then I asked the Grey Wizard about the recipe for arrow poison. He said that a woman had taken it from Ingmar’s room at Wentwood Castle when the women and children left it. She then brought it to the battle at the bridge and helped the brigands to brew a batch of the poison. The Brown Wizard took it from her at the time of the surrender. The recipe was three sheets of parchment held together with three metal buttons as a binding down the left side. A few days later, he burned the recipe and gave the ashes to the King in a clay flask.

The Grey Wizard went on to say something about his colleague the Green Wizard. “The current Green Wizard, the brother of your Uncle Damrod, had a shorter apprenticeship than usual. The previous Green Wizard retired ten years ago at the age of forty-two and took the name Robert Roy. He settled in the North Country to write a history of Black Magic. He collaborates with your father Chistar, with Escalus of the Bearsgard Academy, and with me. I have been quoting some of his research to you just now.”

The Grey Wizard could not answer any of my questions about the Second Magic War, so I said farewell and went on my way.

Polara had given me a letter of introduction to the Queen, so I went to the Queen next.

The Queen welcomed me and we spoke for several hours. She made a batch of lindenflower tea and we sat with our tea to talk. At one point in our conversation, she said, “Let me read to you from the diary of Queen Lavinia, the first Queen of the Kingdom of Men. Polara, Roswitha, or Tilia could have told you this story, but let us hear it in the words of Queen Lavinia herself.”

In the years since my talk with the Queen I have seen the diary of Lavinia many times, and I relate here the passage to which I am referring. I have rewritten the archaic wording into our modern way of speaking:

“I set down these words so that this tale may not be forgotten. The tale I am relating now concerns the combat between my husband’s aunt Queen Sarah and Rhus the Necromancer in the wilderness. In the lore of my good friend the Brown Wizard, it has been preserved that Sarah and Rhus met in the wilderness and fought to the death. Rhus used his magic to summon the Count of the

Western Marches to be second for Sarah. Rhus had his arms-bearer with him, who served as second for Rhus. Unknown to Rhus, the Count had bent his thoughts toward the Muskrats Halesia Finn and Alba Salix and sent them hurrying to him in the North Country. Then Rhus perished in the combat, the Count returned to his home, and the two Muskrats took Queen Sarah to the hunting lodges in the mountains.

“The lore of the Brown Wizard does not record that there was a third Muskrat present. I am now making this tale available to future Brown Wizards so the account may be complete. When Halesia Finn and Alba Salix arrived at the combat site, there was a third Muskrat with them named Arctophila Salix. I received this tale from Arctophila herself who came to visit me in times of peace several years later.

“Halesia, Alba, and Arctophila were visiting a human friend in Hayport when they sensed the urgent message from the Count. They set out for the North Country immediately.

“When the three Muskrats came to the glen where the combat had taken place, they found the Count tending the wounds of Queen Sarah. Rhus lay dead nearby, and his arms-bearer Corporal Grip was under a sleeping-spell placed by the Count.

“The Count told the Muskrats that Sarah would die in about four days. He told them to take Sarah to the hunting lodges three hours walk to the north, where the miners had their refuge. The Count gave the Muskrats food and medicine and said that he must soon return to his own home in the west.

“The Count gave further instructions. He told Arctophila to remain behind and secretly follow Corporal Grip after he awakened. Then the two Muskrats and Sarah departed northward, the Count went homeward, and Arctophila hid behind a tree to watch the Corporal. Arctophila did not have to worry about food because the forest and the forest streams and ponds provided ample food for a Muskrat.

“When Corporal Grip woke up, he looked around and saw that he was alone except for the body of Rhus. He went to the body and took the master spell-book (the only duplicate of Ingmar’s) and all of Rhus’ gold coins.

“After the end of the single combat, the Count had instructed Corporal Grip to return to Wentwood Castle and arrange for the burial of Rhus. However, he did not. He left the body of Rhus in the wilderness and went to live in a cave in the mountains. The body of Rhus was never recovered.

“Arctophila saw the cave where Grip settled and watched his comings and goings. Early the next morning, she saw a raven flying toward Grip’s cave with something in its beak. Two other ravens flew in from the opposite direction and

chased the first raven away. The first raven dropped what it had been carrying in its beak, and Arctophila searched the ground and picked it up. The object was one of King Aelfric's twelve gold coins.

"Arctophila followed Grip for two days and then went to see the Count to give him a report. She was able to observe that Grip had mastered the spell that Ingmar and Rhus used for making synthetic food and thus lived in comfort in the wild. The Count told her to give Aelfric's coin to the Queen of the Muskrats. The Count surmised that an Evil Raven had tried to give the coin to Corporal Grip and was prevented from doing so by two good ravens who saw that Arctophila was nearby to retrieve the coin. Arctophila then rejoined the other two Muskrats in Hayport and they returned to their homeland together.

"Arctophila gave Aelfric's coin to the Queen of the Muskrats, who in turn gave it to the Finn clan to be an heirloom of their house."

This was the end of Lavinia's account.

Then I took my leave of the Queen and went to the Brown Wizard for a brief visit. I wanted to fill in the gap about Aelfric's coin that came to Arctophila Salix.

"I can answer that," said the Brown Wizard. "As you may recall, after the death of Ingmar the Evil Raven Ida came to the Brown Wizard with Ingmar's master spell-book. She also told the Brown Wizard that she and her sister Lia had been two of the three evil ravens witnessing the single combat of King Aelfric and King Fenrir, King of the Wolves. She said that when two of the gold coins fell out on the ground, her sister Lia took one of them and flew away into the mountains. The raven that Arctophila saw 38 years later was probably Lia trying to rendezvous with Corporal Grip to give him the coin. Evidently, Corporal Grip foresaw the downfall of Ingmar and stayed away from the other Black Magicians. For some reason, Lia decided to back Grip rather than Ingmar. The time between the death of Rhus and the death of Ingmar was only two years. What kind of spells Grip could have done with Aelfric's coin we will never know."

"How long do ravens live?" I asked the Brown Wizard.

"A raven can live for about seventy years," he replied, "sometimes ninety or a hundred."

I said farewell to the Brown Wizard and went to see my father's friend Escalus, Provost of the Bearsgard Academy and Curator of the Bearsgard Academy Museum.

I told Escalus all that I had learned from the Grey Wizard and the Queen and Lavinia's diary.

He replied, "My parents admired King Escalus and Good Queen Lavinia and that is why they named me Escalus. I was born a few days after the three hundred and ninth birthday of King Escalus."

He went on as follows. "The Treaty of Olaf's Bridge contained provisions that the Bearsgard Academy Museum construct a separate museum for the history of Black Magic. You walked past the newly-laid foundations on your way here. Here is one of the prime exhibits."

He walked toward me with an ancient and sinister-looking manuscript in his hand. "I don't want to touch it!" I shrieked.

Escalus laughed and said, "No, don't touch it. This is the master spell-book of Rhus the Necromancer. Queen Zaisa surrendered it to us as part of the Treaty, with the proviso that it not be destroyed."

He put it down on the table and I looked at it warily. "Look here," I said, "There are some names written."

"Where?" he said and came over beside me.

"Here." I pointed and said, "Here it says Rhus crossed out, and below that Corporal Grip crossed out and below that is Innkeeper Grimm."

"I never noticed that before," he said. "Look, Corporal Grip and Innkeeper Grimm are in the same handwriting. Perhaps they were the same person."

"How could that be?" I said.

Then Escalus went into the next room and a while later brought back a stack of old parchment documents. He flipped through them and said, "Here is what I was looking for."

Then he read aloud the following passage, which I have studied many times in the years since. As before, I have modernized the archaic language. This conversation took place about a month after the death of Olaf and several months after the founding of Albantown, which had taken place right after the death of Ingmar:

"This is a record of a meeting of King Escalus, Queen Lavinia, the Grey Wizard, and the Brown Wizard.

"The Grey Wizard: A month after the founding of Albantown a strange character showed up calling himself Grimm. He was dressed in a brand-new dark green uniform of a deer-hunter but it did not fit him very well. He did not have any coherent story of whence he came or who his parents were. He could be an unrepentant Black Magician.

“Queen Lavinia: I can tell you where he got the deer-hunter uniform. A good raven brought me a report that after the brigands had raided *The Wandering Bullfrog* there was a solitary character in rags lurking nearby. The brigands left the doors and windows wide open, so this thief went in and raided the supplies.

“The Brown Wizard: Yes, I also got the same report from the raven. I wonder where this character came from.

“The Grey Wizard: Wait, it gets even worse than that. He wants to establish an inn called *The Happy Wolf*. Should we allow that?

“King Escalus: If that is the name of the inn, then it will remind us to keep an eye on him.

“The Grey Wizard: There’s more to the story. He is spending gold all over town and the women are swooning over him. He could establish a dynasty of Black Magicians right in our midst.

“King Escalus: As a White Magician I sympathize with your feelings, but as King I must remind you that we can take no action against him without evidence.

“Queen Lavinia: In the meantime, however, his plot may come to maturity.

“The Brown Wizard: We can overpower whatever schemes he has in hand. His plot may lie dormant for many years so all the apprentices of all the wizards will have to be warned generation after generation. We do not fear him.

“King Escalus: Bravely spoken, friend wizard. I will visit this inn myself and drink a tankard.”

That is the end of the document.

Then I said to Escalus: “We have part of the story of Corporal Grip assembled. Arctophila Salix sees him take the spell-book and gold from Rhus and dwell in a cave. Two years later, a good raven sees him steal a deer-hunter’s uniform. Shortly after that, he appears in Albantown with the gold and presumably the spell-book as well. If the spell-book was hidden in *The Happy Wolf*, then Krizzen would have had access to it. Grip could have used a Black Magic spell to change his appearance so the people of Albantown would not recognize him as the arms-bearer of Rhus.”

“Yes, you are right,” answered Escalus, “Polara can tell us whether or not our guesses are correct.”

“She wants us to figure it out on our own,” I replied, “I already asked her.”

Escalus laughed and said, "Very well. Let's see where we are. Krizzen has the spell-book and learns how to use it. He starts breeding boarhounds and the spell-book tells him how to train them to communicate with the Wolves."

"Is Krizzen a descendant of Grimm?" I asked.

"Grimm had three sons and two daughters," Escalus replied, "and he died two hundred nineteen years ago. Half the town of Albantown is descended from Grimm."

"When King Krizzen brought the spell-book to the ruins of Wentwood Castle," Escalus continued, "he was already adept at using it. With help from Queen Zaisa and Elhanon he was able to open the armories in the dungeons, repair the ramparts and gates of the castle, create synthetic food, and craft a message that the boarhounds could deliver to the Wolves. In the meantime, word of their success spread rapidly and a flood of recruits came to the Black Magic Army. Warriors were attracted by the promises of booty and the generous provisions and armaments of the Second Black Magic Army. I and the other White Magicians were dismayed that our citizens could be seduced so easily. At this time, the leaders of the Black Magic Supreme Command had no doubts that the deep powers would stick by them. There was a powerful magical current moving against us. Also, Queen Zaisa still had the manuscript about alchemy that Orontius had stolen years ago – she used it as a source of ideas for explosives, incendiary bombs, and additional poisons."

"Does the spell-book have the recipe for arrow poison?" I asked him.

"The spell-book refers to it as a three-page parchment document bound on the left with three metal buttons," he said, "but it is not duplicated in the spell-book itself."

Then Escalus went over to the wall and unlocked a small cabinet. He handed me a clay flask. "In here," he said, "are the ashes of the arrow poison recipe. As you recall, the Brown Wizard burned the recipe several days after the brigands surrendered at the end of the First Magic War. Queen Zaisa gave us the flask at the end of the Second Magic War in accordance with the Treaty of Olaf's Bridge."

I shook the flask and asked "Why does it rattle?"

"That must be the metal buttons," replied my compatriot, "they would have survived when the document was burned."

"Has anyone studied the buttons?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Maybe the three pages of parchment were just nonsense," I said, "and the real secret to the recipe was in the buttons."

Escalus went into the next room and came back with a bowl and a carafe. He took the stopper out of the carafe and poured a liquid into the bowl. He put the bowl down on the table and told me to dump the three buttons into the bowl. I did so. Three dusty buttons fell into the liquid and sank to the bottom.

"Where are the ashes?" I asked.

"The Brown Wizard put ashes in the flask over two hundred years ago," he replied, "but now they are gone."

Then Escalus said, "We will let the buttons soak in cider vinegar for half an hour while you and I take a tour of the Black Magic garden of poisonous plants that is just now being laid out behind the two museums."

As we locked the door behind us and walked toward the garden, I asked "Why a garden of poisonous plants?"

"I don't know," he replied, "it was in the Treaty. We have to do it. The garden will be useful for educational purposes."

After we came back in, he took the bowl of vinegar and dumped it on the lawn outside the door, keeping the metal buttons in the bottom of the bowl with a slotted spoon. Then he put a wooden tray on the table and dumped the three buttons onto the tray.

"Look," I said, "there are words on the buttons. It says *aqua regia*. That is Latin for *royal water*."

"Yes," said Escalus, "and it has a specific meaning in chemistry and alchemy. We should go see the Sapphire Wizard tomorrow."

We agreed to meet the next day at noon and seek the Sapphire Wizard in his study.

As I walked out the door of the museum, I whirled around and pounded on the door.

"Escalus, Escalus," I yelled, "come and look at this!"

He was alarmed at my tone of voice and came out at once. I pointed to the patch of lawn where he had dumped the cider vinegar. The grass was black and withered.

"Yikes!" he cried, "The buttons do not encode the poison – they ARE the poison!"

"Yes," I said, "the buttons are an alloy of gold and some magical toxin. Burning the recipe did not destroy the buttons – the three sheets of parchment were just nonsense as I thought."

“How did the clay flask come to Queen Zaisa?” I continued.

“I have no idea” Escalus replied, “tomorrow we should see both the Brown Wizard and the Sapphire Wizard.”

I will give a summary of what we learned the next day. The Sapphire Wizard said that *aqua regia* is a mixture of nitric acid and hydrochloric acid and the only thing that will dissolve gold. He said that soaking the three buttons in aqua regia for an hour would probably provide enough arrow poison for seven or eight days of battle. He said that he did not know the magical toxin and it would not be safe to try to identify it. “The buttons should be destroyed and the Treaty be damned” (his exact words).

Escalus laughed and said, “Fortunately, the Treaty does not mention the recipe for arrow poison.”

“I will keep the buttons here,” said the Sapphire Wizard, “and propose to the Privy Council and the Council of Mayors that they be destroyed.”

“Oh, no,” I said, “don’t send Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard on another Quest!”

The Sapphire Wizard laughed and said, “Our friend the Blue Wizard is still on sick leave from his last Quest. I think the best bet would be to have Sir Patrick and Sir Lionel take the buttons to the Count of the Western Marches. The Count’s magic will take care of them. It will not be a dangerous journey now in peacetime.”

Then we took our leave of the Sapphire Wizard and went to see the Brown Wizard.

The Brown Wizard said that after the end of the First Magic War, the clay flask with the ashes and the three buttons had been put in the Black Magic Collection of the Bearsgard Academy Museum. Pikorro must have stolen the clay flask at the same time he stole the twenty Muskrat Spears at the beginning of the Second Magic War less than a year ago. That is the only way Queen Zaisa could have obtained it. That also explains why Pikorro was so careless about letting the Spears be recovered by the Knights of the Realm.

“Pikorro wanted us to have a false sense of security at the recapture of the Spears,” said the Brown Wizard. “Also, he might have known that the Muskrat spies witnessed the theft, but he made sure that they did not see the flask. He is cleverer than we thought.”

“But why didn’t the High Magicians warn us?” I asked.

The Brown Wizard sighed and said, “The High Magic is not a weapon, or a tool, or an oracle. You are young and will be studying with High Magicians for many years. Bit by bit you will learn. The High Magic gave us enough clues to avoid

disaster, and it gave us the Treaty which saved many lives. Roswitha risked her life to infiltrate Pikorro's headquarters in the Lindenwood Forest. The High Magic will not abandon us, but nor will it shield us from every hurt and stumble."

"Also," continued the Brown Wizard, "there is a further piece to this tale that you may not know yet. From Brown Wizard to Apprentice over the centuries, this lore has been preserved. After Arctophila Salix gave her report to the Count of the Western Marches, the Count sent a pigeon to the Brown Wizard with a hickory nut, which means *come at once*. The Brown Wizard journeyed to the Count's home as quickly as he could and the two of them took counsel together. The Count told Arctophila's news to the Brown Wizard and said that his magic could help. They knew that the spell-book of Rhus was on the loose and could cause trouble in the future.

"The Count and the Brown Wizard crafted a powerful counter-spell to neutralize the power of the spell-book. The spell specified that if the spell-book were ever to be used in a revival of Black Magic, it would be denied victory. And as it turned out, victory was in fact denied. At those times that Fortune seemed to suddenly favor our cause – that was the Counter-spell at work. Polara or Roswitha or Tilia could tell you more about the Counter-spell. They know more than I do."

Tomorrow Roswitha will be coming to visit and I will ask her about the Counter-spell.

Good night, dear diary, good night.

The End

QM 6 pages. Year 657 APC. Diary entry by Queen Chipsa.

Dear Diary,

I now set down more recollections from my youth, continuing the story of my quest for answers to questions when I was seventeen years old.

When I started my senior year of secondary school, the research I had done over the summer was still fresh in my mind.

I kept coming back to the issue of the arrow poison — how did the Black Magicians produce the required *aqua regia* on several occasions? It is an unstable mixture and difficult to make.

I spoke about the matter with my chemistry teacher. She said, “Next week you will be going to Bearsgard for the Harvest Festival, why don’t you take an extra day or two and do some research before you return to school?”

Following her advice, I wrote to Escalus and the Sapphire Wizard and arranged to have lunch with them in the Sapphire Wizard’s study the day after the Harvest Festival.

When the day came, we gathered for a simple midday meal. We finished our bread, cheese, and pickled onion in short order and eagerly launched on our discussion.

“The first thing we need to do,” said the Sapphire Wizard, “is consult the diary of the first Blue Wizard. I have it here. Help yourselves to more apple cider while I locate the correct date. I have never read this diary entry before, so we may find something new.”

The Sapphire Wizard found the correct date and began to read. I am recalling this from memory, so this is just a paraphrase in modern language. The gist of the diary entry was as follows:

Diary entry by the first Blue Wizard, year 341 APC. “Before the Brown Wizard burned the recipe for arrow poison, he showed it to me. Most of it was just nonsense, but the third page concluded with instructions for making sodium hypochlorite and aqueous ammonia and mixing them together. This would have created a poison gas and killed the person following the instructions. Black Magicians are prone to treachery, and Ingmar and Rhus suspected even their closest officers and aides. I believe that the true recipe for arrow poison they memorized and recited to each other at regular intervals.

“The buttons used to bind the document may play a role in the true recipe, but I do not know what it is. The Latin words *aqua regia* are known to me, but their significance is not.

“After the Brown Wizard burned the recipe, I went to Albantown and questioned the women who had brewed the arrow poison. They said that when they left Wentwood Castle, they took the parchment recipe (bound with the three buttons) and two chemicals from Ingmar’s room. They missed the excitement of the Black Magic Kingdom and were looking for a chance to restore it to power.

“One of the women said that a couple of years ago an Evil Raven told her that he had spied on Ingmar and seen him mix a batch of arrow poison. Ingmar poured out liquid from a glass vial labeled ‘AF’ and added powdery crystals from a jar labeled ‘SA.’ He stirred the mixture to dissolve the crystals and then it began to fume. Ingmar coughed several times and opened a window. Then he removed the three buttons from the parchment and soaked them in the mixture for one hour, leaving the room while the buttons soaked. The woman memorized the Raven’s description of the procedure and told her friends about it.

“The women said that when they arrived at the brigands’ camp near the bridge they found that the vial and the jar were almost empty. They succeeded in making a batch of arrow poison following the Raven’s instructions, but they only had enough poison for nine arrows. These nine were all shot in the first day of the battle. I asked the women what had happened to the empty vial and jar — they said they had thrown them in the river.

“We know that three Cudgelwielders died from those nine poison arrows. I might have been able to study the residue in the two containers, but now they are gone. I do not know what the AF and SA could mean, and the women were unable or unwilling to tell me.”

That was the end of the Blue Wizard’s diary entry.

“It is fortunate that the containers were almost empty,” said Escalus.

“The question remains,” said the Sapphire Wizard, “how did the Black Magicians come by an ample supply of *aqua regia* during the Second Magic War?”

Then I said, “My father told me in detail about his time as a prisoner in Wentwood Castle. Commander Kalko took him to see a workshop with a dozen fletchers making arrows and dipping them into arrow poison. Kalko said that they were making nine hundred poison arrows in honor of the nine arrows used by the brigands centuries ago. Because of the Treaty, those arrows were never used.”

“Yes,” said Escalus, “that was a close call.”

“How did the Black Magicians make such a large supply of *aqua regia*?” I asked.

“I just thought of something,” said the Sapphire Wizard. “Wait here until I return.”

Escalus and I studied the Blue Wizard’s diary for a few more paragraphs, and then the Sapphire Wizard returned.

"I just checked the Chemistry Storage Shed behind this building," he said, "there are six jars of chemicals missing."

"Wouldn't that have shown up when the inventory was done?" asked Escalus.

"The Chemistry Clerk was injured in the Second Magic War," replied the Sapphire Wizard, "the inventory was skipped this year."

"Do you know which chemicals are missing?" I asked, "Could they have been used to make a large batch of *aqua regia*?"

"It would take a couple of hours to check last year's inventory and get the names of the chemicals," replied the Sapphire Wizard. "I will do that as soon as our lunch conference is finished."

"We should arrange to speak with Queen Zaisa," said Escalus.

"Queen?" I said.

"Yes," replied Escalus, "according to the terms of the Treaty she was allowed to keep the title Queen."

"Zaisa is currently staying at *The Happy Tar Bucket* here in Bearsgard," said the Sapphire Wizard. "Escalus and I need to finish the work day. Let's meet at the inn an hour after sunset and invite Zaisa to join us for dinner. The Topaz Wizard serves as Zaisa's attorney, so I will arrange for her to be there as well. I will send out a couple of Messengers right away."

"I am staying at the royal guest-house," I said, "so I will go there now to write up some notes. I promised to be back in school by noon tomorrow, so I will have to leave at the crack of dawn in order to get there in time. See you later at *The Happy Tar Bucket*." Then we went our separate ways for the remainder of the afternoon.

I was the first to arrive at the inn that evening. The innkeeper said that Zaisa was at the harbor supervising the loading of a boat of supplies for the new colony. She would not receive the Sapphire Wizard's message until her return to the inn in about an hour.

I sat at a large table and reviewed my notes until Escalus and the Sapphire Wizard came in. The Topaz Wizard was with them — they had met on the street while approaching the inn. We all shook hands and took our places around the table. I told them what the innkeeper had said about Zaisa.

We told the Topaz Wizard about our discussion at noon that day, and then the Sapphire Wizard made his bombshell announcement: "The chemicals missing from the Chemistry Storage Shed are oil of vitriol, alum, and saltpetre. Those three chemicals make *aqua fortis*, a precursor to *aqua regia*. At the Bearsgard

Academy we know how to make *aqua regia* in a fully-equipped chemistry laboratory, but we have no idea how to make it in primitive conditions with just fires and cauldrons. Those three chemicals alone would not have been sufficient.”

“But how did the Black Magicians know how to make *aqua regia*?” I asked, “The lore of Ingmar and Rhus had perished.”

“The Treaty forbids bringing any new charges against Queen Zaisa,” said the Topaz Wizard.

“This is strictly an academic exercise,” said the Sapphire Wizard, “Chipsa is working on her senior thesis in Chemistry.”

“That’s okay, then,” said the Topaz Wizard, “I am curious to see the end of this riddle myself. I will assure Zaisa that you mean no harm to her.”

Then Escalus said, “Pikorro and Kalko have named their new colony *Castra Zaisa* and they claim it will be more beautiful than *Castra Polara*.”

I spoke up and said, “I was talking about that with the Count of the Western Marches recently. When he was a young man in the Other World, a kinsman made a five-year journey to the west over rivers and plains. He eventually came to high mountains that had beautiful timber of cedar, pine, redwood, fir, spruce, larch, and hemlock. The trees were straight, very tall, and well-shaped. The Count has traveled extensively in the Ring Mountains and says that they have magnificent cone-bearing trees of the same kinds. The Count says that once *Castra Zaisa* has built a few sawmills, they will be able to make beautiful buildings and furniture of wood. The architecture will be spectacular.”

Escalus commented, “*Castra Polara* has quarries of marble, limestone, and sandstone — its appearance will certainly differ from *Castra Zaisa*. I would not place any bets on which city will be more beautiful. It would be impossible to find unbiased judges in any case.”

At that moment Zaisa entered the inn and spoke with the innkeeper. The innkeeper handed her the Sapphire Wizard’s message and pointed over to our table. Zaisa read the message — she came over to us and said, “I will go wash up and return soon. Go ahead and order some food and I will join you shortly.”

We did not start our discussion until dinner was finished. After the plates were cleared away we filled our glasses with the local pale ale of *Bearsgard* and launched our conference.

The Sapphire Wizard began by saying, “Chipsa is writing her senior thesis in Chemistry on the subject of *aqua regia*.”

Queen Zaisa laughed and said, “She certainly couldn’t write it without consulting me. You have come to a living primary source. I only ask for your forbearance in one thing. Prior to each statement that I make, I will have a whispered conversation with the Topaz Wizard. Is that understood?”

“Of course,” said Escalus, “that makes perfect sense. We invited the Topaz Wizard for that purpose.”

“The story begins,” said Zaisa after her consultation with the Topaz Wizard, “with our arrival at Wentwood Castle and the declaration of the Second Black Magic Kingdom. As you know, my husband King Krizzen had with him the spell-book that Corporal Grip had taken from the body of Rhus. I looked through it carefully and found a note in the margin, in Rhus’ handwriting. The note said: *To make arrow poison, remove the three buttons from the parchment document and soak them in aqua regia for one hour. Only Ingmar and Rhus are allowed to mix the aqua regia — the recipe is a secret. Warn those knuckleheads in Armaments that the instructions on the parchment document are a trap for traitors.*”

“Did you know how to make *aqua regia*?” asked the Sapphire Wizard.

“No,” replied Zaisa, “but the alchemy manuscript stolen by my first husband Orontius had detailed instructions. The only problem was that we were not sure whether or not it was the SAME *aqua regia*. The stolen manuscript came from the Other World, written by a person named Geber about twenty years before Brother Bede was born. Ingmar and Rhus got instructions of how to make *aqua regia* directly from the deep powers. The two things could have been totally different. Those two Latin words are quite common and could mean more than one thing. There was only one way to find out, and that was to test the instructions.”

“And by this time,” put in Escalus, “you already had the three buttons in the clay flask that your son Pikorro, unknown to us, had stolen from the Bearsgard Academy Museum.”

After a consultation with the Topaz Wizard that was longer than usual, Zaisa said, “Yes, we had the three buttons. Elhanon, Krizzen, Pikorro, and I had a secret meeting. I made a list of all the ingredients we would need, and we discussed the best way to obtain them. Elhanon said that the locks on the Bearsgard Academy Museum had been changed after the theft of the spears. At that time, the theft of the clay flask was still undetected. Elhanon stated further that Pikorro still had the key, and that same key would also unlock the Chemistry Storage Shed. Elhanon would be the thief this time, and he would take along a crowbar in case that lock had also been changed. We gave Elhanon a list in both English and Latin, so he could steal the right chemicals.”

“To make a long story short,” continued Zaisa, “when Elhanon returned we re-convened our council (except for Pikorro who was in the Lindenwood Forest) and took inventory. As the chief alchemist present, it fell to me to finalize the inventory. I then told the group that we were still one key ingredient short of what we would need — we had no *sal ammoniac*. The solution I proposed was as follows. When Orontius and I had our family cottage near the Iron Mines, we had a storage shed out back that we used as an alchemy lab. We sent Elhanon and four Black Magic Warriors to raid the shed. We had no way of knowing if the shed had been cleaned out or demolished, but it was worth a try. Once again we gave Elhanon written instructions, using the secret names that Orontius and I had used to label our jars of chemicals. Orontius and I used to mine *sal ammoniac* in small deposits we had found in the North Country. Elhanon’s raid was successful, and we immediately made large batches of *aqua regia*. Then the poison arrow production began in earnest. We did not use them in the preliminary battles at Olaf’s Bridge — we were saving them for the great invasion.”

“Zaisa does not mean to say that she regrets making peace,” said the Topaz Wizard while giving Zaisa a swift kick under the table.

Zaisa winced and said, “I will keep my thoughts to myself.”

Then Escalus and the Sapphire Wizard went home, leaving Zaisa, the Topaz Wizard, and me. The Topaz Wizard did some reading while Zaisa and I went over lists of chemicals. I had with me my notes from chemistry class, and by the end of an hour I had the exact instructions for making *aqua regia* from scratch as they would have done at Wentwood Castle during the Dark Ages. Then I said goodnight and went back to the royal guest-house to sleep as well as I could before my early departure for home in the morning.

The End

QN 14 pages. Year 657 APC. The Quest to the North

As told to Chipsa by the Blue Wizard and recorded in Chipsa's diary.

[Prologue by Chipsa: The Blue Wizard and I sat by the fire on a long winter's evening, 52 years after these events occurred. He told his tale while I wrote it down in my diary. He gives a brief synopsis of the beginning of the Quest and then jumps to a detailed account of the end of the Quest. These events happened while Taspel and I were on the Journey of Testing on the Far Waste. We were all together for an evening at Darian's home before Taspel and I returned to the Count of the Western Marches the next morning. The Blue Wizard's story begins:]

Patrick and I and Freya hiked south from Darian's cottage and arrived at the home of Raj the Sailor near the coast. We found that he had pitched a tent for us nearby. It was still a couple of hours before the midday meal, so we sat down under a tree for a planning conference.

"Our departure by boat will be delayed," said Raj, "because my rudder is riddled with hidden dry rot. A new rudder will arrive from Bearsgard in about five days or so. We can set sail a week from today."

"In the meantime," said Freya, "we have several things to keep us occupied. We will be receiving a report from the good raven Lisa about the research conducted on our behalf in Olaf's archives. We have also been requested to spend a full day with the Muskrat Parliament — they are interested in our proceedings and would like a full report. We will also hear the story of how one of Aelfric's twelve coins came to Erika Finn."

"We don't know much about our mission yet," said Patrick, "we need to get the details."

"I was coming to that," said Freya, "I can give you the details now. As you know, you are supposed to meet with Chipsa and Taspel on the next autumnal equinox at the same place where you parted from them."

"Why will our Quest last an entire year? Is it that hopeless?" Patrick asked.

"Well," said Freya, "the Quest has two parts. When you meet with Chipsa and Taspel on the next autumnal equinox, the Count of the Western Marches will be there as well. He is planning to work a powerful spell for the downfall of Black Magic. The group of all twelve coins assembled is the key to his spell.

"Your base of operations in the search for the coins will be Castra Sarah. That is the name for the three hunting lodges in the mountains where the miners hid from the Black Magicians many years ago during the Dark Ages. The people

who warned you about a lack of food were pulling your leg – Castra Sarah is kept stocked with food at all times.”

“I will also be with you at Castra Sarah,” said Raj, “and two Cudgelwielders will be coming with us. It will be their task to provide firewood and baked bread through the winter and support your efforts in the Quest. There will be a team of six good ravens searching for the coins, and the two of you will camp out with them at the Search Site for three or four days at a time.”

“Has the location of the Search Site been determined?” asked Patrick.

“That is the next thing we need to discuss,” replied Freya. “There are six Search Sites of several acres each and we will be reviewing the history of how they were selected.”

The next day, when the good raven Lisa arrived from Bearsgard to give her report, we were seated under the same tree near the tent. Our attendance at the Muskrat Parliament was scheduled for the following day.

The good raven Lisa gave us the following account of the history of the ten lost coins:

“Because the war with the Black Magicians is progressing so rapidly, I can only give you a brief synopsis of this entire story. There are certain key points you need to know.

“The story begins during the single combat between King Aelfric and King Fenrir of the Wolves. As you recall, there were three good ravens and three evil ravens as witnesses to the fight. During the single combat, King Aelfric had the twelve coins in a leather bag tied to his belt. As the fight progressed, the leather bag was torn a little by Fenrir’s teeth and two coins fell out. One of these coins was picked up by a good raven, and that is the one that went to Queen Sarah and ended up in the Bearsgard Academy Museum. The other was picked up by an evil raven, and that is the one that Erika Finn gave to Sir Graham.

“The question remains, then – what happened to the other ten? We now jump ahead forty years to the fall of Hayport and the death of Ingmar. You may recall the story of the Evil Raven Ida coming to the Brown Wizard with the spell-book taken from the body of Ingmar right after he was killed. The raven Ida also told the Brown Wizard that she was the raven that spoke on behalf of Baron Kritz when the Wolves confronted King Aelfric not far from his boat. Ida described what happened that day. When Aelfric was dead, the Wolves dragged his body below the high-tide mark so the salt water and carrion creatures of the deep would dispose of it. Ida noticed that the leather bag with the ten coins was left behind on the sand. She debated flying down and taking a coin for herself. By now the Wolves had left the beach and returned to their dens in the wild country

of the north. Before Ida could take a coin for herself, a red fox came by and picked up the leather bag in its mouth.

“Ida followed the fox, which headed southward toward the mountains. Foxes did not dare to make their homes within the borders of the Kingdom of the Wolves, so this one must have been far away from its den. Ida followed the fox for six miles and then lost sight of it in woodlands and thickets.

“Then the Brown Wizard got out a map of the North Country and Ida and the Brown Wizard made marks on the map showing the route the fox had taken and where it had vanished from sight. Ida went on her way and the Brown Wizard had to turn his attention to other things.

“A couple of years later, after the founding of the Bearsgard Academy, the Brown Wizard gathered a group of ten good ravens and showed them the map that he and Ida had worked on. The ravens searched the area for several years and made careful observations of the fox population. They found six possible fox dens and marked the locations on the Brown Wizard’s map.

“That is the origin of the six Search Sites where we will be looking for the coins. The coins could be at the bottom of a den, or buried in a former den fallen into disuse, or dropped on the ground somewhere by a fox. The leather bag would have rotted away by now.”

“Why are we searching for the coins 260 years later?” asked Patrick, “It would have been easier to find them right away.”

“I can answer that question,” said Freya, “this Quest is fated to be yours. Your mother was Elena, the greatest White Magician of all time, and you have a better chance of finding the coins than anyone else.”

“And a better chance of getting killed in the process,” added Patrick.

“That goes with the territory,” I said, “we shouldn’t complain. We should be honored to be given this task. This is our part in the great history of our time.”

“True,” replied Sir Patrick, “we are not the only ones risking our lives. We will have to trust in the high calibre of the people who are backing us.”

“The High Magic would not forsake you so lightly,” said Freya.

“Don’t forget that we were imprisoned by Pikorro,” I added, “and yet here we are.”

“We have a copy of the Brown Wizard’s map,” put in Raj, “it is already on the boat.”

I skip ahead now to the Quest itself in the far north. The Search Sites were not far from the border of the Kingdom of the Wolves, but we had a system in place

for protection from the Wolves. The Brown Wizard had put a spell on us to disguise our scent so the Wolves could not track us in the wilderness. Also, a team of five good ravens kept track of the movements of the Wolves and sent warnings when it was not safe to be out and about. The Brown Wizard also put a spell on Castra Sarah to make it invisible to Evil Ravens and Black Magicians. Another team of seven good ravens kept lookout between Castra Sarah and Wentwood Castle to warn us of any Black Magicians approaching.

In the ninth week of our Quest, Patrick and I were on our way from Castra Sarah to Search Site B to join the six ravens and camp out with them for several days. We were on high ground on the shoulder of a mountain – the terrain was rocky and the trees were short and widely scattered. At sunset we selected a camping place for the night. We put our backpacks on the ground and started to gather some sticks for a small fire. The weather was cold and winter was around the corner.

Suddenly, a lone Wolf approached us through the trees and brush – we left our packs on the ground and ran for it. It was tricky going running full speed through the shadows of the evening. Patrick tripped on a rock and went sprawling. I lunged to the left to help Patrick but found that the Wolf had cut me off from helping him.

I looked ahead and saw that I was at the top of a cliff with a sheer drop of ten feet. Below that was a slope of shrubs and stones going down to a creek. I turned to face the Wolf and I saw Patrick raise himself on elbows and knees. There was nothing I could do but face the Wolf.

The Wolf was two paces from my ankles, with her chin on the ground between her paws. She gazed up at me with a quizzical expression. I did not know what to make of it. Inexplicably, I wanted to care for this Wolf and shield her from harm.

Before I could think of anything, I was wracked with pain. My entire being was split in two – human and White Magic and the High Magic on one side, and Wolf and Black Magic and the deep powers on the other. The torment writhed and contorted my body. I took a step back and my foot hit some loose gravel on the rocky surface. I fell over the cliff and blacked out. I must have hit my head on a rock outcropping as I fell.

I woke up to a throbbing head and pain all over. The sun was above the horizon and it was probably the second hour of the next day. A thicket of stunted spruce trees had broken my fall but they were very uncomfortable. I crawled out of the thicket to a grassy area between some rocks. My head was in a vise.

I noticed that my backpack was nearby – I crawled over to it and had a long drink from the waterskin in the pack. Then I remembered what had happened: “How did my backpack get here?” I thought.

Then my heart skipped a beat and I almost choked on a mouthful of water. There was the Wolf, ten feet away, sitting placidly and gazing at me. She had been there the whole time while I awakened and moved about. She made no attempt to move toward me.

Suddenly, a thought struck me. I picked up my backpack and looked at it closely. The straps had the marks of large teeth – the Wolf had brought my pack to me. I decided to try an experiment. I reached into my pack and took out two sandwiches. I hobbled toward the Wolf and put one of the sandwiches down on a rock halfway between us. Then I sat down and started to eat the other sandwich.

The Wolf got up slowly, ate the sandwich, walked to the creek for a drink of water, and then sat down exactly as before, gazing at me. I finished my sandwich and began to look around for a way to get out of this valley.

At that moment, two ravens flew into view from the south and perched on two branches about six feet apart.

One of the ravens was our friend Walt, the Eldest Raven, and the other was unknown to me.

“Patrick told us where you were,” said Walt, “he saw that you were injured but still breathing and went to get help. He is on his way here with the two Cudgelwielders and a stretcher.”

“I see that you have met my friend Mephistophila,” said the other raven.

“I beg your pardon?” I said.

“Mephistophila is the name of the Wolf,” replied the raven, “My name is Alf, formerly the Evil Raven Alf, lately second lieutenant in the Black Magic Army Signal Corps.”

“Now my head really hurts,” I said. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“I can explain,” put in Walt, “but explanations can wait until we are comfortably settled back at Castra Sarah. Let’s make our way out of this valley and meet up with Patrick and the Cudgelwielders. I can show you the way. Are you able to walk?”

“Can the Wolf come with us?” I found myself saying. “We have become friends.” I was amazed at my words and could not believe I had spoken them.

“Sure,” said Walt, “that is a great idea. Alf, why don’t you go tell the Wolves that Mephistophila is coming with us.”

“Will do,” said Alf, and off he flew to the east. “I’ll meet you back at Castra Sarah,” he said before he was out of earshot.

I staggered to my feet and thought “How weird is this going to get?”

“I think I can walk,” I said to Walt, “but not very fast. I will have to kneel down and rest every ten paces or so. My head hurts.”

“You will find a pleasant surprise waiting for you at Castra Sarah,” said Walt, “Someone on is on the way to cure your injuries.”

“And who might that be?” I asked, wondering what kind of time warp I had entered.

“The Count of the Western Marches,” replied Walt.

Relief flooded over me. “My head feels better already,” I said. “Let’s get there as quickly as we can.”

I turned to the Wolf Mephistophila and said, “Can you carry the pack for me?” She did not understand, so I picked up the pack and took it to her. She took the straps in her teeth and started to follow me. Walt led the way and off we went, making slow progress.

It was slow going over rough terrain. “What a strange parade we are,” I thought. We made frequent stops and my head started throbbing again. I had some more food and water from my pack and then we went on.

“Hullo there!” called Patrick from the high ground ahead of us. Sir Patrick and the two Cudgelwielders came into view from a thicket of short trees. They were carrying a stretcher.

“We are glad to see you on your feet,” Patrick began, and then he saw the Wolf.

“Look out behind you!” he yelled.

I felt faint and sat down on the ground.

“It’s okay,” said Walt, “the Wolf is a friendly Wolf.”

“Are you sure?” said Patrick, scowling.

I looked up and said, “I can’t explain, but yes, it’s okay.”

“Come up to level ground here and we can put you on the stretcher,” said Patrick.

“I have good news,” said Walt, “by the time we get back to Castra Sarah the Count of the Western Marches will be waiting for us.”

“That IS good news,” said Patrick.

I hobbled up the slope and the two Cudgelwielders put me on the stretcher.

“There is more good news,” said Walt, “The first ratification vote has passed. It looks like the Treaty will be finalized in a couple of weeks.”

“Good heavens, the Treaty!” said Patrick. “I had forgotten all about the Treaty.”

“We can have a long talk when we get back to Castra Sarah,” said Walt, “we will save our talk until then. We should concentrate on this rocky ground. Patrick, why don’t you take the backpack from the Wolf, I think her jaws are getting tired.”

“Maybe the Wolf can put the pack down, and THEN I will pick it up,” said Patrick.

Walt signaled to Mephistophila and she put the pack down and walked up the slope behind the stretcher.

Patrick made a wide circle around the Wolf, picked up the pack, and put it on his back.

“What happened to YOUR pack?” I asked Patrick.

“I picked it up on my way to Castra Sarah last night,” he replied, “I walked right past it anyway. I got lost several times in the dark. I arrived at Castra Sarah at midnight and woke everyone up. I wanted to come back for you right away, but they insisted on waiting until daybreak. They didn’t want any additional injuries in the dark, and we weren’t sure what to do about Wolves on the loose. We didn’t want to come across them at night. I don’t know how a Wolf got through our warning system.”

“Off we go to Castra Sarah,” said Walt, “everything will be explained. I will fly ahead and tell Raj and the Count that we are all safe.”

The journey on the stretcher was no picnic but I made it okay. I couldn’t have walked the entire distance in any case.

I will skip ahead to the evening of the same day. We arrived at Castra Sarah and did the afternoon’s work. Walt flew over to Search Site B to explain to the six ravens why Patrick and the Blue Wizard did not arrive as planned. Then we gathered around the fireplace after dinner.

The Count had worked on my injuries all afternoon and after a hot meal I felt much better. So here we were, gathered around the fireplace for a powwow. My mind was abuzz with a million questions. Here is the cast of characters — Sir Patrick and I were there, plus the following: the raven Walt, the raven Alf,

Mephistophila the Wolf, the two Cudgelwielders, the Muskrat Raj the Sailor, and last but not least the Count.

Walt launched the conference with the following report:

“I came to bring the latest news from Bearsgard. The first ratification vote was a smashing success and both sides signed a preliminary Accord and Declaration stating simply *we are no longer enemies*. There are eight more ratification votes to come and some additional negotiations of details. Pikorro and Kalko have purchased two sloops and are preparing to leave for their colony in the Ring Mountains.”

“If the Treaty makes it all the way to the finish line,” asked Sir Patrick, “does that mean we do not need the ten coins?”

“That is an excellent question,” said Walt, “and since the Count is the greatest magician present, I will defer to him. What do you say, Count?”

“The Blue Wizard’s injuries will not permit him to continue the Quest,” replied the Count, “if the Treaty fails, then our only hope will be the archers of the New Kingdom.”

“I hope it doesn’t come to that,” I said, “that would mean another three or four years of war. Our beautiful world would be destroyed by then.”

Walt chimed in and said, “No need to worry – the Treaty is a smash hit with all parties.”

“With all parties except the deep powers,” put in Patrick, “won’t they try to retaliate?”

“They will,” replied the Count, “but it will take them two or three centuries to launch another attack. We can plant many generations of orchards between now and then. Breathe easy. The deep powers and the High Magic do not experience time the same way we do. It is totally different for them.”

“Is someone undertaking to vouch for the good will of this Wolf?” asked one of the Cudgelwielders. “I grew up with warnings about Wolves and am not eager to trust one.”

“The Wolf is a friend,” I said, “although I cannot tell you how I know that. I just know.”

“A friend to you, perhaps,” said the Cudgelwielder, “but the rest of us do not have Wolves inside us. How can you be sure?”

“I can vouch for the good will of the Wolf,” said Alf the raven. “Her name is Mephistophila and she is a princess of the royal blood. She is in the prime of life at age one hundred twenty and a respectable widow.”

The Cudgelwielder scowled and said, “Does anyone ELSE vouch for her who is not a member of the Black Magic Army Signal Corps?”

“Yes,” said the Count, “if my word means anything to you, the Wolf is a friend. Walt and the Blue Wizard agree with me, I believe.”

“Yes,” said Walt.

“I agree,” I said.

“Just for the record,” continued the Count, “there is something we should clarify. The Blue Wizard’s fall from the cliff was not caused by the Wolf – it was caused by an attack by the deep powers. Is that correct, Blue Wizard?”

“Absolutely,” I replied, “I want to clarify that as well. The Wolf is blameless. As I stood with my back to the cliff, I began to realize that the Wolf was not an enemy, but in the next instant the attack came. As you know, I am the incarnation of a Wolf, and inside me there was a three-way struggle. There was an embryonic reconciliation between my human self and my Wolf self, but the deep powers were having none of it. They launched a vicious attack that flooded my body with pain. I stepped backward to regain my balance, slipped on some loose gravel, and pitched over the cliff. Mephistophila fetched my backpack for me and guarded me until I woke up.”

“But there is something that puzzles me,” said Patrick, “how did the Wolf get past our defenses?”

“Wolves travel in packs,” replied Walt, “and packs are easy to monitor with good raven observers. A lone Wolf can slip through the shadows in the dusk and escape detection.”

“There is some detail that I can provide to this discussion,” said the Count, “and I think now is the time to review these facts. The Blue Wizard, born Zorso son of Zaisa and Orontius, is the reincarnation of a Wolf named Magister Hati who was a great shaman of the Wolves. He was a younger son of King Fenrir and a nephew of Baron Kritz. Mephistophila comes from that same lineage and is thus a kinswoman of the Blue Wizard, if that is the right term. The Wolves communicate with each other via telepathy. As you know, throughout history one or two of the Wolves would learn how to communicate with the ravens in order to parley with Humans and Muskrats. I think the time has come for Walt or Alf to explain how that was done, and is still done to this day.”

“I can explain,” said Walt. “There is a code that every raven grows up learning. It involves head motions, right foot motions, and left foot motions. The code is very elaborate and takes about ten years to learn. In each generation of Wolves, one or two volunteers come and live with the ravens for ten or fifteen years to learn the code. Then they would go back to the Kingdom of the Wolves and serve as interpreters. This allowed the Wolves to communicate with Humans and Muskrats through the ravens.”

“Who are the interpreters in our time?” asked Patrick.

“One of them is with us now,” replied Walt, “Mephistophila is one and her sister Arianna is the other.”

“If we are able to communicate with the Wolf,” put in Patrick, “let’s ask her why she came alone into the mountains and frightened us out of our wits.”

“You do not need the code if I am with you,” said the Count, “Mephistophila and I can communicate via telepathy. Is that not so, Mephistophila?”

The Wolf gave a brief bark of assent.

“Let’s take a break,” said the Count. “Put the kettle on the fire and make a batch of chamomile tea. In the meantime, I will learn Mephistophila’s story and try to frame it in human words. Blue Wizard, you will also be able to communicate with Mephistophila via telepathy in a few weeks after the dominance of the deep powers has receded a bit.”

We had a lengthy break and then gathered around the fire again. Raj thoughtfully gave me some bread and jam to go with my tea – I was still feeling weak.

The Count gave us an account of Mephistophila’s story. I relate the story here. When the Count says “I” he means Mephistophila, not the Count. He is rendering her story into human speech the best he can.

“The Blue Wizard was not the only one attacked by the deep powers. It happened to me as well. I was formerly the chief of the pro-deep powers faction among the Wolves and my sister Arianna was chief of the pro-peace faction. A year or two ago I began to have a change of heart and my allegiance to the deep powers withered. More recently, my sister Arianna and I took turns interpreting for the Wolves in the lengthy negotiations about the Treaty. She and I were deep into the terms of the Treaty and we knew it was bad news for the deep powers. Starting a week ago, I had nightmares every night. The dreams were alarming and distressing. The dreams painted a bleak picture of the future of the Wolves. The White Magicians were treacherous and only interested in destroying the Wolves. Many of my fellow Wolves believed this anyway, and sometimes Arianna and I felt like traitors as we conveyed all sorts of honeyed promises to

our kin. It could be a trap, and the nightmares hammered away on this point. I didn't know whom to trust.

"Suddenly, an hour before sundown yesterday, the strength of the deep powers receded and my mind cleared. I was awake, not asleep, and I felt myself again. A voice deep inside me said: *find Magister Hati – he can help you*. Magister Hati died generations ago, I thought. But the voice said the same thing again. I shut my eyes and stood very still. Then I slipped away from the pack and began to walk, and then to run. I didn't know where I was going or why. The voice inside me was a friendly voice -- the opposite of the deep powers. The voice made me feel like a young cub beside my mother and my siblings. I wanted that voice to conquer the deep powers that were tormenting me. I knew that some of the other Wolves might prefer the ways of the deep powers and vote against the Treaty or sabotage it with violence. The loving cub deep inside me didn't want that to happen. I wanted my mother and siblings to be happy and safe. I had to find Magister Hati.

"I started to run faster. The sun set and dusk began to approach twilight. Suddenly I came upon Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard at their campsite. I was confused. I had been taught to think of them as enemies, but my brain said that the Treaty would change all that. It *might* change all that. Everything hung by a thread. The friendly voice inside me said: *don't make them afraid – show them that you are a friend*. I put my chin on the ground between my paws. The look of fear left the Blue Wizard's face, but then he fell over the cliff and was gone. You know the rest of the story."

"Even now," said Raj the Sailor, "as we speak here, the Wolves may be deciding to reject the Treaty. Perhaps this meeting with Mephistophila is fated to be the saving of us all."

"Yes," said the Count, "that is the way High Magic works. Give me a moment to convey that thought to Mephistophila."

After a few moments of silence the Count said "Mephistophila agrees with Raj."

"Mephistophila has conveyed additional thoughts to me," continued the Count. "If the peace treaty is successful, then she wants to come live in the Lindenwood Forest with the Blue Wizard. We can ask the King and Queen to give her exclusive hunting rights to deer and wild boar in the forest."

"Yes," I added, "my injuries will not permit me to continue as the Blue Wizard. I will be a hermit and herbalist once again and Mephistophila can be my companion."

"I have an idea," said Raj. "We can make a muzzle of leather and brass for her to wear when she goes into the villages. That way the children will not be frightened."

“Let me convey that to Mephistophila,” said the Count, and then there was a long pause.

“Mephistophila says yes to the muzzle idea,” continued the Count, “and she will let the children ride on her back.”

“We should have signed a peace treaty centuries ago,” said Patrick. “This is going to be great fun! The children will love it.”

“In my childhood in the Other World,” said the Count, “there were very few peace treaties and not much fun.”

“Now that we have this conduit into the lives of Wolves,” said Raj, “let’s hear more about their point of view and their history.”

“Excellent idea,” said the Count, “make another batch of tea and I will get Mephistophila’s story.”

When we were all settled again with fresh tea, the Count began another discourse from the thoughts of Mephistophila:

“There have always been factions among the Wolves. Some of us made ballads about the courage of King Aelfric and wished that Baron Kritz had acted honorably. Right after King Aelfric’s death, the peace faction wanted to ask the veterinarians of Hayport for help. Wolves have no hands for performing surgery or mixing medicines, and we were jealous of the oxen of Hayport with their superb care. The Black Magicians promised that they would make the veterinarians of Hayport slaves of the Wolves, but it was all a pack of lies. If we had a gold piece for every time the Black Magicians lied to us, we could purchase half of Bearsgard.”

“And the Evil Ravens could purchase the other half,” put in Alf.

The Count continued Mephistophila’s thoughts:

“For many years, I was the leader of the pro-deep powers faction and my sister Arianna was leader of the pro-peace faction. We would debate and spar mind-to-mind and thought-to-thought. A couple of years ago, I began to have a change of heart. My faction was still the largest and strongest among the Wolves, but deep inside I started to reconsider. When the Second Black Magic Kingdom was declared by King Krizzen and Elhanon, a delegation of six Wolves was selected to receive the embassy of the six boarhounds. Neither Arianna nor I were included in the delegation – we were considered too soft-hearted for a conference about war and plunder. The boarhounds had their own Black Magic communication skills and did not use the code of the ravens. The war-hungry Wolves among us were eager to see the battle-plan of the boarhounds. They were also eager to meet Elhanon, since they knew he was the reincarnation of

Baron Kritz – a great hero to the Wolves with the meanest hearts. Of course, the boarhounds never came north, and the great juggernaut of bloodshed was turned aside. Now it is my hope that the Treaty will be successful so we can start a new page of our history.”

When the Count finished speaking, there was silence for a while.

“There is going to be a new wrinkle in the Treaty negotiations in a few days,” said Raj. “As you know, the Black Magicians are going to start a colony in the Ring Mountains due east of Bearsgard. In another part of the Ring Mountains, north of Aelfric’s Vale, there is a large population of lemmings. Since the arctic fox died out twenty years ago, the lemmings have had terrible problems with famine and disease. The Muskrat Parliament has received an official request from the lemmings for the establishment of a summer colony of Wolves in their part of the Ring Mountains. This would consist of eight Wolves living there for four months every year. The lemmings have been gathering gold nuggets from the mountains and have amassed quite a fortune. They plan to hire Pikorro and Kalko to ferry the Wolves back and forth in their two sloops. The lemmings are aware that the Wolves are accustomed to culling populations of deer and wild boar and they would like the Wolves to do the same for them. We should caution Mephistophila not to relay this offer to the Wolves just yet – word will be coming through official channels in a few days.”

“The fact remains,” said Patrick, “that the Wolves might reject the entire Treaty out of hand. It is only a few months ago that they were ready to follow the boarhounds to a great invasion.”

“Wait a moment,” said Raj, “I have an idea.” He went to a shelf in a corner of the room and returned with a sheet of parchment. “This is a copy of the speech that Chistar gave to the Black Magicians – the one that launched the negotiations for the Treaty. Perhaps the Count can communicate the speech to Mephistophila, who can in turn pass it on to the Wolves.”

“Hand it to me,” said the Count, “and we will give it a try.”

“I will have to give Mephistophila an introduction and explain the origin of the speech,” continued the Count, “not everything spoken to the Black Magicians will be applicable to the Wolves.” There was a long pause, and then the Count said, “I will read the speech aloud as I convey it to Mephistophila’s mind.” He began to read the speech slowly as follows:

“You Black Magicians have made an alliance with the deep powers, but you have made a poor choice. The deep powers will chew you up and spit you out. They would betray you in an instant if it suited their purposes. If you make a bargain with the High Magic, it will stand by its word. If you are willing to be halfway decent citizens, the High Magic will even defend your rights. If you have a

complaint, you can come before the High Magic and state your case. You can't do that with the deep powers. No way.

"All the deep powers care about is murder and mayhem, and if it is you who perish what do they care? Think about the things you really care about – your true objectives. If immortality is beyond your reach, then what are your second and third goals? The deep powers have persuaded you that the High Magic will not listen to you, but put it to the test. State your case. Make your best offer. A bargain with the High Magic is more trustworthy, and more profitable, than a bargain with the deep powers.

"You are pursuing the goal of immortality, but have you thought it through? It is customary for people who want power and wealth to also want immortality, but are you following blindly into a dead end?

"Have you ever tried to sleep with a lump or root or pebble that makes you uncomfortable? The more you try to ignore it, the more it preys on your mind. Your conscience works the same way. You just can't put yourself at ease. Now imagine that going on forever. We were not made for immortality – our minds and bodies give out. If you try to overrule that with powerful magic, you don't get more life but rather an extended death. Imagine your frustrations and desires going on forever. You don't want time to become your enemy and tormentor.

"I became immortal by accident, and I have requested that the High Magic give me back my mortality. This it has agreed to do.

"The realm of mortals is where we all belong. Let's stay there. Mortality is a gift, not a curse.

"I rest my case." This concluded the Count's reading of the speech, and there was silence for a while.

"Mephistophila is willing to communicate the speech to the Wolves," said the Count, "but she is unsure about how they will receive it. The pro-deep powers faction may prove to be more recalcitrant than the Black Magicians. In order for the telepathy to work, she must be within sight of the other Wolves. It would be best to wait until they are all gathered in one place."

"I know what must be done," I said, "Mephistophila, Alf and I will go to the Wolves. There is no way to protect us or guarantee our safety. Our reward will be peace or death. Perhaps we were meant to find Mephistophila all along, and not the ten coins."

The End