

The Letters and Diaries of Queen Chipsa

Part Five: The Zaisa Stratagem

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End of Part Five

ZC 2 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa, Queen of the New Realm. Year 658 APC.

Dear diary: I have some sad words for you tonight.

A week ago, shortly before my sixty-ninth birthday, I was summoned to hear the last words of Queen Zaisa. She lived in a small cottage in Albantown next to the inn *The Happy Wolf*. Her second husband Krizzen died ten years ago.

She refused to have anything to do with the Sisters of the Green Leaf, but two kind-hearted men of the local ambulance corps volunteered to be her attendants.

When I arrived and knocked at her cottage, I was greeted by the white-haired Targon, my father's life-long friend. Targon is a second cousin of Damrod. He is a stretcher-bearer and master baker of Albantown. He was one of the rescuers who brought the Blue Wizard to the Infirmary many years ago. He was twelve years old at the time and felt sorry for the injured boy. Targon was visiting the boy when Darian came to the Infirmary and decided to adopt the lost orphan.

Targon motioned to me to be quiet. He stepped outside, closed the door behind him, and we walked to a wooden bench in the small garden. The sun was just setting. "She is asleep at the moment," said Targon, "but she is anxious to speak with you before it is too late." His voice was measured and re-assuring — one can tell that he is a baritone in the Albantown Choir.

Targon stated further that he would awaken Zaisa in half an hour to give her broth and medicine.

"Go continue your duties," I said, "I will sit here and compose a poem until you call me." I sat on the bench and wrapped my woolen scarf tighter against the chill of a winter evening. I noted sadly that no-one had put Zaisa's garden to bed for the winter. On one side there were some shriveled tomato plants, and on the other some dead stalks of bachelor's buttons. There was a rusty trowel leaning against the low fence.

Targon called me in and went into the kitchen to do some work so Zaisa and I could speak in private. As I walked into the cottage I noticed the scent of my favorite aromatic herbs, plus some medicinal smells that I did not recognize. The wood fire was blazing and the room was warm. I recalled the night of Polara's passing, which was also in the winter but completely opposite in all other respects.

"There you are," said Zaisa, "come and sit by me. I do not want your poem. Just listen."

I sat by her and said nothing.

"I have been looking at architectural plans for new buildings at Castra Zaisa in the Ring Mountains. Everyone raves about the beautiful structures of red, gold,

and brown timber. The new sawmill is better than ever. In the last year, the number of children born in the colony is the most ever. My son Pikorro has turned out to be a great architect, among other things. I know that his pardon six years ago was all your doing. You spoke eloquently before the Council of Five Mayors.”

“I –,” I started to say something, but she said, “Hush, just listen.”

“The achievements of Castra Zaisa were my lesser dream,” she continued. “The greater dream was the Second Magic War. We had it all planned out. The first wave would be the Black Magic archers with the nine hundred poison arrows. The second wave would be the Wolf Army, with guidance from the six boarhounds and the Evil Ravens. The third wave would be Black Magic Warriors with spears and swords and ox carts for plunder. Nothing could withstand such an onslaught.”

She winced in pain and took a few moments to catch her breath.

“I know what you are thinking,” she continued, “*Why so much bloodshed? Why so much destruction?*”

Zaisa sighed and closed her eyes. “You will never understand the deep powers. Their ways are mysterious. They are as hard as diamonds and as beautiful as orchids. In the furnace of their wrath great things are wrought. Through the millennia your comfortable world with its apprenticeships and meetings of consensus will never achieve greatness. Mediocrity will reign until it drives us all mad.”

She coughed and called for Targon. He gave her a drink of barley water and left the room again. Zaisa rested for a while before continuing.

“It was our one chance, our only chance,” she hissed bitterly. “The Second Magic War was it. The time loop of the deep powers opens only once. Now the loop is closed forever. We betrayed the deep powers and they will never forgive us. Some other world may achieve greatness, but not ours. Never.”

“Go now,” she said, “the time has come. Targon has my winding-sheet ready. It will be needed soon. Go now and never come again.”

I got up, gave Targon a parting hug, and left Zaisa forever.

ZD 4 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa, Queen of the New Realm. Year 658 APC.

I now relate the events of the past two days, which have prompted deep reflections about the Second Black Magic Kingdom. The power of that kingdom was founded on two books: the spell-book that had belonged to Rhus, and the alchemy manuscript that Orontius had stolen. Now we know that there was more to the story, which is why I have entitled this tale:

The Third Book

Two weeks after the death of Zaisa, I was summoned to an urgent meeting with Althaea, the Curator of the Herbarium at the Bearsgard Academy. She did not tell me in advance the topic of our discussion. Althaea is ninety-five years old and studied with Polara for many years.

When I arrived at the Herbarium, I was taken to Althaea's workroom immediately. There were three people seated around a small table, and in the middle of the table was a large object wrapped in white fabric.

Althaea rose to greet me and introduced the two boys who were with her. Tom and Nick greeted me courteously and explained that they are Apprentice Stevedores in the Bearsgard Harbor. They are both fourteen years old.

"We will take this story in the correct order," said Althaea, "so the two lads will begin the tale."

The boys took turns telling this tale and often interrupted each other. I am now condensing their conversation into a single narrative for simplicity's sake.

"Four nights ago," they began, "we were called in to work a late shift of three hours. There was a packet boat due to depart for the Ring Mountains at dawn. An ox-drawn wagon had arrived from Albantown after dark and the customer demanded that the goods be loaded at once.

"The loads were not difficult and we were finishing up early. Our supervisor was worn out from a long day and said he was leaving. He pointed to the last item and told us to put it in the hold with the others. Then we were to sign our time sheets in the Harbormaster's office and go home. He took the boat's updated manifest to the Harbormaster and left us to finish up the last few minutes of work. The Harbormaster would lock everything after our departure.

"The last item was not heavy — a cedar clothing chest with two brass handles. When we put the chest down inside the hold of the boat we heard a thumping sound inside the chest. We opened the chest and saw that it was full of women's garments packed loosely — nothing that would make a thumping sound. Then we took everything out of the chest and examined it. We tapped the bottom of

the chest with our knuckles and it had a hollow sound. Aha! We put everything back in the chest and went to the Harbormaster's office.

"We told the Harbormaster about the false bottom in the chest and he was very interested. He looked at the boat's manifest, found the listing for the chest, and rubbed his chin. He told us to bring the chest to his office and put in on a bench by the window, which we did.

"After we had brought the chest he looked at our time sheets and said that our parents would expect us home in one hour. He told us not to sign the time sheets yet — he had another task for us. He said that Sir Patrick and Sir Lionel were on Night Watch Duty that night, and told us to go to the Guard House near the inn called *The Happy Tar Bucket* and bring them to the harbor immediately.

"When we returned with Sir Patrick and Sir Lionel, the Harbormaster had emptied everything out of the chest and gotten out a toolbox with crowbars and hammers.

"The three of them removed the quarter-round molding at the bottom of the chest and pried up the false bottom. There we saw a large manuscript closed with a silver hasp. That was what had made the thumping sound.

"Sir Patrick was the only one of us who could read Latin, and he said the title of the book was *Herbs of the Accursed*. He further stated that the handwriting on the cover was that of Queen Zaisa.

"Sir Patrick commented that this was the darkest magic we would ever see in our lives. He wrapped the book in a piece of white cloth and brought it here to the Herbarium.

"Before he left, Sir Patrick cautioned us not to tell anyone of our discovery. He told the Harbormaster to repair the bottom of the chest and put everything back in it. Then he and Sir Lionel were to take it back to the boat and load it just as if nothing had happened. Sir Patrick wanted people to think that everything was normal.

"We were then dismissed by the Harbormaster, signed our time sheets, and went home."

"Thank you Tom and Nick," said Althaea, "you may now return home to do your schoolwork for tomorrow. You have done well."

When the boys had left, I pointed to the object wrapped in cloth and said, "Is this it?"

"Yes," said Althaea, "and there is more to the story. When the Harbormaster checked the manifest he saw that the chest was being sent by Zaisa's Executor for personal delivery to Pikorro."

“What will Pikorro do when he finds that the manuscript is missing?” I said. “Was he expecting it?”

“We don’t know,” said Althaea.

“What does the manuscript contain?” I asked further. “I can read Latin.”

Althaea sighed and said, “It is a dreary business. The entire document is in Zaisa’s handwriting. It is sad to see botany put to such venomous purposes. There is a brief prologue in which Zaisa says that when Orontius and her two boys were asleep she would commune with the deep powers. The words of this manuscript came into her mind from the deep powers and she wrote them out exactly as they came to her.”

“What do the words say?” I asked.

“Some of it is rambling and incoherent,” she replied, “but most of it is descriptions of poisonous plants and recipes of what can be done with them.”

“Are the plants native to Nye?” I said.

“They seem to be native to a dozen different worlds, but there are twenty key species that can be found in the North Country,” she replied. “There are another thirty species that can be found in the Ring Mountains.”

“At the end of the document,” she continued, “is a note added by Zaisa many years later, addressed to her son Pikorro. She says that the true source of the arrow poison for the nine hundred arrows was one of the poisons in this manuscript. The charade about the three buttons and the *aqua regia* was just a ruse to keep this document secret. It was all a scheme to deceive the White Magicians and the High Magic. When Elhanon made his trip north to the Iron Mines to retrieve the chemicals for the *aqua regia* he took four Black Magic Warriors with him. One of the four was Zaisa disguised as a warrior. Zaisa and Elhanon gathered herbs in a magic grove planted by Ingmar and Rhus centuries ago. That was the true source of the arrow poison.”

“What an elaborate scheme,” I observed.

“In her note to Pikorro,” Althaea continued, “Zaisa says not to give up hope for a revival of the alliance with the deep powers. This book, *Herbs of the Accursed*, can be preserved for use by future generations of Black Magicians.”

“So perhaps Black Magic will stage a comeback,” I said. “I had two hundred years of experience fighting the Wolves as a Unicorn. One of the oldest tricks in the book is to pretend to withdraw or pretend to be wounded.”

“I have discussed this matter with the Count of the Western Marches, Roswitha, and Tilia Finn,” she went on, “and this is the plan. You, Taspel, Sir Patrick, and

the Blue Wizard are to appear before a joint session of the Council of Five Mayors and the Privy Councils of the two realms to warn them of the danger. Tilia says that Castra Zaisa was founded for the purpose of keeping Black Magic alive until the deep powers can launch another attack in two or three hundred years.”

I thought for a while and then said, “No, I have a better idea. I will go and meet with Pikorro. Alone.”

Althaea rose and extended her hand in farewell. “We are on a great chessboard,” she said, “and you are the queen of our side.”

The End

I wrote this chronology on my 75th birthday — Chipsa.

605 APC: End of the Second Magic War and final ratification of the Treaty of Olaf's Bridge. Polara cancels the Journey of Testing and summons us home.

606 APC: Founding of the New Kingdom, also called Castra Polara, and founding of the colony in the Ring Mountains, named Castra Zaisa.

607 to 614 APC: Taspel and I spend our three years of voluntary service building roads in the New Kingdom, and spend four years at the Bearsgard Academy studying Philosophy, Science, Engineering, Music, Culinary Arts, and Gymnastics.

614 APC: Taspel and I are married and become King and Queen of the New Kingdom.

615 APC: Birth of our son Alnus.

617 APC: Birth of our son Carpinus.

620 APC: Birth of our daughter Ostrya.

625 APC: The twentieth anniversary of the Treaty of Olaf's Bridge. Pikorro and Kalko are convicted of trying to kill Sir Patrick and sentenced to hard labor.

628 APC: Sir Patrick (age 39) and Sir Lionel invent the sport of Albantown Wrestling.

639 APC: Kalko dies in the Bearsgard Lock-Up at age 78.

644 APC: Elhanon dies in the Kingdom of the Wolves at age 83.

647 APC: Death of Krizzen, formerly King of the Second Black Magic Kingdom.

648 APC: Death of Polara on the winter solstice at age 110.

649 APC: My 60th birthday and the beginning of my diary.

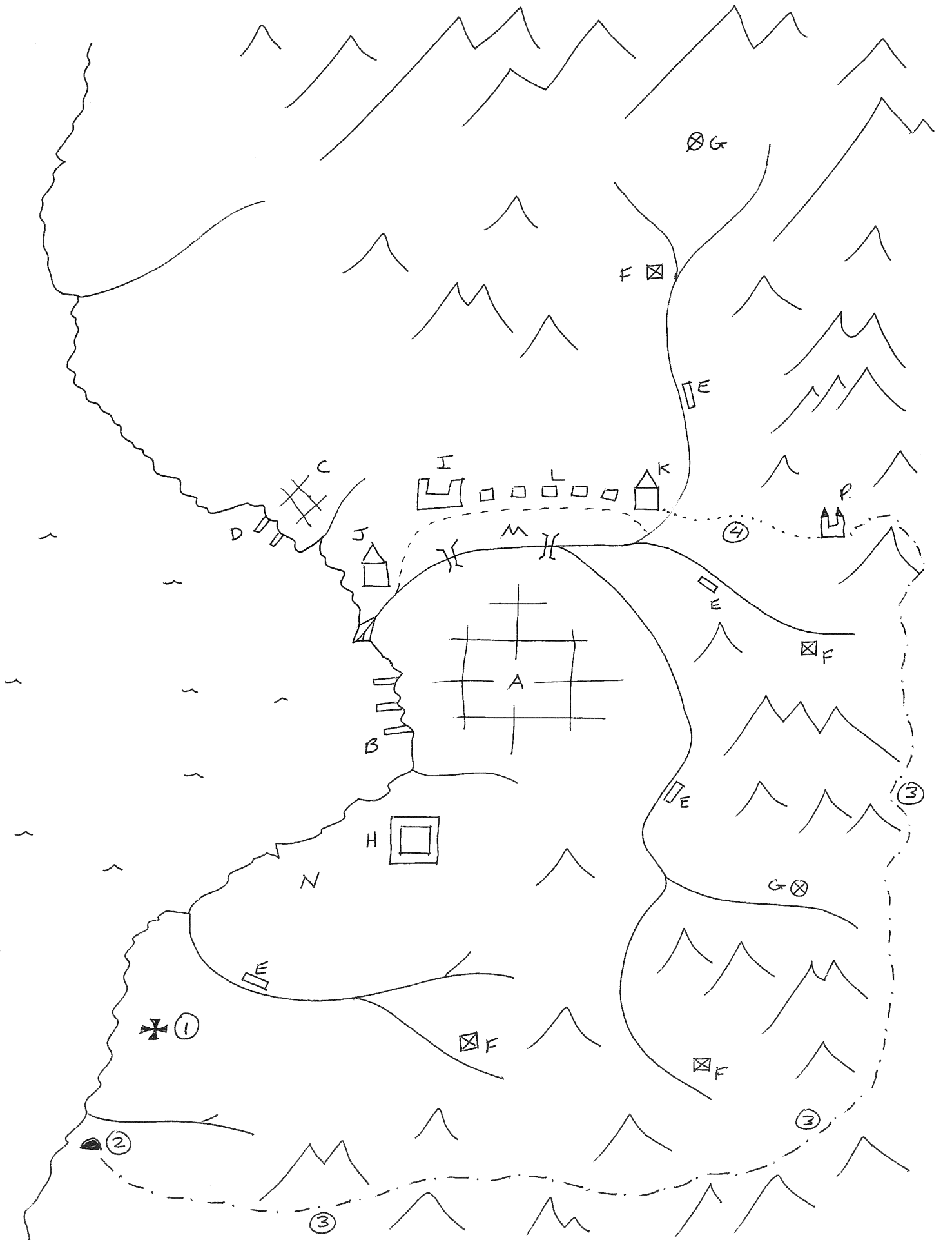
651 APC: The coming of elk to the Land of Nye, courtesy of Polara's magic. Pikorro is released from hard labor and returns to Castra Zaisa (at age 69).

655 APC: My daughter Ostrya gives a speech to the Council of Five Mayors. I start writing my *History of the Second Magic War* (published by the Scriptorium in 658).

657 APC: At the end of December, I hear the last words of Queen Zaisa (age 99).

658 APC: I sail to Castra Zaisa to negotiate with Pikorro and am held captive for three years.

661 APC or 2051 AD or CE: I am rescued from Castra Zaisa by the Muskrat and High Magician Tilia Finn (age 68), the Good Raven Lisa (also age 68), and two of my grandchildren: Sir Alpheus, age 16, son of Alnus, and Betula, age 14, daughter of Carpinus. Note that the good ravens, the Muskrats, the Land of Humans, and Castra Polara share an Embassy in Castra Zaisa.



Castra Zaisa map

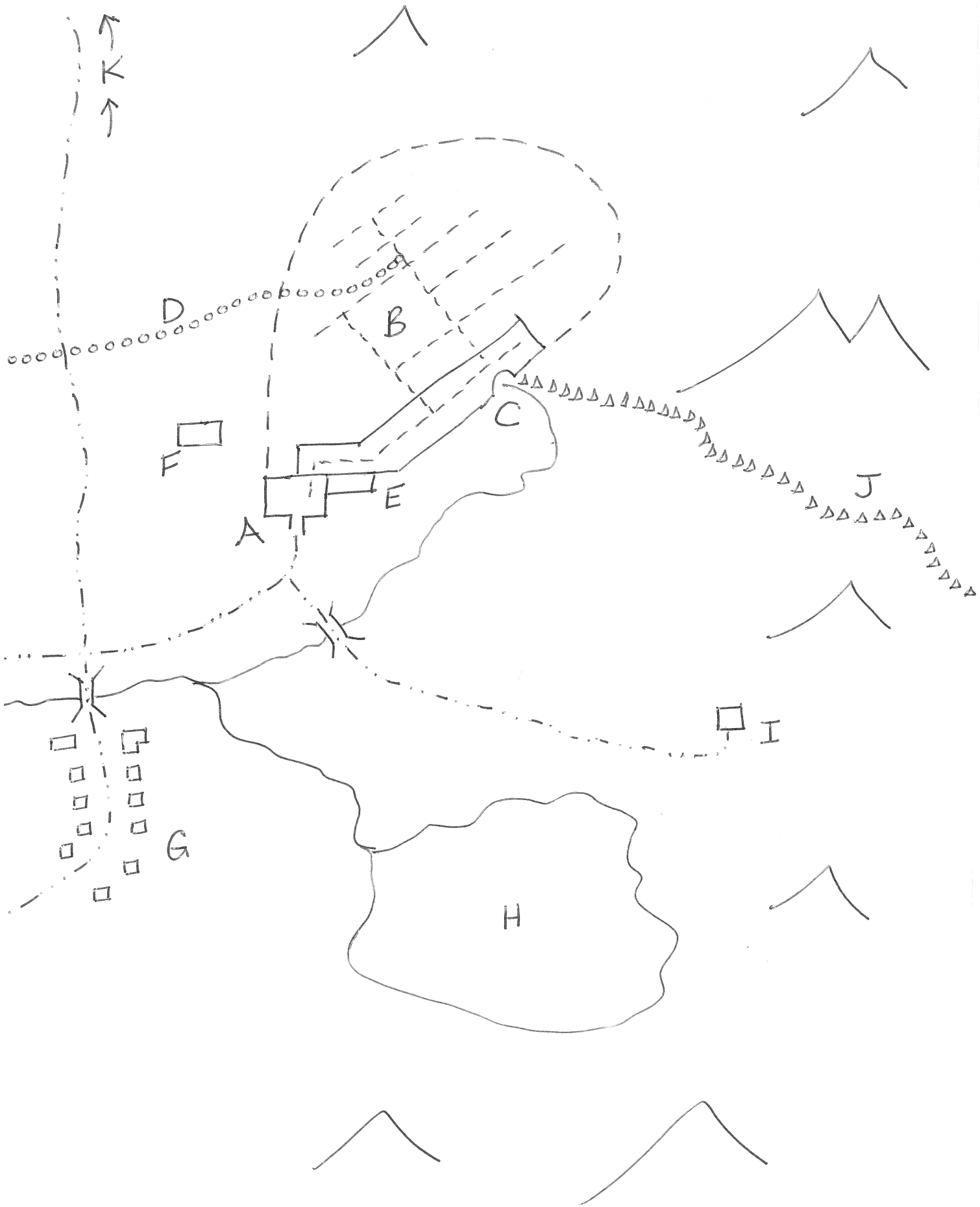
Legend and Commentary, 661 APC

Castra Zaisa is the colony founded by Pikorro and Kalko in the foothills of the Ring Mountains that surround the flat world of the Land of Nye. This small colony is due east of Bearsgard (most of the Ring Mountains are not suitable for settlement). This map shows the economy of Castra Zaisa: the four large sawmills, the four camps for hunting and lumbering, the fishing village, and the two iron mines. Agricultural products such as flour, apples, linen, and wool are purchased from Bearsgard. The hunters and trappers provide meat, furs, and leather. There are no domestic animals in Castra Zaisa except for dogs (lots of dogs). Riverboats take the place of ox carts. Castra Zaisa uses keelboats for fast rivers and Albantown and Castra Polara use flatboats for slow rivers. The esplanade along the riverbank was designed by Pikorro and contains statues of famous Black Magicians. Under the foundation of Pikorro's Castle there is a small gold mine — that was the reason for building the castle in that location. Castra Zaisa is quite wealthy and does not exhibit the gentle humility of the other two human kingdoms. The events shown here are from the year 661 APC, the year of the Great Balloon Race from Bearsgard to Castra Zaisa.

- A. The town. There are small docks for riverboats not shown.
- B. The docks for trade with Bearsgard.
- C. The fishing village.
- D. The docks for fishing boats.
- E. Four large sawmills (water-powered). Lumber is exported to Bearsgard.
- F. Four moveable camps for hunters and lumberjacks (upstream from sawmills).
- G. The mines for iron and copper (metals are also exported to Bearsgard).
- H. Fort Kalko and housing for soldiers (partially built).
- I. The foundations of the Guildhall (under construction).
This will be the seat of the Burgesses who govern Castra Zaisa.
- J. Embassy shared by the two human kingdoms, the Muskrats, and the Ravens.
- K. Embassy for the Wolves.
- L. Stately homes built for the Burgesses (some under construction).
- M. Esplanade along the riverbank, with parks and ornamental gardens.
- N. Military training ground for Fort Kalko.
- P. Pikorro's castle and dungeons.

Locations related to the rescue of Chipsa in the year 661 APC.

1. Landing spot for the Great Balloon Race.
2. Cave where the rescuers hid.
3. Route taken by the rescuers to Pikorro's Castle.
4. Secret tunnel connecting the Embassy of the Wolves with Pikorro's mine.



Pikorro's Castle Legend & Commentary, 661 APC

- A. The Castle with the main gate facing south (dungeons on lower level).
- B. Gold Mine connected with the basement of the Castle.
- C. The stone culvert where the stream flows out of the Gold Mine.
- D. Secret tunnel from the Embassy of the Wolves to the Gold Mine.
- E. Barracks for the soldiers.
- F. Kennels for Pikorro's dogs.
- G. The village where the miners live.
- H. Fish pond.
- I. Gamekeeper's cottage.
- J. The route taken by the rescue party.
- K. Road to the dog-racing track.

At the time of Chipsa's imprisonment, Pikorro is the wealthiest person in the Land of Nye. When Pikorro and Kalko were sentenced to hard labor, the Kingdom of Men recommended that their property be confiscated. The Burgesses did not comply. Kalko had no children, so he left his share of the colony to Pikorro. Besides owning the Castle and the Gold Mine, Pikorro is also landlord for 80 households in the town (he sold 120 houses when he built the Castle). The Castle is built of logs chinked with mortar (to us it would look like a small fort on the 19th-century U. S. frontier). In addition, Pikorro is the owner and exclusive bookmaker for the dog-racing track. There is fierce competition between the three main kennels: Pikorro has one, the Burgesses have another, and there is a third one at Fort Kalko. Occasionally a hunter or lumberjack will use his savings to buy a racing dog and challenge the established teams.

When the Burgesses discovered that Pikorro had held Chipsa prisoner, they changed their minds and confiscated Pikorro's properties after all. His lands and wealth were added to the holdings of the government of Castra Zaisa.

ZF 3 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa

In Pikorro's dungeons I met a fellow prisoner that I knew well. Sir Sagamore was a Knight of the Realm, younger than Sir Graham but older than Sir Patrick. He told me this story as he was dying in Pikorro's prison. "Pikorro does not allow healers in his dungeons" he said without bitterness, "I have lived a long life and have no regrets." He told me the following story of how Patrick came to be knighted at age sixteen and how the Lindenwood hermit was selected as Blue Wizard.

How did Sir Sagamore come to be in the dungeons? Well, when he retired as Knight of the Realm, he took up the trade of beekeeping, but he was curious about Castra Zaisa. He sold his beehives, learned surveying, and came to Castra Zaisa as a surveyor with false identity papers. After two years, he was caught and held prisoner by Pikorro.

This is the story he told me in the dungeons:

The First Tale of Sir Sagamore

It was the eve of the first day of the Harvest Festival in that fateful year when the Second Magic War was brewing, the year 605 in our reckoning.

At one hour after sunset, a group of us had gathered in the kitchen of the Royal Castle.

The people attending were as follows: the Queen, the Brown Wizard, the Green Wizard, the Grey Wizard, the Good Raven Lisa, and I (Sir Sagamore).

The Queen launched the conference thus: "The King decided that our meeting would be more secret if he held a meeting of the Privy Council at the same time. The King, Sir Graham, and the others are at that meeting now. Polara is also attending the Privy Council today as a guest.

"I have many duties as Queen and spend two days a week working with my hands in this kitchen. Tonight it is my turn to clean the kitchen and lock the postern gate. This time I left the gate unlocked so we could gather here without attracting attention.

"The King and I have discussed this matter and are of one mind."

Then the Brown Wizard said, "The three wizards are all present and can speak for themselves."

The Queen continued: "The matter before us is this: a strong magical current is moving against us. The deep powers are now launching an attack, and it will take all the efforts of White Magic and the High Magic to meet it."

The Green Wizard said, "The rag-pickers have brought back unsettling news of discontent among the people of Albantown and the miners of the North Country. There is talk that White Magic stunts the growth of our civilization and limits our ambitions. People are speaking of rebuilding Ingmar's kingdom for the first time in over two hundred years. A week ago two Apprentice Blacksmiths robbed their master and ran away to the North Country. Something has changed in our world."

"The first item on the agenda," said the Brown Wizard, "is the counterspell that has been described in the lore of Brown Wizards from generation to generation."

"Yes," said the Queen, "we need to channel the counterspell to meet the attack."

"Can the counterspell work its magic without us?" asked the Grey Wizard.

"Our actions are part of the counterspell," replied the Queen, "but we need to have them properly coordinated with the rest of the spell."

"What action is required on our part?" queried the Grey Wizard.

"That is the question we must now consider," said the Good Raven Lisa. "I have something to contribute on that score. I have spoken with Polara, Tilia Finn, and Roswitha. They all recommend that we follow the counsel of the Count of the Western Marches in this matter. The counterspell is largely his magic at work."

"Do we know what his recommendations are?" asked the Grey Wizard further.

The Queen turned to me and said, "Now we call upon Sir Sagramore, who has just returned from a journey to meet with the Count. What is your report?"

Then I replied, "The Count says that the counterspell is rolling along nicely. According to him, there is one key action we must take now. There are two individuals channeling the counterspell who need to be promoted and put into action. I have already discussed this matter with Sir Graham and the other knights — we are all in agreement.

"Patrick of Derbyville, son of Darian, is the son of Elena, the greatest White Magician of all time. The magic is strong in him and with help from us he can aid the counterspell. The Count says that Patrick must be made a Knight of the Realm without delay."

"But he is only sixteen years old," said the Grey Wizard, "how can that be?"

"The Count says that the move will puzzle our enemies and aid the counterspell," I replied. "The Count further stated," I continued, "that the Lindenwood hermit should be given the post of Blue Wizard, which is now vacant."

“The Lindenwood hermit is an excellent White Magician, I grant you,” said the Grey Wizard, “but he has not done the Apprenticeship.”

“The Lindenwood hermit has powerful magic at work inside him,” I continued, “and he can connect with our magic to further the spell of which we speak.”

The Queen said, “Patrick and the Lindenwood hermit are foster-brothers and accustomed to working as a team.”

“I think we can waive the Apprenticeship in this case,” said the Brown Wizard, “it is more important to focus the Count’s magic than to follow protocol.”

The Good Raven Lisa spoke up and said, “This double promotion will take our enemies by surprise and throw off their reckoning.”

“But,” interjected the Grey Wizard, “won’t it put the two of them in tremendous danger?”

There was silence for a few moments and then I said, “The Count believes that the currents of good magic will provide a measure of protection. The deep powers have marshalled all their strength and nothing is certain at this point. The two must be willing to take the promotions and take the risk.”

Again there was silence. The Queen said, “We should send the Raven Lisa to speak with them as soon as possible.”

“Yes,” said Lisa, “I am prepared to do that. Do we need to consult the King before we take action?”

“No,” replied the Queen, “our decision is consistent with what the King and I discussed earlier today. We can set the wheels in motion now.”

“First thing tomorrow morning,” said the Green Wizard, “Damrod, Maia, and I will send the Raven Walt to all the rag-pickers with new instructions. Also at noon tomorrow the Council of Finns and Friends will be having a secret meeting after everyone arrives in Bearsgard for the Festival. I will report this meeting to all the members of the Council.”

“Is there anything further we need to discuss?” asked the Grey Wizard.

“No,” replied the Queen, “it is time for me to clean the kitchen. Leave by the postern gate one at a time and keep to the shadows. I will send Ravens to inform Tilia and Roswitha. I can speak with Polara and Thea at the conclusion of the Privy Council meeting in an hour or two. Farewell and Olaf guide you.”

The End

ZG 2 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa

While I was imprisoned in Pikorro's dungeons, fellow prisoner Sir Sagramore and I often had long conversations. On this particular day, I was feeling blue because Pikorro had cut my rations yet again. He had somehow gotten hold of my recently published *History of the Second Magic War* and he was furious.

Sir Sagramore thought of something to cheer me up and pass the time. "Once when I was on sick leave from the Knights of the Realm, the Blue Wizard and I spent a semester at the Bearsgard Academy studying the history of Camulodunum."

Then he went on to tell the following story, which I have entitled

The Road to the Mines

There was always a thriving trade between Camulodunum and Hayport by sailing ship. One of the chief exports of Camulodunum was the metals it obtained from the Fortified Mines — iron, copper, silver, and gold.

During the winter, the Mines were locked tight and the miners and smelters came back to Camulodunum. There was no water route between the Mines and the twelve castles — everything had to go overland by the Road to the Mines. The outgoing wagons had food, clothing, tools, supplies, and the occasional passenger. The wagons returning from the Mines had metal ingots and cords of firewood. A miner who was sick or injured would catch a ride in one of the wagons.

Travelers on the Road were in constant danger from the Wolves. The Wolf attacks came at random at intervals of two or three years — there was no way to predict them. The people of Camulodunum tried using oxen from Hayport to haul wagons back and forth along the Road, but that only attracted more Wolves.

Young people volunteered to solve this problem by hauling the wagons themselves. The craftsmen of Hayport devised special axles and lubricants to make this possible. The young waggoneers devised games and contests to pass the time while hauling wagons and couples that were courting would work side-by-side. They were always dressed in chain mail because of the constant danger.

The waggoneers worked in teams of twelve per wagon: six hauling and six scouting the road in front and back — switching places every two hours. Fortunately, the trip one way could be done in the daylight hours of a single day. The waggoneers would get a short lunch break en route and then have a hearty meal at their destination. The scouts were lightly armed with longbows and short swords. There were always two fully-armed soldiers walking behind each wagon.

At those times when the Wolves sent a raven with an open declaration of war, the contingent of soldiers would be increased as needed. Teams of hunters and herb-gatherers also had escorts of soldiers when they went into the forest. The Wolves knew their limitations and hesitated to tangle with the seasoned soldiers who already knew all their tricks. The usual state of affairs was a stalemate with much wariness and suspicion on each side.

At mid-summer, people of all ages would spend a week or two doing maintenance and improvements on the Road. This event had a festive atmosphere, although the soldiers and scouts had to be vigilant. One of the main topics of discussion as people traveled the Road was planning for the next round of repair work.

Riddles were a popular pastime with people of all ages. The villagers from Cheddar, England had brought riddles with them, and Brother Bede and William Fitzroy had succeeded in translating some Anglo-Saxon riddles from an old manuscript. In his lengthy conversation with the Unicorn Polara, Brother Bede had learned three riddles that were much loved in both Camulodunum and Hayport. Our instructor did not know the riddles, but the Blue Wizard was able to recite all three of them. The instructor and I were not able to guess them, since Unicorn intelligence is so far beyond our own. When the Blue Wizard explained the answers, we thought the riddles clever indeed.

Another popular game, on the Road and around the fireplaces in winter, was “made-to-order stories.” Contestants would take turns being “storyteller” and taking items from the audience to be included in the story. The storyteller had to make up a tale as he or she went along, without forgetting any of the requests from the audience. The person who forgot the fewest items won the contest.

At the festival of the Summer Solstice, there would be competitions between the young people of Hayport and the young people of Camulodunum. The waggoneers of Camulodunum were proud of their track record of defeating Hayport in the tug-of-war. Sometimes Hayport would win — their people also did physical work in farming and haying, and Hayport had a larger pool of people from which to select a team.

The Road to the Mines became embedded in the traditions of Camulodunum as the generations and centuries came and went.

The End

ZH 5 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa

I now recount part of the story of my rescue from Castra Zaisa.

I was asleep in Pikorro's dungeons. I did not know what the day or month was, but I knew it was summer outdoors. I was alone — Sir Sagamore's coffin had been shipped to Bearsgard a week or so earlier. In his last days he said he was in a lot of pain. "Unicorn Magic is good at resolving that," I told him, "close your eyes and picture a meadow in the summer sun. Then the magic will work." He did as I suggested and slept peacefully until he breathed his last.

I awakened to the sound of the door opening. There was nothing unusual about that — the guards pestered me all the time. This time, it was not a guard. I saw my grandson Alpheus holding a torch, and behind him were my granddaughter Betula and the Muskrat Tilia Finn. I jumped up and ran to greet them. They motioned me to be silent and follow.

They led me through the corridors and into the entrance of the gold mine. Betula whispered to me, "There is a stream that flows out of the gold mine through a culvert. We can get out that way."

My rescuers had chosen a moonless night to make their move. Alpheus extinguished the torch in the stream. When we came to the culvert, however, we could see the shapes of soldiers moving up and down the stream.

"They must have seen our footprints," whispered Tilia. "We must go back into the mine and wait until they're gone."

We made our way through a dark passage deeper into the mine.

"Stop," said Tilia, "there is a Wolf in the passage coming towards us. A friendly Wolf. She and I can communicate via telepathy." There was a pause and then Tilia said, "She is Mephistophila and she has come to help us escape. She will turn around and we will follow her."

Suddenly we heard shouting in the underground corridors of the castle.

"They have discovered my absence," I said, "the pursuit will be swift and deadly."

After another fifty paces, Tilia said, "We turn left here." We entered a smaller tunnel on the left and we could hear the Wolf breathing nearby.

Suddenly we heard running and shouting behind us in the mine — the soldiers were coming after us.

"There is an iron door that will close by magic behind us," whispered Tilia. "Stay very still."

We could hear the door coming down from the top of the tunnel. Just as the door was closing to the floor of the tunnel we saw bright torchlight at the bottom of the door. The running feet went past and then they came back. There was a deafening sound as someone pounded on the iron door with the butt of a spear. We could hear dogs barking on the other side of the door. Then the feet went away and all was quiet.

“They have gone to get blasting powder,” I said.

“Follow me,” said Tilia.

After fifty paces, Tilia said, “Stop a moment. Mephistophila says we will have a long journey in the dark. We must keep together. I will be number one, Chipsa will be two, Betula will be three, and Alpheus will be four. Every twenty paces or so, say your number aloud. No-one can hear us down here, and we must keep together. Alpheus will be rear-guard. This tunnel was made for Wolves, so we will have to stoop over. We will stop every hundred paces to rest our backs. Mephistophila will lead the way. Off we go.”

After half an hour of walking and stooping and resting, Tilia suddenly said “Stop” and we almost piled up in a heap. “We can rest here for a while,” said Tilia, “We have come to a great underground cavern with a swift stream of cold water. We will drink from the water first, and then wade through it. Mephistophila knows where the secret tunnel continues on the other side of the cavern. She says we are halfway there.”

“Halfway to where?” whispered Alpheus.

“Good question,” answered Tilia, “I will ask Mephistophila.” After a pause, Tilia said, “This tunnel goes to the Embassy of the Wolves.”

Just then we heard an explosion far behind us. “They have blasted the iron door,” I said.

“Quick,” said Tilia, “drink first, then wade through. Follow me.”

After we entered the tunnel again on the far side of the cavern, Tilia whispered, “Wait here a few moments. Mephistophila is going to close a portcullis behind us. Pikorro’s men will track us with dogs, so I will put a High Magic spell on the portcullis to disguise our scent.”

The rest of the underground journey was painful to our backs but otherwise uneventful.

Suddenly we felt fresh air on our faces and saw starlight above. There were high walls around us, shadowy in the darkness.

“We are safe here,” said Tilia, no longer in a whisper. “This is the courtyard behind the Embassy of the Wolves.”

We saw candles being lit in the Embassy and two Muskrats came out — Mephistophila’s two servants at the Embassy, the twin sisters Cordata Salix and Cryptodonta Salix. They brought us inside and took us into the basement of the Embassy. There was a fire on the hearth and hot water and copper tubs for bathing. We were given clean nightshirts and straw beds for a few hours’ sleep before dawn. At daybreak, the Muskrats gave us a hearty breakfast and clothing that would serve as our disguises.

“There is a sloop that leaves for Bearsgard in two hours,” said Cordata. “We have disguises and false identity papers ready for you.”

As we started to dress in our disguises, Alpheus said, “I have a bag of coins that we can use to pay our passage.”

Betula said, “I have some roots we can use to color our skin. I can be a tanned shepherdess.”

“Excellent,” said Tilia.

“Alpheus, you are a blacksmith’s apprentice,” said Cordata, “so you will need some charcoal and a couple of bandages on your hands.”

“There is one thing I do not understand,” said Alpheus, “the Ambassador of the Wolves to Castra Zaisa is Arianna, not Mephistophila.”

“At the festival of the balloon landing,” said Cordata, “there were six Wolves present. Arianna and Mephistophila switched places. Non-wolves cannot tell them apart. Pikorro still thinks it is Arianna.”

“Where is Mephistophila now?” I asked.

“She has gone to call upon Pikorro,” came the answer, “and lead him astray with false reports.”

She further told us to memorize our false names and practice walking in the disguises. She said that while we were boarding the sloop, there would be two men from our own Embassy present dressed as dock hands. If Pikorro’s soldiers made any trouble for us, they had plans to start a fist-fight and thus obstruct the soldiers.

“When Pikorro discovers our escape,” said Betula, “won’t he just declare war on Bearsgard?”

“The Burgesses of Castra Zaisa would not agree to that,” I answered, “Pikorro cannot fight us alone.”

“How did the Wolves construct the secret tunnel?” asked Alpheus.

“As part of the Treaty of Olaf’s Bridge, the Wolves were granted certain powers of Wolf Magic,” replied Cryptodonta.

“What is the purpose of the tunnel?” asked Betula.

Cryptodonta laughed and said, “The Wolves are very smart — they find it handy to have a supply of gold nuggets now and then.”

Our walk to the harbor was uneventful, and the Harbormaster only glanced briefly at our false papers.

Just as we walked up the plank into the sloop, three of Pikorro’s soldiers came running toward the dock shouting “Stop that boat! Stop the escape!”

The two Embassy dock hands removed the plank and cast off the ropes holding the sloop. The sailors from Bearsgard hoisted the sails and the boat began to pull away.

We saw the three soldiers stop dead in their tracks, since their access to the dock was blocked by a Burgess and two unarmed Constables. Then the sloop veered to catch the wind and we lost sight of the dock. We could hear shouting but could see nothing.

[The two Embassy dock hands later told us what happened that day.

The Burgess held up his hand and said, “Stop. Let me see your orders.”

“We have standing orders to serve Pikorro,” said one of the soldiers, “his prisoner is escaping. Queen Chipsa is on that boat.”

“No-one ever told the Burgesses that Queen Chipsa was being held prisoner,” said the Burgess.

“Quick, she is getting away,” yelled the soldiers.

The Burgess was unyielding. “If Bearsgard puts an embargo on us,” he said, “is Pikorro ready to replace the lost income? He could give us some of his gold, but what use is that? We cannot eat gold.”

The Corporal in charge of the soldiers yelled, “Grab the fastest boat. Quick. After the sloop. We can fire burning arrows at it.” The three ran to the neighboring dock. Just as the soldiers jumped into a large rowboat nearby, one of the two Embassy dock-hands threw a large coil of rope that landed on top of the soldiers. At that moment three more Constables arrived with handcuffs and the three soldiers were disarmed and arrested. The next day they were sent to Pikorro with a summons for Pikorro to appear before the Burgesses the following week.]

In the meantime, the sloop was making good time getting away from the harbor. Alpheus was stationed at the stern with a bow and arrows to watch for renegade Evil Ravens coming after us. Betula and I kept watch with Alpheus while Tilia went below to rest. There were only two stern cabins for passengers on the sloop, but the voyage to Bearsgard would last only about thirty hours. Once we reached Bearsgard we were planning to crash at the royal guest-house and sleep without fear for the first time in a long time.

We saw three ravens coming after the sloop. The first one turned out to be Lisa who collapsed on the deck in exhaustion. Alpheus fitted an arrow on his bowstring and the other two ravens veered away and flew back toward land.

Betula and I went to the sick raven and I said to Lisa, "Do not say anything. You need to rest. Betula, take her below to one of the stern cabins. I will get the Herb Kit from the ship's master and meet you there. You can use your healing skills. I will use some Unicorn Magic and Tilia can use some High Magic. Lisa is close to death."

The rest of the voyage to Bearsgard was uneventful. In other diary entries I will recount the tales we told each other when we were safely back in Castra Polara.

ZI 4 pages. Diary entry by Queen Chipsa

We had just returned to Casta Polara and were seated around a fireplace telling the tales of the rescue from Castra Zaisa. Since it was still summertime, we had a small fire of apple wood.

I turned to the Raven Lisa, recently returned to health, and said “Now it is time for your tale.”

Taspel and I were there, plus all of our children and grandchildren. We all wanted to hear the complete story. Tilia and Lisa were there to participate in the tales of the daring rescue. I had pen in hand to take notes for my diary.

Lisa began her tale:

We were halfway from the coast to Pikorro’s Castle and we were making good time. Our secret journey had succeeded in dodging the many hunters, trappers, and loggers that fill the wilderness around Castra Zaisa. It was my task to scout ahead and plan a route for the other three. Tilia could detect steel traps on the ground by means of the High Magic. We had passed a dozen of them and taken no harm.

“We need a plan for getting from the Castle to Bearsgard,” said Tilia.

“We have instructions to contact our Embassy,” said Sir Alpheus, “they can help us get from the Castle to the harbor. We are safe if we can get on board a ship owned by Bearsgard.”

“There will be trouble when the prisoner’s absence is detected,” said Betula.

“We can use the High Magic to help our escape,” said Tilia.

I said, “It is time for me to fly to our Embassy and speak with the people there. Let’s make our plans now and I will fly west at daybreak.”

The four of us held a conference that evening and worked out the details. The Grey Wizard had given us floor plans of Pikorro’s Castle and a Black Magic skeleton key that would open the dungeons and the doors of the mine. We knew there was a culvert leading into the gold mine, and we knew we would arrive during a time when the moon would not rise until after midnight. We would ask the Embassy to smuggle us by riverboat from the forest near the Castle to the harbor. We could hide under a load of furs. The Embassy was expecting our request, and I could easily fly to the Embassy and back within one day.

At daybreak I left the others and headed west and a little north. After half an hour flying through the mountainous terrain, two other ravens left a tall tree and came after me. I dipped my wing in greeting but they did not respond — they

pursued me and herded me toward a large pine on the brink of a cliff. I decided to cut close to the pine and then take evasive maneuvers over the cliff.

As I passed close to the pine, a third raven attacked me at short range and knocked me to the ground. The three ravens landed and dragged me to a cave nearby. They put a tangle of twine around my wings and feet.

One of the ravens said “We are renegade Evil Ravens who do not honor the Treaty. We are going to hold you for ransom.”

I was relieved to see that they did not know anything about the rescue party moving northward through the forest not far away.

The three ravens gave me something to eat and took turns guarding me in the cave.

I was terribly afraid about the fate of the rescue party without aid from the Embassy.

On the second dawn of my captivity, I was awakened at the first daylight by one of the ravens. The raven said, “I am called Ora but my true name is Beth. I am a double agent. The other two have gone to the Embassy to speak to the Ambassador about the ransom. I will set you free and then fly away to the south where the others cannot find me.”

“Thank you,” I said, “you are saving more than one life.”

“I can tell you something further,” said Beth, “I know of your secret journey and I can give you a tip. Time is short. When you leave here, fly directly to the other Embassy — the Embassy of the Wolves. The Ambassador Arianna can help you more quickly than our own Embassy. Also, you will avoid meeting the other two ravens who just left here.”

“Will I have time to tell the rescue party that help is on the way?” I asked.

“After you leave the Embassy of the Wolves,” said Beth, “you can meet up with them in the forest. They will be very close to the Castle by then.”

“Thank you,” I said, “I must be off. There is no time to lose,”

“Farewell and Olaf guide you,” said Beth.

I arrived at the Embassy of the Wolves and entered through the special entrance for ravens in the bell tower. The Muskrats Cordata and Cryptodonta Salix greeted me and said the Ambassador was expecting me.

I was ushered into the Ambassador’s private parlor. By means of Wolf Magic, she was able to communicate with me via telepathy.

She said that she was Mephistophila, not Arianna, but she wanted people to think she was Arianna.

“By means of Wolf Magic,” she said, “I can see that the rescue party is hiding near the Castle waiting for nightfall. I can get them safely to the harbor using secret means known only to the Wolves. There is room for them on a boat that leaves for Bearsgard at the second hour tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you,” I said, “we are greatly indebted to your kindness.”

“You do not need to go to the rescue party,” she continued, “the time is very short. There is something else you can do. Go to your own Embassy and tell them to execute Plan C at the second hour tomorrow morning. They will know what that means.”

Cordata gave me something to eat and drink and then I left for the other Embassy.

At the Embassy of the Humans, Muskrats, and Ravens, I had a conference with the Ambassador and the staff. We discussed the kidnapping and they made plans to arrest the two ravens when they came back to continue the negotiations. They did not need to worry about my safety now that they knew I had escaped. They were glad to hear that Beth was in good health and hard at work in her espionage duties.

After I delivered Mephistophila’s message, I went out to the public square in front of the Embassy. I was planning to scope out the harbor and get a good view of how things stood. I knew enough about the escape sloop to recognize it in the harbor. It was a golden summer afternoon in the square and children were playing. There was a merchant nearby selling oysters and clams from several wheelbarrows.

I was about to take wing when I felt a sharp pain in my left side. I was stunned and fell to the ground. I looked to my left and saw that a boy had shot me with a slingshot. A moment later, the boy picked up an empty wooden box and put it over me. The box stank of clams. Then I must have passed out.

I awoke cold, stiff, thirsty, and hungry. The air inside the wooden box was hard to breathe. I heard bells ringing and figured it was the second hour of the next day. I heard the merchant arrive with his helpers and wheelbarrows.

I started calling for help but my voice did not carry far.

I heard the merchant shout, “There’s my stolen box!” The box was yanked away and the merchant yelled again, “Be off, all three of you! This city needs more dogs and fewer birds!”

I did not know what he meant by “all three of you,” but at that moment two ravens attacked from behind and started pecking my back and neck. I took to the air and the two ravens followed me. They were the same two ravens who had kidnapped me in the mountains! As I flew with all my might to get away it occurred to me that they had been hanging around the Embassy waiting for an answer to their ransom demand when they recognized my voice calling from inside the box.

Of all the dratted luck! I was injured and weary and now I had to flee for my life. Fortunately, the harbor was not far away.

I saw a sloop under sail pulling away and was overjoyed to see Chipsa, Betula, and Sir Alpheus on the deck. I could see a disturbance on the docks below but paid no attention. I made one last burst of speed, collapsed on the deck, and lost consciousness.

The End

ZJ 3 pages. Diary entry by Queen Chipisa of the New Realm

Dear Diary,

This evening we were once again gathered by the fireplace in the Royal Palace. The previous evening we had heard the story of the rescue from the Raven Lisa's point of view.

There were still many things I did not understand. Taspel and the rest of the family were present, plus Lisa and Tilia, of course. The two youngest grandchildren were already in their pyjamas.

"There is one thing that puzzles me," I said to the group, "how did Alpheus and Betula get to Castra Zaisa?"

"To answer that question, we need to tell the story of the Great Balloon Race," said Alpheus.

"What's a balloon?" I asked.

They all burst out laughing and someone said, "Let Betula tell the story from the beginning."

Here, in Betula's words, is the story of

The Origin of the Great Balloon Race

The story begins over one year ago when Alpheus and I finished our exams at the end of the school year. Six students at our school were invited to attend an "Honors Colloquium in Chemistry" to be held for one month at Castra Sarah over the summer. The instructor was to be none other than the Sapphire Wizard himself. Alpheus and I were included in the six students and we were the only ones who accepted the offer.

Grandfather Taspel delivered us to Castra Sarah at the beginning of July and left us there to settle into our bunkrooms.

We were fascinated by the course, but the most interesting event came in the second week. We were seated with the Sapphire Wizard in a corner of the Great Hall, which is the oldest and largest building at Castra Sarah. Over the last century, a succession of Blue Wizards and Sapphire Wizards had worked out an approximate "Periodic Table of the Elements." We sat with copies of the Table in our laps as the Sapphire Wizard explained it. On a wooden box between us were samples of minerals we had gathered in the mountains and cliffs nearby.

Suddenly we heard a sound behind us. We looked around and saw a trap door opening in the opposite corner of the Hall. We jumped to our feet and stared at

the trap door. We knew about the tunnel from our history lessons, but had not expected to see the trap door actually open in our own lifetimes.

Two young miners emerged from the trap door and closed it behind them. They were covered with the usual dust and grime but seemed to be excited about something.

They spotted the Sapphire Wizard and came across the Hall to speak with him.

“We made a discovery in the mines today,” one of them began, “and our supervisor said to come speak with you right away. We were searching for a new vein of iron ore, and our picks broke through into a large cavern. When we spoke to each other, our voices had a high squeaky sound. We blocked up the hole in the cavern again to seal it shut. Then we were told that you were here at Castra Sarah.”

“What you have found is Helium,” said the Sapphire Wizard, “which can be found in volcanic deposits.”

The Wizard took the Periodic Table from Alpheus and pointed out Helium to the two miners.

“Leave the cavern undisturbed,” continued the Wizard, “and look for iron ore in a different direction. I will report your finding to the Council of Five Mayors and the Privy Council of each realm.”

The Sapphire Wizard wrote down the names of the two miners and assured them that they would receive recognition for their discovery. Then the miners disappeared through the trap door again.

We did not return to our interrupted lesson, but talked about Helium instead.

“What can be done with Helium?” asked Alpheus.

The Wizard said that it could be used to make a balloon, and he sketched one for us on a sheet of paper.

“How would we make a balloon?” I asked.

The Wizard patiently replied that we would need to speak with the Sailmakers’ Guild, the Ropemakers’ Guild, and the Basketweavers’ Guild. He explained that the Helium would lift the balloon, and that a large balloon could carry people in a basket underneath.

“Let’s build two balloons!” cried Alpheus.

“We can have a race!” I added.

“We can challenge Pikorro and his great-grandson Gaius to a race,” put in Alpheus.

“That Gaius is a real pill,” I said, “the last time I saw him he spat on my foot. I have an idea — we can race the two balloons from Bearsgard to Castra Zaisa!”

“Wouldn’t it be great to see Gaius go down in defeat?” said Alpheus.

“No, we want Pikorro to win,” I said.

“Why on earth?” queried Alpheus.

“Come close,” I whispered, “I have an idea.”

The three of us huddled closely over the box with the minerals and I whispered my little speech. “We want Pikorro to win so that his team will get roaring drunk. We can sneak away from the celebration and rescue grandmother from Pikorro’s dungeons. We can have a plan worked out. It would have to be a small rescue party to maintain secrecy. We can smuggle grandmother back to the harbor and then we all take ship for Bearsgard.”

We broke for lunch at the dining hall and then re-convened in a forest glade half an hour’s walk from Castra Sarah. We didn’t want anyone to overhear our discussion. The Sapphire Wizard brought with him a map of Castra Zaisa. The Grey Wizard was visiting Castra Sarah for a few days, so we invited him to join our conference.

The four of us spoke for two hours and worked out a plan. One of the balloons would be piloted by Sir Patrick and Sir Lionel — Alpheus and I would be concealed in the basket. Our balloon would be heavier than Pikorro’s, but we were planning to lose the race anyway.

At the end of our meeting, the Sapphire Wizard said, “Discuss these ideas with your parents and grandfather Taspel, but do not let anyone overhear you. They will finalize the plan for you.”

Alpheus was dubbed “Sir Alpheus, Knight of the Realm.” Grandfather Taspel added Tilia Finn and the Good Raven Lisa to the rescue team, and that is how it all came about.

The End

ZK 3 pages. Diary entry by Queen Chipsa

Dear Diary,

When we were on the boat from Castra Zaisa to Bearsgard, we spent most of our time nursing the Raven Lisa back to health.

About midway through the voyage, Lisa spoke up and said, "Tell me a story."

Tilia and I were sitting beside her in the port cabin at the stern of the ship.

"I can think of a good story," said Tilia, "how about the adventures of Artemisia Finn?"

"I would love that," said Lisa.

"I learned a synopsis of that tale in school," I said, "but I have never heard the full story."

Here, in Tilia's words, is

The story of Artemisia Finn

This story takes place during the First Magic War. It is now almost two years after the fall of Camulodunum, and there are rumors that another attack is coming.

During this era, there are two High Magicians: Achillea, the President of the Sisters of the Green Leaf, and Artemisia Finn, the chief spy for the Queen of the Muskrats. This occurs long before the founding of the Council of Finns and Friends, but even at this time there are a few Muskrat spies that report directly to the Queen.

Because of the High Magic, Achillea and Artemisia know that the Black Magicians and the Wolves are going to attack Hayport from the north along the coast.

At this time, the Sisters of the Green Leaf have already moved their Library and Herbarium to Bearsgard.

The soldiers of Bearsgard are moving secretly to positions to the north of Hayport, disguised as farmers and shepherds traveling in small groups. Their weapons are also moving into position, concealed in the usual oxcart traffic and ship voyages of the merchants.

The Mayor of Hayport is sitting at his desk when a knock comes on the door. His visitors are the Muskrats Artemisia Finn and her husband Viminalis Salix, and they have come to offer their services. They will undertake to evacuate all the

children and livestock in Hayport, taking them to Bearsgard under cover of darkness.

The Mayor is delighted. After a one-hour conference, the Muskrats leave the Mayor's office and begin their work. The Council of Elders is ecstatic and sends out secret orders to the people to help the two Muskrats in any way possible.

Artemisia is not flying blind in this venture. She has enacted a special High Magic spell that allows her to communicate with animals via telepathy for one week.

Artemisia begins to make the rounds of Hayport, telling the animals and the humans of the plan. A date is set for five days hence. The journey to Bearsgard will take about twelve hours, beginning as soon as it is dark. For the second half of the journey, the group will have the Lindenwood Forest for concealment and the Lindenwater as a source of water for the animals.

In the meantime, Viminalis is taking ox carts to Bearsgard, leaving supplies of hay and grain to feed the animals halfway along the route. The kittens and puppies that are too young to walk to Bearsgard are smuggled in the hay wagons. The hens and some other small livestock go to Bearsgard by boat.

The children will be split into two groups — half of them can go by boat to Bearsgard and the other half (the older ones) will go overland with the animals.

Artemisia is concerned that the Evil Ravens will get wind of this plan, so she devises a distraction for them. She arranges for the Good Ravens to scope out Wentwood Castle as though Bearsgard were planning an attack. The Evil Ravens are kept busy playing cat-and-mouse with the Good Ravens while Artemisia and Viminalis carry out their plans.

Four days have now gone by and the plan is progressing well. Artemisia is at the Mayor's office studying a map when a sailor comes in.

"There is a large storm approaching from the west," says the sailor, "it will be here tomorrow night." Artemisia consults a High Magic spell and finds that the sailor is right.

Artemisia and Viminalis tell the Mayor that the date of the evacuation will have to be moved two days out.

"The seven-day spell that gives me telepathy powers will run out halfway to Bearsgard," says Artemisia, "the dogs will have to round up the sheep and the children will have to run after the cows."

The roads are still muddy from the storm but the evacuation is successful. Thanks to the patience and ingenuity of the children, disaster is averted. Three hours after sunrise some Evil Ravens spot the refugee procession emerging from

the Lindenwood Forest and making the final two-mile sprint to Bearsgard, but it is too late for them to interfere. Ingmar is furious when he learns of the successful evacuation.

At the end of the journey Artemisia and Viminalis collapse in the royal guest-house and sleep for three days.

The End

ZL 2 pages. Diary entry by Chipsa. Year 663 APC.

The Death of Pikorro

The Burgesses took away Pikorro's castle and gold mine following my rescue from Castra Zaisa. He was put under house arrest in a cottage behind the Guildhall.

Two years after the rescue, Pikorro's doctor told him he had only a couple of weeks to live. He summoned four of us to come pay a last visit — "my favorite enemies" he called us.

Taspel and I, along with Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard, set sail from Bearsgard for Castra Zaisa. After spending the night in the guest-house of our Embassy, we went to his cottage.

The Constable at the door let us in and we stood awkwardly in the small space.

Pikorro immediately launched into a monologue.

"The deep powers do not experience time the same way we do. I was born to do great things, but I have been shackled in the body of a mortal. I do not know what happens after I die. Perhaps I will become one of the deep powers. I hope so."

I said to him sadly, "I won't bother to tell you what Brother Bede believed about the afterlife."

"Good, I don't want to know," he replied. "My father Orontius had an opportunity to become immortal when he made the twelve pies out of Muskrat flesh. He did not want to become immortal as a human, but as a Wolf. Perhaps he has been re-born as a Wolf now. If so, watch out. Your Treaties won't be worth the paper they're written on."

Pikorro continued his tirade. "I have always been surrounded by traitors. When the Second Black Magic Kingdom was declared, King Krizzen gave a lovely wedding for me and a beautiful maiden of the Wentwood Castle settlers. After the end of the Second Magic War, my wife left me and went to live in Albantown. My daughter was born in Albantown, but I never saw her. As the years went by, a granddaughter was born as well. Finally my great-grandson Gaius ran away from home and came to me in Castra Zaisa at the age of twelve. That was just a year before the Great Balloon Race."

Then Taspel, ever the diplomat, said, "Your great-grandson is in the Castra Zaisa Lock-Up for stealing. We will visit him before we return to Bearsgard."

"Gaius is a kinsman of yours, Blue Wizard," said Pikorro, "don't forget that. If you can spare any of your White Magic goodness for him, perhaps you can help him

out. He is only fifteen. Like me, he is a caged beast that receives nothing but goads and fetters. Perhaps you can find some occupation for him in this worthless world.”

“I will not return to my home until Gaius is safely settled here,” said the Blue Wizard.

Pikorro grunted and said, “Better late than never.”

“Gaius needs an occupation that will challenge his skills and engage his interest,” I said. “Perhaps we can find employment for him at the Embassy of the Wolves. He can write a history of the Kingdom of the Wolves. The Ambassador Arianna can put a Wolf Magic spell on him so he can communicate with the Wolves via telepathy.”

After a period of silence, Pikorro said, “That is actually a good idea. Of all the things I ever called you, Chipsa, stupid was not one of them. When you leave here, have the Burgesses bring Gaius to me so we can discuss it. He is not a thief — he only steals because he is restless.”

“As part of the Treaty of Olaf’s Bridge,” I said, “Taspel and I were granted certain powers of Unicorn Magic. I was able to glimpse briefly into the minds of Gaius and Arianna. You will find that my suggestion has a better-than-average chance of success.”

“I never thought I would ever be grateful for Unicorn Magic,” said Pikorro with a scowl.

“The age of Polara’s Peace has come” said Taspel, “we have entered a new era.”

“I certainly hope that Gaius will live to see the end of it,” said Pikorro bitterly, “Good-bye and good riddance!”

We said our last farewells to Pikorro and then went to see Gaius.

The End

ZM 2 pages. To Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard. Year 663 APC.

From Chipsa

Greetings. I am glad to have some peace and quiet after the difficult years in Castra Zaisa. The New Realm held a constitutional convention as you know, and to my great relief the offices of King and Queen will be only ceremonial from now on. Daughter Ostrya has agreed to be Queen, so now I am completely retired.

I have before me a copy of a manuscript that I wish to discuss with you. It is *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. The original from William Fitzroy's collection is now very fragile, but the current Green Wizard's Apprentice kindly made a copy for me when he was on duty as a volunteer in the Scriptorium. When William Fitzroy first came to the Land of Nye, this poem was still brand new.

The first time I read the poem, while a student at the Bearsgard Academy, I could not make head nor tail of it. The Other World is a puzzling place.

When Sir Graham passed away in the year 645, Polara and I sat down to write an epitaph for him.

Polara had a copy of this poem that she had borrowed from the Bearsgard Academy, and we started to look for an appropriate epitaph. Reading the poem with Polara's help was enlightening because her knowledge of the Other World was extensive.

We went first to the *Prologue* and began reading the description of the Knight. The knights of that world bear little resemblance to the Knights of the Realm in our own world. Chaucer's Knight seemed to be a virtuous person, but not in any concrete way that I could comprehend.

I soon got lost in the list of battles in which the Knight had fought, so Polara drew me a map of a place called Europe. Then I was really lost! One of his chief virtues was slaying "hethens" whatever those are. Polara started to explain but I interrupted and said "Let's write an epitaph from scratch." That was a happy suggestion and we spent a pleasant hour with the Muses composing our own poem.

After a lunch break with the family, we returned to the manuscript once again.

"Let's turn to *The Chanoun's Yemanne's Tale*," said Polara, "there is something I want to show you."

When Polara explained that this was "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" I was none the wiser.

Polara went on to say that the Canon and the Yeoman were alchemists and I pricked up my ears. The only alchemists I had ever heard of were Orontius, Zaisa, and Pikorro, and I had only a vague notion of what an alchemist was.

“The alchemists of our world were demonic villains,” said Polara, “but the alchemists of the Other World were villainous charlatans.” It took her half an hour to explain this to me, but I finally caught on.

We delved into the poem and tried to decipher the personality of the Canon. Chaucer seemed to have a low opinion of the Canon, which we shared as well. When Polara told me that the Canon and the Knight supposedly served the same religious faith, I was dumbfounded.

“The Other World is too much for me,” I said. “I think the children are picking apples in the orchard. Shall we go join them?”

“Yes,” said Polara, and off we went.

Note to Sir Patrick and the Blue Wizard – I wanted to share these words with you, since we have all been caught up in the doings of Orontius, Zaisa, and Pikorro.

Taspel and I will be seeing you in a few weeks at the Winter Solstice Festival.

From your friend,

Chipsa.

ZN 3 pages.

(Letter from Chipsa, Year 663 APC)

Dear Blue Wizard,

Greetings from the cool north woods. Taspel and I are here at Castra Sarah for the month of August as usual. Alpheus and Betula just arrived for a week's visit.

You'll never guess what Alpheus wants to do for his three years of voluntary service. He wants to find the ten lost coins of King Aelfric! Can you imagine?

When I told him that all new volunteer projects have to be approved by the Council of Five Mayors he was downcast for half an hour and then set to work on an essay about his scheme. He is working on it now.

The reason for my letter is this. You know more about the history of Camulodunum than I do and I have questions for you.

Betula is now a junior at her school. When she arrived at Castra Sarah yesterday, she handed me a copy of the valedictorian speech from this year's graduating class.

The subject of the speech is Camulodunum, and I want to check the facts with you. These two stories are not known to me. I will give you a synopsis of each of them. The student who gave this speech is known for high spirits and clever pranks. I admire her spunk, but would appreciate your opinion in this matter.

The first story begins in the early days of Camulodunum. In the time when there was only one castle, a team of explorers and surveyors was sent along the coast all the way from the castle to the Land of the Muskrats. When the team came to the mouth of a large river, they called it the "South River" since it was to the south of Camulodunum. They camped for a week next to the river, at the present site of the city of Bearsgard.

Twelve years later, another expedition was sent by boat up the South River. They came to a large tributary coming in from the west and called it the "Westwater." They made notes about the natural freshwater harbor that later became Albantown.

In later years, the hunters and trappers of Camulodunum became familiar with all of this territory. The Brown Wizard and the Sisters of the Green Leaf scouted the region for rare medicinal herbs.

In the year 235 APC, just after the twelfth castle had been built, the Count of the Western Marches came to Nye from the Other World. The Count was a seasoned woodsman and explored all of Nye on foot and by small boat, including the Ring Mountains.

Through the strength of his own magic, he was able to speak our language. He appeared before the King and Queen of Camulodunum and requested that the name “South River” be changed to the “Bear River.” He explained that he was homesick for the black bears of his homeland. The King and Queen gave their permission, pending approval by the Mayor and elders of Hayport. After several years, the Count finally got consent from Hayport, the Brown Wizard, and the Mapmakers’ Guild.

When Olaf founded his city at the mouth of the Bear River, he called it “Bearsgard.”

The second story reaches even further back into history. If you do not know the answer to this, please ask Roswitha to come visit me after I return to Castra Polara.

It is recorded in our history that Brother Bede visited with the Ancient Unicorns immediately after the arrival of humans in Nye. It was during that first night, when they were sleeping on the ground, that a raven took Brother Bede to see the Unicorns. The Queen of the Muskrats was present on that occasion as well.

The Ancient Unicorns vanished to another world, and Brother Bede went back to sleep. In the morning, he sketched twelve Unicorn heads and hid the sketches.

Those sketches were passed down from Brown Wizard to Apprentice generation after generation.

In the year 296 APC, before Olaf was born, King Aelfric, Queen Sarah, and the Brown Wizard gathered in the Royal Mint to make the twelve coins. Each coin was made to match one of the sketches. Humans often do not realize that the twelve Unicorns are different individuals — they all look the same to us. We assume that the image is just a stylized Unicorn and not a specific individual.

The verso of each coin was different. Queen Sarah had sketched twelve images from the visions she had in her dreams. King Aelfric, Queen Sarah, and the Brown Wizard did not know the meaning of the images, but they knew that the magic was good and not evil.

That was the story as told in the valedictorian speech. What do you think?

I have seen only two of the coins. The two Unicorns are Polara and another royal Unicorn of ancient lineage — I remember him well but his name, Baranor, does not mean anything to you. We could spend many winter evenings relating the life of Baranor and cover only a tenth of it. I remember telling my first riddle when I was just a foal:

What flies straighter than a bee,
Gives color to the goldenrod,
Makes possible the growing tree,
Gives shadow to the swimming cod?

Baranor kindly took me aside and gave me some tips on making my riddles more difficult.

The verso of one coin has an image of Taspel at the age of sixteen and the other has the famous Wolf general Grendel the Great. Grendel died before the coming of humans.

King Aelfric, Queen Sarah, and the Brown Wizard composed a manuscript about the twelve coins, but it was lost when the twelve castles were burned.

I wonder about the student who gave this speech — what was her source of information?

From your old friend, Chipsa

Editor's Epilogue to Part Five

I asked Chipsa, "What on earth put it into your head to go visit Pikorro, alone?"

She sighed and said, "I wasn't thinking of my own safety."

"Obviously," I interjected.

Chipsa was pensive. "There was a bond between me and Pikorro. He wanted Castra Zaisa to be beautiful and I wanted Castra Polara to be beautiful. It was a friendly rivalry at first."

"But you knew he couldn't be trusted," I admonished.

"Yes, I knew that," she continued. "Once I saw the book *Herbs of the Accursed*, I knew in my heart what had to be done. The gauntlet was thrown at my feet, and it was up to me not to shrink from the task. As the Wolf Mephistophila once said: *everything hung by a thread.*"

"And the thread broke," I said.

Chipsa took a deep breath and said, "Yes, the thread broke. Pikorro locked me in his dungeons."

I was persistent. "Your husband King Taspel could have appealed to the Burgesses."

She shook her head and said, "That would have meant civil war in Castra Zaisa and death for me. My friends in Castra Polara and Bearsgard knew that perfectly well. When Pikorro got his hands on a copy of my *History of the Second Magic War*, my rations were cut in half. When I saw Alpheus, Betula, and Tilia barge into my cell with the skeleton key, the maps, and the torch, I had two simultaneous thoughts: *I KNEW my luck would change* and *We're NOT out of the woods yet.*"

Now it was my turn to be pensive. "There is something I wonder," I said, "will Earthlings learn anything from your adventures?"

Chipsa laughed and said, "It's worth a try. I love the Earth: home of my ancestors and home of my hopes and dreams."

The End of Part Five

