



The Tree of Life

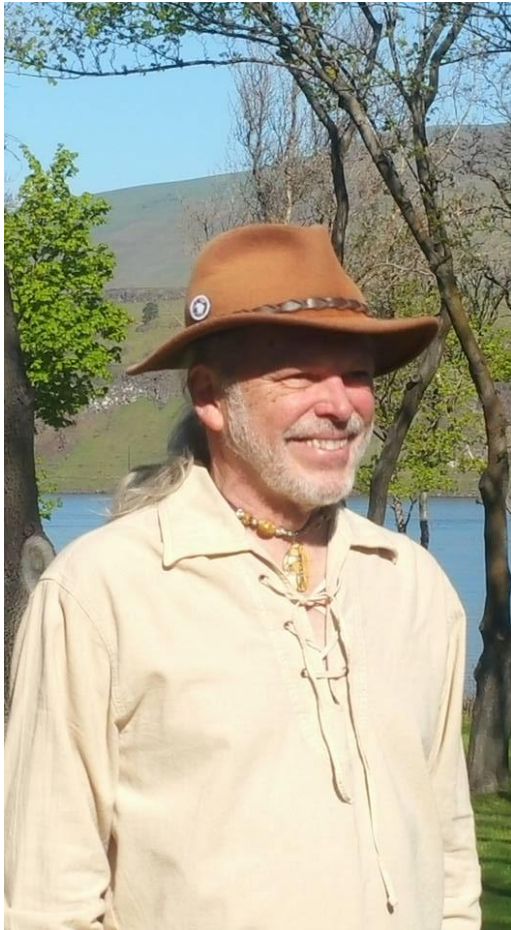
a novel by

Russell E. Vance, III

Tree of Life. Copyright © 2022 by Russell E. Vance, III. All rights reserved.

Cover by Mary Hollis Troup

Paperback ISBN: 979-8-9861970-2-9



ABOUT THE AUTHOR. Russell E. Vance, III, PhD. is a retired psychotherapist who, after retiring, has followed his passions and dreams. He currently lives a nomadic RVer's life spending most of his life off-the-grid far out into the Sonoran Desert or in the Rocky Mountains of Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana where he and Pamela serve as volunteer campground hosts. An unabashed tree-hugger and environmentalist, Russ' post-retirement advocacy became wildlife management, living among and helping keep deer, mountain goats, big horn sheep, bears and other creatures safe. Many of his stories carry a strong environmental message. ` Living in a twenty-five-foot camper trailer they named Sinopáá, Russ enjoys spending his evenings writing stories. He has published three novels – *AGEH*, *New Prince of Coillearnach* and *Tree of Life* – and four novella.

CHAPTER 1.

In the eleventh year of the reign of Queen Alainn an ti de Coillearnach life was prosperous and peaceful in the Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth and the entire Coillearnach kingdom. On her 100th birthday the Queen Mother, Maetheriel, had abdicated the throne to Alainn. Prince Consort Brian Ferguson kept all of their children busy with the Foundation he and Alainn had created years earlier. The BPF Foundation had successfully purchased an existing hospital and created a free research hospital in north Atlanta. The foundation's land protection division was almost constantly embroiled in a legal battle with a mining company. Most of the time they were successful in keeping the mines away from public land and wilderness. At first the acquisitions were all within the Coillearnach kingdom. To the humani that would be the states through which the Appalachian Mountains passed. It didn't take long for them to be fighting battles anywhere in the continental United States. Their stable of attorneys represented some of the most prestigious law schools in the country and the foundation found itself working with humani organizations with similar goals.

Bhean Manwathiel - Cathy, to her friends and Dr. Beaulac, to her patients - sat sipping Miruvor on the balcony of her townhouse on the north side of Atlanta. With a sad smile she held the fluted glass up to the light. She had acquired a taste for this clear sweet cordial during her time at Flaitheas Scáth and she usually ended her day with a glass. It was a bittersweet ritual that allowed her to admit how much she missed living in the deep forest at Ferguson Pálás with her grandfather and Alainn. After the Battle of Flaitheas Scáth her parents had permitted her to live with her grandfather and his wife, now Queen Alainn, in the marvelous house he built for them in the woods near the magical town of Cigam. When she married Turin and they went off to medical school together, they had returned to Ferguson Pálás whenever they had breaks and to escape the rigors of school and the confusion of so-

called civilization. Now they had a nice place of their own just down the road from the hospital where they both worked but it didn't really feel like home to either of them.

She laughed at herself. She had grown up thinking that she was a city girl, but a short time in Flaitheas Scáth had changed that. In a matter of a few weeks Cathy had gone from a typical modern city teenager who only thought of clothes, boys and high school gossip and believed that she could not survive without her smartphone and Facebook to being a battle hardened, kickass "lady" whose best friends were a dwarf and a boy-crazy elf, whose grandfather turned out to be a powerful wizard, whose new grandmother was an Elvin queen and whose love-of-her-life was a drop-dead handsome Elf with whom every female he encountered flirted. It's a good thing she trusted him completely.

Cathy took a sip of the sweet nectar and thought how much she missed Flaitheas Scáth. She had to admit that she was envious of her little brother, Kevin, who had been able to attend Coillearnach Academy - a real-life version of Hogwarts. He was a great wizard and, by the age of 24, had earned a PhD in the Science of Magic and was the Academy's youngest faculty member. She liked being a physician at the hospital which was owned and operated by the foundation created by her grandfather and step-grandmother in honor of their deceased spouses. Turin had almost died in the Battle of Flaitheas Scáth. They were married within two years of the battle and a short while later the two of them went to medical school. She was so proud that Turin was the first Elf in Clainn Coillearnach to become a physician. He was kind and gentle and his specialty became pediatrics. The kids loved him and he loved them. Turin and Cathy had often talked about children. They didn't have any school bills but they just didn't feel particularly settled. The children at the hospital had become their surrogate family.



While Cathy was musing and anxiously waiting for Turin to finish his shift so that they could go off for the weekend to Flaitheas Scáth, Turin was entering the room of his last patient for the day. The little girl, named Sally, looked up and grinned as Turin entered. The girl was a dwarf from Clainn McAllistar, a clan of dwarfs in the wilderness of the northern Rocky Mountains. No one could pronounce her real name, Saileighta, so she went by Sally. Sally had cancer and Turin had the results of her recent testing. Sally's parents sat next to her bed. They were nervous wrecks but tried to smile. Turin smiled at the anxious family. He was so happy that he had good news. That wasn't always the case. Sally was in remission. He would be sending her home.



Cathy and Turin were anxious to get to Cigam. As soon as they had pulled out of the city all they could talk about was home, who they were going to visit and what they were going to do. They didn't talk about work. They didn't want to talk about work or the city or the human world. Their room at Ferguson Pálás was waiting. "Their room" was one of the family suites. It was at the end of the wing and had a balcony overlooking the woods and ravine. They knew that Queen Alainn and Prince Brian (grandma and grandpa) would be waiting for them, no matter how late they arrived, and that the kitchen staff would have instructions for a light supper in the atrium. Everyone in the palace, from the under stairs staff to the Torc guards were family and they were anxious to see them.

The driveway back into Cigam was dark and the subdued lights of the village were a wonderful 'welcome home'. Besides needing to leave their car at the guard station, which was fashioned to look like a simple gate-keeper's cottage, they had to go

in and greet all of Turin's old childhood friends. It had been at this very gate house that Turin had mustered the courage to ask Cathy's grandfather's personal Torc Allta guard, Neala, to walk Cathy home. It had been a long time before she realized how bold Turin had to have been and how badly he wanted to walk her home to do that.

Because Cathy was Bhean Manwathiel in Coillearnach all of the Torc guards gave her their best bow and "m'lady" before breaking into smiles and hugging the happy couple. Cathy always enjoyed that these Torc friends and family could balance their respect for the granddaughter of the Queen with true love and friendship. Their role as the Queen's personal guard was a matter of great pride and their display of respect for the Queen's family was a matter of love.

Winslow, one of Turin's life-long friends, was the captain of the watch when they arrived. He insisted upon driving them on to Ferguson Pálás in a royal landau, which he loved to drive. As they drove through the village in the royal carriage cheers and greetings came from every direction. These were their family and friends. This was their safe haven and their source of renewed life. This is where they came to share the joy of a victory. It was the place where they came for solace, comfort and protection when things in the humani world went wrong.

The Torc Allta at the door of the pálás were a wee bit more formal than those at the gatehouse, but the greeting was as sincere and loving. Inside the excited staff scurried around. Manwë was probably the most excited. He had been Brian Prionsa's valet, companion and close friend since before Brian was a prince, and these two were like his own grandchildren. After a formal greeting, he gave the two bear hugs and scurried off to let the royal couple know of their arrival.

Soon Cathy and Turin were sitting in the atrium with Brian and Alainn with a lovely light supper spread before them. Brian and Alainn sat looking at the young couple and beamed with pride.

"You must tell us everything you're doing," said Alainn.

"Oh, it's just the usual," Cathy replied.

"Nonsense," said Alainn in mock sternness. "That's a royal command!"

"Awe, Grandmother Alainn, we came here to get away from all that," complained Cathy.

"I'm sorry," Alainn said more seriously. "I would imagine that working with sick and dying people can be very hard. We're just so proud of the two of you and want to know all about what you're doing." There was a brief pause, "oh, and do tell us any news about your parents, aunts and uncles. They never write." Alainn and Brian smiled and shrugged. That was the down side of adult children and grandchildren.

"Yes, Grandmother," Turin still felt a bit uneasy addressing the Queen of Coillearnach in such a familiar manner, but Alainn had insisted when the two of them lived in the pálás. "But there are a lot of rewards that go along with the suffering. We ease the pain. We help people have the highest quality of life and sometimes we see miracles."

"We're so proud of both of you," said Cathy's grandfather, Brian Prionsa. "It must be the most magnificent experience to save or restore life!"

"It's a feeling beyond explanation," Turin turned serious. "So many of our patients have been either passed over by the society or just plain thrown out to die. That's what makes us angry. When we can send those people home with a new lease on life, we want to party."

"It sounds like you had such a case recently." Alainn was showing her perception. She had become so good at reading people and sensing what they were feeling. Brian looked at her with pride and thought to himself 'that's what makes her a tremendous queen.'

"Actually, I did," replied Turin. "I had a young dwarven girl whose cancer is in remission. When they came to BPF they had been rejected and abused. They are a lovely family and it makes you really angry to see them treated so shabbily just because

they look different." Everyone nodded in agreement. They all knew that Bridget-Prince Fionn Hospital (BPF) was known for taking the "rejects". Many of the area hospitals looked down on BPF and got really angry when BPF was ranked higher than them in patient care and success.

"They must be really excited to get to go home," added Cathy.

"Yes, but they're a bit scared."

"Why?" questioned Brian.

"They are from a clainn in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains that doesn't have the medical resources," said Turin. "Do you know Clainn McAllistar?"

"Yes, I know them," exclaimed Alainn. "They pushed father west when we all fled the humani invasion of the seventeenth century. We've lost contact with them the past century or so because they're so remote, but they were good friends. They're a dwarven clan."

"I rather ... well, I sort of ... " Turin stammered, "I kind of told them that I'd make house calls to follow up."

It took a moment for what Turin said to sink in. The first to respond was Cathy.

"That's marvelous!" she almost shouted.

"It is?" Turin looked puzzled.

"Sure! I've had just about all of the city that I can handle. Our people here have good medical care and there are lots of very competent people at BPF, so let's go see if we can help Clainn McAllistar."

Somehow Turin's softheartedness had launched a crusade for Cathy. Alainn and Brian watched somewhat between amazement and amusement as the couple outlined their own personal attack on bigotry and abuse. None of them knew whether or not Clainn McAllistar would want or appreciate their help, but, if Cathy had her way, they were going to get it . . . regardless.



No matter how it appeared, the decision to go to the Clainn McAllistar was not as spontaneous as it appeared. Cathy was sensitive to the needs of the clainn, however the situation presented an opportunity for which Cathy had been waiting. Just as she had realized that she was no longer a city girl and missed life in Flaitheas Scáth, the Shadowrealm, she longed for the wilds of the wilderness. One of the driving factors in going to medical school was being proactive - actively and aggressively attacking problems, disease, evil and every form of threat to all organic life. Cathy had concluded that so-called humani civilization was not pro-active. It sought only equilibrium or status quo. It was reactive even to its own destructive nature. This was epitomized by the Health Department telling a dying patient that they could not drink because the alcohol might damage their livers. By going into the wilderness and helping a group like Clainn McAllistar confront and overcome that which threatened them she would be proactive.

There were, of course, concerns for their safety on such an adventure but after seeing Turin and Cathy fight in the Battle of Flaitheas Scáth no one doubted their ability to manage any danger they might encounter.

Preparation for their trip was a project unto itself. The young couple tried to remind family and staff that this wasn't a royal expedition. They didn't need tents the size of a small cottage, china dishes or staff. Grandmother Maetheriel had never been on such an adventure. Except for sneaking out with Sadron, the Queen Mother Maetheriel had never gone anywhere without a complete entourage, so she was a constant companion of Cathy and Turin's while they were preparing. The elder queen, now one-hundred and eleven years old, was obviously enjoying an adventure through the young people. She had to look at every piece of equipment they were

packing and learn how it was used. Maetheriel wondered about spending the night on the ground in a sleeping bag. It was all so foreign to her, so she had to try it. Sadron didn't have any problem with the elderly queen sleeping in a tent - which, of course, was ringed by Torc Allta guards - but he drew the line at cooking over a campfire. To make his mother-in-law happy, Brian built a fire pit in the garden outside Ferguson Pálás and let her cook her own hot dog. She had never tasted a hot dog nevertheless cooked one by herself. She was thrilled. Had she not been one-hundred and eleven years old the family was sure she would have taken up back country camping.

Alainn wanted Cathy and Turin to take a cuideachta of Torc Allta. She couldn't convince the couple in her role as grandmother so she pulled the "I'm the queen" card and they compromised on having two Torc go along. Winston and Alfred, two life-long friends of Turin's were asked to go. They jumped at the opportunity for a western adventure.

The day before Cathy and Turin were to leave, Isla arrived. She had heard that the clainn was dwarven and wanted to go along.

"I'm an epidemiologist and I spend my day fighting the spread of disease and helping people avoid getting sick," Isla argued. "If Clainn McAllistar has enough need that you're going to offer help, I'm one that should be there!" Isla was almost shouting by the time she finished. There was a long pause. In a more quiet and almost pleading voice, "Besides, I'd love to see a dwarf flaitheas. I'm related to almost every dwarf in Coillearnach, and well" her voice trailed off. Cathy knew very well what that meant. For Isla to go on a date with a Coillearnach dwarf was like going out with your brother.

"What do you think?" Cathy asked Turin just to tease her friend.

"I don't know," Turin tried to look serious, "she's awfully short and one of the Torc would probably have to carry her just so she didn't slow us down."

Isla was prepared for an argument ... not teasing. As a result, she bristled.

"Don't underestimate the speed, strength, endurance or tenacity of a dwarf," she barked. "I'll still be going when you're yelling 'uncle' even if I do have to take two steps to your one!"

Cathy quickly apologized. It was obvious that Isla was not in the mood for the good-natured banter that usually passed between the two close friends. Despite their close relationship Cathy was unaware of all of the difficulties her best friend experienced as a dwarf in a human and elfin world. It was more than the discrimination and cruel jokes. It was more than being related to most of the eligible male dwarfs. There was loneliness even when surrounded by good friends like Cathy. Isla had many good friends who were male but she'd never had a boyfriend, and she knew that she wouldn't as long as she lived in a big persons' world. Isla wanted to see a world where she was the norm. For a person like Isla, whose life was totally altruistic, to admit these feelings caused a sense of selfishness but she could not deny her own needs. There was a void in her life which no amount of friendship could fill. She knew that this was her opportunity to fill that void and relieve her pain.



All draíochta, magic folk, families are transported to and from the hospital by port key. Checking with the transportation department, Turin learned that the port key was placed near a rail road hotel in Essex Junction, Montana and was still active. Turin and Cathy studied a topographic map of the area. The only clue they had was Sally mentioning the name Tunnel Creek when she was talking to Turin about home. There on the topo, about seven miles west of Essex Junction, was a creek and trail by the name Tunnel Creek. That had to be their starting point. They could only hope that by getting into the general vicinity of the flaitheas scáth they would be seen by a patrol or someone living outside the flaitheas who would report their presence.

They would have to start their adventure from the hospital. According to Cathy's little brother, Professor Dr. Kevin Beaulac, a port key is a magic device used to transport people or objects from point A to point B between two devices. Unlike Ley Lines, which are always there and open to public transport between fixed points, the port key is specific to a single place and may be time sensitive. Occasionally a humani might activate a port key but it is exceptionally rare. As Kevin explains it, the port key works on a combination of quantum physics's non-locality, entanglement and infinite possibilities. The two points are related by entanglement while non-locality permits the objects to be at location A one moment and location B the same or next moment. The path is determined by the infinite possibilities available prior to observation or measurement. According to Kevin "it's all pretty basic quantum physics."

When everything was ready there were five going - Turin, Cathy, Isla, Winston and Alfred. Each had a backpack with the essentials for five days.

The port key room at the hospital was well hidden from humani in the basement of the hospital behind a magic door. It was a large room that was almost sterile with heavily padded floor so patients would always have a soft landing. There was no need for an operator but a well-trained witch or wizard was on standby in case of a problem. There was an exam room just off the port key room where new patients could be examined or stabilized before sending them upstairs. Beyond the exam room was the office where the port keys were made by a staff of wizards. These wizards would set the ports up in conjunction with a wizard who traveled to the patient end of the port. Once the connection was made nothing was required until the maker wants to shut it down.

"Who's going to lead the way through?" asked the witch in charge without looking up at the group.

"I'll lead," Cathy offered. This caused the witch to look up.

"Oh, M'Lady!" Then she noticed the others. "Dr. Mar'sil. Dr Banicape. What are you all doing?"

"We're on a mission," Cathy beamed as she briefly explained.

"Wow, this is exciting. We've never done anything like this before. Where to?"

"Essex Junction, Montana," replied Turin.

"Sweet Sally," exclaimed the witch. "I'm so happy she's in remission. You should have seen how happy they were when I sent them home."

"I bet." said Turin.

The witch handed Cathy a staff with a row of numbers and letters down its length.

"Hold on to the port key with both hands. Everyone else put your hands on the person in front of you and concentrate your attention on Lady Manwathiel," the witch in charge said almost in monotone. She had obviously given the same instructions so many times that she didn't realize how her recitation sounded.

"When you're all ready, Lady Manwathiel will state your destination and you'll be off." She paused. "Bon voyage."

Cathy looked at her group to be sure everyone was connected and said "Essex Junction, Montana."

The trip was over almost immediately. There was no sound involved but they did experience a few moments of light headedness.



The port key team at the hospital never put a port too near a patient's home, especially if they live in a flaitheas scáth - Shadowrealm. This is often inconvenient for the patient's family but an essential for security. If their identity were to be compromised it would lead humani or an undesirable draíochta right to their home or

flaitheas scáth. They try not to put the port too far away but, at the same time, it needs to be somewhere where the family can have seclusion to come and go as well as to be able to quickly and easily assimilate into the humani world, if necessary.

That was the case with Essex Junction. Anyone arriving would have the seclusion of the forest and be able to easily blend in with the hikers, bikers and other visitors to the hotel and the area.

The group stood in awe of their surroundings. Majestic mountains towered above them and the heavy mountain fir and spruce forest completed the breath-taking picture and sense of wilderness. They knew they were going to arrive on the edge of the Big Bear Wilderness but they were not prepared for the sense of remoteness.

The group donned their backpacks and headed toward the hotel. There was a footbridge across the rail road tracks. A small hotel sat only yards from the tracks. It had a large porch facing the rail road and the mountains beyond. A young woman was at the desk in the small lobby. She smiled at the group when they entered and welcomed them. Cathy asked about the distance to the Tunnel Creek trailhead and if there was any transportation. The clerk didn't know Tunnel Creek but she did know that there wasn't any transportation.

Sitting nearby, sipping coffee, was a middle-aged man. He was wearing blue jeans, a plaid shirt, down vest, a very worn Tilly hat and equally worn hiking boots. The mention of Tunnel Creek caught his attention.

"Not many people even know of Tunnel Creek," he said amiably as he rose and approached the group. He was a big man and offered a bear-sized hand in greeting. Here's where growing up in the humani world paid off. Cathy reached out and shook hands as she introduced the group. Following Cathy's lead, the others extended their hands in greeting.

"I bet," Cathy smiled. "We're doing research on glacial creeks."

"That's a good one," said the man who introduced himself as Mark. "It comes

right out of Grant Glacier."

"That's what our maps indicated."

"I'm headed back to the North Fork so I'm going right by the trailhead, if you don't mind sitting in the back of my old pickup."

The group expressed sincere gratitude and were soon situated in the bed of Mark's old diesel Ford F250 pickup. The diesel engine was loud and speeding down the road unsecured made Winston and Alfred uncomfortable. They were the only ones unaccustomed to the human world and therefore the only ones who were holding tightly to the side of the truck and not enjoying the view. Those in the truck bed knew that there were mountains to their left but they were a bit too close to see them well. The mountains on the right side were a bit further from the road and were magnificent. Their mountains back home were beautiful but these were awe-inspiring.

While those in the truck bed could not talk and communicate by smiles and hand gestures, Cathy and Mark were in the cab shouting over the noise of the engine.

"We're with the Bridgette-Prince Fionn Foundation," Cathy had remembered that when you don't want people to know who you really are it is best to tell as much truth as possible. That makes for less fake story to remember and trip you up.

"I know them!" Mark exclaimed.

"You do?" Cathy was amazed.

"Yeah. You guys saved my home!"

"I'm so glad. How did we do that?"

"I live in an area called the North Fork," Mark explained. "We all live off the grid and like it that way. A dirt road leads into our community. We fought for years against having it paved because we knew that if the road was paved electricity would soon follow and a McDonalds or Walmart would be right behind. We don't want those things. Some rich investors noticed how many of us make our living on tourist, especially those going into the back country. Those rich bastards just had to try to

develop the area and take away our livelihood."

"Profit before people," Cathy said shaking her head in disgust.

"Damn right!" Mark blushed and apologized.

"No need to apologize."

"Your people came here with some heavy weight lawyers and slick real-estate people and outbid the developers. Mark paused. "At first we were afraid you were just other developers but then you hired some local people to manage the land for you and opened some of it for recreational use and designated most of it as wilderness. We couldn't thank BPF enough!"

"Happy endings are the best," Cathy was thrilled to hear that local humani were so appreciative. "Our land preservation people are hard to beat." She wondered what they would think if they knew the truth about the BPF Foundation and smiled to herself.

It didn't take long to go the seven miles from Essex to the trailhead. Mark pulled off the road and helped those in the bed to get out.

"If you ever need anything; " Mark said in parting, "and I mean anything; just holler. My family has been in these mountains for generations and, thanks to your foundation, we'll be here for generations to come." He wrote his name and phone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to Cathy. "Oh, and by the way. I do believe that there are reports of folks akin to your short friend living hereabouts."

With that Cathy's mouth must have dropped open. Mark just winked, climbed into the big truck and roared off. She turned to the others who likewise stood speechless. Isla was staring at the mountain filled with excited anticipation. Dwarf were historically mountain dwellers. Inside the mountain, that is. This was the type of mountains in which Isla imagined her forefathers living. While Dwarf are friends with almost every other draíochta species they are still fierce warriors. That is because their only natural enemy is the Mountain Troll.

The five adventurers stood transfixed looking up the canyon toward the imposing Mt Grant that was crowned with a glacier. On the side of the road, near the trail head, was an old dilapidated barn well back into the trees. The barn looked like a gentle breeze would bring it down. Inside this structure, which was actually quite sturdy, was a late model non-descript van that looked like every other van on the road. Awareness of this vehicle would have gone a long way in relieving some of the apprehension the group was feeling. This van was why Sally's family never mentioned having any difficulty reaching the contact point for the port-key.

It was a lovely day. The temperature was in the low 60s with very little humidity. The heavy canopy of trees made it feel cooler. The creek rushed along its course, crashing over rocks and smashing against boulders on its way to the wild Middle Fork Flathead River. The Middle Fork had been designated as a "wild and scenic river" because of its pristine water and wild course.

The Tunnel Creek trail was never out of sight of the creek, staying on the northwestern side a hundred feet or more above the creek. There was almost no elevation change in the first two and a half miles when the creek split. Looking at the topographic map the group could see that the northern fork led into a cirque below Grant Glacier while the southern fork went into another cirque fed by a lake in the saddle between Mt Grant and Mt Liebig. They had no idea which fork of the creek would lead them to a flathead scáth, if they were actually anywhere near one. Only Mark's cryptic remark about dwarfs had given them any confidence to this point. The trail followed the northern fork. There were arguments to be made for either. Straight along the trail would probably be the most common but putting a turn in your path could help security. It would also be safer for them.

The group headed up the southern fork. There was a four-hundred-foot climb in a very short distance and then it opened into a meadow that was the center of the cirque. Here they made camp. Except for Cathy and Turnin who shared a tent, each

of the group had a small back-country tent. They kept the tents close together. The food preparation, cooking and eating area was well away from the tents. If the smells attracted bears or other animals, they did not attract them to the tents. Since black bears are excellent climbers, they stretched a rope between trees more than ten feet off the ground where they could hang their bear-proof food containers. Even though the devices were certified bear proof, there was no reason to test them. They kept the fire low and used it for cooking only. Even though there was no threat of attack Turin and the two Torc Allta took three-hour shifts standing watch throughout the night.

Two days later they were still camped in the cirque and had no contact. The group had hiked around the area and done everything but yell for dwarven guards. On the third day they moved camp to the northern cirque and repeated their efforts.

On the night of the fifth day Alfred had a suggestion. He felt that if they were being observed there was nothing to identify them as draíochta. He suggested that Isla teach the group some really old dwarven songs they could sing as a group.

It was a terrific idea and Isla was quite happy to share some old dwarven songs. As she sang the songs for her friends her clear, sweet voice filled the cirque with sound. As the songs swelled so did the intensity of the love and respect for her ancestors which could be felt in her singing. Isla had just finished a ballad in the dwarven tongue about a queen who sacrificed her own life to save a poor village. The group was learning the refrain. During a brief silence a voice in the forest could be heard singing the refrain.

The group became quiet. Isla would sing a verse and be quiet. The voice would sing the refrain. The group sat in anticipation but no one came. They retired for the night excited for having made contact but disappointed that no one came to see them.



Morning in the Montana Rockies comes quite early. Due to the latitude it never gets truly dark in the summer. It doesn't matter when, technically, sunrise is supposed to be, the sun will only be seen when it clears the mountains. For the Coillearnach group it became light at 0500 but the sun didn't rise above Mt. Liebig until 0900. It must have been some sort of instinct that caused Winslow, who was on watch, to jump to his feet just as it was becoming light. The same instinct caused Turin and Alfred to be by his side in a moment. Trying not to present as aggressive, they stood with weapons sheathed but they were as taut as an over tuned guitar string. They stood back-to-back with Cathy and Isla in the middle. There was silence but the Torc knew they were being watched by several beings.

"We're not going to get anywhere this way!" Isla exclaimed in disgust pushing her way past the Torcs. In a loud voice she called in the dwarven tongue, "I am Isla Banecape. I'm a dwarf from the Coillearnach kingdom. We work at the BPF hospital and just sent Sailaigha Morngold home. We came to visit. We are friends."

Soon a Dwarf in leather armor and carrying a broad ax emerged from the forest.

"Welcome, Isla Banecape," he said in Dwarf. "I am Sorg McAllistar, Prince of Clainn McAllistar."

Isla curtsied and lowered her head in respect. The others followed her lead. "I am honored Your Highness. May I present my friends?"

"By all means."

"None of them speak Dwarf. May I use English or Common Tongue?"

"English would be fine."

"Thank you, Sire." Isla turned to the group and in English, "friends this is Sorg Prionsa McAllistar." They all verbalized acknowledgment and again bowed as Isla continued. "Your Highness, this is Bhean Manwethiel Beaulac, granddaughter of

Alainn Banrion and Brian Prionsa of Clainn Coillearnach."

"Enchanter," said Sorg Prionsa bowing from the waist without lowering his eyes as befitted his position. Cathy acknowledged the Prince's chivalry.

Isla went on to introduce each person in the party emphasizing that Turin was the physician who treated Sally. Sorg was very interested in the Torc Allta but focused on Turin and the hospital.

"We are very grateful for your hospital and the medical care you give our clainn."

"It is our desire that all creatures, draíochta and humani, might receive good care. That's why we're here."

The prince looked pleased but a bit confused.

"May we be so bold as to request admission into McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth? We brought only five days of provisions and today is the sixth day."

"Most certainly," Sorg Prionsa seemed a bit embarrassed. "Most definitely. My parents, Gadin Ri and Ara Banrion, will be most anxious to meet you."

With a raise of his hand a company of Dwarf warriors stepped out of the woods. Turin and the two Torc Allta looked at each other. They each knew what the other was thinking . . . 'sure glad there wasn't a fight. Those guys look tough.'

"My men will take down your camp and bring your things. We will go ahead," Sorg Prionsa said. A dozen Dwarf warriors set to the task of breaking camp while Sorg Prionsa led the way beyond the trail.

In the woods not far from their camp was an enormous boulder. Sorg explained that many such massive pieces of rock had been carried by glaciers and were dropped when the glacier was no longer able to move it. This particular rock was special. With a Dwarfincantation the rock was replaced with a large opening that led through the mountain into the flaitheas scáth.

CHAPTER 2.

McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth was exquisite. It was dominated by a massive mountain that looked much like Mt Grant, even crowned with a glacier. Water from the glacier dropped hundreds of feet in a magnificent waterfall and ran down the mountain side where it was parted by a giant gated passageway. There was a winding road that climbed up the mountain to the doors. The water from the falls went in two directions then returned with two smaller, but equally beautiful, falls to form a single river again that flowed by a picturesque village and into a cobalt blue lake.

Sorg smiled when he realized that his new guests had stopped and were looking on his home with such awe.

The village was mostly on the left side of the road as they moved toward the mountain gates. There was a short road running north and south with a row of shops on the east side and cottages on the west. At the north end of the street the road divided with a public house and inn in the Y. Other than the public house, only the shops were two stories high.

There were eighteen to twenty cottages in the village. Other cottages could be seen scattered around the large meadow and along dirt trails leading out from the village like spokes into the surrounding forest. The cottages were constructed of stone with thatch roofs. They were all painted with bright colors making the village look like a field of wild flowers.

Each cottage was within a low stone fence with a small garden of vegetables and flowers in the back. Dwarves could be seen hoeing their gardens and moving up and down the street, often carrying baskets on their way home from a shop. They all stopped and waved as Sorg and the visitors passed; those closer calling out greetings.

Children were playing in the street and the nearby meadow where a number of goats grazed. One of the children in the meadow, upon seeing the visitors on the

road, began running toward them. It was Saileighta Morngold. Followed by her friends, she ran waving and calling “Doctor Mar’sil! Doctor Mar’sil. You came! You came!”.

The procession stopped for the approaching child. She was so excited and happy. Turin noticed how healthy she looked. She was wearing a simple cotton dress with a bright flora design and her dark hair was tied back with a bright orange bow. She, like the other children, was barefooted.

Reaching the group Saileighta realized that her doctor was with Sorg Prionsa. She barely stopped long enough to curtsy and then lunged toward Turin, grabbing him around the waist. He picked the child up and swung her around. Sorg laughed heartily at the flying-curtsy.

“My favorite Montana patient,” Turin said as he put her back on the ground.

“Oh, Dr. Mar’sil,” the child said laughing, “I’m your only Montana patient.”

“That’s beside the point,” Turin insisted.

“See,” she said, “I can play with my friends again.”

Turin gave the girl another hug. Nothing could have made him happier. Cathy watched with pride. This was the Dr. Mar’sil all the children loved. And he, as all could see, loved them.

Saileighta looked at the prince. “Tiarna, this is my doctor,” she said. “He cured my cancer and came all the way from Atlanta to see me.”

“That’s wonderful,” Sorg smiled.

“You go back and play with your friends,” said Turin. “I’m going to be here a while and I’ll have time to visit you and your parents.”

The group continued on their way emotionally lifted and excited to see how well Saileighta had looked and how happy she was to see Turin. Turning back almost south the road followed the rushing stream through a thick stand of mountain fir, spruce and a scattering of aspen. After another switchback the road crossed a stone

bridge. One of the twin falls dropped from the point where the water came out from under the bridge. A short distance further and the visitors were standing on a gigantic ledge facing the two massive wood doors. Guards were posted on either side of the doors. As the group approached the guards acknowledged Sorg Prionsa and, signaling those inside, threw open the enormous wooden doors.

It was hard for the visitors to see inside looking in from the sunny ledge. As their eyes adjusted, they could see a rather dark passage lined with torches. However, in a distance they could see bright light.

Sorg led the way down the corridor which quickly opened into a sizable room where there were guards and servants. The corridor became quite wide and light could be seen ahead. In a short distance they were standing on a balcony at the end of an enormous great hall that was brightly lighted with chandeliers and wall sconces. Two semicircular stair cases descended on either side of the balcony. The main floor of the great hall was covered with long tables, benches and chairs. A great many draíochta of all types were eating and talking. At the far end was a large dais. The king and queen sat on their thrones behind a high table piled with food. There were others on the dais with them.

The great hall became quiet as the Coillearnach group gathered at the edge of the balcony in sight of the room below.

"Your Majesty," Sorg Prionsa called out to his father, "It is my privilege to present to you visitors from the Coillearnach kingdom and doctors from the Bridget-Prince Fionn hospital."

"Welcome! Welcome!" called out the king, Gadin Rí, good-naturedly as he raised his cup to the group. There was a cheer from the hall and soon the Coillearnach group was seated around the king's table.

Of course the McAllistars were curious about the purpose of the Coillearnach visit. Turin explained how he had treated Sally - known to the McAllistars as Saileigha

Morngold - and how her parents had commented that their clainn was in need of health care.

Gadin Rí acknowledged that they, indeed, were in need of medical help and would appreciate any assistance. Their healer was excellent but his facilities were antiquated and they didn't have the wizards who could go into the humani world and get what they needed. When they did encounter humani they were treated horribly. "The only humani," said Gadin Rí, "who treats us with any respect is an old country doctor who lives up in the North Fork."

"Mark!" Cathy exclaimed.

"Yes, Dr. Mark Demer," replied Gadin Rí. "Do you know him?"

Turin laughed. "That's why he knew Tunnel Creek."

"What?" asked a puzzled king.

"That's why he winked and told me that there were people like Isla around."

Gadin Rí started to huff. Kings were not accustomed to being left out of conversations.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty," Cathy apologized, "Dr. Damer gave us a ride to the trail-head."

Their conversation was interrupted by a herald on the balcony.

"Your Royal Majesty," the herald called in a loud and formal voice. "A Seeker, Tanrus Hame by name, desires an audience with Your Majesty."

As with the Coillearnach group, Gadin Rí cheerfully invited the Seeker to join them.

"What exactly is a Seeker?" Alfred asked innocently.

Tanrus Hame smiled. "we are wizards who dedicate our lives to finding Crann na Beatha - trees of life - and protecting them."

"Doesn't your finding them put them at greater risk?" asked Winston.

"It would if it weren't that we're trying to find them first, before evil draíochta

do."

"Tell us about the Crann na Beatha," Cathy asked.

Tanrus explained that Crann na Beatha is a magnificent magical tree. They are often one-hundred, twenty feet in diameter and almost five-hundred feet high. It is the mother of all vegetation.

"Thousands of years ago, according to legend, the trees had to be hidden from Aonolc, a tremendously powerful and evil wizard. He wanted to destroy all of the trees because they offended him and stopped the spread of his territory. Dedicated wizards hid the trees in flaitheas scáth. Some elders say that the spirit of Uinci Maka - grandmother earth - resides in the Crann na Beatha. Most believe that the Tree has a consciousness beyond that of all trees and plants - a consciousness more like a humani or draíochta. One legend I heard from another seeker is that once every thousand years the Tree bears fruit. If a draíochta of pure heart asks permission to take the fruit, they can plant the seed and a new Crann na Beatha will grow."

"They sound like a marvelous tree," Isla said.

"Indeed they are," replied Tanras with a big smile. "I hope to see one in my life and maybe even be the one who is permitted to plant a seed."

The conversation went late into the evening talking about the McAllistar flaitheas scáth, the country in which it was located and the Crann na Beatha.



Over the next few days the Coillearnach group visited the kingdom guided by the banrion (queen) or Sorg Prionsa. Each evening was spent sitting on the dais eating and drinking with the royal family and talking about what they had seen and how they might give aid to a fellow clainn.

Their first day they visited the dispensary in the village and met the healer,

Thebur Springlord. He was very knowledgeable in preventative medicine but limited in other areas. He told the visitors how those living outside the shadowrealm were being influenced by the humani - poor diet, sedentary life-style, etc. - not good.

Thebur was excited about the idea of getting help and hoped he would be able to learn a lot more. Isla cautioned Thebur and the others not to replace good proactive, preventative behavior with humani reactionary medicine. She suggested newer first aid techniques and things which can be done for accidents and injury along with some diagnostic education so that Thebur could recognize diseases, etc., which might not be addressed in traditional health care.

"White humani carry many deadly diseases unknown to draíochta, as well as other humani, so we must be even more mindful of our traditional preventative medicinal ways. The humani life-style is going to be its downfall. We do not want to be dragged down with them," Isla cautioned.

During meals and in the evening Isla and Sorg Prionsa spent a lot of time talking. She asked a great many questions about being a dwarf in a dwarven kingdom. She also shared some of her frustrations with living in a humani and elven world.

Sorg's only experience with humani was the rare occasion he would venture into a humani village. Most of the people would look at him and ignore him. If he had to interact with humani they were usually polite enough. He had had only one experience with a drunken humani who made fun of him. If the humani remembers that night at all he will remember to never make fun of a dwarf. Nevertheless, he could understand Isla's feelings.

"Would you like to visit the remains of my ancestral cave? It goes back to the traditional use of actual existing caves instead of created caves like this."

"That would be wonderful!" exclaimed Isla in a loud voice. Her voice and excitement were enough to cause a pause in other nearby conversations with several questioning looks.

"Sorry, Prionsa Sorg just offered"

"To take her to see Grant Glacier."

The others smiled and went back to their conversations.

"Why did you lie?" Isla looked puzzled.

"Two reasons," Sorg said in a conspiratorial manner. "First we have to leave the Flaitheas Scáth through a secret exit that isn't public knowledge. Secondly, Father doesn't really like me going into the old cave. He doesn't think it is safe anymore."

"Oh, okay," Isla kept her voice low. "When do we go?"

"In the morning."



Morning could not arrive quickly enough for Isla. She met Sorg in the deserted great hall and followed him down a flight of stairs which he explained led to the dungeon and armory. The dungeon consisted of one unused cell at the end of a long hallway. Sorg put his hand against a bare wall, mumbled an incantation and a doorway appeared. Taking a nearby torch, Sorg led the way down a long winding passage which finally opened into a large room. Again, placing his hand on a wall and speaking an incantation they stepped out of the room on the side of a mountain high above a large lake.

Isla found the view breath-taking. The lake far below was ringed by lush green mountains. A small pond was in the middle of the cirque into which the magic portal had opened. It was obviously the last vestige of a glacier. They carefully made their way along a ledge that was a good 400 feet almost straight down. Isla had to focus on where she was going to avoid looking at the drop on her left or the wall to her right. Fortunately, it lasted for less than half a mile. Then they maintained their course along the ridge. The drop became lesser until it was a relatively gentle slope. In another half

mile they were about sixty to eighty feet above the headwaters of a creek on the side of a higher mountain that Sorg told her was called Great Northern Mountain.

Isla continued to admire the panoramic view that was always around them. The bare side of the mountain had given way to heavy growth of mountain fir, Douglas fir and spruce although they were still against a rather steep side of the mountain. There were the occasional enormous chunks of rock dropped by the glacier. Sorg was leaning up against one such giant.

"Are we about there?" Isla asked excitedly.

"Close," said Sorg looking around.

"Are you expecting someone?" Isla couldn't help noticing Sorg's increased vigilance.

"That's the last thing I want."

Isla turned back to admiring the beauty around her. Her eastern mountain home was not nearly as high. Here they call anything under 6,000 feet a hill when these "hills" were much higher than her eastern mountains. Nevertheless, her home mountains were beautiful. The problem was that this type of panoramic vista rarely exists in the east. You could be in the highest of the mountains, like those around Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth, and not see the mountains. These mountains were so massive and take up so much space that you can't miss them. There was a youthful ruggedness to these mountains that was accentuated by the year around snow fields and glaciers. These mountains looked wild.

Isla was shaken from her thought by Sorg going around the massive rock against which he had been leaning and getting down on his knees.

"Come here," Sorg called from the bushes.

Isla got down on her hands and knees and followed Sorg as he crawled through a narrow gap between the boulder and the mountain wall. A short distance back they were able to stand up.

Sorg lighted a torch that was lying on the ground. Before them Isla could make out what was left of gigantic wood gates. On the lentil was written in Dwarf

Ruklidome - Clainn McAllistar

27th Year of the Reign of

High King Roren

"That's about 1723," Sorg said anticipating Isla's question.

"Wow!" is all she could say.

They walked down a short passage and came to an intersection. To the left the passage went downhill. Sorg led Isla to the right which ascended gradually into the great hall. He lighted a chandelier and raised it up. The hall was an enormous natural chamber with several passage ways exiting the sides. The passage at the far end of the room had a lot of ornate stone carving framing the natural opening.

"What's down that passage?"

"That's where the royal family lived."

Sorg and Isla went exploring. With all of the furnishings gone it appeared like a large natural chamber. Isla walked around trying to imagine and visualize what life would have been like. That's when she noticed what appeared like a hole that had been dug out of the wall and then refilled. The refill was falling out. She could see what appeared like cloth. Pulling out the rest of the fill she found a leather sheath filled with papers.

"What's that?" enquired Sorg.

"I don't know," said Isla opening the folio. "It looks like papers."

"As many times as I've been in these caves, I never saw that," Sorg said a wee bit embarrassed.

Sorg moved toward Isla as she read "Metarí McAllistar". It was a diary.

"May I take and read it?" asked Isla.

"Fine with me."

The two explored some of the other rooms as Sorg shared stories of early dwarf life in the mountains. Sorg's great-great-grandfather had been the last family McAllistar to live in Ruklidome.



After dinner that evening Isla didn't want to stay up and talk. As soon as she got the chance she excused herself so she could return to her apartment and read Metarí's diary.

Metarí was the young granddaughter of the High King Roren. She was happy in the mountains and her clainn lived peacefully with their neighbors, the Piikani and the Salish - humani who would later be called "Indians." In fact, Metarí's best friend was a Piikani girl named Sohkapíni - big eyes. The Piikani had lived in the mountains for a long time before the McAllistars arrived. Not too far away south and west of her home were the Salish. They were a different tribe and spoke a very different language.

Toward the end of the diary Metarí's friend tells her of a white person looking for the McAllistars. It turned out to be a wizard named Nearin who had come to warn the McAllistars of a union of Morganians, the remnant of a dwarf clainn called McKintry who fought for Morgana, and a handful of humani mercenaries. Nearin helped the McAllistars build the flaitheas scáth and move the clainn.

Metarí told of the dwarf making broad swords and axes in preparation for the coming of the Morganians and McKintry. Many of the weapons were magic blades. Metarí had made a magic blade which would only serve a dwarven woman. The chief armorer was so angry that he was going to destroy the blade but Metarí buried it.

The McAllistars had been in their new flaitheas scáth several months before the Morganians and McKintry arrived. McAllistars had pushed a giant boulder in front

of the entrance to Ruklidome to hide it. They had planned to return some day.

When the Morganians and McKintry arrived, they were cruel and heartless with the native people. For no apparent reason they attacked a Piikani village and killed almost all of the people. Metarí's friend, Sohkapíni, was among the dead.

Metarí told about the McAllistars and Piikani joining forces and attacking the Morganian camp on what today is known as the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Metarí wanted to fight but she was forbidden. She tells of her plan to sneak out of the flaitheas scáth through the west entrance, get her magic blade and go after Sohkapíni's killer. That was the last entry in the journal. Since Isla had found the journal in Rucklidome, Metarí must have returned there for her sword and carried out her plan.

The next day Isla begged Sorg to go back to Rucklidome to search for Metarí's sword. Sorg felt Isla was being silly but he liked being with her and agreed to go. He wanted to make her happy.

Arriving this time at Rucklidome they went left at the intersection and followed a long tunnel down to the armory and forge. They searched the entire area. Finally, in a far corner, they found what looked like a very small and shallow grave.

"You said that she said in her diary that she was going to dig it up," said Sorg trying to comfort the disappointed Isla. "It looks like she did what she said."

"I'm sorry," Isla felt foolish.

"That's okay," said Sorg without thinking about what was coming out of his mouth. "I enjoy having you to myself, I mean" He stopped suddenly and blushed.

Isla likewise blushed. "I'm glad," she almost whispered. But Sorg heard.



When Ara Banrion questioned the two at dinner about where they had been all day, Isla told the queen about Metarí's diary and begging Sorg to take her to look for the sword.

Gadin Rí picked up on their conversation so Isla told them all the story which ended Metarí's diary.

"I know that sword," said Gadin Rí, "and I know the sad ending to that story. The name of the sword was Nat'lunda. It was only used in battle once and that was by Metarí. It was never seen again."

Everyone insisted that Gadin Rí now had to finish his story. He loved that. Watching the king situate himself and take on a storyteller's persona, Cathy thought to herself that, if Gadin Rí had been born in a human world he would have become an actor.

"Metarí knew," he started in a very theatrical voice, "that the battle was going well. The Morganians and McKinstry were no match for the McAllistars and Piikani. Soon they were fleeing down the river through the wild canyon. Metarí also knew that if they continued downstream they would run into a Salish village. If she went out the west entrance - where you two sneaked out - she could go to Ruklidome and get Nat'lunda on the way to the Salish village. The lake you see from Ruklidome wasn't there then. She followed what is known as the South Fork of the Flathead River. The name Flathead came about when the human explorers, Lewis and Clark, came through the area and called the Salish tribe "Flathead".

The Salish were not prepared for the approaching battle. They had no idea what was coming until Metarí warned them. The women and children fled through a narrow canyon. A runner was sent south to other Salish villages asking them to send warriors to help. Meanwhile Metarí led the warriors who were there against the Morganians-McKinstry. The McAllistar-Piikani were right behind catching the Morganian-McKinstry in a squeeze, destroying them. Sadly, Metarí died in the battle."

"Is she Moireluna Banrion of the ballad?!" Isla exclaimed, interrupting the king in her excitement.

"Yes she is," Gadin Rí beamed. "She was actually a princess. She was my great-grandfather's older sister."

"You must be so proud!" exclaimed Isla.

"I certainly am." Gadin paused. "The story goes that the Salish asked her father for permission to bury her in a place very special to the Salish because her warning and valor saved them. He agreed. Legend says that they buried her on the side of the mountain above the narrow canyon she defended and ever since pure water eternally flows from the rock of the canyon nourishing the humani whom she had saved.

"Badrock Canyon," Sorg blurted out. "She's buried on the mountain above the spring at Badrock Canyon!"



Making a magic wand or staff is not an easy process. First there is the issue of the material of which the wand/staff is made. Time and experience had shown that wood from different trees reacts differently. Some magic wands are very hard to control because the donor tree has a more independent and aggressive nature. Other trees are very protective in nature and their wands will do anything for their owner. There are also trees that are so universally protective - protecting all living creatures and plants - that those wands will refuse any evil spells. Some will even refuse to produce plasma bolts or spells used in combat. The Douglas Fir, which Cathy and Tanras selected, was a stately, strong and powerful tree. When a wandmaker gets permission from a Douglas Fir to use one of its branches for a wand or staff a vow must be made that the end product be only used for good and that the draíochta user

will use the wand/staff to protect the forest and its creatures as well as the draíochta.

This vow was no problem for Cathy and Tanras. What was a problem was making the staff for a third party; viz. Isla. Usually the wandmaker takes the user with them to select the wood and later has them there for the dedication. Cathy and Tanras wanted the staff to be a surprise so they had to get the tree's permission to make the staff for Isla.

The process of going from tree branch to wand or staff is similar to that of creating a quantum entanglement. The spirits must collide in such a manner that the wand/staff is like the third particle in quantum physics that spins off when two particles collide. This creates a bond of entanglement which permits instant communication between those bonded. Entanglement is the scientific explanation of oneness. Once entangled the entangled particles cannot be described, tracked or measured as independent entities but must be observed as a unit or a whole. Thus, oneness regardless of proximity. This is what enables the user to instantly focus their magic through the wand/staff. Although there has not been any research done on the subject, this is very likely the reason that, except for the rare wizard like Cathy's grandfather, all draíochta must use a wand, staff, or ring to do magic.

Having obtained permission from the Douglas Fir tree and fashioned a lovely, simple staff Cathy and Tanras' first task was to teach the staff to react to a magical dwarven blade. Wands and staff are generally used only to direct and project the power of the user, so having the staff react to the blade was a difficult task. The two conspirators had to let Sorg in on their surprise because they needed to borrow a magic dwarven blade. When the staff touched the dwarf blade they noticed that it vibrated. They worked at sensitizing the staff so that it would vibrate strongly when it was within a hundred meters of the blade. The staff would vibrate until the holder says "go raibh maith agat" – “thank you”.

They tried the staff with several blades and it performed perfectly. Now they

had to teach the staff that it should only work with Isla's touch. Cathy and Tanras decided that they would have to risk Isla finding out to get her to touch the staff.

The plan was that Cathy would take the staff and show it to Isla with the story that Turin had made it for her for hiking. When she handed it to Isla, Tanras would be behind Isla, where she couldn't see him, and he would put the spell on them as they touched.

It's great when a plan works. Isla took the staff in her hands and admired it while Tanras stood out of sight casting the spell. Now the beautiful plain looking staff should identify dwarven magic blades only for Isla. To be sure it would not respond to others, several draíochta held the staff near the magic blades. There was no reaction. If they had done everything correctly, the staff would now only respond to Isla's touch.



Thus the adventure began. Everyone wanted to go. Isla was really hoping that it could be just Sorg and her, but that was out of the question. Ara Banrion wanted to send along some royal guards. (Geez, mothers and grandmothers.) Thankfully even Gadin Rí agreed that that was both unnecessary and impractical. Having learned about the Toyota station wagon stashed in the old-looking barn, Cathy was quick to point out that she could drive them to a starting point much closer and probably save days. Turin wasn't going to let Cathy go without him and the two Torc Allta guards weren't going to let either of those two out of their sight. It was going to be a six person adventure.

The men studied the topographic map. They found a trail that led to the summit of Columbia Mountain. From there they could go north to a point which was almost directly above the spring. It was going to be close to a 4,000-foot climb. The

first two-thousand plus feet was a gradual rise over a distance of about three miles, maybe a bit more. The trail then turned almost directly uphill, which happened to be east, at which point the map indicated a number of switchbacks over the next thousand feet in about two miles. Isla sat watching the 'boys' pouring over the map. It wasn't exactly how she envisioned her adventure to be, but she realized that having some sort of route planned was important.

While Isla was becoming totally bored Cathy and Tanras Hame, the Seeker, approached Isla. Cathy was holding the staff. It was quite plain but was a beautiful piece of natural wood that had been finely finished.

"This is for your adventure," Cathy said, offering the staff to Isla.

"It's beautiful," Isla admired the fine staff.

"Take it," Tanras was obviously anxious.

Isla reached out and took the staff. Immediately it began to vibrate. "What?" exclaimed Isla.

"It works!" shouted Tanras. "It works!"

Isla gave the two of them a puzzled look, looking between Cathy, Tanras and the staff.

"Well show her," Cathy had to prompt the excited wizard.

From under his cloak Tanras produced a short sword.

"Tanras and I made this staff for you," said Cathy. "It vibrates only when you hold it and it comes near to dwarven magic. Say 'go raibh maith agat.' Isla repeated the common tongue formal phrase for 'thank you' and the staff stopped vibrating.

Tanras was all smiles. "We didn't know if it worked until you touched it. Now we know. IT WORKS!"

"How do you think you are going to find a magic dwarven blade that has been buried on the side of a mountain for a couple hundred years?" Cathy demanded.

"Well, here's the answer."

Isla smiled and gently stroked the staff.

"This is a wonderful gift," she thanked her two friends.

All this and the boys hadn't noticed. Cathy and Isla looked at them and laughed.

"Aren't you going to tell them?" asked Tanras.

"Naw," said Cathy. "Let them be surprised."



The next morning the six adventurers set out down the Tunnel Creek trail toward the old-looking barn that housed the Toyota van. To see the number of people, including the king and queen, who turned out to bid the six young people farewell, one would have thought they were being sent off to discover a new world.

The old Toyota van was like the car back east; viz. made to look common place. It was, however, a fine automobile. Cathy enjoyed driving it down US-2, the John F. Stevens Canyon. Since none of the others knew how to drive, they were all impressed with her skills. She was always in command of the vehicle. They passed through what had once been the town of Belton. It's now a part of the village of West Glacier, the entrance to Glacier National Park, but the old historic Belton Inn, the Belton railroad stop, Belton Bridge, Belton Stage Road and the Belton Hills all remind one that you can change what you call someone, something or someplace but you can't change its true identity. This was Belton.

From there they passed through the small community of Coram and soon were slowing down as they entered the town of Hungry Horse. Hungry Horse supposedly got its name from two horses that got lost along the South Fork of the Flathead River for several days and returned safely but quite skinny and hungry. Hungry Horse had been the "town" nearest the construction of the Hungry Horse Dam. At one time

there had been a great number of taverns along the road. It was called the Trapline and men would attempt to have a drink in each one in succession. There is a restaurant that still carries the name.

At the west end of town the road narrowed and crossed a small bridge. They were now entering Badrock Canyon. It was Columbia Mountain that loomed above them on the left and Teakettle Mountain across the swiftly flowing Flathead River rushing on its course southward toward the Flathead Lake. Cathy slowed down. There was silence in the car as Cathy pulled off the road and up to a spring pouring water from the mountain side.

They all sat and looked. People were gathered around the spring holding water bottles under the flow. It was life being given to the people, animals and the land. A truck pulled up to fill a large tank with water. For many of the people who lived nearby this was their only source of pure water. Looking up the mountain Isla knew that somewhere up there was Metarí and Nat'lunda.

Cathy drove the Toyota to the other end of the pull-out, found an out-of-the-way spot, and parked the van. The group got out. They stood looking back at the spring and finally turned their attention to find the infrequently used trail.

It was Winston who found the trailhead, and the six young adventurers - two dwarfs, two Torc Alta, an elf and a wizard - headed up the side of Columbia Mountain.

They were heading in a south to southwest direction and ever so gradually moving eastward as they hiked up the side of the mountain. When there were openings in the trees the group could look out on the enormous valley that was home to the towns of Columbia Falls, right below them, Kalispell and Whitefish. They maintained this constant ascent for just over three miles. Then the trail turned almost a right angle and headed east directly up the mountain in a series of switch backs. It maintained this sharp 1,600-foot ascent for over a mile arriving at the summit of the

mountain.

The group stopped and pulled out their bag lunches. They had come a long way sustained only by water and Cathy's marvelous "running food" - a nutritious chewy cookie Cathy had learned to make from an ancient Tamamuhara Indian recipe. The Tamamuhara are an Indian tribe that live in the mountains of northern Mexico. It is not uncommon for them to run fifty miles a day. In his book *Born to Run* Christopher McDougall tells about the Tamamuhara Pinole, the running food, which is toasted cornmeal, natural sugar, spices and water. The Indians would eat it as a porridge or bake it into cakes to carry when running. It could also be thinned so that it could be drunk. The running food had done a good job in providing energy, but the group was ready for something a bit more substantial.

Since the boys had all been in on the map study, they told Isla and Cathy about the ridge that was just north of the actual summit. On the map it appeared as a faux summit. It just stood out as a place of honor. From this point on they were totally off trail. Going off trail had its problems. It was difficult to maintain a straight course because of undergrowth and natural barriers that don't show up on a topo map.

It took the better part of an hour to get to the location. It was a high point, but it didn't have any panoramic view. They all agreed that the spot the Salish picked would somehow be commanding or, in the least, dominant. Turin made the observation that it could have changed a great deal over the years but, looking around, the trees were far too old. Nevertheless, the group set up camp and started looking for anything which might be a cairn, cave or other form of grave. Isla started at the high point and walked around in concentric circles with her staff. There was nothing.

After dinner Isla went off and sat at the top of the high spot. Sorg decided that she should not be alone. At least he hoped that she didn't want to be alone. He was very attracted to this eastern Dwarf who was so different than any of the females in

his claim. She was not only pretty but she was smart and quite capable of taking charge. Actually, he thought, she reminded him of his mother. Isla, Sorg thought, was very queenly.

"May I join you?" Sorg asked politely standing just below Isla.

There was a long pause and then Isla shook her head, realizing that Sorg was there and had spoken. "I'm sorry," she said, "what did you say?"

"May I join you?"

"Of course," Isla was a bit embarrassed that she had let him stand like that. "I would like that."

The two sat there. There was a long silence but, for some reason, it wasn't an uncomfortable silence. Sometimes two people can sit together and without a word share a world. Even though they both knew that somewhere nearby were the remains of a dwarven woman who epitomized everything good and gallant and compassionate about dwarfs, Isla had doubts about her own motives.

"Do you think I'm being selfish, wanting to find Metarí?" she asked Sorg.

"Not at all," Sorg replied without the slightest hesitation. "I think that Metarí has become your hero. She is the Dwarf you want to be. She is, for you, the true definition of the Dwarven woman. And I think that, somehow, she's calling you. You are the new manifestation of Metarí."

"You're being too sweet" Isla started to object.

"No I'm not," Sorg insisted. "I can't be anything but honest. You won't let me."

"What do you mean?" Isla gave Sorg a quizzical look.

"I mean that everything about you demands that I be honest and forthright," explained Sorg. "Every time I even think about saying something complimentary just to make points and make you like me, I realize that those empty compliments don't hold a candle to the truth."

"Your so"

Before Isla could get the word 'kind' or 'sweet' or anything else similar out of her mouth Sorg stopped her again. "No, I'm not being sweet or kind. I'm being honest! I don't know how to convince you."

He stopped and fell silent.

"I'm so sorry, Sorg," Isla almost pleaded. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings or doubt your truthfulness. You just make me sound like like"

"Like Metarí?"

"Yes, I guess that's it."

"You are!" Sorg exclaimed turning to face Isla. "I was enchanted by you from the beginning," Sorg paused. "I fell in love with a young Dwarf who was so obviously searching for herself. I was torn between courting you and trying to help you find yourself. I was terrified that by helping you find yourself I'd be left out. I want so much for you to fall in love with me, but I can't deny reality. You are Metarí. You have the compassion not only for your own people but for all life. I just I just I just" Sorg turned away to hide the tears that were beginning to well up in his eyes.

Isla pulled Sorg to herself and held him tight. She had no idea what to say. He had just confronted her with a reality that was so far beyond her comprehension that it left her brain swirling.

She didn't know what to say about her search or what made her feel so bonded to Metarí. She didn't know what to say about the reality with which Sorg had just confronted her. She didn't know what to say about his confession of love for her. But one thing she did know to say, "And I love you, Sorg. I would never push you away. I do love you."



The next morning it was back to the maps. There was the headwater of a stream that led down to the canyon, but there was nothing there. Going back to the maps Cathy pointed to a place on the topo maps where there were a number of lines very close together and then a large space between the lines.

"What's that?" she asked

"That," explained Turin, "is a ledge or shelf."

"Could ...?"

"Yes," interrupted Turin, "it could be a place that appears to extend out over the spring below." He leaned over and kissed her. "You are a genius!"

Cathy had indeed noticed a natural feature that wouldn't have changed with time and would put a grave almost above the spring as though to watch after it for eternity. The ledge was only a little over a mile north of their camp but to get there they had to go south about a quarter of a mile, turn west for a half mile and then follow a narrow ridge northward to the spot Cathy had identified.

As the group gathered on the ledge Isla's staff began to vibrate. Everyone stopped and stood silently. They hadn't given any thought to how they would react when the staff told them that they were near. At first they froze. Then they began to look around. A few yards in front of them the mountain dropped almost straight down at least four-hundred feet or more. Behind them was a wall that ascended several hundred feet. It is why they had to go the long way around to get here. As Isla approached the wall the staff's vibration became stronger.

For Isla this was a moment of great emotion. The others seemed to be excited as when you find a treasure. Isla could understand that and, to a point, shared that, but for her there was much more. She was anxious to "meet" Metarí. It was an anxiousness like you feel when you're about to see an old friend again after a long time. Until a few days ago Isla knew nothing of Metarí. Now she seemed like a close friend or a sister. With that feeling came fear. When you see an old friend after a long

time you know they will have changed. Sometimes the change is strictly physical - looking older - and sometimes it is a change in their person. We all change some because we adjust and react to life. Sometimes two old friends meet again and they are strangers. It is best when the old spark reignites in recognition. That is the most marvelous thing. It gives you a renewal to your life and a sense of stability. But Isla had never met Metarí. Why was she experiencing this anxiety? Perhaps it was because Sorg was right. Metarí had become Isla's idol. She wanted to be a new Metarí.

The entrance to a cave was behind a pile of rock which appeared natural. It took the group quite some time to clear away the boulders only to find one extremely large boulder in the cave entrance. The two Torc Allta took their natural form, pushing and pulling to move the massive rock. Finally, it rolled away. Before them was the open grave of Metarí McAllistar. The entrance was covered with cobwebs. They could make out the paths of rodents and other small mammals that had used the grave for home.

Alfred, back in his human form, cleared away the cobwebs with a stick. Sorg spotted a torch that had been extinguished and tossed into the grave as it was closed.

There was an apprehensive pause before Isla led the way into the cave. Sorg lighted torches along the short hallway. The entrance opened up into a large chamber. With only the light of the entrance torches the group could just make out three biers. Sorg gave Winston a lighted torch and the two started around the chamber lighting torches protruding from the wall. As they did they saw that the room was circled with shields, each with a bow or spear. All of them were battered and bloody. They were undoubtedly from the battle and may have belonged to the fallen warriors. In front of each bier were a large variety of food and household items as though the three were being prepared for a long journey. The center bier was slightly higher than the other two.

The center bier was Metarí dressed in dwarven leather armor. Nat'lunda lay on

top of her body with the hilt on her breast. It was unsheathed, as though ready for battle. But her hands were not on the hilt of the sword. They were holding a bouquet of flowers that were now dry.

On each side of Metarí was a chief. One was Piikani and the other was Salish. The Piikani chief wore a war bonnet. The Salish chief wore a basketry headdress that was a part of their ceremonies. Only about a half dozen plains Indian tribes, including the Blackfeet nation, wear the war bonnets made popular in humani movies. The Salish basketry headdress was made of cedar bark and spruce root.

It seemed highly unlikely that the chief from both tribes would have died in that battle.

"It's my guess," said Alfred speaking from a warrior's view, "that these two chiefs fought together with Metarí and earned the privilege of being buried with her when they died."

"That makes sense," said Isla not taking her eyes off Metarí. Everyone agreed.

Isla stepped up beside the skeleton. She reached out and gently touched Metarí's shoulder. The sword glowed briefly. Isla wondered whether that was a warning.

Sorg stepped up beside Isla. "You should take the sword."

"Why?" Isla whispered. "It isn't mine. If I had found it buried alone that would have been one thing. Even then, I might have brought it here and left it with Metarí. But it's already where it should be."

"Who knows who in the great hall heard me and my big mouth proclaim that Metarí was buried above Bedrock springs," Sorg looked and sounded embarrassed.

"You were just excited," Isla consoled him.

"But others could follow and rob this grave."

"I may not be the greatest witch," Cathy interrupted, "but I can put a spell on this grave that will keep it safe until I can get my brother, Kevin, here to seal it

permanently."

Isla smiled. She knew that her friends always had her back.

Evidently, however, Nat'lunda had other ideas. The sword began to glow brighter and brighter. Then it raised above Metarí with the point up and moved to just in front of Isla.

"I think the sword has no intentions of being left behind," Turin said softly.

Hesitantly Isla reached out and took the sword. When she held it the two of them became a blinding light; a light so bright that the rest of the group had to cover their eyes.

"Please leave us," Isla asked her friends once the light had subsided.

Each of them approached the remains of Metarí to pay their respects. Sorg left the dwarven dagger he wore. Cathy left an amulet she had received from her grandmother. Turin left a silver ringlet while the two Torc Allta left their sashes, a sign of great respect.

When Isla was alone with Metarí she asked, "why me?"

"Because it is your destiny," Metarí replied.

"Destiny?"

"I have been waiting for you."

"What is my destiny?"

"You will save the lives of many but the one you cannot save will give you her life and it will bring new life."

"But I'm just a simple dwarf!" Isla exclaimed.

"So was I," Metarí replied calmly. "Now I'm remembered in song and you find me buried between two wise and powerful chiefs."

"Tell me what happened," said Isla. "With such a powerful weapon why did you die?"

"I knew nothing about battle. I had succeeded in warning the Salish village and

should have withdrawn but I was still filled with hatred and anger over the death of my friend, Sohkapíni. I wanted to kill Morganians and McKintry for what they had done. The Salish Chief, Xallqs, had asked me to cross the river to be sure that all of the women and children had passed safely through the canyon while he and his braves took up positions where the two forks of the river meet. That was the only point where the Morganians and McKintry would be able to cross the river and pass through the canyon."

"I heard the calls of the braves as the enemy approached. The Morganians and McKintry were weak from being pursued by my people and the Piikani. They were totally caught by surprise when they encountered the Salish ready and waiting."

"Perhaps I was fearless, brave and powerful in battle but I was at the ford because I wanted revenge and was heading back toward the battle. A small group of McKintry warriors, including their leader, had slipped by the Salish warriors and were heading toward the ford to escape through the canyon. They were deserting the Morganians. If I had gone to the battle any earlier, leaving my place in the canyon, the McKintry would have been successful in escaping and I would have been a disgrace instead of a hero. As it was, I kept the McKintry from crossing the river and soon Salish warriors were by my side. A young Salish warrior, who couldn't have been any older than me, was hit by a McKintry sword. He was badly injured. As a Morganian stretched out his arm to kill the young warrior, I covered the young man with my body and tried to move him so he wouldn't get hit by the bolt. The bolt hit me in the back and I died still shielding the young warrior with my body."

"The Piikani chief next to me got the honor of being buried with me because of his valor and leadership in the battle. The Salish chief is Mitt-to, the young man I saved. He was the chief's son and later became a great chief himself. He asked to be buried with me so that he could stand guard over me for eternity."

"That's amazing," Isla said after several moments of trying to process what she

had heard. "You are amazing. I'm not that strong."

"Yes you are," said Metarí, "You have just not been tested ... yet. And if you permit, my spirit will reside in you. My strength and my skills will be yours and you will be Isla Metarí. But the choice must be yours."

Isla stood silently. The destiny was hers already. There was no changing that, but if she would permit the spirit of Metarí to reside in her the two would be one amazingly powerful dwarven female. It was not an easy decision. She sat down in front of Metarí's bier with Nat'lunda in her lap and tried to digest and understand what had happened and what was happening. She pondered on the ramifications of being the host to such a great spirit. Would they truly become one? What would happen if they were incompatible? Question after question arose in her mind so she and Metarí spent the night talking.

Outside the grave Isla's friends sat waiting. Occasionally one would stand up, walk to the grave entrance and look in. They knew they weren't going to see anything, but it was something to do. On even rarer occasions one would say something, but generally they got no response. Everyone was in their own thoughts. They had all seen how the sword went to Isla. What was happening inside now was only limited by their imagination.

"There's nothing to hurt her in there," someone remarks.

"No, nothing," several mumbled in reply.

"She just needs time to process what's happening."

"Anyone have any idea what's happening?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"There's nothing in there to hurt her." And the conversation would repeat.

They changed position and soon all were lying on the ground by the almost dead fire. As they drifted off to sleep one could hear the occasional "she's safe." "She just needs the time."



It was just after sunrise when Isla emerged from the grave. One by one her friends raised their heads and, each in turn, rose to stand looking at Isla in awe. They just stood and stared. It looked like Isla but it wasn't the generally shy and somewhat timid dwarf whom they all knew. Facing them was a strong dwarven woman wearing leather armor with a floor-length scarlet hooded cloak. Her dark brown hair had turned white and now cascaded over her shoulders held back by a slender band of gold. She stood erect; her feet at shoulder width and her hands resting on the hilt of Nat'lunda whose tip sat on the ground. She was smiling.

"What's for breakfast?" asked Isla Metarí casually.

As though she had given the command 'eye's right' they all looked at the dead fire then back to their friend.

"You guys look like you've seen a ghost," Isla Metarí said good-naturedly. Still no one spoke. "Okay, come over and sit down. I'll tell you everything that happened if someone will please make some tea."

The group sat down while Turin rekindled the fire and Cathy started the tea. Isla Metarí told her friends all about her night. There was no doubt to any of them that Isla had accepted Metarí. Sorg sat off to one side. He was so very happy for Isla and proud of her, but he felt that what they might have had together was gone. Their relationship was no longer a love growing between a dwarven prince and a shy dwarven physician. Would there be any relationship for him with Isla Metarí? Was he or could he be a part of this mysterious destiny? He had fallen in love with Isla and it was Isla alone who had fallen in love with him. What about Isla Metarí? The more he thought the less he was hearing what was going on around him and the more withdrawn he was becoming.

Sorg's demeanor wasn't lost on Isla Metarí. She noticed that while he was smiling his eyes were sad. She wanted to reach out to him to reassure him but there was always someone there. As they were packing up for the hike back to the car Sorg wondered off and Isla Metarí followed.

She found him standing on a rock promontory looking out over the canyon. Far below was the Badrock Canyon spring. He was so lost in his thoughts that he didn't hear her approach.

Standing right next to him Isla Metarí said, "It's been a crazy two days, hasn't it?"

"Sure has," said Sorg without raising his head or turning.

"Something's wrong."

"Well, I ... uhm, I mean ... It's just that ..." Sorg couldn't find the words to say what he wanted to say.

"Do you know I've never been in love before?" Isla Metarí began. Sorg glanced over at her scared to even think about where this might lead. "When it happened, I wasn't sure it was love. It didn't seem anything like what I'd expected or read about in books. It was so warm and real and comfortable in a very uncomfortable way, if you know what I mean."

Sorg looked again. Isla Metarí smiled at him. "Did you know the difference between love and infatuation your first time?" she laughed. Sorg had to laugh too and shook his head 'no'.

"Do you know the first thing that came to my mind when I was confronted with the decision to allow Metarí's spirit to become a part of my life and spirit?" Sorg just stood looking in fear. "The first thing that came to my mind was whether or not the new me would lose any chance of being loved by you."

Sorg turned to face Isla Metarí. There were tears running down her face. "I knew," she said through the tears, "that whatever awaits me isn't going away." She

took a moment to wipe her tears and try to regain her composure. "I knew that I was going to need Metarí to survive and even though it was my choice, I didn't really have the right to deny Metarí. I know her spirit now. It is with me and becoming a part of me. She was a beautiful being and I am not afraid of her being a part of me. But looking at you I wonder if my greatest fear is true."

"What's that?" Sorg asked. He had been listening but he had been afraid to hear.

"My greatest fear is that there would never be an 'us!'" Isla Metarí burst into tears, put her head on Sorg's shoulder and sobbed.

Sorg wrapped the sobbing Isla Metarí in his embrace. "That was my fear too!" he whispered in her ear.

"Then . . . ?" Isla Metarí started to ask.

"I will be by your side, loving you, as long as you will have me."

The two embraced in a deep and passionate kiss. They didn't want to let go of each other. They didn't want the moment to end.

Cathy had been looking for the two of them to let them know that everyone was packed up and ready. She came to the edge of the trees as they embraced.

"Finally," she said to herself with an audible sigh. She returned to tell the others that it would be a little while before Sorg and Isla Metarí were ready to go.

CHAPTER 3

Life was very different in the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth after the group returned. The Shadowrealm took on a new life which was energetic and vibrant. Gadin Rí and Ara Banrion could hardly wait for the evening gathering in the Great Hall where draíochta from both inside and outside the flaitheas scáth would come to report new things happening in the kingdom. Cathy, Turin and Thebur Springlord would always have exciting stories about draíochta from across the kingdom now returning to the clinic and learning or re-learning ways to stay happy and healthy, not getting dragged down and becoming ill with human baggage. As Isla had foretold, Thebur had more to teach Cathy and Turin than they had to teach him, but the exchange was always exciting. No one became more excited than Cathy did about the marvelous new world of herbs and preventative medicine that Thebur was opening up for her. Thebur was excited about the clinic's face-lift and the modern new equipment that BPF Hospital had sent. To get it from Atlanta to McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth they created a portkey near the trail by the flaitheas scáth entrance. It was a calculated risk and was closed as soon as everything had been sent. Thebur now had the supplies and equipment to handle emergencies and situations beyond the scope of traditional medicine.

There was still the problem of medical care for those who lived away from the flaitheas scáth. The three physicians paid a visit to Dr. Mark Demer. Mark, who had grown up in northwestern Montana, had gone off to make his mark on the world and had become a highly respected and prosperous physician. Medicare learned that Mark had treated a dying woman for free because Medicare denied her claim. He had relieved her pain and permitted her to have a peaceful death with her family around her. Medicare doesn't permit such humane acts of kindness for free. It is against the rules. A practitioner cannot treat a patient for free without Medicare permission, and

they never give permission. Medicare calls such humane acts "fraud". They almost destroyed Mark. He sold what was left of his practice and returned to the North Fork where he made his living as a seasonal ranger with the National Park Service and a medic at a ski lodge. He had treated a number of members of Clainn McAllistar who live in the mountain wilderness and with whom he had become friends. He knew of McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth but did not know its location.

Mark was surprised when he opened his cabin door to find Cathy, Turin and Thebur.

"Well, I'll be!" exclaimed Dr. Demer. "Lost again?" he laughed.

"Not this time," Cathy took the teasing good naturedly. "In fact, you're just the one we're looking for."

"Me?"

"Yep," said Cathy. "we know a few little people who know you and said that you're just the person we need."

"Need?"

"May we come in?"

Mark's cabin was made from local logs, probably none cut more than fifty yards from the cabin. The main room consisted of a very comfortable sitting area on one side under a loft that was accessed by a ladder, and a cooking area on the other end dominated by a fireplace, Hoosier cabinet and table. There was a small bedroom that had been added and a door that accessed the storage lean-to.

A long, friendly and very productive conversation followed. Mark was thrilled with the idea of collaborating with Cathy, Turin and Thebur. There were only two conditions - first, he had to be allowed to visit McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth because he had heard so much about it, and secondly, he wanted Thebur to teach him the preventative and herbal skills of the draíochta. The four healers spent hours talking about their individual and group role in providing Clainn McAllistar with good health

care, and they parted with the promise to meet again two days later when Dr. Demer would make his first visit to McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth.



Tanras Hame was revitalized in his efforts by the success of the staff he and Cathy had made for Isla. He had made friends with a Piikani Blackfeet *áípi'kssokinaki* (shaman) named Napikyáiyó who was into the old ways. The old shaman told many stories that had been passed along to him that were about small people with strange dress and magic ways. Today the young people laughed at the stories so Napikyáiyó was happy to tell them in the hopes that this white man would write them down and they would survive him.

"Before the white man came to live in our land," Napikyáiyó said, "a war party of white men came and killed everyone in a peaceful Piikani village just east of what is today called Calf Robe Mountain. Because of the friendship of two girls, the Piikani and the Sahkáikahtomi-wa, joined together to destroy the invaders. The Sahkáikahtomi-wa were short, wore leather armor and carried bows, axes and swords. They were fierce warriors. My people had never seen axes and swords like the Sahkáikahtomi-wa made. The Sahkáikahtomi-wa girl, whose Piikani friend had been killed, crossed the southern mountains and cut off the invader's escape, saving a Salish village. We were not at peace with the Salish but this was a common enemy. It is said that the Salish asked that she be buried at one of their sacred spots."

Tanras smiled. He wanted to tell his friend the rest of the story but it couldn't be. He wanted to give confirmation to his new friend, but he knew that it would not be good for either Napikyáiyó or the McAllistar clainn.

One evening Napikyáiyó told the story of a tiny shaman called Imoika - hairy feet - who had lived on the mountain known as Nínaistáki.

"Nínaistáki is a scared mountain to my people and Imoika lived in a cave near the base of the mountain. Imoika was a powerful shaman with strange ways, but he had great reverence and love for Nínaistáki so he was respected by the Piikani. His wisdom was legendary."

"It was not uncommon for Imoika to be gone for weeks at a time, returning loaded down with herbs and berries and lots of great stories about magic. After one such trip Imoika was particularly excited. He had a treasure of such great importance and value that he had to go to a great king in the mountain for counsel. He returned to his cave after two moons had passed. With the help of the great king he had hidden the treasure so it would be safe. Every year after that Imoika would travel to visit the treasure and assure that it was safe."

This story excited Tanras. Could this shaman, who was probably a dwarf, have received a Crann na Beatha seed? Who was the "great king"? Piikani didn't usually use the title "king". Actually, the word for king - aáhsa - is also used for grandfather, a mother- or father-in-law, or an uncle. Why did Napikyáiyó translate it as "king"? Could the king have been of Clainn McAllistar? Tanras needed to see Imoika's cave. Perhaps, even after all of these years, there might be some clue.

Napikyáiyó recruited a young Piikani man named Mahx, which means 'red' in Blackfeet. While Napikyáiyó addressed him as Mahx, the young man went by Max in the English world. Mahx was a tall, slender man in his mid-twenties. He had gone to college and was a teacher at the reservation school. Mahx was one of the few younger generation who listened to Napikyáiyó and wanted to learn the old ways.

With Mahx as their guide the three men headed toward Nínaistáki. Mahx drove them in his beat-up pickup to a dirt road that turned off Highway 17 almost due east of Nínaistáki. The dirt road was too much for the old pickup so they packed and started toward the sacred mountain on foot.

Nínaistáki is like an enormous monolith standing well away from other

mountains. In Glacier National Park, the mountains are predominantly sandstone, shale and limestone. The mountains in the park are made of some of the oldest sedimentary rock on Earth. A unique feature of the mountains in Glacier is that often the oldest rock is at the top of the mountain. That's because the mountains were created by two forces: firstly, the earth's crust to the west was pushed up over the crust to the east. This is called the Lewis Overthrust. Secondly, at one time only the peaks of the mountains over ten-thousand feet high were visible above the ice. As the ice receded the glaciers began to carve the landscape millions of people from around the world go to see each year. Glacier is one of three places on earth where one finds stromatolites; the fossils of the oldest life on earth and the reason we have oxygen on earth today. The other two places are in Australia and Siberia. A wall of stromatolites that is about six feet high and ten to twelve feet long can be seen at over 7,000 feet up Mt. Oberlin.

It was easy for Tanras to see why Nínaistáki is a sacred mountain to the Blackfeet. It is sacred to many first nations people and native peoples from all around travel to its base for sweet grass ceremonies and other spiritual acts like placing of prayer flags. Tanras felt a swell of anger when he learned that when the United States government, which has broken absolutely every treaty it ever made with indigenous people, drew the park boundary so that it took in half of the sacred mountain.

Less than two miles up the road a trail headed northwest. This trail, explained Mahx, would lead nearest the mountain base with a much less steep incline. If Imoika lived up against the mountain it would have to be around this area. Napikyáiyó agreed. He was proud of his young protege whom he hoped would take his place when he was gone.

It took several hours to get to the base of Nínaistáki. From where they stood the mountain seemed to go straight up. At its base the mountain sloped off gently like a giant fan. It was the only place near the base of the mountain like that.

They made camp just below 7,200 feet elevation where the mountain began to rise almost straight up. After dinner Tanras was admiring the beauty of the sacred mountain. Something told him he was in a sacred place. He could feel it. He could feel a sense of inner peace. He watched and listened to Napikyáiyó tell stories. There was almost an aura around the elder shaman as though he was the visible manifestation of generations of sacred spirits. The aura was not bright but was lighter than the area around him and as Tanras watched the aura seemed to engulf Mahx who listened intently to Napikyáiyó's every word. Tanras had no doubts why Imoika loved this mountain.

The next morning Tanras had picked out a recess in the side of the giant monolith to explore. He had studied the rest of the walls for signs of a cave without success. There was an area of the recess which he couldn't see. If there was nothing there Mahx suggested that they move around the mountain in a counter-clockwise direction so they were not forced down by the steep southeastern wall.

They began their ascent. They did switch backs to make climbing in the frequent scree easier. It took a long time to cover a relatively short distance. There was nothing there.

The three men sat silently on the mountain side sipping at their camelback water containers and eating energy bars. They knew they should not be so disappointed so early on their first day, but they were. It just seemed like the right place. There was a lot of mountain to explore and they were looking for a cave which might have been buried in a landslide years ago. There was, they had to admit, even the possibility that Imoika lived somewhere else but it made for a better story to have him live on the sacred mountain.

Just below them and to their southeast was a large scree field. The men did not want to cross the scree nor did they want to descend three to four hundred feet to go around it then climb back up. They made their way down to the edge of the field

which was a steep slope covered with loose rock a good five or six hundred feet long and three hundred feet wide. It was Mountain Goat and Big Horn Sheep terrain. Anyone else approached at their own risk.



For millennium no one paid attention to a wizard walking along the road with his staff. That was probably because there were lots of people walking along the road with a staff. It was easier for a wizard to use a magic staff than fumble through a pocket for a wand. Rings were the easiest but they were hard to come by and easily lost. Besides, back then you always used a staff on the road. It served as a walking stick and self-defense.

Tanras didn't really like twenty-first century humani garb but he kept his black cassock and purple trimmed cloak in a backpack while wearing blue jeans, flannel shirt, hiking boots and a Tilly hat. Even with his six-foot staff he wasn't out of place in western United States.

The wood for Tanras' staff had been a gift when he graduated from Draíochta Academy and decided to become an Iarrthóir, or seeker. A friend and mentor named Mangard Tilbert was the Iarrthóir who inspired Tanras. Mangard had found his Crann na Beatha while Tanras was still in school. It was in the northern end of the Coillearnach kingdom in what the humani call Vermont. The tree's name was Lilliletta. She was extremely old and had recently lost her Cosantóir, defender. (The Iarrthóir may become the tree's Cosantóir, defender, once he or she is accepted by the Crann na Beatha, but this generally only happens when the Iarrthóir is a relatively powerful draíochta.) Mangold brought Tanras an oak sapling.

Tanras had created a long staff with the ezingocer tag spell. He named the staff Tagaim and the two became very close. It is exceptionally rare for Tagaim to be out of

'Tanras' sight. No one seems to notice that if 'Tagaim is lying on the ground or against a tree, all Tanras has to do is open his hand toward the staff and it will go to him.

Tanras prefers that no one notice.

One cannot see or detect a flaitheas scáth but one can detect the magic of the entrance. This is the most vulnerable point. There are three types of entrances. The first is a password entrance. It is the most common where a tree, rock, wall or other feature which would commonly be found in that location is a magical entrance activated by touching it in a particular way while stating the password. Flaitheas scáth like the Clainn McAllistar and Coillearnach are password entrances. They do not require constant attention but because anyone can use the password it is best to have some other form of security, like guards.

The second type of entrance is the touch recognition entrance. As the name tells, this is an entrance where the flaitheas scáth recognizes the person's touch and opens allowing them to pass through. There is a single-entry version of the touch recognition where only the person recognized can enter. This is common. There is another, quite rare, version where the recognized person can be accompanied by a set number of others.

The third entrance is an open guarded entrance where one must know to enter, usually along a path, through a magic wall or backwards door but no password or recognition is required. This type is always heavily guarded.

A staff with an ezingocer tag spell can detect the magic associated with a gate. Hence Tagaim was 'Tanras' constant companion.



Napikyáiyó, Mahx and Tanras stood trying to decide whether to cross or go around the scree field. A scree field is actually quite dangerous and most parks make

them off-limits instead of trying to get people to stay off on their own. The rock is quite loose. To attempt to climb a scree field is comparable to trying to climb one of those giant piles of gravel one sees at a quarry; viz. one step forward, slide two back, usually ending with you lying at the bottom covered with rock. The difference is that a scree field is generally on the side of or around the base of a mountain and to end up at the bottom covered with rock is most likely fatal. Mountain Goats and Big Horn Sheep are about the only animals known to venture out on scree fields, and, if you watch them, they pick their footing carefully.

It was not an easy decision so Tagaim decided to help. Tagaim began to gently vibrate. If Tanras had not been caught off guard and reacted to Tagaim's movement the others might not have noticed. But Tanras did react and the other did notice.

Tanras had no choice but take the two men into his confidence, at least as far as being a wizard with a magic staff. He wasn't going to share information about Crann na Beatha or McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. In hindsight he realized that sooner or later he was going to have to tell them. He hadn't given any thought to how he was going to use Tagaim without the humani noticing.

As it turned out Napikyáiyó wasn't at all surprised. In fact, he was delighted. Mahx, on the other hand, wasn't sure he could buy into the "wizard thing" but he didn't have any other explanation for the vibrating staff. That disappointed Napikyáiyó who was seeing Mahx as a possible apprentice.

Tanras pointed the staff down the mountain. Tagaim became quiet. When Tanras pointed across the scree field Tagaim began to vibrate again. "Go raibh maith agat," Tanras said. The staff became quiet.

"It said that way," exclaimed Napikyáiyó pointing across the field of scree. "Let's go!"

"Wait a minute!" Mahx put his hand on his mentor's shoulder. "Let's think this through rationally."

Napikyáiyó wanted nothing to do with rational. With the knowledge of 'Tanras' wizardhood, finding Imoika's cave became more important. If Imoika was, like Tanras, a wizard then who know what they might find in his cave. Napikyáiyó was in favor of the shortest, most direct route.

Tanras was anxious as well but he looked at the forbidding scree. One false step and all three of them could end up in a pile of rock hundreds of feet below.

Napikyáiyó, however, was not about to wait. He hurried into the scree field expecting the others to follow. Three steps out and he was sliding down the mountain. Mahx immediately ran down the edge of the field. Without thought to his own safety he leaped across boulders and himself sliding, albeit a semi-controlled slide, down the mountain to get ahead of his master. Mahx sprinted a good twenty yards before he was able to intercept the elder shaman.

"Are you hurt?!" ask Mahx once he was able to catch his breath.

"Just my pride," Napikyáiyó said sheepishly hanging his head and avoiding eye contact. "Years ago I would have been on the other side waiting for you."

"You could have been killed," Mahx started to scold the elder Napikyáiyó but Tanras shaking his head 'no' caught his attention and he stopped.

"I'm so sorry," Napikyáiyó's pride was totally destroyed. "I gave up wisdom for the excitement of the prize, and I put your life in danger because of my foolishness. Please forgive me."

"That's okay," Mahx patted the old man on the shoulder. "We now know we're not cutting across."

Hours later the three men began to climb back toward the point at which the mountain goes straight up. Tanras was following Tagaim who led them to a pile of rock against a wall of a large recession.

"Tá draíocht ann anseo?" Tanras spoke to the staff. Tagaim vibrated.

"What did you say?" asked Mahx.

"More importantly, what was the answer?" Napikyáiyó added.

"I asked it if there was magic," Tanras said to Mahx. "And it said 'yes'" he smiled at Napikyáiyó.

"Please help me move this rock," Tanras spoke to Tagaim in the draíochta common language. Soon the two were moving stones and boulders from the side of the mountain. Napikyáiyó and Mahx stood and watched in awe, and shared Tanras' disappointment when the rocks were moved and there was nothing. Tanras just sat down on the ground and stared at the mountain wall.

"Could Tagaim have made a mistake?" Mahx asked as gently as possible after a long silence.

"No," Tanras said sadly, "Tagaim can only react to magic, so it must have been something I did wrong."

"Well if you did something wrong," Napikyáiyó reasoned, "then it must be that you misunderstood what Tagaim was telling you."

"That makes sense," agreed Tanras.

Turning toward the deep gash in the side of the sacred mountain Napikyáiyó said, "could the magic be further up the mountain?"

"Look at that," Tanras said in exasperation, "it goes almost straight up and there are no signs of caves or crevices or anything that would indicate a place to live."

"You're a man of magic, but you don't sound like one," Napikyáiyó scolded. "What would you do if you were Imoika?"

Tanras looked at the old shaman as though he had just given him a new life.

"It would be right in front of us," said Tanras standing up and looking around. "He's hidden it. That's the magic Tagaim is sensing."

"Could it be a place like ... oof!" Mahx had started to walk into a fair-sized flat area and had bumped into something big.

Tanras quickly ran to the spot and started patting the object, working his way

toward the ground. At the ground he found an edge of what appeared to be material. He lifted it gently. As he lifted large rocks nearby began to move. They had obviously been put there to keep the material from being blown away. The others watched.

"Have you ever heard of an invisibility cloak?" Tanras asked.

"No," they both replied.

"It is usually a cloak which makes the wearer invisible," Tanras noticed Mahx's skepticism. "It's actually mostly chemistry. Humani chemists played with the theory off and on through the latter part of their twentieth century with some minor success. They just never got past the chemistry and into the magic, the quantum physics, of the process."

Mahx and Napikyáiyó just stood looking.

"Bottom line," Tanras smiled as he started lifting the material, "Imoika made a very large invisibility cloak." The other two men started to help lift the heavy material. "I'll bet anything we find Imoika's cave under here."

It was slow going. Imoika had put a large number of rather sizable rocks on the material to keep it from blowing away. After a lot of effort and a lot of tugging on the very sizable piece of material a beehive hut stood before them.

"Beehive huts were common in western Ireland, especially on the islands off the west coast," said Tanras studying the structure. "The McAllistars are Irish but I can't say I ever remember Dwarfs using beehive huts."

"Does it matter?" Mahx was getting anxious to look inside but was being polite and letting Tanras go first.

With that Tanras looked over at Mahx, recognized the signs of anxious excitement, smiled and said, "I guess not," as he started through the door.

The structure was typical of a beehive hut. There was one small round room with a fire ring in the middle. It was hardly high enough for the three men to stand up. There was nothing in the room except a cupboard that had at one time been

attached to the wall.

"This is exciting," offered Mahx with a decidedly disappointed tone.

"What did you expect?" asked Napikyáiyó.

"A bit more perhaps," replied Mahx.

"Oh, there's more," said Tanras smiling. "There's more. If no one ever found this place after Imoika disappeared, then why is it empty?"

"Because this is just a front?" offered Mahx.

"Exactly! He was a dwarf wizard, not a hermit. He would have liked a nice comfortable cabin or tipi as much as the next person."

"So how do we find his real digs?" asked Mahx.

"Start feeling the walls for anything unusual ... unusual frame, unusual paint, unusual feel ... anything."

The three men started tapping and patting the walls of the hut. Napikyáiyó started to go around the cupboard which was falling off the wall.

"Give him a hand, please," Tanras said to Mahx. "We need to check behind it as well."

Mahx pulled the cupboard the rest of the way off the wall as Napikyáiyó started checking the wall behind. Suddenly his arm disappeared into the wall. He looked at Mahx and said "you were saying something about magic?"

"Great stuff," Mahx smiled at the jab. "Great stuff."

The room was of fair size, probably ten feet wide and sixteen feet long. It was filled with a soft light coming through windows on either side of a door to their right. Mahx looked back toward the beehive hut and then walked to the windows. The look on his face told Tanras that he needed some explanation. Napikyáiyó stood and smiled.

"Where are we?" Mahx demanded.

"Somewhere along Tunnel Creek," Tanras said casually looking out the window.

"There's Grant Mountain."

"How in the hell . . .," Mahx looked dismayed.

"Magic," Tanras began, "is not about doing unnatural or impossible things. It is about knowing physical sciences."

"This isn't science!" Mahx exclaimed.

"Oh, but it is," Tanras tried to be gentle with the distraught young man. "You see your humani quantum scientists will have to admit that theoretically it is possible to step from point A, here on our earth, to point B in another galaxy. I won't even attempt to explain quantum oneness, entanglement, or the fact that nothing is really solid but everything is energy. I will tell you that draíochta, those who are called magic people, are not doing the impossible but have learned to manipulate the energy. The only thing which is different between draíochta and humani is that draíochta use fifty to seventy percent of our brain power. Humani only use around ten to fifteen percent."

Mahx stood shaking his head. "You mean to tell me that we stepped from the side of Nínaistáki to someplace near Grant Mountain because of quantum physics?!"

"That's what I'm telling you," Tanras patted the young man on the shoulder. "The things which Napikyáiyó does and which some laugh and call hocus-pocus are actually an intelligent humani attempting to learn and apply what the draíochta already know. His senses tell him that it should be possible. His senses are good."

Napikyáiyó beamed with Tanras' confirmation of his shamanic rituals.

"So you can just pop in and out of anyplace?" asked Mahx.

"Not quite," Tanras laughed. "We have a number of ways to cover long distances like Ley Lines and Port Keys, but for the most part we travel just like you." Tanras paused then added, "except we probably walk a lot more than humani."

"So why did Imoika do this?"

"My guess is that he wanted to be easily assessable to your people while also

wanting to be here, which was probably his original home." Tanras came dangerously close to saying that Imoika was a Clainn McAllistar dwarf and this was his home. Imoika obviously loved the Piikani people as well as having some deep relationship with Nínaistáki. This way he was able to dwell in both worlds. What, Tanras wondered to himself, caused him to disappear?

To the left, coming in from the exterior door, was a kitchen area complete with a cooking fireplace, what the humani call a hoosier cabinet, and a table. Not far from the fireplace was a rocking chair that appeared to be well used. Next to it was a small side table with a pipe lying in an ashtray. Opposite the door was a work table covered with cruets, bottles and bags of unknown powders and dried leaves. At the back of the table, against the wall, was a bookcase filled with old manuscripts and leather-bound books. To the right of the door, under a sleeping loft accessed by a wooden ladder, was a large desk with green cloth covering. The desk was dominated by a large writing box and was covered with papers and open books. Behind the desk was another bookcase. A lamp hung from the support beam for the loft as well as a homemade globe.

While Napikyáiyó and Mahx wandered around the room, Tanras focused on the work table and the desk. The powders could have been rare earths. He wondered if Imoika was trying a bit of alchemy. The desk, however, told a story of fear and concern.

The papers and books that cluttered the desk were all about evil draíochta creatures that are either found in nature or can be created by evil wizards or other draíochta. Tanras' eyes fell upon one name and he knew why Imoika disappeared. The name was Ceann a Dhualgas.

Ceann a Dhualgas is an exceptionally evil creature that is created by and works for a master. It was first created, according to legend, by a particularly nasty wizard named Aonolc. Aonolc was supposed to have lived in the time when humani were

just building villages and still did not have writing. He was able to subdue and enslave a number of villages in what is today Denmark. As Aonolc became more powerful and hungry for more and more land, he encountered a Crann na Beatha (tree of life) that protected all life-forms and kept him from expanding his kingdom. He was able to destroy the Crann na Beatha. Because of his wrath and hatred toward Crann na Beatha, Aonolc created the Ceann a Dhualgas (stalker) to hunt down and viciously destroy all Crann na Beatha. Legend holds that that is when draíochta began to hide the Crann na Beatha.

Lying to one side on the desk was a leather-bound volume with no title. Tanras opened it. It was Imoika's journal. Tanras sat down and opened the journal.

"3rd day after Chokecherry. 19th year of Sedrick Rí. Metarí, the king's daughter, died in the battle where the Morganians were trapped between the Salish on the south and the McAllistars and the Píikaní on the north. She died saving a young warrior who turned out to be the son of the Salish chief. Sedrick allowed her to be buried in a place sacred to the Salish. He almost died of grief. No one can console him."

"8th day after Corn Planting Moon. 20th. year of Sedrick Rí. I am convinced that there is a Ceann a Dhualgas in the area. It probably came with the Morganians and survived the battle because it was not created to fight but seek and destroy. There are times when I know I'm being followed. I have gone to great lengths to get home undetected, and have been successful thus far. I have not gone to mo grá for almost a fortnight."

"10th day of Corn Planting Moon. 20th. year of Sedrick Rí. I doubled back on my trail today and caught sight of that which was following me. It was, indeed, Ceann a Dhualgas. I am no match for this creature. If he

determines that I know the location of a Crann na Beatha he will capture and torture me. No one can resist the torture and magic of Ceann a Dhualgas. I must either escape or take my own life so I do not give away the location of mo grá. I wish that I had time to say goodbye to my dear Píikani friends. If I do not come back, my prayer is that an Iarrthóir will come and take my place, for a true Iarrthóir will first seek illumination."

That was Imoika's last entry.

"What's a Crann na Beatha? What's a Ceann a Dhualgas? And what's an Iarrthóir?" Unbeknown to Tanras, Napikyáiyó had been reading over his shoulder.

Tanras repeated the legends and accounts of Crann na Beatha that he had shared with Cathy and her friends, and explained the horrible Ceann a Dhualgas.

"And I am an Iarrthóir. The title means 'seeker'. We are specially trained wizards who dedicate our lives to finding and protecting the last of the Crann na Beatha from creatures like Ceann a Dhualgas and their evil masters."

"But you must never mention this to anyone," Tanras emphasized every word. "If you do it could be fatal to all of us as well as Crann na Beatha."

"Do you think that Imoika was an Iarrthóir like you?" asked Mahx.

"Most likely," replied Tanras. "He spoke often of mo grá which means 'my love.'"

"'a true Iarrthóir will first seek illumination.' was a clue for you, wasn't it?" said Napikyáiyó still staring at the page.

"Yes."

"Illumination could mean enlightenment or it could mean simply something you see by a light." Mahx strained to see the diary.

"Good observation," Tanras smiled. "A true Iarrthóir does not seek enlightenment. So he must be speaking of light."

"A light fixture?"

"No, Where would we look for light in a place like this?"

"Imoika lived in what we call the middle of the 19th century," said Napikyáiyó. "They didn't have electricity, obviously," looking up at the candle lamp above them, "so they would have some place to store candles, torches, and oil."

"A candle box," Tanras said excitedly. "He would have had a candle box to keep new candles, pieces of used candles, and the means to light them without magic."

The search began. "I don't know what a candle box looks like," Mahx called over his shoulder as he started scanning the room.

"Just look for a box," Napikyáiyó and Tanras both called out at the same time.

"Oh great Quantum magic guide me to find this bloody box," Mahx was holding his hands in the air in supplication.

Napikyáiyó looked at Tanras who was smiling. "Don't laugh. That was me not long ago and I didn't even know about the quantum physics."

It was actually Mahx who ultimately found the candle box in the kitchen. Napikyáiyó looked at Tanras and said "maybe I should rethink going back to those days." They laughed.

The box was a very unassuming box that two of the three men had overlooked in the corner of the hoosier cabinet. It was made of an unstained light-colored wood, probably a pine. There were no hinges or latches on the box. The lid simply fit into the top. Inside were a couple of candles and some matches. At the bottom, unnoticeable unless you turn out the contents of the box, was a key.

"Oh, boy," exclaimed Mahx. "Is this guy ever going to give us a break?"

"No," said Napikyáiyó. "whatever is at the other end of this hunt was extremely important to Imoika so he wants to make sure that only the right people can find it."

Another search ensued. This time it was Tanras who found a small tin with a key lock in the bottom of the writing box. The key fit. Inside was blank paper. It was

blank until Tanras touched it. With his touch writing appeared. When he passed it to one of the others the writing disappeared. On the paper there was what appeared like a poem written in Draíochta Common Language.

my love calls to me like the pica upon its nest
what is hidden and cannot be seen
atop the sacred monolith
toward the setting sun just before the duck flying moon
as the land grows warm
life blood of the land pulsing
where north meets south forever joined
looking at half-three above the summer creeks
á mo ghrá ann
her kiss like the sweet nectar of the snowberry

Tanras translated the poem and the three men studied and read the poem for quite some time before Napikyáiyó spoke.

"I think that lines one, five and the last line are nothing more than markers to throw off anyone who might accidentally get ahold of this."

"What do you mean?" asked Tanras.

"What is a pica?"

"It's a small rodent that lives in the high mountains."

"Doesn't this make it sound like a bird? A pica doesn't call from its nest."

"You're right."

"Do you eat snowberries?"

"Heavens no!"

"Then why would he say her kiss is like the sweet nectar of the snowberry."

"Got me again."

"For the last one you need to know something about our Blackfeet way of telling the passage of time. The 'duck flying moon' is the last full moon before winter, but he puts in a line that says 'as the land grows warm'. The land sure isn't growing warm. So that line is, what do they call it, oh, red tuna."

"Red herring," Mahx laughed.

"Either way, definitely fishy," said Napikyáiyó.

"That means that only lines two, three and four, then six, seven and eight are important," said Tanras.

"That would be my take on it," replied Napikyáiyó.

The three men studied the six lines - two sets of three lines.

"What is hidden and cannot be seen must mean that it is hidden like his beehive," Mahx offered.

"Yes," replied Tanras. "If we are talking about a Crann na Beatha, it would be in a flaitheas scáth."

"A flaylie what?" asked Napikyáiyó.

"Tell you later, but for now something like the beehive."

"Where did we start?" asked Napikyáiyó.

"On Nínaistáki," Mahx added excitedly. "And it's a sacred mountain."

"Which looked like a monolith," added Tanras.

"And if you could be standing on Nínaistáki looking toward the setting sun just before the duck flying moon you would be looking south south-west," said Mahx.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Tanras.

"What?!" the other two demanded.

"He's giving us coordinates by which to triangulate the location of Crann na Beatha."

"How?"

"It takes at least two lines to triangulate a location. One is a line that goes south south-west from the top of Nínaistáki. The second will be a line from a different location. Where the lines cross is the location."

"Creeks coming out of the mountains are the life blood of this country," said Napikyáiyó.

"North and south meeting could mean any number of things. North and south meet wherever you stand. It meets where I am standing now, and," Mahx said moving a few feet, "it meets right here too. There is always a north and a south."

"What are your major rivers and creeks around here?" asked Tanras.

"The Flathead is probably the biggest and most well-known," said Mahx. "There's the north fork, middle fork and south fork." He stopped and looked down at the poem. "North and South forks."

"Do they come together?" Tanras asked.

"Yes, down by the little town of Hungry Horse. That's where Metarí died." said Napikyáiyó.

"But what does the 'looking at half-three above the summer creeks' mean?" Mahx threw a damp blanket on the fire.

"Since this must be the second line for triangulation it must refer to a direction," Tanras was thinking out loud.

"But half-three isn't a direction," said Mahx, "it's a number. Half three is one and one half."

"It must be an object," interjected Napikyáiyó, "because it says 'looking at.'"

The discussion went on and on until Napikyáiyó notice that it was getting dark.

"There is a place we can go which is very near here, but we can't leave the beehive hut exposed. We've already left it visible the whole time we've been in here," said Tanras.

"You're speaking of the secret home of the Sakháikahtomi-wa." Napikyáiyó

smiled at the surprised expression on Tanras' face. "We have our stories which we only share between medicine men."

"You two go ahead to this secret home," said Mahx. "I'll go back out through the beehive, cover it up, hike out and get the truck in the morning. I'll drive around to the - what was the name of that trail?"

"Tunnel Creek. Seven miles past Essex where that old Isaac Walton Inn is. You will turn left and find where people have been camping by the road bridge over Tunnel Creek. Start up the trail toward Grant Mountain and we'll find you."

Mahx repeated back the direction. "Works for me," he said with a smile as he disappeared through the passage into the beehive.

CHAPTER 4.

In the middle of an enormous meadow filled with wildflower covered with bees and butterflies was a gigantic tree. It was over five hundred feet high and one-hundred twenty feet in diameter. A small figure sat against the roots of the giant tree. The roots wrap around him like he was being embraced or cuddled like a small child. He was small in stature and a bit stocky. His legs were pulled up almost to his chest giving the impression of his lying in a fetal position. He wore calf-length britches held up by braces - what American humani call suspenders. His shirt was white linen with full-cut sleeves and a v-neck held together with laces. His feet were bare and noticeably hairy. His hair was long and white. His face looked ancient with deep lines. He might not have looked so old if he had not looked so sad.

"You worry too much, my dear Mokakiápi," said a disembodied voice which seemed to come from the tree.

"I hope, Earrach," replied the aged dwarf, "but . . ."

"But," interrupted Earrach, "you made sure Isla found the diary and became Isla Metarí. You made sure that Napikyáiyó knew your story and that Tanras Hame found him. Now all that is left is to lead Lady Manwathiel to the password." Earrach paused. "You have done well."

"But Ceann a Dhualgas still lurks nearby. Can I bring them to us before it finds us?"

"You are doing a fine job. Now you must give Lady Manwatheil the password."

"I'm afraid to go out any more. Every time I go in and out of our flaitheas scáth I risk getting caught or showing Ceann a Dhualgas our location."

"It is a risk we must take. We need those three."

"As you wish."



Mokakiápi, known as Imoika among the Blackfeet, knew that the only way of giving Cathy - Lady Manwathiel - the password was in what is called a controlled dream. He couldn't risk just walk up to her and tell her the password to his dear Earrach's flaitheas scáth. They might be overheard by the wrong person or she might not believe him and/or tell someone so that the password would no longer be a secret. No, he had to teach her the password in such a way that she would have no idea she knew but, when the time came to use it, she would realize that she knew it.

Most people assume that a controlled dream is done by controlling the subject's mind. This is not true. It is, in fact, a matter of bringing together two or more consciousness in the realm of the universal consciousness called Akasha. As the source of information for all sentient being, Akasha provides a place where one consciousness can encounter another.

To purposely make this happen takes tremendous concentration and skill. The person wanting to guide the dream actually seeks out the subject in Akasha. This requires that the subject be contemplating a key subject or words. To do this requires what is called 'Priming'. Priming is the process whereby the subject is so sensitized to a key word or subject that she/he cannot help but think of it when they go to sleep. Sometimes priming is done physically by giving the subject a suggestion and sometimes indirectly by having the keyword or subject come up in their conversation extremely frequently so that they cannot help but think of it when they go to sleep.

Once the guide has located the consciousness of the subject they bring their two consciousness together in a preconceived scenario where they can communicate. The scenario location can be anywhere because of the unlimited potential known in quantum physics. It can also be no place because the consciousness does not require a physical location. Meeting in Akasha, where all thought originates, is the safest and

easiest.

Mokakiápi primed Cathy by having Crann na beatha come up in conversation and thought throughout the day. When she went to sleep the subject of Crann na beatha was so strong that Imoika had little trouble finding Cathy. Now to teach her the password.

In what Cathy thought was a dream she was standing at a door. It didn't seem to matter that there was nothing else around. Just a door with an old dwarf standing guard.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Imoika demanded.

"I'm Cathy and I wish to enter," Cathy replied, not ever wondering why she wanted to go through a door that was in the middle of white space.

"Welcome Sealbhóir Eochair. Crann na beatha go deo." Imoika smiles and disappears through the door. Cathy finds the door locked, and then awakens.

It was a strange dream, she thought to herself, and went back to sleep.

A second time she finds herself standing in front of the door with Imoika waiting for her.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Imoika demanded.

"I'm Lady Manwathiel, granddaughter of Brian Prionsa, and I wish to enter," Cathy said firmly.

"Welcome Sealbhóir Eochair. Crann na beatha go deo." Imoika smiles and disappears through the door. Again Cathy finds the door locked, and then awakens.

"What a strange dream," she thought. "Why in the world would I care to get through a door when it's just in the middle of space and I can go around?" She laughed to herself that her friends in the psych department back at the hospital, especially the Jungians, would want to make something of the dream, but that wasn't her thing. It was just a weird dream and could probably be attributed to something she ate or drank. She went back to sleep.

A third time Cathy finds herself standing in front of the door with Imoika waiting for her.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Imoika demanded.

By this time Cathy was getting a bit annoyed. She tried to shake the dream or to awaken without success.

"I'm Sealbhóir Eochair, and I demand to be allowed to enter," Cathy said in an annoyed tone of voice.

"Welcome Sealbhóir Eochair. Crann na beatha go deo." Imoika smiles and disappears through the door. For a third time Cathy finds the door locked, and then awakens.

This dream was becoming both boring and annoying. It was mostly annoying. Why should she care about going through the door. It was just a door. Cathy got up, got herself a finger or two of good dwarven liquor, and slowly sipped the strong drink until it made her sleepy. Now she could hopefully go to sleep without that annoying dream.

It wasn't meant to be. Cathy found herself standing at the closed door but Imoika was not there. She knocked. There was no answer. There was no challenge or question. Finally, totally annoyed, Cathy called out, "I am Sealbhóir Eochair. Crann na beatha go deo." The door swung open.

Cathy looked through the door. On the other side was the most beautiful giant tree she had ever seen. As she stepped through the door, admiring the tree, Mokakiápi approached.

"You must never tell anyone about what has happened here," said Mokakiápi. "You will go to sleep, have beautiful dreams, and remember none of this until Iarrthóir, Sealbhóir Eochair and Cosantóir are together confronted with a door that will not open."



Since her return from Metarí's grave Isla Metarí had focused all of her time and energy on the skills that Sorg and his father, Gadin, felt she would need to fulfill her destiny. They were, of course, assuming that her destiny and challenge would require warrior skills since it involved Nat'lunda. The training was grueling and her teachers were particularly hard on her. They knew that no draíochta challenger would give her quarter.

She received tremendous support from Sorg and the spirit of Metarí within her, but the emotional price was high. The expectations of her performance and the awareness of what will be expected of her often reduced the young dwarf to tears. At such times Sorg would hold and rock her, giving her comfort and encouragement. He wanted to do something but he knew that this was a lesson Isla had to learn on her own.

Mokakiápi happened to witness such an episode. He realized that her problem was confidence. Sorg and her instructors could tell her how well she was doing but only experience could give her confidence. Only by realizing that she was a strong and powerful warrior would she have the confidence to face and survive a Ceann a Dhualgas. He thought about what he could do to help her. As much as he disliked the idea, the only thing he could do was put her into a situation where she would have to use her new skills.

Mokakiápi created a demi-ceann. A demi-ceann is a mindless magical creature that is nothing more than an animated clay doll that only follows the orders of its creator/master. He instructed his demi-ceann to attack and attempt to capture Isla Metarí. It was not allowed to kill or harm anyone.

The next evening while everyone was gathered in the great hall for dinner, Mokakiápi released his demi-ceann. He felt horrible about doing this but he knew

that it was for Isla Metarí's good. The creature pushed its way into the crowded great hall. It pushed guards and warriors aside without notice. Impervious to their attacks the demi-ceann stood in the center of the great hall looking around until it spotted Isla Metarí sitting at the king's table. It headed toward her, knocking guards out of the way like dolls as it moved toward the dais.

No one knew that the creature was after Isla Metarí. They assumed that it was going to attack the king, Gadin Ri. Isla Metarí looked at Sorg. He started to say something but stopped. Isla Metarí picked up Nat'lunda. "Guess it begins now," she said to Sorg as she jumped over the table and down to the main floor of the hall. Everyone backed away. Guards tried to get the king to flee, but he stood fast. There was silence.

Without thinking Isla Metarí stood with her feet shoulder width apart twirling Nat'lunda from the hilt. She had gone into warrior mode without thinking about it. She and those whom she loved were being threatened and this is how she responded.

The twirling was not showing off but was specifically designed to hold the attention of her opponent while she sized them up and decided how to take them down. This creature - this demi-ceann - had shown that it was totally impervious to the stab of a sword into its gut. It had sustained several large gashes where the guard had slashed, but they had always gone for the torso. That's your normal kill zone, but they should have realized immediately that 'normal' wasn't going to work with this creature.

Isla Metarí started to circle the creature. It kept its focus on her and always moved toward her. This told her that the creature was looking for her. It had picked up guards and soldiers and tossed them like rag dolls but it hadn't hurt one of them. It was here for her.

A soldier, taking advantage of the demi-ceann's following Isla Metarí, approached from the back and drove a spear completely through the creature. The

demi-ceann merely pulled the spear the rest of the way through its body and threw it to the floor while waving a giant hand toward the soldier.

This distraction gave Isla Metarí the opportunity to attack. She moved in quickly and lowly slashing at one of the huge legs removing a large chunk of clay. The demi-ceann grabbed for Isla Metarí and caught her cape. The skill of twirling came in handy. With a twirling motion she slashed at the creature's wrist cutting it through. She and the severed hand fell to the floor. Realizing it had lost its hand, the demi-ceann reached for Isla Metarí with its other hand. Isla Metarí rolled out of the way and made another slash at the giant leg.

This time the leg broke and the demi-ceann fell to the floor. It could not get up nor could it roll over to defend itself. Isla Metarí raised Nat'lunda ready to sever its head from its body when she stopped. The demi-ceann lay there waiting. Thinking that the creature was a living being Isla Metarí was unable to strike down the helpless demi-ceann. With an unnoticed wave of his hand Mokakiápi, watching in the crowd, made the demi-ceann returned to a pile of clay.

The cheering for Isla Metarí was deafening. She looked up at Sorg who was beaming with pride. She saw the happy, relieved faces of people who had a short time before been stricken with fear. She had been the warrior willing and able to face what appeared to be an unbeatable foe and prevail yet she had not lost her compassion for life.



The McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth was still abuzz about Isla Metarí and the demi-ceann when Tanras arrived with Napikyáiyó and Mahx. Having two humani with him turned out to be an extremely quick way to get an audience with Gadin Rí.

The king was scolding the Iarrthóir for bring humani into the flaitheas and

risking their security when Tanras took the risk of interrupting.

"Your Majesty," said Tanras, "I am very sorry but I had to bring them along. They have been instrumental in finding our way to the nearby flaitheas scáth of a Crann na Beatha. I could not bring you this important news without them." Gadin Rí gave this some thought and then permitted Tanras to continue. "These two gentlemen, members of the Blackfeet Piikani tribe, helped me find the hut of a dwarven iarrthóir, alchemist and shaman to the Piikani. There I found clues to the location of the flaitheas scáth of the Crann na Beatha. What causes me real concern is that the dwarf, named Imoika by the Piikani, was certain that there was a Ceann a Dhualgas lurking around. He disappeared shortly after confirming his fears. Now we have a demi-ceann show up. That doesn't sound like coincidence."

It didn't take more than that for Gadin Rí to summon Sorg and Isla Metarí. He had Tanras repeat what he had just told him. Before Tanras could even finish Isla Metarí suggested that Cathy and Turin should be involved because they could get help from Clann Coillearnach. Gadin Rí agreed. He knew that his warriors were skilled and fearless but they were still small in numbers and not prepared to meet a Ceann a Dhualgas.

For a third time Tanras shares his story. Everyone in the group agreed that the appearance of the demi-ceann was most likely not coincidence. Tanras shared their entire adventure as well as the clue to the location and how they were stumped by the term "half-three". There was a great deal of discussion totally unaware of the figure standing with her back to the door trying to hear what they were saying.



Prionsa Maefran, Gadin Rí's younger brother, was estranged from his big brother. Even as a youth he had a chip on his shoulder. He wanted to be king and he

did everything he could to trick, discredit, or cheat Gadin out of the throne. Their father, Sedwich Rí, always carried a great sense of guilt because of Maefran's behavior and spent a great deal of his life trying to help his wayward son. Sadly, Maefran grew more and more angry as he grew older. Just before Sedwich Rí's death, Maefran got involved in a humani land deal. Basically, he and a humani friend sold land that didn't belong to them and disappeared with the money. His greed was so great that he led authorities to his friend and returned to the flaitheas scáth with the money. Maefran enjoyed this adventure which brought great sadness to his father.

After his father's death he left the flaitheas scáth to use his magic to gain power and riches in the humani world. All he wanted was power and riches. He used magic to steal a mining company then his dwarven knowledge to make the company very successful and very wealthy.

Maefran could not participate in humani politics because his birth certificate, Social Security and other forms of identification were all fake, but he was a very handsome man with the proverbial 'golden tongue'. He soon became the power behind many a political throne. After becoming involved with the secret society known as the Sons of Ploutos he was known to brag to them that he had more senators and congressional representatives in his pocket than horses in his stables. Ploutos was the Greek god of wealth. To be a member of the Sons of Ploutos one had to be among the one-percent of the world population that controls about 90% of the world's assets. Maefran hung out with so many of the Sons of Ploutos that they soon began to believe that he was actually a member. He was also as ruthless as any member which gave his ruse credence. Despite his great power and wealth, Maefran was still obsessed with being king of Clainn McAllistar.

This is the point at which a Morganian wizard, named Socusdus, entered the picture. He would help Maefran because he wanted revenge on those who supported Merlin during the Great Morganian Wars. What he didn't tell Maefran, at least at the

beginning, is that he was searching for a Crann na Beatha that was supposed to be near the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. Socusdus lived in the mountains near the Flaitheas Scáth. He had abducted the family of a young servant girl named Rotuva. Rotuva served in the king's chambers and Socusdus made her spy on the king and his family. This paid off when Rotuva reported hearing Tanras telling the king and others about finding the Crann na Beatha.

For the first time in decades Maefran was just outside his family's home. The nearness made him angry and edgy, but after hearing of the prize he decided that he could tolerate his brother's closeness.

There is also a belief that whomever has the heart of the Crann na Beatha lives forever. If Maefran and Socusdus are able to get the heart of the tree they have both achieved not only immortality but both of their life-long ambitions. Maefran would rule Clainn McAllistar and use the clainn to become the most powerful dwarf in the world. Socusdus would have fulfilled a vow made by his family many generations before; viz. to destroy the Crann na Beatha.



Socusdus was able to visit the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth whenever he wanted. He was known to the guards and was never challenged. Even though he had Rotuva reporting what was happening in the royal chambers, he found it helpful to talk to those who lived in the flaitheas. Gossip had its upside and often there could be a bit of truth in the least truthful rumor.

Socusdus had spent a lot of time in the flaitheas since the arrival of the group from Clainn Coilearnach. He knew of what they had done to Morgana's grandson, Morcion. He wanted so much to find a way to get some revenge on behalf of his fallen hero. His spending so much time in the McAllistair flaitheas spying on the

Coillearnach group and the king's chambers had not only paid off by discovering the Crann na Beatha but he encountered Imoika.

Imoika, known in the flaitheas as Mokakiápi, was on his way home when Socusdus spotted him. Socusdus grabbed the old man and forced him into a room. Imoika tried to deny his identity but Socusdus would have nothing to do with it.

"Don't think I don't recognize you even though you're so much older. My Ceann a Dhualgas has been searching for you for all these years, and now here you are."

Imoika telepathically called to Cathy for help. His only hope was that Cathy was still sensitive to him because of their encounter in Akasha. He had no other hope. Feeling Imoika's call for help more than hearing words, Cathy was confused. She had, however, spent enough time around the draíochta world and her experiences as a teenager in Coillearnach taught her to react first and ask 'how' second. Actually, there was a great similarity between her draíochta and her medical training. Both of them provided her with a set of skills which she was taught to use almost instinctually - no delay, no calculating, no questions, just get the job done. She could tell that someone was in a life and death situation. As she followed the directions in her head she spotted Isla Metarí. Whom else would she want by her side if she found herself facing a fierce adversary. Like Cathy, Isla Metarí saved the questions as they were running down the corridors of McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. It didn't matter. Cathy had no answers.

To Imoika it seemed like an eternity but shortly Cathy and Isla Metarí burst into the room. It was an immediate stand-off.

"If it isn't the newest dwarven hero and the granddaughter of the man who murdered my master's grandson."

"Who?" asked Cathy as they jockey for position.

"Morcion," Socusdus almost screamed. "Morcion! Morgana Pendragon's

grandson who should now be ruling the world."

"You Morganians do have a problem with inflated egos."

"Shut up!" Socusdus demanded noticing that Cathy and Isla Metarí were moving apart. "And get back where you were or I'll kill the old man."

"Who is this poor old dwarf you're so intent upon hurting?" Cathy tries to act calm.

"You don't know who this is?"

"No," both women reply

"I don't believe this," Socusdus laughs. "This is Mokakiápi. Or at least that's what his name is here. He lived most of his life, almost a hundred years ago, with the Piikani. They called him Imoika - hairy feet."

Recognizing the name from Tanras' account the situation took on a new urgency.

"Why don't you just let the old man go and we'll talk about this," Cathy suggested.

"What is it you want to talk about?" Socusdus gave a sardonic grin.

"We can talk about whatever it is you think the old man did to make you so angry," suggested Cathy.

"He didn't do anything to make me angry. He knows the location of the Crann na Beatha."

"Do you know . . . "

"Of course he does!" Socusdus almost exploded. "Where have you been all your life? He's been protecting the tree since he planted the seed almost three-hundred years ago and now he's been giving you and your friends the location."

"You must be mistaken," Isla Metarí responded.

"Don't patronize me you little slut," the words came out of Socusdus' mouth like a hiss. "I know he gave you clues."

"And how would you know that?" asked Cathy.

"We have . . ." Socusdus paused and grinned his evil grin. "You are clever aren't you. You almost caught me off guard. Just know that I know."

"Well," said Isla Metarí, "we're back where we started. There's no way you can get out of here, and if you hurt Mokakiápi, or whatever his name is, we will get you. So why don't you just let him go and . . ."

Realizing that he was in a no-win situation Socusdus said, "sure!", stabbed Imoika in the back, pushed him into the two women, filled the room with smoke and fled through the open door. By the time either of the women could get up Socusdus was long gone.

Imoika lay dying. "Don't chase him," said the dying man. "You'll never catch him and I must tell you" Imoika coughs.

"What must you tell us?" asked Cathy holding the old man's head in her lap.

"I am the Iarrthóir who planted and protects the Crann na Beatha named Earrach," Imoika struggles for breath. "The three of you must go to her and protect her."

"Where?" Isla Metarí asked.

"Tanras knows the way. He is the Iarrthóir and must take my place. You, Lady Manwathiel, know the password even though you might not think you do. Isla Metarí, you are Cosantóir, the defender. It was no coincidence that you came here, found Metarí diary and became the mighty warrior you are today. You are the direct descendent of Hilgad Anmór, a dwarven king who was so powerful that he actually defeated a Ceann a Dhualgas in combat. With Nat'lunda you are as powerful as he was." Imoika gasped for one last breath. "The three of you are the key to Earrach's survival. You must" The old man died.



Maefran Prionsa knew that the Crann na Beatha would be heavily guarded, assuming that Tanras and his group got to the flaitheas scáth first. Since he had no idea of the password it made sense to allow them to get there first and show him the location. Once he had turned Earrach over to Socusdus, it would be time to turn their combined power against his brother, Gadin Rí. To do that would require a small army.

To obtain an army of mercenaries meant that he would have to include a dispicable humani named Malard Cocman in his plans. Cocman was a member of the Sons of Ploutos.

The Sons of Ploutos is a nefarious secret society whose membership is limited to the most wealth people in the world. Ploutos was the Greek god of wealth. Even though mythology makes Ploutos a “kindly” god, those who took his name were anything but kindly. Actually, the Sons of Ploutos didn’t worship Ploutos but worshipped wealth. The members were all among the one-percent of the world population who owned and/or controlled over ninety percent of the world wealth. Their motto was *Prodest Super Omnia* – profit above all else – and avarice was the principal requirement for membership, apart from extreme wealth. As a group they were toppling democracies and taking over dictatorships because they had the money to do so and it made them lots of money. War made them the most money because they got paid by both sides. Politicians pretend not to know of the Sons of Ploutos because, besides the fact that many of them are members, they fear Damond Kwaad.

Cocman was not really very smart but he had three attributes which made him Maefran's choice: (1) he was a member of Sons of Ploutos which meant that he would do anything for wealth; (2) he was extremely wealthy which meant that he could easily recruit and pay the needed mercenaries; and (3) while being rather stupid he was, without a doubt, one of the most unbelievably ruthless and violent members

of Sons of Ploutos. He was known for his uncontrolled outbursts of rage toward anyone who displeased him and he had no reservations about starting a bloody world war if it meant that he would get richer.

The biggest problem anyone had working with Malard Cocman was that he was so narcissistic that even Damond Kwaad, the founder and leader of the Sons of Ploutos, had a hard time controlling him, and Kwaad was evil personified. Cocman was the walking, breathing definition of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Anyone else with such severe symptoms of NPD would either be in prison or a mental hospital. Cocman was so rich that no one could touch him. He knew it and thought that that meant he was superior in all ways. Damond Kwaad, who was actually a Morganian wizard, used Cocman and the other Sons of Ploutos members to try to rule the world. So far it was working rather well.

Maefran had met Damond Kwaad several years before at a meeting in Chicago. Kwaad had spotted him at a cocktail social and knew that he was draíochta. It was more than the fact that Maefran was a dwarf. Kwaad obviously sensed magic. The old wizard; whose age was unknown, leading Maefran to suspect Philosopher's Stone; ambled over to the dwarf.

"I know who you are," Kwaad said softly in Draíochta Common-tongue. "I certainly hope you are a friend."

"I certainly am," replied Maefran, also in common-tongue. "And as you know, that means that I have more than anyone else in this room to offer in your quest for world domination."

Maefran had worked hard to get the most private table in one of Missoula's finest restaurants known as Shadow's Keep. The building was built on the foundation of a one-hundred-year-old landmark known as The Mansion which burned down many years ago. One must remember that for a town in Montana, one-hundred years is really old. The new building is a combination of classic Montana mansion; which

means that its wood and heavy timbered interior resemble the opulent hotels built by the Great Northern Railroad barons; and what some Montanan thought a castle looked like. Maefran wasn't particularly interested in the architecture or panoramic view of mountains and city but its famous rack of lamb did make having to go out to dinner with Malard Cocman easier.

Cocman was late. Fortunately, one of Cocman's "associates", as his lackies called themselves, called to let Maefran know. At first Maefran was quite annoyed, but then he realized that he could enjoy a good meal without the incessant, incoherent blabber of Malard Cocman. He ordered the rack of lamb and was actually looking at the deserts when Cocman arrived.

Cocman demanded attention from everyone. Maefran figured that Cocman could not survive without constantly being the center of attention or thinking he was the center of attention. He was rather stocky and appeared almost pudgy despite being six foot three inches tall. He had an almost constant look of disdain, anger or haughtiness. He wasn't even close to anything which would attract a woman, but he thought he was a 'chick magnet'. His only attraction was that he was filthy rich.

He owned a casino in Las Vegas and would go back stage during show numbers where the female dancers had to make quick changes and stand and watch them. He had countless charges of sexual harassment and assault against him, but he had an army of attorneys. He didn't care. To the contrary, he bragged about it. Cocman made his usual loud and ostentatious entrances. He wasn't satisfied unless everyone in the room at least looked in his direction. He made a vulgar pass at a young female server who happened to walk by. He went from that to yelling profanity at the maître d' for some unknown offense.

"So much for clandestine," thought Maefran shaking his head as he watched the walking disaster approach.

"Did you see that?" Malard almost yelled, "she almost jumped me on the spot."

Cocman sat down across from the silent Maefran. Maefran looked down at the lion ring on his right hand. With it he could instantly rid the world of this vulgar excuse for a human. He was thinking whether he would be wiser trying someone else, but sadly this pathetic creature was the only one ignorant enough to consider such a venture. Instead Maefran made a comment about their meeting supposedly being private.

"Watch it, buster," Cocman was annoyed. But Cocman was always annoyed. "I'm the one with the money and means, I mean I've got lots ... I've got tons of money, more money than anyone else, to get your army, so you'd better be nice to me."

"Sorry," Maefran made a faux-apology barely pausing between that and business. "It seems that our goodie two-shoes have figured out the password so we don't have a lot of time to get our army together."

"Don't worry, little buddy." Cocman laughed because he knew that reference to Maefran's size always made him angry. "I have an army. I have a big . . . I have the best damn army money can buy. I mean"

"That's great," Maefran interrupted. Cocman's inability to make an intelligible statement was well known among the Sons of Ploutos. "Have them gather at the conference center in Columbia Falls in two days. I'll provide transportation from there to my secret staging area."

"So tell me again, I mean, what's this Crayon nuh Breathe worth? How are you going to sell it?"

"The Crann na Beatha is priceless. We're after the power."

"Oh, yeah, the power."

"Why don't you come with us," Maefran suggested. "I'll let you stay in the king's chambers."

That was more than Malard could resist. "The king's chambers?"

"Yes," Maefran smiled a wicked smile. "The place we're going is the ancient fortified city of a king, and I'll let you stay in his private chambers."

"Does it come with girls?"

"I'll see what I can do."

Cocman smiled as though he had just pulled off the biggest business scam in history. Little did he know that, despite the fact that Maefran didn't really want Cocman anywhere near the action, he was planning a surprise for the rich buffoon that would mean Maefran didn't have to share any of the power he sought. Cocman was going to disappear and Maefran knew that millions of people around the world would cheer.

"Two days. Columbia Falls," Maefran reminded Cocman who had already turned his attention to the menu and just grunted. "I'm going to leave you to enjoy dinner. I have work to do." He paused. "I would suggest that you refrain from making a pass at our server."

"I'll make a pass at anyone I please," Cocman blustered.

"Fine, but our server looks like a professional linebacker and might possible rip you a new one," Maefran laughed heartily as he walked away without looking back.

CHAPTER 5.

Dr. Mark Demer sat behind the wheel of the old van shaking his head in disbelief. Walking down the road toward him were four men who were so out of place that he couldn't tell you where they would not look out of place. Out a bit in front of the others was a tall young man with a totally out of control shock of strawberry red hair sticking out from under his Alabama red cap. He was wearing a plaid flannel shirt, blue jeans, sneakers and studying a map as he led the band of misfits.

Right behind the young man was a middle-aged man about five feet ten inches and two hundred pounds. He wore a bright red academic gown with yellow trim over a black cassock. A black beret sat jauntily on his long black hair that hung unobstructed down his back to his waist. From Dr. Demer's vantage point it seemed that this person was attempting to talk to the young man in the lead.

The two of them were enough to gather a crowd, but there were two others right behind them. They looked like twins. The size of pro-football linemen these young men wore dark green leggings, leather armor and had swords hanging at their waist. They had dark red hair and, as Mark Demer approached, they both seemed to have florescent blue eyes. Having met Alfred and Brandon, he knew these two to be Torc Allta.

Mark brought the old, purposely non-descript, van to a stop facing the four men. The young man was so intent upon his map that he almost ran into the van. The older man looked up with a 'deer-in-the-headlights' expression, while the two men in armor quickly positioned themselves between the two men and the van with their hands casually on the hilts of their swords.

"I don't know where the four of you would look normal," said Dr. Demer climbing out of the van, "but it sure isn't walking down US-2 in Montana, USA."

“Hello,” said Kevin cheerfully stepping between the two guards and moving toward Mark, “You’re absolutely right, but we’re looking for Tunnel Creek.”

“You’ve gotta be Professor Dr. Kevin Beaulac,” said Mark. “Your sister almost described you to a tee.”

“Where’d she miss?” Kevin asked amiably.

“You’re wearing a flannel shirt and not a t-shirt.” Mark laughed. “And you,” turning to the man in the academic gown, “You must be Professor Valiard Armgrom.”

“At your service,” said Professor Armgrom looking over Kevin’s shoulder.

“And these are Lucas and Marthin,” said Kevin. “And who might you be?”

“I am Mark Demer. I was sent to give you a ride to Tunnel Creek, and” Mark replies as he points to the van, “I suggest that we get you four into the van and out of the road before we attract any Billy Bobs.”

“Billy Bobs?” Valiard questioned.

“Billy Bobs are usually locals, generally uneducated and of low intelligence who like to enforce a strict down-home cultural code that often means being very impolite to out-of-town guests,” explained Kevin.

That’s all the explanation Prof Armgrom needed. He hurried to van and climbed into the back followed by the two Torc Allta guards and finally Kevin.

“You are actually Doctor Mark Demer,” said Kevin as Mark climbed in behind the wheel. “My sister, Cathy, can’t stop bragging on you.”

“Really?” Mark hadn’t thought about his young colleague being impressed with him.

“Naw,” Kevin laughed. “She thinks you are a country bumpkin who wouldn’t know forceps from a pair of pliers.”

“Oh,” Mark looked a bit deflated. He wasn’t sure how to take this young man.

“Sorry, Doc,” Kevin said reaching over and patting Mark on the shoulder, “She thinks you’re fantastic. Honest!”

This type of exchange was typical of the conversation the short distance to the turn into Tunnel Creek. Mark paused for a moment to look around before he pulled the old van up to the dilapidated barn, handed the keys to Kevin and told him to make himself useful and unlock the door. From there the five walked southwestward on the Tunnel Creek Trail to the entrance to the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth.



Cathy, Turin, Isla Metarí, Sorg, Tanris, Napikyáiyó and Mahx were gathered around a table still working on finishing the clues. A Dwarven garda showed Kevin, Armgrom and the two Torc into the room.

After hugs, greetings and introductions Kevin and Armgrom were brought up to date on the situation and shown the clue.

“And we still can’t figure out this half-three,” Tanras was saying.

Armgrom looked puzzled. “That’s a time,” he said.

“What do you mean, that’s a time?” demanded Tanris.

“Half-three is an Irish way of saying three-thirty,” explained Armgrom.

“ ‘Looking at three-thirty above the summer creeks?’ ” said Tanras. “That still doesn’t make sense.

“In the forest,” said Mahx, “you can use a compass as a watch. Which direction would three-thirty be on a summer day?”

“Good thinking,” exclaimed Tanras. “who has a compass?”

Kevin pulled a compass out of his pocket. “I knew there was a reason I always carry this thing,” he quips as he opened and laid it on the table.

“Three-thirty is going to be between 100 and 110 degrees east-southeast,” Tan-ras was studying the compass and ignoring Kevin’s humor.

“Drawing a line 100 to 110 degrees from the confluent of the Middle and South Forks should bring us awfully close to the entrance to the flaitheas scáth,” said Napikyáiyó.

As the group looked on eagerly Cathy noticed that one of the king’s servants was hanging around the perimeter. Cathy gave her a couple of looks. The girl seemed uncomfortable and started to move away.

“Wait a minute,” Cathy called.

“M’lady?” said the servant girl.

“What’s your name?”

“Rotuva Caskmaul, M’lady,” said the young woman moving slowly toward the door.

Cathy stepped between the servant girl and the door. To her the girl was much too nervous. No one else was paying attention. They were all focused on the map.

“Guys,” Cathy said. No reaction from the group. “Guys!” she shouted, “I think we have a situation here.”

The group looked up just as Rotuva tried to run. It didn’t take much for Cathy to stop here. Isla Metarí was quickly there to help restrain the struggling woman.

“That’s Rotuva,” exclaimed Sorg. “She’s been on my Father’s house staff for several years.”

“Well,” replied Cathy, “she has some reason to be very nervous and run away. I wonder what that might be.”

“Imoika,” said Isla. “The man who killed Imoika let it slip that he had an inside source.”

Isla Metarí sat the woman down on a nearby chair as the group gathered round.

“Valiant Torc, would you please make sure that Rotuva is safe,” Cathy said keeping her eyes fixed on Rotuva. “You know,” she said quietly to the woman, “you’re never safer than when you have a Torc Allta at your side. Now you have two.”

“Okay Rotuva, trusted member of Gadin Rí’s household staff, tell us why you’re here, why you’re so nervous and why you tried to run.”

Rotuva sat and looked from one person to the other. There was no aide. They were all waiting for her answer. The problem for Rotuva was that she was terrified to answer. She began to cry but she could not speak. If she spoke, he would know.

“Rotuva worked very hard to be appointed to the royal house staff,” said Sorg totally confused. “She and her family have been loyal members of the clan for generations.”

“Where does her family live?” asked Isla Metarí.

“Rotuva lives in the servant’s quarters when she’s on duty,” replied Sorg. “Her family has a cottage in the village.”

“Send a couple of garda to fetch her family,” Isla Metarí suggested.

Rotuva’s eyes grew large with fear.

“No, please, no!” pleaded Rotuva.

“They’re not there, are they?” Isla Metarí confronted the crying woman. “You don’t want us to send garda to your house because that horrible man who killed Imoika is watching and will know that you’ve been caught.”

Rotuva began to sob harder. Isla Metarí was right but Rotuva had to keep quiet.

Cathy sat down next to the sobbing woman and put her arm around her.

“You know,” Cathy said, “that if that horrible man has your family, the only hope you have of getting them back is to trust us.”

Rotuva stopped crying and looked at Cathy. She wanted to believe her, but she knew how powerful Socusdus was.

“Do you see that woman there?” Cathy indicated Isla Metarí. “There’s no one in this kingdom as powerful as her. So tell us how we can save your family.”

Rotuva thought about what Cathy had said. She knew the truth. Her family was only alive as long as she was able to feed Socusdus information. As soon as she was useless, so was her family, and they were all dead. As soon as Socusdus learned that she had been caught, she was useless.

“You have to save them!” Rotuva suddenly blurted out. “You have to save them!”

“We’ll do everything we can to save them,” said Cathy, “but you have to help us.”

“Who is the wizard who has your family?”

“A wizard named Socusdus,” said Rotuva trying to retain her composure. “He’s horribly evil. He’s a Morganian.”

“We could have guessed as much,” Cathy replied. “and I bet he’s the one who killed Imoika.”

“Yes.”

“How do you send information to him?” asked Isla Metarí.

“When I have information I leave the flaitheas scáth wearing a red shawl. I walk slowly toward the mountain for about thirty minutes and then start back. Before I get back a man will contact me and I will give him the information.”

“He’s got to be within 3 miles of here,” Kevin blurts out.

“And how do you know that?” demands his sister, Cathy.

“It’s easy,” Kevin continues. “If she’s walking slowly she’s only doing about two miles per hour, or a thirty-minutes mile. If the spotter hustles, and does a 20 minutes mile, he can easily intersect her before she gets back to the entrance.” He pauses and walks over to Rotuva. “I bet that he contacts you before you’re half way back, doesn’t he?”

Rotuva nods.

“Yep,” Kevin grins, “if he’s doing around a 15 minute mile he can easily cover three miles before she gets half way back. He’s less than five miles from here.”

“So what’s our next step?” asks Sorg.

“I’d suggest that we send her out to tell them that we have two of the three clues,” replied Isla, “and are close to the third. Tell them that we’re thinking that the Crann an Beatha is somewhere to the northwest, but we’re not sure. We have someone in sight of Rotuva and follow the messenger to Socusdus.”

It was a good plan. Simple and straight forward. Mahx volunteered to follow the messenger.

“You?” Napikyáiyó looked at the young Piikani.

“Why not me?” Mahx demanded, a bit insulted that Napikyáiyó would question his ability.

“I’m sorry,” Napikyáiyó quickly apologized. “I didn’t mean that I don’t think you can do it. I just didn’t expect a school teacher to volunteer for a brave’s job.”

“There’s more to me than you know,” Mahx said quietly. “I am an excellent tracker.”

The group agreed that since no magic should be involved having a good native tracker could hardly be beat.

Professor Armgrom was studying Mahx during this exchange. There definitely was a lot that others did not know about this young man. Valiard’s mind flashed back to his own life many years ago. This young brave, he thought, was nothing like he appeared. He was a kindred spirit.

“Come young brave,” Valiard motioned for Mahx to follow, “and I’ll give you some defense against the dark arts tips, just in case.”

The two men spent the remainder of the time, until Rotuva was ready to leave, off by themselves talking. They indeed were kindred spirits but what joined them wasn't something they necessarily wanted to share with others.

Mahx, with bundle under his arm, left the flaitheas scáth almost an hour before Rotuva. He turned northwest, toward the highway, as he existed. He moved quickly down the trail and, when he felt certain that no one was around or watching, slipped off into the woods. In his bundle he had a change of clothing. He changed into traditional Piikani clothing – a buckskin tunic, breechcloth with leggings and moccasins. The bundle also contained a gift from Valiard; a black hooded floor-length cape that made the wearer invisible.

Putting on the cape, Mahx moved quickly across the trail and into the cover of the woods. He was at the foot of the ridge that was across from the entrance to the Shadowrealm. He moved carefully along the northern side of this ridge as close to the creek as possible. He could just make out the trail on the other side of the creek and could have easily passed the entrance to Flaitheas Scáth. He stopped and waited sitting cross-legged under a large pine. Between the cloak, his native dress and his skills one would be right next to him before they would be aware of his presence.

He hadn't been waiting long when Rotuva emerged from the entrance wearing her bright red shawl. She was easy to follow. Somewhere there was another person watching her. That's the person in whom Mahx was interested. He had to move very carefully because that person could be anywhere around. Even though the forest was not thick here, even a well-trained tracker like Mahx had to be close enough.

Knowing that Rotuva would be returning, Mahx moved very slowly and stealthily along the south side of the creek watching carefully for Rotuva's contact. As they entered the heart of the cirque the tree cover stopped. The area was open and barren with one permanent ice-field on the super-steep north wall of the cirque and a very

large permanent ice-field almost straight ahead of Mahx on the southwest wall. The terrain around the southern ice-field was quite open and a much gentler slope.

Mahx watched from the edge of the trees. Rotuva had just come out of some trees into the barren cirque. Anyone watching would not miss her bright red shawl. Mahx scanned the cirque. That's when he spotted the watcher sitting a couple of hundred feet up the south side of the cirque. As soon as Rotuva came into sight the watcher stood up and began to move toward Mahx's position. Mahx silently moved up the ridge, found a good spot and disappeared. A short while later he could see the watcher pass just below him.

The watcher was a big man with wide shoulders and very narrow waist. From appearances Mahx figured that there would be some gigantic biceps and a six-pack under that battle blouse. The man was wearing brown khaki trousers, combat boots, a camouflaged combat blouse and camo slouch hat. Having seen the Torc Allta and Dwarven warriors, Mahx was pretty sure this guy wasn't draíochta. Besides, he was wearing a police style web service belt with a two-way radio and what appeared to be a 9mm pistol among other items. If Mahx was right, this was a mercenary. That wasn't good. It would mean that somewhere nearby he would have a high-powered automatic rifle and there would be several more like him.

He watched as the soldier made his way down to the creek and crossed. He was keeping Rotuva in sight but allowing her to go to the end of the trail. Mahx followed the soldier.

On Rotuva's return to Flaitheas Scáth the soldier stepped out onto the path. The two of them talked for a while. The soldier watched Rotuva walk away and let her get a fair distance before he pulled out the two-way radio and spoke into it briefly. He turned and headed along the stream toward the west. He evidently wasn't concerned about being seen for he walked in the open.

Mahx followed at a discrete distance staying in forest or high vegetation. Mahx's movement was almost without sound. He watched the soldier start up the less steep southwest side of the cirque. He was heading directly toward the large ice-field. Mahx was running out of cover and would have to move much higher on the side of the ridge. It was a steep climb.

As the soldier moved south along a finger of the ice-field he waved. Mahx stopped and searched the side of Mount Grant for a sentry. There, almost two-hundred feet above him, was another soldier watching. The sentry had a clear line of sight in every direction. It was going to be really tough to get by him.

While Mahx had paused to find the sentry and consider his options, the soldier he was following disappeared into a recess. All Mahx could do was to move a bit higher and follow the ridge west while staying in the trees. As he reached the recess there was what appeared to be a bivouac in front of him. However, the soldier he had been following was not to be seen. A half dozen men, all wearing the same para-military dress with high-powered rifles stacked nearby, sat talking and drinking out of tin cups. It looked like a small bivouac. Mahx studied it for a while. Something didn't seem right. Then it hit him, everything was right except he saw no place for the men to sleep. This must be a front to hide an entrance into a cave or bunker.

Without a sound, Mahx returned to the place near the entrance to the flaitheas scáth where he had left his white-man clothes. He changed clothes, neatly folding Valiard's cape inside his clothes, and heads back to report. What happened next, however, was beyond his wildest imagination.

CHAPTER 6.

The Piikani maiden, Minaku Píítaa, turned every male head as she walked into the lobby of the Izaak Walton Inn. Minaku seemed not to notice, but she was always quite aware. She always wondered about male behavior. She never thought of herself as being particularly attractive. Minaku had an IQ of 172, but this was an area in which she was a bit slow. At five foot eight, she was a tall stately woman with classic Blackfeet beauty. The nose is one of the most dominant of the Blackfeet women's facial features. It seems that the vast majority of Blackfeet women's noses have a rather narrow bridge, long and graceful, with high and frequently dominant cheek bones. Minaku was slender, but not skinny. The best way to explain this is the fact that when she walks through Browning, Montana wearing tight blue jeans, t-shirt and cowboy boots, she definitely turns heads just as she did here.

A wee bit of jealousy passed over the girl at the desk, but she tossed it off and smiled as Minaku approached.

"May I help you?"

"I'm looking for my father," said Minaku. "He's a Blackfeet shaman named Napikyáiyó. He would be traveling with a young Blackfeet man named Mahx and a white man."

"Haven't seen anyone like that," said the hotel clerk. "I figured you were going to ask how to get to Tunnel Creek." She laughed.

"Why did you expect that?"

"It suddenly seems like that's a very popular place," explained the clerk. "I've had some really interesting looking people asking me how to get there." She paused and looked around as though not wanting to tell everyone. "I just had four guys through here that looked like they just walked out of a hobbit movie."

"And they all wanted to go to Tunnel Creek?"

“Yep,” the clerk laughed and shook her head.

“But none of them were Blackfeet?”

“I don’t think so,” said the girl. “Most were lily white.”

“Thanks!” Minaku was truthfully appreciative. If there was something going on at Tunnel Creek she could be certain that her father was involved. She climbed into her Ram 4x4 and picked up the topo map lying on the seat next to her. Tunnel creek was just down the road.

Minaku parked her truck by an old dilapidated barn near the Tunnel Creek Trailhead. In the back seat was a backpack with everything she would need to survive several days in the backcountry. Minaku kept the backpack loaded and ready for just such occasions. She hoisted it onto her back, grabbed her staff and headed up the trail. She had gone just beyond the point where the stream forked when she saw a man step from the forest onto the trail. It was Mahx.

“Mahx,” she called.

The shocked brave froze momentarily and then turned toward the familiar voice.

“Minaku! What in hell are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same question,” Minaku shot back. “I’m looking for my father.”

“Oh, he’s fine,” Mahx tried not to show his nervousness. “he’s off with that new white friend, Tanrus. I’m sure they’re around somewhere.”

“Mahx Beebe! I’ve known you too many years to not know when you’re trying to BS me. You know exactly where my father is because you always know where he is.”

“We’re in a bit deep with some new friends, and,” Mahx was struggling, “why don’t you just go home and”

“Not on your life,” barked Minaku. “Take me to my father.”

“Would you wait here and let me bring him to you?” Mahx was almost pleading.

“No!”

Mahx didn’t know what to do. He knew that the McAllistar clan didn’t like non-draíochta visitors. But Minaku wasn’t going anywhere without seeing her father and her father was in the Shadowrealm.

As they drew near to the entrance to McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth a guard came to meet them. A guard had been stationed near the entrance since the Mokakiápi incident. He recognized Mahx but obviously didn’t know Minaku. With his hand casually resting on the hilt of his magic dwarven sword that hung at the side of his leather armor he stopped a few yards in front of Minaku and Mahx.

“Like something out of the Hobbit movie,” Minaku said.

“Beg pardon, Ma’am?” said the garda.

“I’m sorry,” said Minaku. “I meant no disrespect, but the hotel clerk at Essex said that she had seen people who looked like something out of a Hobbit movie. That describes your garb.”

“Look, friend,” Mahx began, “I know this is crazy, but this young lady is Napikyáiyó’s daughter. She is an excellent Piikani tracker and found her way here looking for her father” The garda looked suspicious. “Honest. She’s a good person and can be trusted.” Mahx paused. “If I can get her to walk up the trail with me for a while, could you ask someone to send her father out to talk to her?”

“I don’t know what’s going on here, Mahx,” Minaku was getting testy, “but you’d better take me to my father and take me soon. I’m getting tired of the games.”

“I can assure you, Ma’am, that we’re not playing games,” the garda gave Minaku a stern look. “but I know Mahx and am willing to send for your father if you would please move away from the area for a short time.”

“I don’t”

“Please, Minaku!” Mahx pleaded. “It won’t hurt you a bit to cooperate and

you'll see your father a lot sooner."

"Okay," she said grudgingly.

"Let's go see the cirque," said Mahx pointing ahead. The guard stood aside and let them pass. As soon as they were out of sight he sent a messenger to Minaku's father.



Mahx stopped before they came out of the woods into the openness of the cirque. He realized that they would be seen by Socusdus' sentry.

"I thought you wanted me to see the cirque," said Minaku.

"Believe me," replied Mahx, "there are some really nasty people that will see us if we go out into the open, and I don't really want them to see us."

"What the . . ."

"Look," Mahx interrupted. "you're a member of the Brotherhood. You know the type of nasty people we deal with. Well, that's what we have here. It just happens that we're cooperating with some locals."

"Why didn't you say so? I don't want left out." Minaku looked over her shoulder. "Is that hobbit what you're calling a local?"

"He's not a hobbit, and right now I can't tell you anything that is" Mahx spotted Napikyáiyo, Isla Metarí, Sorg and Tanras coming up the trail. He was saved. Minaku followed Mahx's line of sight.

"Minaku," her father called. "Minaku, what are you doing here?"

"I tracked you down to make sure that you're okay," Minaku answered. "And now I find you with Mahx and these hobbits, or whatever they are."

"I'm fine. These are my friends. Mahx and I are helping them with a problem and we'll be home soon."

“Not good enough.” Minaku was not about to be put off. A look of exasperation came over the men’s faces. Only Isla seemed unperplexed by the situation.

“Hi,” Isla Metarí said stepping forward, “I’m Dr. Isla Banecap from the Bridget-Prince Fionn Hospital in Atlanta. Here I’m known as Isla Metarí and you can call me Isla.” Isla paused for the usual cordialities. “We came here to check on a young local girl who was at our clinic and became involved in something a bit more difficult. I really can’t blame you for refusing to leave. You don’t know us so you don’t know whether or not we’re holding your father captive and he’s sending you home to keep you safe. Your manner and your posture tell me that you are a warrior. Obviously, I am too. If the two of us could excuse ourselves from the men, we might talk woman-to-woman.”

The two women headed back down the trail toward the entrance to the Shadowrealm. The men stood looking after them and then at each other.

“I guess we got put in our place,” Sorg laughed. The others likewise laughed and agreed.

It was getting dark when Minaku and Isla Metarí stopped and turned toward the men.

“Sorg,” Isla Metarí gave him her sweetest ‘sugar-won’t-melt-in-my-mouth’ look. Sorg knew he was in trouble. “I need to ask you to permit Minaku to be a guest in Flaitheas Scáth.”

“You know I can’t say ‘no’ to you,” Sorg replied laughing. “Let’s get inside before we can’t find our way there.”

Isla Metarí gave the prince a big smile.

“Oh, by the way,” she said as they headed toward the entrance, “Sorg is actually Sorg Prionsa McAllistar. He’s the local prince. The tall white man is Tanras Hame. He’s what’s known as a Iarrthóir, which means seaker. I’ll let him explain it later.”



Almost immediately upon entering Flaitheas Scáth the conference room was filled with people anxious to hear Mahx's report. Minaku and her father sat to one side talking. One look at his face told you that he was get soundly scolded. He did not know that Minaku and Mahx were both members of the Brotherhood, a secret organization of Blackfeet warriors. He was totally unaware that Minaku and Mahx were constantly protecting the old shaman.

Sorg and Isla Metarí were more interested in how they were going to deal with Sorg's father, Gadin Rí. It had been very difficult for them to convince the king that it was important to admit Napikyáiyó and Mahx, and now there's another humani. The king was, of course, concerned about humani telling others about the Shadowrealm. They had a hard time convincing him that, besides the fact that they were no more likely to give away the location of the flaitheas scáth than anyone else, if they did say something no one was going to believe them. He was thinking like a draíochta not a humani. Draíochta know that humani exist. Humani don't believe that draíochta exist so they would laugh off the idea of a Shadowrealm. Nevertheless, they had to come up with a good reason to keep Minaku. Little did they know that Mahx had the reason. The Brotherhood.

It didn't take long for Cathy, Kevin, and Valiard to arrive. They had invited the four Torc guards and Golouth Longbeard, the command the of the McAllistar Garda. Gadin Rí also showed up.

Mahx gave a detailed account of his activity, leaving out the part about changing into his tribal garb and Valiard's cape. Immediately the military people were talking about how they would carry out an attack and rescue Rotuva's family.

"Gentlemen, I know that you are all great warriors. I know your history and I

know you, but this is a job for a different group who is much more skilled at this type of operation.”

That caused chaos in the room. The warriors could not comprehend any warriors who would be more suited.

“Please,” Mahx had to slightly raise his voice to get everyone’s attention.

“Minaku, I think we need to tell them.”

“I don’t know,” replied Minaku, “no one knows about us.”

“For the same reason that these people keep their Shadowrealm a secret.”

“True, but no one is going to believe a story about a magical Shadowrealm. They would believe a story about the Brotherhood.”

“You mean those stories about a secret tribal society are true?” exclaimed Napikyáiyó.

A murmur went over the group as the two struggled with their decision.

“Okay,” Minaku finally said, “tell them.”

“A number of years ago the braves in our tribe were getting tired of being mistreated by the *niitsáápiikoan* - white man. They were tired to being treated like ignorant, errant children. You have to remember that when Columbus landed in the islands over 500 years ago, we already had a superior social system to anything in Europe. Many tribes had a pure democracy superior to modern US, and almost all of them had equal rights for women, female chiefs, and civil rights not afforded to many Americans today. Yet the white man was sure he was superior. Later people like Andrew Jackson started depicting native people as savages. Actually, he would often ascribe to us traits and behaviors of the white man to show how violent and savage we were. He did it so he could drive us off our land.”

“Our braves were getting so angry that they were ready to get their shotguns, get into their pickup trucks and go have it out with the white men. A man . . . a white man . . . whom we named *Inákkíááyo* stopped them. He pointed out that the rich

white men who want our land would like nothing else than for us to start a fight. That would give them an excuse to hunt down and kill every Piikani. It would be right back to the ‘only good injun is a dead injun’ days.”

Inákkiááyo made us memorize the words of Sitting Bull. Minaku recited the famous chief’s words along with Mahx. *‘Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another life. The warrior for us, is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity.’*

“He insisted that the braves return to the ways of their fathers. They should learn to live off the land and be stealthy hunters. He took groups of braves into the mountains to re-learn their ancestral ways. They were given the responsibility of protecting their tribe and all people, without being seen. They would return home and pretend to be the ‘stupid Indians’ the white man expected. People of all races have done that to survive the arrogance of the white man.”

“Native women often work in the rich white men’s homes. As usual they are treated as ignorant so they are able to listen in on their masters. One servant girl reported that her employer was a member of the KKK and they were going to burn out a young native man who bought a farm outside the reservation. The braves, who now called themselves Brothers of Inákkiááyo, were there waiting but they were out of sight. If a man in that town limps, he’s probably a KKK member. Some will have a scar on their ass, but none of them will ever try that again. The Brotherhood didn’t kill a single person.”

“Minaku and I are both members of the Brotherhood,” Mahx concluded. “This rescue is the type of thing at which we excel. No, disrespect, but if Torc and Dwarf warriors go in there, there’s going to be a lot of bloodshed and they might kill the family. If you let us go, they won’t know what happened.”

Napikyáiyó walked up to the two young people with tear rolling down his cheeks. “I’ve never been so proud of the two of you.” Turning to the others, “you have no idea how many lives these people have saved and how they have so often kept the white men from running rough-shod over our people and our community.”

There was a lot of discussion and plenty of questions, but there was no doubt that the rescue was a job for the Brotherhood. Even Gadin Rí agreed to welcome Inákkíááyo.



It had been a full day but Isla, Cathy and Minaku were still up and talking late into the night. As with most such gatherings, they needed something on which to snack. They decided that a raid on the kitchen was in order.

The kitchen wasn’t guarded, so they didn’t really need any stealth, but they were three giggling girls having a great time pretending that they were up to something. They were especially looking for leftover of the roast they had had for dinner. It was outstanding and the three young women were thinking in terms of a couple of slices of the roast between a couple of thick slices of the cook’s delicious wheat bread with mustard and horseradish. While Cathy and Minaku worked on the sandwiches Isla looked around for something to drink. Jagerbeir was their choice.

The three women thoroughly enjoyed some old-fashioned girl talk. Of course, Isla and Cathy had to tell Minaku about the Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth, Isla’s first encounter with humani boys and how Turin had tempted the wrath of Cathy’s grandfather’s personal Torc guard by asking her permission to walk Cathy home. They told of the love story of Cathy’s grandfather, who turned out to be a silver aura wizard, and Alainn, who was now Queen, and how they established a foundation that ran a free hospital and saved wilderness. As one would expect, the stories got better as time

went on and the beer disappeared. Minaku was especially moved by how Isla became Isla Metarí. Even Metarí joined in and, through Isla, shared stories about she and her Piikani friend, Sohkapíni, who was killed by the Morganians.

It was Metarí's stories about Minaku's tribe that led the two draíochta to ask their new friend her life story. Did she have a boyfriend?

"Naw," Minaku sadly shook her head. "No boyfriend. Boys don't really like me."

"I really find that hard to believe," said Isla shaking her hand as though she had touched something hot.

"Oh, they look but that's about it."

Cathy and Isla gave each other a glance. It didn't make sense until Minaku finished her story.

"I live with my father in a cabin by Otatso Creek near the sacred Chief Mountain, Ninaistáki, up by the Canadian border. My father insisted that I go to college. I really just wanted to follow the old ways and help my people break free from the white man's domination that I feel is killing the Blackfeet, as well as other native tribes."

"I started out at the University of Montana at Missoula, fell in love with anthropology and transferred to the University of Wyoming. I got to study with Dr. Michael Harkin, one of the leading anthropologists in the United States specializing in ethnohistory of indigenous people of the western US and Canada. I did my master's thesis on the role of European religion in the destruction of Blackfeet life and culture."

"Wow," both Cathy and Isla said together.

"That's some pretty heady stuff," Cathy concluded.

"I guess so," said Minaku, "but besides loving the subject, it seemed the best thing I could do to help my people other than, perhaps, become an attorney."

“So guys feel intimidated,” said Isla.

“Yeah, I guess that’s it,” Minaku said sadly. “The guys in the Brotherhood aren’t intimidated by me but that would be like dating my brother.”

“Speaking of brothers,” Cathy changed the subject. “how did you find Mahx?”

“Oh, it wasn’t really all that hard, and I had a lot of luck. Until Mahx and I told everyone about being members of the Brotherhood my Father was clueless.” Minaku laughed. “He suspected the existence of the Brotherhood but he never considered that Mahx and I might be a part of it.”

“There were a number of strangers poking around and asking questions about my father. He is the tribal shaman. We had no idea why, but the Brotherhood wasn’t taking any chances, so we kept a close eye on him. It makes sense now.”

“Anyway, I got home from a First Nation event in Calgary and couldn’t find my father or Mahx. Father is really hoping that Mahx will take his place as shaman.”

“I asked a brother in Browning if he had seen either of them. He said that Father was excited about something he was doing with a white man. Mahx, the white man and my father had headed to Ninaistáki, the sacred mountain. As I was heading toward the mountain I ran into another brother who works for the National Park Service. He said that he had run into Mahx coming down off the mountain. He was in a hurry and said that he had to meet my Father and the white guy near Essex. I stopped in several public places but no one had seen them. When I was at the Izaak Walton Inn the desk clerk had said that she hadn’t seen him but everyone recently seemed to be looking for Tunnel Creek. I knew that if something was going on at Tunnel Creek, my father and Mahx were probably involved. You should have seen Mahx’s face when I came up behind him.”

The girls laughed. That led to stories about making the weaker sex, males, look like fools. They were having great fun when they heard someone coming.

Giggling like a gaggle of school girls the conspirators turned down the lights and stepped into the shadows. If it was a guard, they hoped that he wouldn't take a lot of time checking the kitchen. The footsteps grew closer. A figure stepped into the doorway.

The girls watched expectantly. Suddenly there was a small flame at the end of a wand and the lamps were lighted. It was Kevin.

"Kevin!" shouted his sister.

Kevin jumped. "Cathy! You scared the hell out of me."

"What are you doing?"

Kevin had had time to look around the kitchen. There on the table in front of the young women were the makings of the sandwiches and a pitcher of Jagerbeir. "I think the same as you," he grinned.

"Well, we, er"

"Kind of reminds you of raiding the kitchen at Ferguson Pálás when we were kids," Kevin laughed. "I too thought that roast would make a great sandwich."

While everyone was laughing at the circumstances Minaku was smirking as she studied Kevin. He was wearing black-watch plaid flannel pajama pants, a t-shirt reading "outside – where real things happen" and a dressing gown in the Ferguson tartan.

"What are you supposed to be?" Minaku said with a mischievous smile.

"A powerful wizard," Kevin quipped.

"Is that the way powerful wizards dress?" Minaku laughed.

"Of course," Kevin replied. "the conflicting plaids disrupts the adversary's ability to think."

"And anyone else's nearby, I'd bet."

"Hey," Kevin pretended to look hurt. "give me a break. I don't look like you. I get my attention any way I can."

That caused Minaku to blush. The other two, who were having a conversation of their own and had not really been paying much attention to Minaku and Kevin, stopped in mid-sentence when they heard Kevin. Maybe it was time for them to leave.

“You don’t mince words do you Professor Beaulac?”

“No. Subtly has never been one of my strong points.”

“What are your strong points?” Minaku asked.

“Well, I’m extremely smart, but that doesn’t generally attract the girls.”

“Smart? How smart?”

“Smart enough to know I don’t want to tell,” Kevin answered showing a bit of sadness.

“Oh, that smart,” Minaku’s face betrayed shared feelings. “I know how you feel. Smart scares people away.”

“Sounds like that’s spoken from experience.”

“More than I care to admit.”

“What’s your field?” Kevin made an effort to recover the lighter mood.

“Anthropology . . . and I teach Blackfeet language.”

“Wow, all that and looks too,” Kevin said with an admiring look.

Minaku stood in silent thought. This was the first time that she had ever had a man get past her being smart and still seem interested. As this reality sunk in the tears started to fill her eyes.

“Are you okay?” Kevin asked.

Minaku looked at Kevin. The tears were now streaming down her face. She kissed him on the cheek and ran from the room.

Kevin stood in disbelief. He touched the cheek where Minaku had kissed him. Evidently he didn’t do anything wrong, but why the tears?



While the three young women and Kevin were raiding the kitchen, Tanras and Valiard were sitting on the ledge outside the cave looking out over the valley and the village below sipping Jagerbeir. They had been admiring the construction of the Shadowrealm and the brightly colored cottages of the village.

“This stuff is pretty good,” Valiard commented as he held his glass of the black beer up to the light. “How do they make it?”

“That’s a question you really don’t want to ask,” Tanras laughed.

“Why would that be?” said Valiard as he looked over the top of his glass with a totally clueless expression.

“Two reason,” said Tanras laughing all the harder. “First, the recipe is always a well-guarded secret, and, second, you probably wouldn’t want to know if they were willing to tell you.”

“Oh!” gave his glass a quizzical look. He paused a moment. “So tell me, Tanras, my friend. How did you come to be an Iarrthóir?”

“It’s a long story.”

“I don’t have any appointments.”

“I am a leath draíochta. My Father was a wizard but had pretty much given it up to spend his life with my mother in the human world. My parents didn’t tell me until I was almost ten years old. When I was growing up I began to have dreams of being with my Mother under a giant tree that talked to her. Finally, my parents told me about being leath draíochta and how, when I was little more than a babe in arms, a Crann na Beatha had protected my family. My Father had somehow made a Morganian very angry and he had left my mother and me in the care of a Crann na Beatha while he dealt with the Morganian. That’s when he decided to spend his life in the human world.”

“My Father really missed life in the Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth so he would tell me stories. When I asked to go to the Draíochta Academy, my father interceded with my mother on my behalf. She had nothing against me going to the Academy or living in the Flaitheas Scáth. She was afraid that the Morganians would take out their grudge against my father on me. I promised that I would study Defense against the Dark Arts very carefully. I don’t know if that really made a difference, but I did keep my promise and was actually an outstanding student in the field”.

“One of my good friends and mentors at the Academy was a man named Mangard Tílbirt. He would visit the Academy often to confer with my Dark Arts professor. Mangard was an Iarrthóir. He actually found his Crann na Beatha while I was still in school and he brought me an oak sapling from the flaitheas scáth of his Crann na Beatha.”

Tanras held up his staff. “I used the wood to create this long staff with the ezingocer tag spell.” Valiard gave the staff an admiring look but knew not to touch. “It’s name is Tagaim. That’s when I decided that I too would be an Iarrthóir.”

“I wasn’t sure what my parents would think about the idea, but I was in for another surprise. My Father took me aside and confided in me that he had been an Iarrthóir. That’s really why the Morganians were after him. He used disappearing into the humani world as a means of protecting what he knew. The Morganians were probably still searching the draíochta world for him. It is unfathomable to a Morganian that a wizard would give up the wizard-life and live among the humani. My Father still carries his wand with him everywhere. This secret is why I had always thought of him as being somewhat of a recluse and anti-social.”

“So now you are close to your journey’s end,” Valiard said softly.

“I hope so,” replied Tanras. “It has not been an easy journey.”

“I can understand.”

“I have the feeling,” said Tanras taking a sip of jagerbeir, “that your story is not that much different.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean that I noticed the way you connected with that young brave, Mahx,” said Tanras. “Somehow I got the impression that the two of you share a secret. Besides,” Tanras paused as though a bit embarrassed, “Tagaim noticed something magical in the bundle Mahx carried when he went to follow Rotuva and he had just spent a lot of time with you.”

“Aren’t you the detective?”

“Well, I am an Iarrthóir,” Tanras laughed, taking another swig. “we spend most of our lives following clues.” There was a brief pause as both men laughed. But Valiard knew what was coming next.

“And you want me to tell you my secret.” It was a statement, not really a question. Tanras just smiled.

“As you suspected,” Valiard began, “I’m not exactly the lost and frightened academic I appear to be. That’s something between a cover and penance.” Tanras gave him a quizzical look.

“I grew up in England. There was a man named Drayfus leFey. He was a Morganian who was attempting to establish Morganian rule among the draíochta in England. My parents openly opposed him, and I witnessed Drayfus kill them.”

“I spent my youth studying the black arts and wizard combat. By the time I was fourteen none of the other boys wanted to duel with me. One night, in an impromptu match, I took on the English dueling champion. I defeated him quickly. In fact, even though I didn’t mean to, I hurt him rather badly. The match had just ended when a member of a group called Cosantóirí took ahold of me and ushered me quickly out of the building.”

“I know the Cosantóirí,” Tanras interjected. “They’re some badass dudes. Lucky for the rest of us that they’re the good guys.”

“Yes,” Valiard acknowledged, “they’re some badass dudes, as you say. Evidently one of them stayed with the dueling champion I had defeated and convinced him not to mention or identify me. The one who had grabbed me took me to an ancient crypt. It was there that I became a member of Cosantóirí.”

“You guys were like a super-SWAT team,” Tanras was in awe. “We would read about the worst rogue wizards being brought down all over the world, and we knew that it was the work of Cosantóirí.”

“Like you said, it’s just lucky we were the good guys,” Valiard tried to smile at Tanras’ appreciation. “They actually still exist. I became a deadly wizard warrior known as Presidio.”

“You’re Presidio!?!?” exclaimed Tanras. “I’m talking to the famous Presidio?!?”

Valiard was totally embarrassed. “Yes, but that isn’t all that great. I had no life except tracking down and destroying Morganians and other evil, rogue wizards. I spent my life always looking over my shoulder and afraid to make a friend. It was a life based upon anger and vengeance, and it wasn’t much of a life.”

“A few years ago we were sent on a mission to West Virginia. Draíochta living in the forest above a place called Slabcamp Hollow were being terrorized by a group of Morganians. When I got there I saw that it was Drayfus leFey, the man who killed my parents. I lost all reason and I put several of the locals at risk. By this time in my life I was so powerful that I didn’t need to verbalize the mahrú.”

Valiard stopped. His head hung down as he was pulled into the memory. Tanras reached out and put his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“I . . . I,” Valiard struggled to regain some composure. “I killed all of them. I paralyzed Drayfus and saved him for last.” Another long pause. “I honestly thought I

would feel better, but I felt horrible. To revenge my parents, I had acted as violently and as mercilessly as they ever did. I felt like one of them.”

The two men sat in silence for a long time. Tanras could not even imagine how Valiard felt back then or feels now.

“I realized what I had become. Everyone was afraid of Presidio. Even good people were uncomfortable being around me. I was the monster whose job it was to rid the community of monsters, but how do you deal with me? Two days later I walked away from the Cosantóirí. Presidio was never seen again. I spent almost two years struggling to get my head back on straight. Mostly I worked odd jobs in the human world. Then I ran into Kevin.”

“Dr Beaulac?”

“Yes,” Valiard actually chuckled as he thought about meeting the professor. “he knew how to push my buttons, and push he did. I thought I was going to ring his neck a few times, but he helped me deal with myself.”

“That’s amazing.”

“Valiard Armgrom, academic geek extraordinaire. Kevin showed me how to teach what I knew best – defense against the dark arts.”

Tanras sat shaking his head in disbelief. “And here I am,” Valiard laughed, “looking like I couldn’t hurt a fly.”

Kevin Beaulac appeared in the door with a stein of jagerbier. Valiard and Tanras looked up and greeted the young professor.

“I just had the strangest encounter with Minaku,” said Kevin, again touching his cheek.

“What happened?” asked Valiard.

“I don’t know,” Kevin answered. “I really don’t know.”

With that he sat down and the three men sat quietly sharing the magnificent view while lost in their own thoughts.



Dr. Mark Demer had become a common sight in the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. He had become the groups primary source of information. He knew everything that was going on in at least two counties. Since one of those counties is three times bigger than the State of Delaware, that's a lot of information. He had gone to Columbia Falls for their Thursday evening Farmers' Market. It is located across the street from the convention center where Maefran had told Malard Cocman to gather his mercenaries.

Mark was sitting in the crowd listening to a local band perform when he noticed three men dressed in paramilitary garb come around the corner. Mark almost looked away before noticing two more close behind and some behind them. That was an awful lot of paramilitary people without there being a parade.

Curiosity led the good country doctor around the west side of O'Brien's Liquor store. The parking lot of the conference center was filled with black vehicles and a lot of men wandering around in uniforms.

Mark crossed the street and "bumped into" one of the mercenaries.

"Wow," he said casually, smiling at the soldier, "there sure are a lot of uniforms. Are you guys having a conference?"

"No, sir," said the soldier without returning the smile. "We're just here . . . to meet a friend."

"Oh," said Mark as though disappointed. "Oh, well. Be safe in the woods."

"Who said we'd be in the woods?" the soldier questioned sternly.

"No one," Mark acted innocent. "I just figured from the way you're dressed. Most everybody comes up here to go out into the woods."

“Oh. Yeah, Sure,” said the soldier turning and walking away without another word.

Mark went into the conference center. Trying to pass the desk clerk without her noticing him, he made his way down the hallway toward the conference center meeting rooms. Coming around a corner he almost ran into Maefran Prionsa and Malard Cocman.

Cocman was his usual obnoxious self while Maefran was barking orders at mercenaries and trying to get Cocman to agree to something.

“This is a covert operation,” Maefran yelled at Cocman. “You weren’t supposed to show up looking like an invasion.”

“You want my army,” Cocman leaned down and put his face close to Maefran’s and yelled “you put up with it.”

“Then get them together and we’ll go to the staging area,” Maefran yelled back.

After that there was some profanity by both men and Maefran stomped off yelling orders.

Mark didn’t waste any time getting to his truck. He waited as the soldiers regrouped and got into vehicles. Mark was able to follow them to the turn into Hungry Horse Reservoir. He was afraid to follow them into the reservoir. They might get suspicious.

Isla, Sorg, Minaku, Kevin, Cathy, and Torin were sitting around a table in the great hall sipping caife, the draíochta version of coffee. They were talking about Mahx and Minaku was explaining the Brotherhood.

“Hey, guys!” Mark called out as he entered the hall and moved toward their table. “you won’t believe who I saw when I was in Columbia Falls.”

“Okay. Don’t keep us in suspense,” Sorg returned.

“I saw Maefran.”

The group looked at Sorg. “My uncle,” he said. “he’s rather the dark side of the family.”

“That’s an understatement,” Mark added as he arrived at the table. “He was with a group of paramilitary types and some fellow who spoke as though the paramilitary group was his own private army. He was so full of himself that Maefran couldn’t talk to him.”

He went on to tell the group about the number of men and vehicles he had seen and how Maefran had spoken of a staging area. “I followed them to Hungry Horse Reservoir.”

“This is not good,” said Sorg. “This is not good at all.”

“Is there any chance that he’s connected to Socusdus?” asked Isla Metarí.

“If there’s something vile or underhanded going on, you can count on my Uncle Maefran being involved.”

“Then we need to find out where they were going,” Isla Metarí insisted.

“I know where they’re going,” said Sorg. Everyone looked at him with anticipation. “Maefran is going to Ruklidome, the ancient family cave.”

Nothing else needed said. The group followed Sorg and Isla Metarí as they quickly led the way through the back entrance to the Shadowrealm and along the mountain. Sorg didn’t stop until he was just above the entrance to Ruklidome. He indicated for the group to stop. They watched.

Just below them and near the trail in both directions were sentries now dressed in camouflage and carrying automatic weapons.

Without a word the group moved silently back up the mountain and across the ridge to flaitheas scáth. No one spoke until they were safe inside.

“We’re going to have to do something to beef up security on this entrance,” said Sorg looking around as they entered.

“We’re going to need a lot more than security,” added Cathy. “I need to contact Grandmother Alaiinn.”

Sorg gave her a questioning look.

“She can send help,” said Cathy. “We’re going to need all the help we can get.”

“Do we have any connections to the Musad?” added Mark.

“We need some serious firepower,” offered Kevin. “Either that or some seriously fantastic magic.”

“I must tell Father,” Sorg said as though he hadn’t heard a thing the others said.

“Litríocht higad,” Isla Metarí suddenly said.

“What?” Sorg asked.

“Litríocht higad,” Isla Metarí repeated.

“What does that mean?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” said Isla Metarí, “but Metarí keeps repeating in my head. Litríocht higad.”

CHAPTER 7

Things were quite chaotic in the Flaitheas Scáth. They had Maefran moving into Ruklidome on one side with a small army of mercenaries while Socusdus was gathering his followers in the mountains just east of the Flaitheas Scáth main entrance. Both not only knew where Flaitheas Scáth was located but where the entrances were located. What they didn't know inside the Flaitheas Scáth was that Maefran and Socusdus had an alliance. Maefran could not move on the Flaitheas Scáth until he fulfilled his promise to Socusdus to either deliver the Iarrthóir or get him the coordinates to the Crann na Beatha. Then there was the matter of rescuing the Caskmaul family. Max had already sent for Inákkiááyo and some members of the Brotherhood. They could arrive at any time. Gadin Rí put up no argument when Cathy suggested asking her grandmother to send a cuideachta (a company – generally 30-50) of Torc Allta.



Prionsa Maefran stood on the dais of Ruklidome looking out at the army of mercenaries assembled in his ancestral great hall. It reminded him of pictures he had seen of Fidel Castro's men camped in the Statler Hilton Hotel in New York City. What a mess. Malard Cocman was sprawled out on the “throne” screaming demands and orders to anyone nearby. Cocman thought it was the real throne but Maefran had purchased it from a second-hand store in Columbia Falls. It still made Maefran angry because had it been the real throne, Cocman's behavior was totally callous and disrespectful. Maefran couldn't wait until this pathetic aberration of a man was gone.

Slipping away to the royal bed chambers, Maefran checked to be sure that everything was ready. He entered the king's chambers dominated by a large circular bed.

It was what Maefran figured Cocman would expect of royal chambers. In reality, the ancient kings had slept in the same type of simple beds used by their subjects, but he knew that Cocman could not understand a king being a leader among people rather than an arrogant despot.

Two young women, wearing lingerie, were lying on the bed. They jumped up and stood at attention when Maefran entered. Both women were quite beautiful and curvaceous, but, if one looked at them closely, they had muscles where your normal prostitute or Playboy model doesn't have muscle.

"Please stop acting like soldiers," Maefran barked at the two women.

"Yes, Sir!" they said in unison.

"You're supposed to be courtesans; delicate female sex-toys," Maefran said shaking his head. "Please do your best to act like them."

"Yes, Sir!" again came the chorus.

"I'm so glad that Cocman won't be looking at anything other than what you're wearing . . . or the lack thereof." Maefran laughed as he looked at the two women. He knew that Cocman wouldn't look past the various fully exposed female anatomical features to notice anything else. "When you get the chance, take care of him. Please use the poison syringe I've provided. I really don't want to have to clean blood off the sheets." The women laughed.

Maefran returned to the Great Hall. Cocman was still playing the fool.

"Excuse me, Lord Malard," Maefran said with as much pomp and style as he could bring himself to allow this buffoon.

"King Malard," Cocman corrected.

"With all due respect," said Maefran, "king is a title that is earned. You're not there yet."

A hint of anger passed across Cocman's face. It was hard to tell because no one had ever seen the man laugh, smile or look pleasant, but Maefran could feel the

tension and for a brief moment wished that he hadn't said anything. "Come along, I have something to show you," said Maefran, ignoring the anger.

As they walked toward the royal bed-chambers, Maefran asked, "have you paid the men as promised?"

"Of course!" Cocman snapped angrily.

Maefran knew that was a lie. Cocman was absolutely incapable of telling the truth. When they were still in the conference center in Columbia Falls, Maefran had learned that Cocman had only given the mercenaries a portion of their pay, saying that they would get the rest when the job was done. Maefran had provided the money and that wasn't a part of the plan. Maefran sat down with the leaders. He immediately paid the soldiers what they were due and told them that there would be a bonus if the mission was successful. In fact, he told them, if the mission was a success they would have the option to stay on. The soldiers were happy. Maefran asked them not to mention their deal to Cocman. None of them liked Cocman, so that definitely wasn't a problem.

Arriving at the bed-chambers Cocman's eyes widened and mouth dropped open at the sight of the two women on the bed. "For me?" he said, not taking his eyes off the women.

"I promised that you'd sleep in the royal bed-chambers and I'd try to have some female companionship. I'm keeping my promise."

Cocman paused a moment and then started toward the bed. Maefran was glad to see that Cocman was totally oblivious to the fact that neither of the women had any idea of how to act seductively.

Maefran turned with a smile and walked away. "At least he'll die happy," he said under his breath. He took one last look as he closed the door. Cocman was mauling the two young women. The look on their faces told Maefran that Cocman wasn't long for this world. All he could think of was "please don't get blood on the sheets."

Back on the dais Maefran got the soldiers' attention. They gathered around as Maefran spoke.

"I hope that you've all received the total pay that I promised you." There was a murmur of approval from the group. "Good. Mr. Cocman will no longer be with us." A snicker passed through the crowd. "I know you ladies and gentlemen don't like being cheated."

The two female mercenaries appeared in the doorway wearing dressing gowns. When Maefran looked their direction they both nodded.

"Good," Maefran said to his dwarf guards standing nearby. "Would a few of you please go dispose of our unfortunate guest."

"Our former colleague never cared enough for his soldiers to ask about whom they would face in combat," Maefran said calmly to the mercenaries. "I'm sure you'd like to know your adversary." The room muttered in agreement. "Well, let me say this. You will be facing one of the finest fighting forces that humans have never seen." He could see the puzzled looks as the mercenaries thought about what he had said.

"I need two volunteers to take on two of my dwarf guards in non-lethal combat."

The mercenaries laughed. Maefran tried not to show his annoyance. They would learn . . . the hard way. Two young men stepped forward. Both were built like the proverbial brick shit-house. They were about six-foot tall, weighed about two-hundred pounds and had to wear a size larger battle shirt to get around their enormous chests and biceps. To say that confidence exuded from them would be an understatement.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Maefran asked the two young soldiers.

"Sure," they laughed. "No sweat."

In a matter of minutes, the two young studs were lying on the floor, face down, tapping out. Their colleagues watched in amazement as the two dwarven warriors quickly dispatched the men.

“As I said,” Maefran said to the soldiers, “you are going to meet one of the finest fighting forces that humans have never seen.” He paused for his words to sink in. “Humans have the distinct disadvantage of not believing in the existence of magic folk.” Again, time for his words to be pondered. “You just witnessed the skills of the mountain dwarf known only in legend and fairy tales. They are one of the fiercest and most skilled combatants you will encounter anywhere on Earth.”

“If you're ready for the truth, I'll continue.” The soldiers encouraged Maefran to tell them more.

“You know me as Maefran, the man who paid you and promises you a bonus if we succeed. You will notice that I did acknowledge that there is a possibility that we won't succeed. That's because you will be facing an army of these warriors.” The mercenaries stood in silence. There was no laughter this time. “Our natural enemy is the Mountain Troll who isn't very smart, but is about twice your size and unbelievably strong. These guys take them down.”

“To these warriors and the magic folks whom they protect, I am Maefran Prionsa. That means Prince Maefran. My Father was a mighty king; my ancestors ruled from this cave. My brother is the current king and, with your help, I'm going to take his throne.”

“Now these warriors are going to come at you like a wave of berserkers, wearing leather armor and carrying swords, pikes and axes. The reason that you are going to survive is because I warned you to take them seriously. If you get off a good shot, you will kill them with your guns. If you end up in hand-to-hand combat, I give you about a fifty-fifty chance of survival. They'll quickly learn that they can't penetrate

your body armor so they'll take you off at the knees and decapitate you before your body hits the ground. So don't let them get close.”

“I know Cocman was too stupid and full of himself to learn all this, so all of you ended up taking a very dangerous job without knowing it. Because of that, I'm going to let anyone who wants to quit leave with the money Cocman gave them. Does anyone want to quit?”

The room was silent as Maefran looked around. After a long silence, three men raised their hands.

“That's okay. No problem. Please don't tell anyone about this operation or anything you saw or learned.” The men grabbed their packs and started toward the cave entrance. Maefran looked down at his dwarf warriors, nodded toward the departing mercenaries, and drew his index finger across his throat. Three of the dwarfs followed the departing mercenaries.

Turning back to the remaining soldiers, “Okay. The rest of you are in and you all know who you are going to be meeting. If you don't underestimate them, treat them like the most dangerous adversary you've ever met, and get off a kill-shot before they get close enough to engage you, we will pull this off. When I am king, I will need some good soldiers to keep my new subjects in line. I'm not real popular with them. If you take the gig, you'll be well paid.”



Gadin Rí sat in his audience chamber; now a war room; and listening to the argument that was taking place. Neither of their adversaries had moved. No one really wanted to make a pre-emptive strike. That could end up fighting on two fronts. Alainn Banrion was sending some Torc Allta. They should arrive any time. The group

still had to figure out how to get them into the Flaitheas Scáth without being seen by one of Socusdus' watchers.

It was Mahx who came up with the best solution. He suggested that, since Inákkiááyo and the braves from the Brotherhood should be arriving soon, he, Minaku and Kevin would meet them in the forest near the trail-head by the car-barn. The Brotherhood braves could set up a perimeter while Kevin set up a port key to bring the Torc through. With some distraction for Secundus' watchers; perhaps people hiking up to the cirque; the torc could slip into the Flaitheas Scáth. This would get the Torc into the Flaitheas Scáth and make it unnecessary for the Brotherhood to even get near.

Mahx could not believe the tension as Minaku, Kevin and he hiked to the end of the trail-head, and it was even worse as they waited for the Brotherhood to arrive. As the old gag goes, 'the silence was deafening.' All he could think of was a couple of love-sick pre-teens who were too frightened and embarrassed to engage the new love of their life in direct conversation. Eye contact was quickly broken and their body language said they were terrified to be near each other. They were undoubtedly certain that the other one could tell how they felt and afraid that the other person didn't feel the same way. Mahx was the only one who was certain that both were absolutely, totally, one-hundred percent enamored with each other.

“Oh, man!” Mahx finally exclaimed, standing up and facing the two. “This is killing me!” He received two sheepish, totally lost looks. “I know you two are both too geekie to have done this type of thing before. I guess someone has got to kick-start this affair, and I guess that someone is me.” Now total embarrassment. “Okay, let me assure you, from my many years of experience, the two of you are nuts for each other. You're not just nuts, your hot. So, I'm going to walk out by the highway to watch for Inákkiááyo and you two are going to talk, or make out, or whatever.” He

paused. "Okay, forget the making out. I'll be lucky to get you to talk." He walked off shaking his head. They couldn't see him laughing.

"Do you think we're really that obvious?" Kevin finally asked, still not looking directly at Minaku.

"What's this 'we' business, kimosabi?" Minaku tried to lighten things a bit.

That did cause Kevin to look in her direction. She was smiling self-consciously, but she was looking at Kevin over her shoulder. That, Mahx would have agreed, was a start.

"You don't . . ." Kevin started to say.

"No, Mahx was right," Minaku interrupted. "he was talking about both of us." She paused. "The kimosabi thing was just a nervous joke. I mean . . . how do I say, . . . I mean, admit." She just stopped.

"Then maybe you . . . err . . . like me a bit?" said Kevin.

"If, by 'like me a bit', you mean I think about you all the time, I'm hot for your bod, and I'm terrified that you will reject me, the answer is 'yes!'"

"Me too," Kevin said softly. "I keep thinking about how it must feel to kiss you."

They leaned together and kissed. The first kiss was little more than a peck. The next was long and tender.

"I guess we were kind of acting like a couple of kids," Kevin said.

"I think we graduated to the Mensa version," Minaku laughed. "I had a friend tell me about being strongly attracted to a young man when she was in Florida at a conference. He was there for a Mensa convention. He finally asked her to go for a walk one evening. It was a romantic Florida night, with the beach, moon and ocean waves. She said something about the beautiful stars. He replied with a full account of the constellations. She was ready to smack him up side his head, but instead she

grabbed his head and planted a big kiss on him. He looked totally caught off guard. 'Oh, that's what you meant,' he said."

They both laughed.

"Have you ever had a girlfriend?" Minaku asked.

"No. You?"

"No," Minaku turned away a bit with embarrassment. "The boys all look at my boobs but as soon as I open my mouth they're gone."

"I know how that goes," Kevin replied then chuckled, "except for the boobs part." He paused. "You do have nice boobs."

"Thanks," Minaku laughed. "but I hope there's more."

"Definitely," responded Kevin. "besides being the first girl who actually seemed to understand what I was saying, something just clicked."

"Same here."

"But you know," Kevin was beginning to relax and his impish side began to show. "having nice boobs doesn't hurt."

He knew that was going to get a reaction and he wasn't at all surprised by the smack to his head. It was, however, followed by an embrace and a long, sensual kiss.

Looking up from their embrace they saw Mahx. Behind him were Inákkíááyo and a band of warriors of the Brotherhood. For Minaku this was tantamount to being caught by your brothers. She knew she would never hear the end of it.

"Now that's better," Mahx said with a broad smile.



Kevin went about establishing the terminal point for a port key. Once he was done, the Torc would pass through. He explained every step of what he was doing in magic-quantum physics terms. He laughed and gave Minaku a big boyish grin when

he realized that she was the only one paying attention to what he was saying. Of course, he knew that she was not only the only one interested but most likely the only one who had any idea what he was saying.

After the Torc arrived, Kevin closed the port key and guided them to the Flaitheas Scáth while Mahx, Minaku and the Brotherhood headed off to rescue the Caskmaul family.

Watching the Socusdus camp, the braves immediately noticed that the mercenaries were wearing body armor. This was going to make things a lot more difficult. The braves were a lot more accustomed to dealing with drunken rednecks and the occasional errant cop. This was going to be a challenge, but they were confident of their skills. Stealth was still going to be a game-winner for them.

While Minaku was good at close-quarter combat she was even better with a bow at long distance. She had made her own bow in the traditional manner using osage orange for the stave, bison horn on the belly (inside) of the stave and bison sinew soaked in glue on the back side (outside). This made a very powerful bow.

Minaku's job was to silently take out the guards and anyone trying to go in or out during the rescue. With the mercenaries wearing body armor she had few choices. As she drew back the first arrow, she couldn't help but think about this being the first time she had ever killed a person. She knew that it had to be done and that these men would not hesitate to kill her, but she still wished that there was some other way. It also had to be done silently. As gruesome as it seemed, a neck shot would be quick, as painless as possible, and quiet. Minaku didn't miss. While Minaku was dispatching the guards on the door, other braves were silencing sentries scattered in the hills around the compound.

Mahx led the way wearing the cloak Valiard had given him. Once inside the entrance, Mahx realized that it wasn't a cave. It was a building which appeared, from the outside, to be a cave. Obviously more magic. Mahx figured that it was something like

a flaitheas scáth. What it was and how Socusdus put it here was of no concern. What mattered was finding the Caskmaul family and getting them to safety.

Ahead of Mahx was a long corridor. The walls appeared to be unpainted plaster or concrete. There was very little light and what little there was came from a half-dozen torches attached to the walls. A short distance up the hall he could see light from rooms on either side. Voices were coming from both rooms. Peering cautiously into the room, one was a day room while the other was a dining hall. The day room was brightly lit with two large chandeliers. The walls were the same grey unpainted plaster but the comfortable furniture, writing desks, and over-stuffed chairs around the giant fireplace gave the room a comfortable feeling. Mercenaries filled the room. There were a couple of groups playing cards, a few reading, and a lot just sitting and staring at the fire. Mahx noticed that no one was wearing body armor and there were only a few hand guns in sight. The dining room had three rows of trestle tables with benches and two chandeliers for light. A few men sat playing chess at one of the tables.

Mahx moved silently past the doorways. The next two doors on the left were closed. Mahx slowly tried the handle. It was not locked. The room was the armory with rows and rows of high-powered weapons. The builder must have had Mahx in mind. The lock was the type with a spring behind the bolt so the door could be locked from the inside without a key and pulled closed. Mahx locked the door, shoved a sliver of wood in the key-hole and broke it off. That, he thought, should slow them down. The next door on the left was a supply closet. Just beyond the closet was a stairway leading up.

His first reaction was that it was unlikely that they would put prisoners on an upper floor, but before he could process that thought he looked to his right and saw guards sitting at the end of a hallway playing cards. There were no high-powered

weapons in sight, but both of the men wore bullet-proof vests and a service belt with both a 9mm Glock and a taser.

Like Minaku, Mahx had never killed another human being, and he really wanted to keep it that way, even though he knew that it was going to be hard in this type of situation. He knew that he didn't have much time to make a decision. Moments felt like hours as Mahx became more aware of how he was risking everyone spending too much time. He was trained for this. He had just never actually done it. He moved quietly up behind the closest guard. In what was almost one fluid movement, Mahx snapped the closest guard's head to the side while reaching over and thrusting his long-knife into the throat of the man across from him. It was over. Mahx's stomach lurched, but he didn't have time to get sick. He quickly found the keys to the room they were guarding. Inside was the Caskmaul family.

One look at them and the squalid conditions in which they were held, Mahx quickly got over his remorse for killing the guards. In one corner was an open pit toilet. Some nasty looking dishes were lying on the floor by the door. Much of the room was taken up by a raised platform covered with straw. The five members of the family were huddled together on the platform. The smell just about knocked Mahx over.

Quickly he identified himself and started moving the family toward the exit. When he got to the doorway into the day-room, he held his invisibility cloak up so that the family could sneak past behind it. The rescue was going without a hitch until a mercenary came ambling down the hallway. He saw one of the braves and raised the alarm. In a moment there was chaos. At least it was chaos for the mercenaries. The braves stuck to their plan and executed it flawlessly. Each of the braves would fall back toward the exit as Mahx passed with the family. One of the mercenaries got off a quick shot and grazed one of the braves. At the exit, each of the family members was accompanied by a brave who, in some cases, actually carried the person away from the compound. Once the family was clear the braves who had been keeping the

mercenaries from getting out and pursuing the family fell back and scattered into the woods with Minaku and the braves who had neutralized the sentries keeping the mercenaries pinned down. Unable to get into their armory all the mercenaries had were a few handguns which are known for their lack of accuracy. One of the mercenaries grabbed the rifle of a fallen guard outside and shot at the scattering braves. He hit one in the back. Minaku didn't give him a chance to shoot a second time.

The braves all met back at the trail-head and waited for some time in silence to be sure that they were not followed. The Caskmaul family cried and hugged their liberators. There just are not adequate words of thanks in Blackfeet, Dwarven or English, but the braves knew. Of the two braves who had been shot, one was quite serious. Minaku and Mahx considered going to the flaitheas scáth and bringing one of the doctors back but they realized that that would take too long. The brave would not survive. They knew how Gadin Rí felt about humani in the flaitheas scáth but this was an emergency and this brave had just rescued a dwarven family from almost certain death.

Minaku ran on ahead to the flaitheas scáth to get help. She could outrun anyone in the Brotherhood. Mahx, the family, two braves as litter bearers and the wounded brave who could walk made their way toward the flaitheas scáth.

Minaku ran faster than she had ever run and was actually returning down the trail with Turin and two Torc long before Mahx and party got near. Turin made sure that the braves were stable before finishing the journey to flaitheas scáth. The two braves who had carried the litter returned to their comrades at the trail-head. It would not be long before Gadin Rí himself gave the orders to have the Brotherhood braves brought into the flaitheas scáth. That was a very good thing because a short time later the mountains were infested with mercenaries seeking revenge.

The one wounded brave was barely clinging to life when he arrived. Fortunate for him he had five excellent healers waiting to care for him. The bullet had passed

through the brave's scapula just below the clavicle and lodged just above his lung. An inch lower and he would not have made it to surgery. Cathy and Mark did the surgery while Thebur Springlord assisted.

The great hall was sparsely lighted and empty except for the small band sitting together at the foot of the dais. They spoke softly in short sentences as though the effort was almost too much. Minaku and Kevin had stood facing each other for several minutes before finally embracing. No one seemed to notice. The rescue had been a success but not all the news was good. There had been a skirmish with Maefran's mercenaries and several dwarf and a Torc were killed. Gadin Rí shared what happened but not in his usual theatrical manner.

Gadin Rí explained that Dwarven and Torc commanders hit it off right away. They had taken a small company of Dwarf and Torc to show the Torc commander the entrance to Rucklidome and get a view of the terrain and mercenaries. On their way back they encountered a party of mercenaries. The mercenaries opened fire with their automatic weapons and immediately killed four Dwarf. With the mercenary's body armor the Dwarf had no choice but run and hide. The Torc flanked the mercenaries, changed into their natural state, and literally ran them down. One Torc was killed in the charge.

Kevin notice Valiard pacing as the others talked. Knowing Valiard's history, Kevin went to support his old friend.

"This is really eating you up, isn't it?" Kevin observed. "I shouldn't have brought you along."

"Yes, it is eating me up," replied Valiard, "but you did the right thing to bring me. Perhaps this is my chance for atonement."

"We've been over this a million times. You never hurt an innocent person and you saved millions of lives. You have nothing for which to atone."

“Perhaps, but I can’t let this go.” Valiard stopped and looked his friend in the eyes. “Those dwarves and that torc should not have died, and if I don’t come out of hiding a lot more are going to die unnecessarily.”

“That’s hard to argue,” Kevin said gently, putting his hand on Valiard’s shoulder.

“I don’t expect you to argue,” said Valiard. “I have an idea for a magic shield that will protect our warriors from the high-powered rifles. I need you to start working on them while I ‘neutralize’ a problem.”

Valiard leaned over one of the tables and pulled out a piece of paper covered with drawings and equations. Kevin looked over his shoulder as he explained his idea.

“That’s bloody genius!” Kevin exclaimed. “Absolutely true bloody genius. You’ve basically created a force field that doesn’t stop or reflect the bullets but absorbs them. Amazing.”

“Thanks, but can it work?”

“It should,” said Kevin, still studying and admiring Valiard’s plans. “It definitely should. Your calculations are one-hundred percent right on. This is the definitive example of quantum physics and magic.”

“Would you make some for me while I’m taking care of business?”

“Sure,” Kevin said excitedly, still admiring Valiard’s work.

Kevin was so engrossed in Valiard’s shields that he missed the master-assassin disappearance from the room.



Kevin return to the group. “Before you get too engrossed in battle plans, I need to share two things.”

Everyone stopped and looked at Kevin expectantly.

“First, Valiard came up with the most amazing shield that doesn’t reflect bullets but absorbs them. I’m going to go start making some.”

“Where is Valiard?” asked Isla.

“He’s gone to take care of some business.”

“He’s not going after Maefran by himself, is he?” Mahx exclaimed.

“Are you kidding? Valiard?” Cathy responded.

“It sounds like the two of you have shared some secrets,” Kevin said to Mahx. Mahx was quiet. “That’s what I thought,” said Kevin.

“What do you mean, secrets?” demanded Gadin Rí.

“I imagine that all of you, with the exception of our humani friends, have heard of Presidio.” Kevin started his explanation.

“You’re not going to tell us that meek, mild Professor Armgrom is Presidio!?” gasped Isla Metarí.

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you,” Kevin said emphatically.

Minaku and the other humani looked totally confused by the impact this had on their draíochta companions. The reaction of the draíochta seemed to be a combination of disbelief, amazement and joy.

“For our humani friends, Presidio is a very famous warlock who single-handedly took out some of the worst villains the draíochta world had ever seen,” a murmur among the humani accompanied by a variety of ‘understatement’, ‘yep’, and other confirming verbalization by the draíochta. “He was a member of a group like the Brotherhood called Cosantóirí; some really tough, bad-ass warriors whom you are thankful are the good guys. The Cosantóirí is still around. Cosantóirí might be compared to a humani SWAT team who deal, on a world-wide basis, with the worst of the worst rogue wizards. What even you draíochta don’t know is that Presidio was so feared that even good people were afraid to be near him. It made him feel like some sort of monster. It all started when he witnessed his parents killed by a Morganian,

named Marrok, who was attempting to establish Morganian rule among draíochta in England. To get revenge he studied the spells, techniques and magic of the Morganians and other dark arts practitioners until he was an expert. He became a deadly wizard warrior known as Presidio. He was feared by Morganians and anyone who practiced the dark arts. He had been sent on a mission that brought him face to face with Marrok. After successfully dispatching the killer he simply walked away and disappeared. All sorts of rumors and stories are still out there about his disappearance. What actually happened was that he went on a two-month drunk, almost killed himself, and ended up literally colliding with me on an Atlanta street. I realized that he was draíochta and got him off the street. Long story short, after a very rough and rocky beginning we became fast friends. Because even good and honest people were afraid of him, he felt like a monster. He knew that he didn't really like killing, but other people didn't know that. I basically was his therapist helping him deal with unreal guilt and undeserved self-hatred. I got him the position as Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts. He has been the shy, meek, nerdy Professor Armgrom ever since. I had no intention of having him return to being Presidio when I brought him here. I brought him because of this," he held up the plans for the shield. "He really is a genius."

"I heard that Presidio is a giant Fearleon," said Turin.

"That's true. His patronus is a lion, but in order to be able to speak, he transforms into a Fearleon," Kevin explained.

"Has he ever taken on a group like this?" Cathy asked.

"I don't think so," Kevin's face showed his concern, "but there was no stopping him. He has a secret weapon. Don't share this, but he developed what he calls the 'death grip'. It appears like he's just gripping his adversary by the back of the neck, but it is deadly. He won't tell anyone about it or share it. He said that if anyone bad learned it, they would be almost invincible."

There were lots of questions for which Kevin had only a few of the answer, but finally he said “I’ve got to get started on these shields. If they work, it will turn the tide for us when we face automatic weapons.”



No one heard the sentry in the forest go down, nor the guards at Rucklidome’s gate. Soldiers seemed to suddenly just drop. Maefran was sitting on the throne and could see that whatever it was it was coming right toward him.

“Everyone, make a path from the body of that soldier to me and don’t attempt to engage anyone or anything you might see. Let me handle this.” Maefran called to the mercenaries. The men made a path even though they couldn’t see anything.

“To whom to I have the privilege of addressing?” Maefran said calmly.

Valiard threw back his hood. As Presidio he took the form of a Fearleon, a magical creature that is part humanoid and part lion. Standing over seven feet tall, his head was that of a lion. Except for a lion’s tail and feet like a lion, his body was that of an extremely strong, well-muscled, humanoid. He wore a leather chest harness with a large silver medallion in the middle of his chest, and a kilt of the ancient all-Ireland tartan. An enormous dagger hung at his side, but Presidio usually used magic. He wore a large silver ring on his right hand that looked like a skull. Because of his form, Presidio can speak and do magic, which is often not possible in other animagus forms. The Fearleon, also known as Löwenmensch, dates back over 35,000 years. A statue, carved out of mammoth tusk, was discovered in Hohlenstein-Stadel depicting the creature. It is one of the oldest statues ever discovered and the oldest-known animal form. Valiard learned to take on the Fearleon form because, at first, the name Presidio didn’t instill the fear that it would later. The fearsome creature was exceptionally

powerful apart from the power and skills natural to Valiard and was soon associated with the name Presidio.

The room gasped audibly. Only Maefran recognized Presidio. He had heard accounts of the power and fierceness of the master assassin.

“People call me Presidio,” Valiard replied in wizard-voice causing many of the macho mercenaries to take a step back.

At the name Presidio, which confirmed Maefran’s worst fears, Maefran went pale. “And to what do I owe a visit from such a distinguished assassin?”

“You have not been a good person,” Presidio’s voice boomed, “but that is not enough to kill you. However, your being in this place with highly trained, heavily armed mercenaries does not bode well. I could kill you and end this here, or you can disband your army, leave the area, and live.”

“As terrifying as is your reputation, I can’t do that.”

Presidio reaches out and pulled one of the mercenaries to him. “I have no love for mercenaries but I must feel a bit sorry for you,” said Presidio holding the mercenary close to his face, “do you have any idea what this dwarf is leading you to?”

The mercenary shook his head ‘no’.

“I didn’t think so,” said Presidio almost sympathetically, “now listen carefully and do not lie. I will know if you are lying and will kill you immediately. Do you understand?” The mercenary shook his head. “Did you kill one of my dwarf friends?”

“No, Sir!” The mercenary begged, “Please don’t kill me. I was here. I wasn’t even on duty when that happened.” The soldier passed out and Presidio dropped him on the floor.

“He isn’t dead,” Presidio assured the remaining mercenaries, “but I have the feeling that he might decide that this isn’t the job for him when he wakes up.” Turning to face the mercenaries, “You are all intelligent enough to know you can’t hurt me.

I, on the other hand, can easily kill everyone in this room. If I touch you, you will die. I suspect that Maefran Prisona failed to warn you about creatures like me.”

A murmur went through the crowd of mercenaries. Indeed, they had been lied to, cheated, and not told about the unbelievably powerful magical creatures they were expected to face.

Presidio could tell that Maefran was getting ready to attack. Besides many years of the assassin’s instincts, he could see the mercenaries looking at the dais instead of him. To keep the assassin’s reputation and mystic, Presidio had to time this just right. Everything around him told him when to turn around. When he did Maefran was just letting go of the battle ax he was throwing at Presidio’s back. Holding up his hand the ax flew directly back at Maefran and lodged in his chest. A moment’s look of disbelief and the dwarf prince fell dead on the dais.

Presidio again turned to face the mercenaries and in an almost deafening wizard voice, “gather your things and leave this place. You weren’t paid to die for a dead man. Leave here and I will spare your lives. I will return at noon tomorrow. Anyone here will die.” With that he walked through the mercenaries to the door. None of the mercenaries made a move toward him. In fact, most of them took another step back to give the fearleon plenty of room. At the door he turned toward the mercenaries. “Tomorrow! Noon!” Putting his invisibility cloak back on, he disappeared and left.

The mercenaries just stood for several moments. The man whom Presidio had questioned regained consciousness and sat up on the floor looking around for his tormentor. Shortly the mercenary commander stepped up on the dais and stood over Maefran.

“What the hell,” he said shaking his head, “we start with an egotistical idiot and end up with a power-hungry liar.” Turning to his men, “I suggest that we take whatever that thing was up on his very kind offer. I don’t think there was anything in our

agreement about avenging his death.” A murmur of agreement went through the ranks.

Turning his attention toward the handful of dwarf warriors who were Maefran’s personal guards, “I know you guys are tough as nails, and maybe you want to try to avenge his death, but you can’t take on the whole lot of us. We’re sick and tired of this magic shit. I lost eight good men today to some magic shit hippos, and I don’t know how many that thing just killed by touching them. We’ll take a modern day fire-fight any day. I would recommend that you go into those king’s chambers, or whatever they are, not come out until we’re gone, and pray that we’re gone before noon. Do you understand?”

Maefran’s personal guards acknowledge the commander.



Valiard returned with the news that Ruklidome should be free of mercenaries by noon. He told Gadin Rí what happened and how Maefran had thrown a battle ax at his back. He was honest enough to say that he had purposely turned his back on Maefran. Maefran had refused his offer to leave alive, but he didn’t want to just kill him. Maefran made his choice when Presidio turned his back. Valiard apologized profusely for killing the king’s brother and said that he would accept any punishment the king deemed appropriate. Valiard knelt before the king with his head bowed.

“I will mourn the death of my brother,” said Gadin Rí, “but I cannot hold you responsible for his death. Whether or not you baited him into striking first, he was already lost. He has been arrogant, angry, deceitful and a shame to this clan his entire life. I would rather have him die at your hand than end up a body in the gutter after a drive-by humani shooting.”

“Besides,” the king continued, “you saved us from a horrible loss of life in two ways – you got the mercenaries to leave and you gave us a wonderful gift of magic shields. They are marvelous. We haven’t had them tested with bullets but anything else just doesn’t get past them. The objects are literally absorbed.”

Valiard was excited to hear that his shields worked.

As Valiard and Kevin spoke in private, Kevin confronted him with his concern that Valiard now carries more self-deprecating baggage. Valiard did not deny that reality, but pointed out that it was better that he, a trained assassin who was already carrying a heavy load, carry the guilt than Gadin Rí, Sorg Prionsa, Isla Metarí or someone else in the group. Maefran had to die. Valiard knew that Maefran had created that scenario. It was no one else’s fault. There were only two possible conclusions. Either Maefran killed all of them and became Rí, or he would die. Valiard realized that all he had done by killing Maefran was to help skip the bloody battle that would have definitely come soon.

“Now show me my shields!” Valiard exclaimed excitedly.



With Socusdus having lost his hostages, been soundly humiliated, and, unknown to those in Flaitheas Scáth, lost his ally, there was a momentary peace. They still had to find Crann na Beatha before Socusdus and figure some way to defeat him and his monstrous creature, Ceann a dhualgas. In the meantime, there was call for rest and relaxation . . . rest and relaxation for everyone except Kevin and Minaku. There’s no rest and relaxation for new lovers, and novices at that.

Minaku was in a quandary. She believed that she was very much in love with Kevin, but, having no prior experience and being rather Mensa; i.e. over-analytic; she didn’t know if what was happening was real. Unbeknown to either her father,

Napikyáiyó, or Mahx, Minaku really wanted to be a shaman in her father's footsteps. She knew that Napikyáiyó was looking to Mahx to carry on, but she was hoping that she would be able to show herself worthy. She finally decided that she had to talk with her father.

The group had been at the public house in the village making new friends and enjoying the hospitality of the McAllistar Clainn. Napikyáiyó said 'good-night' and headed back to the mountain. Giving Kevin a peck on the cheek, Minaku told him that she had to talk with her father and would walk him home.

"Father," she called as she ran to catch up with Napikyáiyó. "Father, I need to talk with you."

"It must be something important, for you to leave Kevin and your friends to walk with me." he said.

"Yes, it is quite important."

"So."

"So, I don't know where to start. Kevin and I . . . well . . ."

"I know," interrupted Napikyáiyó. "I'm so happy for both of you."

"Does everyone know more about our love life than we do?" Minaku was a bit annoyed.

"Sorry, but yes."

"Well," she went on, "I have a problem." She went on to explain about her concerns that their love wasn't real, that Kevin might change his mind, and that, if she chose Kevin she would never have the chance of becoming a shaman.

"Wow!" exclaimed her father. "Is that all?"

"Are you mocking me?"

"No! No! my child," he stopped and held up his hands. "It's just that you have such overwhelming anxiety and you are so over-analyzing everything."

"I know. I do that."

“You and Kevin are both so super-smart that you speak a different language than the rest of us. That super-smartness sometimes gets in the way of your heart.”

“Please help me,” pleaded Minaku. “I’m so confused.”

“Firstly, there is no doubt to anyone who sees the two of you that you are genuinely in love.” Minaku started to interrupt but the old shaman held up his hand. “No one can guarantee you that it will last forever, but I would be willing to wager almost anything that it will.”

“Secondly, I had no idea that you wanted to be a shaman,” Napikyáiyó said. “Tell me about that.”

“I have watched you practice my entire life,” Minaku started. “I admire your wisdom, your knowledge, the way you help people and your spirit. When you sent me off to college, I wanted to tell you that all I really wanted was to be like you.”

“And you think that if you love Kevin you can’t be a shaman?”

“Yes,” she said softly. “I’m also afraid that you will pick Mahx before me because he is a male.”

“Girl,” he said sternly, “you must know me well enough to know that I would never make such a decision based upon gender. Besides, there’s nothing that says a woman can’t be a shaman.”

“What about Mahx?”

“I don’t know that he wants to be a shaman,” Napikyáiyó looked a bit disappointed, “but there’s nothing that says I can’t have two apprentices. You both would be outstanding. It is exciting to know that you want to be my apprentice and you’re welcome to start any time.”

“How about now?”

“That works for me,” Napikyáiyó smiled and gave his daughter a big hug. “Firstly, being an apprentice isn’t like going to college. I’m sure you will find plenty of reading material, which is fine, but most of your education will be from watching,

listening carefully, doing things I ask of you, and practicing skills I teach you.”

Minaku was thrilled and went racing off to tell her two new friends the good news.

The two of them had walked to the bridge by the falls. After Minaku had run off to tell Isla and Kathy that she was going to apprentice as a shaman, Napikyáiyó stood looking at the beautiful waterfall from the bridge and enjoying the wonderful sense of peace and happiness their conversation had brought. He was enjoying the tranquility when Kevin approached. He looked up at the young wizard and smiled.

“Oh,” said Kevin, “I thought Minaku was with you.”

“She was,” replied Napikyáiyó, “but she ran off to tell her new friends that I have accepted her as an apprentice shaman.”

“That’s wonderful,” Kevin looked a bit disappointed. “That probably doesn’t leave a lot of room . . . I mean it must keep her . . . I mean . . .”

Napikyáiyó interrupted. He couldn’t bear to watch the young wizard struggle.

“Do you watch movies?” asked Napikyáiyó.

“Not really,” answered Kevin.

“Pitty,” Napikyáiyó smiled. “Sometimes there are lessons to be learned from a silly movie.”

It was obvious that Kevin wanted to say or ask something but he was smart enough to want to hear what Napikyáiyó had to say, so he just smiled and said “like what?”

“There was a movie where a girl from Nepal fell in love with an American black man. She asked her father for advice and he gave his blessing. Then the American went to her father and told him that he loved his daughter and wanted to know how to win her.” Napikyáiyó paused and laughed. “That’s a typical movie scenario isn’t it? Yet it isn’t as silly or untenable as you would think.”

Napikyáiyó studied the young wizard for some time. Kevin didn’t know what to say and stood waiting for Napikyáiyó to explain.

“Neither one of them was sure that the other one loved them and neither of them just came out and confessed their love to the other. They lived in fear of being hurt or rejected. The girl almost died, confessing her love with what appeared to be her dying breathe, and the man then faced unbelievable evil to save her life and tell her he loved her.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Kevin. “that sure sounds like the hard way.”

“Understatement, my young friend. A giant understatement,” responded Napikyáiyó. “It would have ruined the movie, but how could they have resolved their problem without facing down unbelievable evil?”

“I guess one of them could have taken the chance and told the other of their love.”

“And I thought you were such a bookworm you couldn’t figure out everyday things.” They both laughed. “Like I said, Minaku just ran back to see her friends.”

“Thank you, sir!” Kevin exclaimed and ran off after her.



Socusdus’ mercenary army was demanding a lot of attention. Valiard’s shields were a masterpiece but that still left them trying to figure out how they were going to deal with Socusdus camped just outside the flaitheas scáth as well as finding and protecting the Crann na Beatha.

Isla Metarí kept hearing Metarí saying “Litríocht Higad” and Metarí couldn’t tell her why this name kept coming to her, but it must be important.

“We have a professor of ancient history who probably knows Litríocht Higad,” Kevin comment in his usual calm, casual, ‘I can’t be hurried’ manner. “Cornelius Pen-master probably knows more of the ancient stories than any draíochta alive.”

“So what are you waiting for?” snapped his sister. “get him here NOW!”

Kevin looked at this sister. “Dang, Sis. Are you auditioning for Grandmother’s job?”

“Grandmother Alainn would be a lot more tolerant!” screamed Cathy as she lunged for the young wizard who was already running from the room yelling “Okay! Okay!”



Mark Demer seemed to have become the clainn driver since he not only had a Montana driver’s license but he knew the area and was known by many locals. On this occasion he was waiting on the road to the Marion Creek trailhead near the Izaak Walton Hotel in his old pickup because he was only transporting Kevin and a professor from Draíochta Academy. He had convinced Kevin to wear something a bit less wizard mod-shock and a bit more western Montana; like zip outs or blue jeans. Kevin had appeared dressed in kakis – “the closest thing I have to hiking trousers” – and what Mark was sure was the loudest print shirt he had ever seen.

“That’s subtle,” Mark quipped when Kevin had appeared at the trailhead.

“Don’t worry. No one is going to look at me,” Kevin was a bit testy. Mark and his sister were about the only two beings whom he couldn’t put off with his clever tongue and attitude, and the only ones who could push his buttons; i.e. give him a taste of his own medicine.

“You’re right. They’re not going to look at you,” Mark wasn’t giving up, “they’re going to gawk and stare at you.”

“Just shut up and drive, humani,” Kevin snapped. “I hope Penmaster is ready when I get there.”

Kevin had gone through the port key to escort the professor back to Montana. If they were lucky, no one would see either one of them when they came out of the

forest and got into Mark's truck. At least that was Mark's hope. He caught himself laughing out loud at the memory of Kevin, Professor Armgrom, and two Torc Allta walking down the middle of US-2. He didn't think it could get any worse than that, but the two draíochta nerds did their best to outdo Mark's memory.

Mark spotted two figures emerging from the forest. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to laugh, cry or pull his hair. He was just thankful that he had pulled his truck well down the gravel track that led to the Marion Creek trailhead. There was Kevin in his kakis and loud print. His companion was dressed as though he was heading out on safari sometime around the end of the nineteenth century. Cornelius Penmaster would later tell Mark that he wanted to wear something outdoorsy. Except for his hat, he was dressed in a light tan brown from head to foot. His shirt was long-sleeved with epaulettes and two button-down pockets. His trousers were the old pantaloons style, puffed out just below the pocket line and extending out a good four inches from each leg and secured just below the knees like a pair of knickers. His socks, which matched both trousers and boots, extended out of his low-cut hiking boots and disappeared under his trousers. The outfit reminded Mark of pictures he had seen of white hunters and explorers in Africa. Had the outfit not drawn enough attention, Penmaster wore a long stocking hat with an enormous tassel on the end. He walked with a tall staff with a shepherd's hook top. Mark had been through the port key and visited the hospital. Looking at the two of them he had to wonder how they ever got to the port key room in the hospital basement without drawing attention. BPF Hospital looked, to the human world around it, like a very large, modern, big city hospital.

The two men were laughing and talking as they approached where Mark was parked. He wasn't sure that they were even aware of his presence. Kevin was pulling a fair sized two-suiter suitcase and wearing a soft black hat that reminded Mark of what he had always thought of as a witch's hat. It was a very worn black felt hat with a

wide brim and a conical crown that was so tall that it folded over and hung down almost to Kevin's shoulder.

When the men noticed Mark, Cornelius Penmaster beamed broadly and quickened his pace with outstretched hand. "Dia es Muira gritch", he said when in hearing distance.

"English," Kevin said politely.

"Oh, of course," Penmaster said without so much as a glance in Kevin's direction or pause in his pace. "So glad to meet you, my good fellow," Penmaster continued, switching from the lilting, almost musical accent of the draíochta common language to the stiff and very proper Queen's English.

"Nice to meet you too," Mark smiled and held out his hand. He couldn't scold these two. They were just being who they were. Nothing phony. Nevertheless, Mark couldn't help but wonder if either of them had ever been out of the ivory towers of Hogwarts, or whatever the name was of their magic university.

"It is such an honor to meet a real country doctor," Penmaster went on. "I don't know many humani," he paused and continued with a laugh. "Come to think of it I don't think I know any humani, but Kevin has been telling me so much about you. I am just amazed and so impressed. You must share how you do such great things in such primitive surroundings."

"Thank you, sir," Mark didn't know how to react to such exuberant praise. "I'll be glad to answer your questions and share my secrets, but right now I need to get the two of you into the truck and on our way."

"Oh, my," exclaimed Penmaster. "Is that really a pickett?"

"Pickup," Kevin gently corrected.

"What an adventure!" Penmaster bubbled. "What a marvelous adventure!"



Mark was sure that Penmaster had broken every record for the most questions asked in the time it takes to drive seven miles. He had asked about the purpose and/or use of every dial, lever, instrument, and pedal in the truck. When he had finished with the truck he started asking about the road, the signs, their speed and every vehicle they passed. Mark couldn't help but notice how quiet Kevin was. Kevin couldn't get a word in edgewise. Mark knew that he would get some mileage out of that at some time in the future.

Once they had parked and started up the trail, the good professor had to know about the trail, the stream, the mountains, the glacier, and absolutely everything. Mark was certain that at some point he would have to run out of questions and/or exclamatory words, but Cornelius Penmaster didn't show any signs of that.

It wasn't until they entered the flaitheas scáth and Mark witnessed the excitement as people got to see and speak to the famous Cornelius Penmaster that he realized what a draíochta celebrity he had been transporting. The bubbly professor almost looked like a politician. He stopped and shook everyone's hand, patted babies, and talked to people as though they had been friends for years. The big difference between Cornelius Penmaster and the common politician is that Cornelius was sincere. If he said he would visit with them later, he meant he would visit with them later. If he promised to get the name of an Irish ancestor, he would get the name of the Irish ancestor. And most of all, Cornelius Penmaster treated everyone with great and sincere respect. Mark didn't think he had ever taken this long to walk from the front entrance to the cave, but he couldn't help admire the old professor.

Cornelius wanted to get out of his traveling clothes and into something more familiar and comfortable before paying his respects to Gadin Rí and getting down to the business which brought him to the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. Disappearing into

the suite to which he had been shown he soon emerged in a long black cassock under a bright yellow velvet doctoral gown sporting scarlet sleeves with the traditional three parallel bands of royal blue, which is the North American color for history. His stocking hat had been replaced with the pointed hat which covered his long flowing grey hair that had once been blonde. As formal as it may appear to some, this was for Cornelius Penmaster, BA, MA, PhD, PhilD, MRHS, and Queen's Historian, his comfort zone. He was a draíochta academic and this is how a draíochta academic is most comfortable. Professor Penmaster had insisted that his young colleague likewise be properly dressed since they were representing the prestigious Coillearnach Draíochta Academy. Kevin wasn't one to be easily embarrassed but he was a bit uncomfortable showing up outside the great hall dressed in his academic finery and he wanted everyone to know that Cornelius had insisted. His doctoral gown was scarlet with black sleeves and three yellow-gold stripes representing science.

Professor Penmaster, as I have indicated, was anything but arrogant or egotistical. Quite the contrary. For him the ancient traditions of paying your respect to the head of the house, tribe or clainn was important. It didn't matter whether you were visiting a queen or a witch in a beehive hut. It was just something you do. Cornelius spends hours playing cubix with the Queen Mother and hiking with Brian Prionsa, but he still goes through the tradition of being presented and welcomed, because that's what civilized draíochta do. He was truly terrified that draíochta were going to become uncouth like the humani.

At Penmaster's request, Sorg Prionsa walked to the center of the great hall, followed by Kevin and Cornelius Penmaster, and announced the professor.

"Your Majesty, it is my privilege to present to you Professor Dr. Cornelius Penmaster, a friend and colleague of our good friend Professor Dr. Tiarna Kevin Beaulac."

"Welcome! Welcome!" came the familiar, sincerely gracious reply from Gadin

Rí.

Cornelius stepped forward and made one of the most classic, eloquent bows anyone had ever seen as he said, “Your Majesty, I am honored.” Then with a slight turn to Ara Banrion, sitting next to the king, he touches his hat to the floor, “and the beautiful Banrion.”

Ara blushed while Gadin jumped to his feet clapping. “I have not seen such a marvelous display of court courtesy for many, many years.”

Without cracking a smile Cornelius said, “I’m English.”

“Most obviously,” said Gadin Rí in his usual good humor. “Please come join us.”

There was no doubt that long before the meal was over Gadin and Cornelius were best friends. Since Cornelius was an expert on ancient Dwarven history, even though he was not a dwarf, Gadin bombarded him with questions about the McAllistar Irish ancestors. It worked out well for both because Cornelius, in turn, almost overwhelmed Gadin with questions about the McAllistars after they moved from the east coast to the Rocky Mountains. It was getting well into the evening when Ara Banrion gently interrupted and reminded the two men that there was important business to which they needed to attend.

In the king’s audience/war room, Cornelius pulled out a leather binder in which was wrapped a small book. Everyone in the room watched intently as the professor unfolded the book. Then he unfolded it again. Again and again he unfolded the book, with it getting larger each time, until it was a massive missal lying on the table. The title read “Dwarves in Ireland.”

“As I understand it,” Cornelius said, addressing Isla Metarí, “the spirit which you host keeps repeating Litríocht Higad – which means The Story of Higad. And she does not know why.”

“Yes, sir,” said Isla Metarí.

“Let me first say that I am deeply honored to meet you and your spirit,” Cornelius gave a gentle and very sincere bow. “Perhaps after we have finished with our business, you and your spirit would be so gracious as to grant me an audience.”

Isla looked a bit embarrassed at the use of the term ‘audience’, but she smiled and said, “Of course.”

“I am such an admirer of Metarí but we know so little about her apart from the Dwarven, Piikani and Salish legends.” Cornelius continued. “Litríocht Higad is, just as the name says, the story of Higad, except that it is only that portion where he slayed the Ceann a dhualgas. You, young Isla, are a direct descendent of this wonderful man. I would assume that you would want to know more about him.”

“I would love to know more about him,” said Isla, “but at this point we are trying to protect a Crann na Beatha, and figure out how I’m supposed to do combat with a Ceann a dhualgas who is nearby and knows that we have the clues to the Crann na Beatha’s flaitheas scáth.”

“That’s pretty much what Professor Beaulac told me,” replied Cornelius showing great deference toward the young Dwarf. “You have a most formidable task ahead of you and I will do everything in my power to help you succeed.”

“Thank you,” Isla smiled.

Penmaster spent a short time finding the page and began to read.

“It was the twenty-first year of the reign of the great Higad Anmór Rí. Higad had been elected high-king by the Council of Dwarven Clainns because of his strength, valor, honesty and compassion. Royalty and common folk alike petitioned Higad to settle disputes and rule on the fairness of a decision. He was also known as a great healer having brought Tellik Niison, the son of the Druid High Priest, back from the dead.

“On a cold winter night an Iarrthóir, Balimekter by name, sought shelter and protection. Balimekter had in his possession a Crann na Beatha seed that he was

protecting. He was trying to hide from a Ceann a dhualgas long enough to build a flaitheas scáth and had come to Higad for help.

“Hear me and have mercy, O great Higad Anmór Rí,” Balimekter pleaded, “for I have heard that you are kind and compassionate to all creatures. I have been entrusted with the seed of Maire the great Crann na Beatha in the land of the Dun na gall. The evil wizard, Leeden, of whom I’m sure you have heard, has put a bounty on my head and created the most fearsome Ceann a dhualgas to track me down and kill the seed. If he catches me you know that his magic is so great that I will not be able to keep the secret of the location of Maire’s flaitheas scáth. Please, I beg of you, let me hide under your protection and your kindness will not go unrewarded.”

“Higad Anmór Rí was not interested in honor, fame or reward. He knew of Maire and had great respect and admiration for the Crann na Beatha. The king had only two requests if he were to protect the Iarrthóir. First, he wanted to be permitted to hold the precious seed. Second, if he succeeded, he wanted the privilege to see the Iarrthóir plant the seed.

These were simple requests, especially in light of the great service Higad provided, and so, while Balimekter hid in the dungeon of Higad’s cave, the brave and compassionate king studied how a Ceann a dhualgas was created.

The vile creatures were created from the body of giant or other large being, with the brain of a person who had committed the most heinous crime (the more heinous the better), and a beating heart. To keep control over the beast and assure obedience, the master/creator has an elixir made up of several chemicals vital to the body. The beast must receive the elixir every day or die and it knows that the only way to receive the elixir is to give the master/creator total obedience.

“By springtime the Ceann a dhualgas had tracked Balimekter to the cave of Higad Anmór Rí. True to his promise to protect the Iarrthóir and Maire’s seed, Higad went to meet the monster.

As the beast approached across a meadow filled with flowers, the flowers shriveled and died and the strongest of men fled in terror. No one knew where Higad Anmór Rí was. Had he become mad with fear as had the others? Had he fled his kingdom leaving all who lived in his cave to be destroyed by the Ceann a dhualgas?

“Higad Anmór Rí had climbed a high tree in the meadow and waited for the beast to pass. When the Ceann a dhualgas passed under him, Higad Anmór Rí dropped onto the beast’s back and clung to its neck. Some who watched swear to this day that Higad Anmór Rí used immense strength to sever the head of the beast from its body. Others claim that Higad Anmór Rí struck the beast with such a tremendous blow that his fist penetrated the Ceann a dhualgas’ skull and he pulled out the beast’s brain. No matter who, if either, was correct, the Ceann a dhualgas stopped, closed its eyes and fell dead on the ground.

“Balimekter built a flaitheas scáth near Higad’s cave and the great king was present when Balimekter planted Maire’s seed. The seed grew great and strong and beautiful and was known as Isla leBeau. When Higad passed into the spirit world at a very old age, his body was laid to rest at the foot of Isla leBeau. Because of Higad’s great valor, Isla leBeau gave Higad’s grandson one of her seeds to take to the new world when the clainn fled the Morganian scourge.”

Professor Penmaster paused. He studied the giant book for a moment and then began to look for a page. “There’s a reference here to the lineage of the Crann na Beatha Maire,” he said as he studied the open page.

“I think you will find this interesting,” he continued after several minutes. “From this it appears that Higad became Isla leBeau’s first cosantóir and she did give Higad’s grandson a seed to take to the new world. What is interesting is that Higad’s grandson named his daughter ‘Isla’ after the Irish tree, and the name pops up in Dwarven royalty frequently since then. The seed that was sent to North America became known as Lillietta who was the mother of all Crann na Beatha in North

America. Lillilettá gave a seed to the dwarf, Mokakiápi, who went west with Roren Rí. When Roren Rí built Ruklidom, Mokakiápi planted the seed nearby. The tree grew to be known as Earrach.”

“That would mean,” Cathy exclaimed, “that that old dwarf whom Socusdus killed was over three-hundred-years old, assuming that he’s the original Mokakiápi.”

“That’s more than just a possibility,” said Isla. “It is not uncommon for dwarves to live hundreds of years.” She paused and got an almost stricken look on her face.

“What’s more is that Earrach has always known Mokakiápi. He has been with her as long as she has existed. She must be horribly worried.”

“We need to get back to Mokakiápi’s clues and find Earrach,” added Cathy.



Within a few moments two large topographic maps of the area were laid out on the table. Cornelius folded up his book and watched the group mentally and physically switch gears.

“If there is any way I can help, I’d love to stay,” Cornelius said.

“The more brains the better,” Kevin said standing over the clues which Tanras had just put on the table. Everyone agreed and made room for the professor.

“Okay,” said Isla who took charge of the meeting. “Napikyáiyó, you say that some of the lines in the poem are meant to throw off people who don’t know the area and Piikani culture. Right?”

Napikyáiyó nods his head in agreement.

“So here is what we’ve got left. ‘Atop the sacred monolith toward the setting sun just before the duck flying moon.’ and ‘where north meets south forever joined looking at half-three above the summer creeks.’” Isla puts up a large piece of paper on which she had written the two clues. “Now what does that tell us?”

“Number one . . . Napikyáiyó. Please explain,”

“The sacred mountain is Nínaistáki,” Napikyáiyó begins. “the duck flying moon is the last full moon before winter. That would mean that you are looking southwest.”

“That would be around 200 degrees,” interjected Mahx.

Ever one agreed. Mark pulled out his compass, placed it over Nínaistáki and drew a line across the map at 200 degrees.

“Okay,” said Isla, “step one.” She paused to look down at the line. “Now, Valiard, you told us that ‘half-three’ is a time.”

“It most certainly is,” Cornelius blurts out. “The English and Irish would never say three-thirty. It is half-three.”

“But if we were to convert that into a number, it would be 330, right?”

Both Valiard and Cornelius, “yes, of course.”

“A watch can be used like a compass and vice versa,” Mark offered. “If you want to convert a time like that into a direction,” he paused to look at his compass, “it would come out about 100 to 110 degrees.”

“And we’ve determined that ‘north meets south’ is referencing the confluence of the Middle and the South Forks of the Flathead River?”

“Most definitely,” Mark again answers. “I’ve lived my entire life on these rivers. The North Fork, on which I live, merges with the Middle Fork at the Blankenship bridge and joins the South Fork almost due west of the town of Hungry Horse.”

“That’s where the famous battle was fought,” chimed in Sorg.

“So let’s put a line out at 100 and 110 degrees from where they meet,” suggests Kevin.

Mark again puts his compass on the map. This time he covered the point west of Hungry Horse where the Middle and South Forks of the Flathead meet and drew a line at 100 degrees and 110 degrees. The group leaned over the table and studied the map. The line from Nínaistáki is intersected by both of the Flathead lines. Within a

few moments Mahx, Minaku, and Sorg almost simultaneously point at Hungry Horse Mountain.

“That’s got to be it,” they exclaim.

The others studied the map. The three ‘locals’ are right. The triangulation points to the west side of Hungry Horse Mountain.

“And it is near Ruklidome,” Sorg said excitedly. “Just like the history says.”

Everyone in the room knew that the biggest problem was that Socusdus knows the location of the McAllistar Flaiteheas Scáth and knows that they have Mokakiápi’s clues to Earrach’s location. They weren’t concerned about him breaking into the flaitheas scáth. Even with a Ceann a dhualgas the powerful wizard did not have the power to get into the McAllistar flaitheas scáth. But he did have the power and the army to keep them trapped inside the flaitheas scáth.

“He’s got us trapped,” said Cathy in her frustration. “We don’t dare go to Earrach. He’ll just follow us and unleash his Ceann a dhualgas.”

“Sounds like you guys need a dopa rope.” As the group looked at Mark they saw an excitement in his eyes that belied a great idea.

“What the hell is a dopa rope?” Cathy questioned.

“Before I tell you,” Mark laughed, “you have to admit that not all humani are stupid.”

“I never ...,” Cathy started but was interrupted.

“I think the Piikani already established that,” Mahx teased.

“Come on, you two,” Isla chimed in showing that her patience was growing short. “Out with it!”

“Dopa rope is a boxing term,” Mark started.

“Boxing is an English art,” Cornelius said matter-of-factly.

“Oh, come on, Professor,” Kevin gave him an incredulous look. “You’re an historian. You know better.”

“Well, maybe,” Cornelius concedes, “but we perfected it.” Most everyone laughed. The rest stood in anticipation.

“Dopa rope is a technique of feigning with one hand, causing your opponent to prepare for an attack from that direct while you strike from the opposite direction.”

“So how is that going to help us with Socusdus?”

“Oh, we’re going to do our own McAllistar-Piikani-Coillearnach-Mountain Man version.” The group physically leaned in toward the map in anticipation of Mark’s plan, as Mark began to draw lines and arrows on the big map.

“Given,” said Mark. “Socusdus is watching us and we have to assume that he knows about the secret back door. Right?” All agree.

“Our MPCM – that stands for McAllistar-Piikani-Coillearnach-Mountain Man – our MPCM dopa rope will be to send out three groups at the same time. Misdirect, feign and catch him off balance.”

“Group A, here,” he pointed toward the back entrance, “exits Flaitheas Scáth and starts circling north and slowly turning back toward the Tunnel Trail. At the same time Group B exits through the front and starts up the cirque. They will split into two groups in the cirque. One group will go north. Their job will be to go around to the back entrance. We can assume that Socusdus’ watchers will send someone to report. Even radios with repeaters aren’t much good out here, and radios without repeaters are useless over the long distance. We can also expect them to follow Group-A while leaving one or more behind to keep watch. If we’re lucky there won’t be enough men there to do all three.”

“The northbound portion of Group B will most likely be able to intercept the person sent to report before taking out anyone left to watch the back entrance. The southbound portion of Group B will go a short distance and double back. If the northbound portion doesn’t get the reporter, the southbound portion should. They will then return through the front entrance. That should mess with Socusdus’ brain.”

“At the same time all that is going on, Group C leaves from the front entrance. As Group B is going toward the cirque, Group C will go down the trail toward the trailhead. At a planned spot, a couple of Group C will break off and go up Tunnel Ridge and set up an ambush. Group A will pass through the ambush leading whomever is following them right into it. Some of Group A will return to the front entrance and some will join up with the larger portion of Group C. That combined group will make a wide circle and, from a safe distance southeast from his camp, harass Socusdus’ soldiers. When Socusdus responds to the harassment, the Group AC will lead Socusdus’ men over Tunnel Ridge down to Paola Creek where they will hide out until Socusdus’ soldiers get tired of looking. All this should mean that our northbound Group B will have total control of the area around the rear exit and the group going to find Earrach should be able to go northwest and make their way to Hungry Horse mountain.”

“Could you repeat that please,” teased Kevin.

“Not a chance,” Mark laughed, “but I think it should work.”

Everyone started talking at the same time. Isla Metarí, trying to regain control of the meeting, suddenly spoke in a commanding voice she didn’t know she had. The excitement in the room was electrifying. The group quickly decided that Group A should be Dwarven and Piikani warriors. Group B should be Dwarf and Torc, while Group C should be Torc and Piikani. This way Socusdus can’t really get a good idea how many Dwarf, Torc and Piikani are in the flaitheas scáth. It was agreed that the Piikani Brotherhood would be the best ones to do the harassment because of their bow and arrow skills. The silence of the bow would make it hard for Socusdus’ soldiers to locate the source. It was also decided that they were to avoid actually engaging Socusdus’ soldiers. Just harass and run. The important thing being to draw attention in the opposite direction. If part of Group A is Piikani, they could join with the other Piikani in Group C and make their way around Socusdus’ flank.

It was Kevin who brought up the idea that the Piikani needed a safe place to hide once they got to Paola Creek. If the Socusdus soldiers were to be too tenacious, unwilling to give up their chase, the Piikani might be forced into a bloody battle. Kevin suggested that he and Valiard take the car and drive to the Paola boat landing. From there they would hike into Paola Creek and create a small flaitheas scáth just big enough for a Brotherhood war party to live comfortably until Socusdus' army gives up looking for them.

The group liked that idea even though it meant waiting for Kevin and Valiard to establish the flaitheas scáth. Kevin pointed out that it was going to take some time to put the plan in place and get the group going to find Earrach prepped and ready to go. He and Valiard should have plenty of time to set up the flaitheas scáth and get back.



To an extent, Professor Penmaster's recitation and references created almost as many questions as it did answers. The group still had no idea how Higad had actually defeated the Ceann a dhualgas and the mystery was under constant discussion as everyone prepared for Mark's dopa rope. Isla could be seen sitting off alone talking to herself. In the humani world people would have been wondering about her sanity. Here, however, everyone knew that she was undoubtedly having a spirited interaction with Metarí.

"How did people see Higad defeat the Ceann a dhualgas if they had all fled in terror?" Isla was asking.

"They had to have been watching from a distance."

“Exactly. How much of a distance? You have to be pretty close to two people to tell if one is attacking the other or holding them up; whether they are striking them or lovingly patting them; whether the encounter is angry or kind.”

“This had to be a violent encounter.”

“Really? Why?”

“Because Ceann a dhualgas is an evil, violent creature.”

“True, but was Higad?”

Cathy and Minaku came by.

“Is this a private debate,” Cathy asked, “or can we join in?”

“You can join only if you have some answers,” Isla Metarí replied. “We have more questions than we need at the moment.” As the two friends sat down on either side of Isla, Isla recapped their discussion to that point.

“I know nothing about magic,” said Minaku, “but how did you envision Higad from the Professor’s description?”

“What do you mean?” Isla looked puzzled.

“The vision I had of Higad had nothing to do with magic.” Minaku paused and smiled at her two friends confused looks. “He sounded like a wise and compassionate chief.”

“That’s right,” Cathy exclaimed as though a light had come on. “it called him a ‘healer’.”

“That’s true,” replied Isla, “but you can’t heal pure evil. Ceann a dhualgas is created from pure evil.”

“Yes,” agreed Cathy, “and when evil and compassion meet there is a conflict.”

Minaku sat quietly looking as though something was really not right.

“You are all thinking like humani,” Kevin said as he walked up to the group.

“What do you mean by that?” Minaku looked up and scowled.

“Oh, I can understand you thinking like a humani,” Kevin laughed. “You are a humani, but these other two need to go back to the Coillearnach Academy,”

“Beg your pardon, brother dear,” Cathy said dripping with sarcasm, “but I didn’t get to go to the Academy like you,” Because of her age when she first went to Coillearnach, Cathy had not had the opportunity to attend the Academy like her little brother. She had been ‘home schooled’, so to speak, in basic witchcraft by her step-grandmother and the Ferguson Pálás staff. On the rare occasion; this being one; her jealousy over her brother’s Academy education would surface.

“Oh, come on, Sis,” Kevin, aware of his sister’s jealousy, tried to be as gentle as possible. Since gentleness wasn’t a word frequently applied to Kevin, it caught his sister’s attention. “you haven’t thought inside the box since you learned you were a witch.”

“Okay, Smartass,” Cathy replied, “let’s think outside the box.”

“Good!” exclaimed Kevin. “then let’s start with a few questions you haven’t asked.”

“Oh, I’ve got more questions than I can handle right now,” objected Isla.

“Throw them all out and start thinking like a draíochta.”

“That’s fine for them,” Minaku interjected, “but what about me. I’m not a draíochta.”

“Then you need to start thinking like a Mensa.” Minaku looked at Kevin like he had two heads.

“So what are these new questions?” demanded Isla and Cathy almost simultaneously.

“What is magic?”

“Oh, come on,” Cathy was almost shaking, “don’t play games with us.”

“I’m not playing games,” Kevin actually looked a bit hurt. “It is what you need to get you to start thinking like draíochta again.”

“Tell me,” said Minaku.

“He’s talking about quantum physics,” said Cathy. “magic is the modification of given or available materials through the use of quantum energy.”

“Actually that makes a whole lot more sense than what I always thought,” said Minaku. “So magic becomes more science than fantasy.” Kevin beamed. Cathy just shook her head, ‘now there are two,’ she thought to herself.

“So how does that help us?” asked Isla.

“How do you undo or counter a spell?”

“I never got to study Defense against the Dark Arts,” said Cathy.

“I’m not talking Dark Arts,” Kevin replied. “just any magic. If you know what causes it, then you know how to stop or reverse it.”

“You mean a counter-spell?” asked Isla.

“That’s one way. Would that work in this case?”

“Not likely,” replied Isla.

“He was a healer,” Minaku reminded them. “How do you heal with magic?”

“We modify, restore”

“That’s good,” Kevin encouraged the three women who were now deep in thought.

“But you can’t restore a Ceann a dhualgas,” Isla Metarí said firmly.

“Do you have the answer, little brother?” Cathy was irritated. “If you have the answer and are putting us through this, I’m going to show you magic! And it isn’t going to be healing!”

“No, I don’t have the answer, but the more I get you to go in a straight line, instead of a circle, the closer we all get to an answer.”

“Okay, let this poor humani catch up,” Minaku interrupted. “It sounds to me like you’re all agreeing that magic can be reversed. If it is like manipulating energy then you undo the manipulation?”

“Not quite,” said Kevin. “it’s more like disrupting the manipulation.”

“But the manipulation was in the past.”

“What’s time?” Kevin smiled.

Cathy and Isla shook their heads. They couldn’t believe where this was going. Minaku was the only one who actually took the question seriously. In fact, she and Kevin went back and forth for a fair while about the definition of time, whether time was actually a constant, and other questions which seemed pointless to the other two. Cathy finally had enough.

“Okay! Okay! But what does this have to do with defeating the Ceann a dhualgas?” she demanded.

“I don’t know,” Kevin admitted, “but I’m sure it does somehow.”

“If magic is the modification of given or available materials, then the means of destroying or reversing magic is to disrupt that modification,” Minaku said as though reciting a new lesson.

“Yes, so how do you reverse or disrupt the modification that creates a Ceann a dhualgas?”

“In human chemistry we sometimes neutralize a chemical not by trying to remove something but by adding another chemical.”

“What makes a Ceann a dhualgas?” Isla obviously had an idea.

“A giant body, evil brain and a beating heart,” Cathy summarized the ingredients.

“So if I were a draíochta,” Minaku said, “how would I disrupt the modification?”

“I’d start with the brain,” said Kevin.

“If this creature’s brain is pure evil, is there a part of the brain that makes you evil?”

“I don’t know about making a person evil,” Cathy said with a smile, “but the supramarginal gyrus – part of the cerebral cortex – is believed to be responsible for compassion and empathy.”

“Supramarginal gyrus,” Kevin repeated. “You may not have gone to the Academy, but I never went to medical school. Excellent!”

Cathy gave her brother an appreciative smile. “The supramarginal gyrus is part of the somatosensory association cortex, which interprets tactile sensory data and is involved in perception of space and limb location. It is also involved in identifying postures and gestures of other people and is thus a part of the mirror neuron system.”

“If the creature is truly evil and has a human brain, then the supramarginal gyrus is either diseased and not working, not present or disconnected, right?”

It was as if there had been a group epiphany. They were now all on the same wave length, following each question and answer to its logical conclusion. Each answer, even if it created another question made them believe that they were on the right track. Soon the room was filled with people watching and listening. The observers, except for Professor Penmaster, kept silent as though not to interrupt the flow of genius.

“Isn’t this exciting!” he would whisper a bit too loudly to Professor Armgrom, who sat next to him. “Isn’t this exciting! Don’t you wish we could get our students to do this?” Valiard smiled at his colleague then turned back to concentrate on the flow of logic which, by this point, had brought the definitions of time, being, existence, life, the quantum of human physiology and other issues into the discussion.

It was Minaku who decided that it was time to do some summarizing. “Let me see if I’m still following all this,” she sat quietly for a moment gathering her thoughts. The group waited patiently. “You actually can’t heal evil, but the act of healing is a powerful opposite to the act of destruction, therefore the fundamental elements of evil that comprise the beast are negated. Since it cannot be healed, it can only cease to exist. Healing becomes the means of, for lack of a better term, disrupting the modifications of time, existence and matter made by the spell. By healing or enabling the right supramarginal gyrus the contradiction to the very foundation of the beast’s

creation should disrupt the modification of nature which created the beast and cause it to cease to exist.”

Everyone in the room, which was a sizable crowd by this time, sat in silence. Minaku looked around for confirmation or reaction. Then the room erupted in applause. Napikyáiyó, who had come in and sat down with the two academy professors, jumped to his feet clapping. The professors, then the rest of the room followed. Minaku sat looking very embarrassed.

“She’s my apprentice,” Napikyáiyó told the professors. “She wants to be a shaman. How am I to keep up with that?”

“The young people have no idea how wonderful it makes you feel when they start putting things together for themselves and begin to surpass you,” said Valiard.

Some time later Kevin had a moment alone with his colleagues.

“Do you think there’s a chance that Minaku and her father are leath draíochta?” The two elder stood pondering what Kevin had said. “After all, doesn’t it take something more than smarts for magic to make sense?”



Kevin immediately headed off to get ready to go. Minaku followed. She had to run to catch up with him but catch up she did. Enfolding him in a passionate embrace she whispered, “I’m so frightened for you. I know you are the best person for the job and I know that you have Valiard, but I hate to see you go into such danger.” She kissed him and held on tight.

“Look who’s talking about danger,” Kevin said as he returned her embrace. “I don’t want you getting carried away with that harassment. You just piss them off with your arrows then get the hell out of there. No heroics.”

“Okay,” she agreed, holding him even tighter.

“There’s also something about me that I didn’t think to tell you,” he said hesitantly. Minaku gave him a puzzled look and felt the tingle of fear of what he might say. “I’m not the mild-mannered reporter you think I am.”

“What?”

“That’s a reference to the movie ‘Superman’,” Kevin looked at the clueless expression. “Oh, forget Superman. Like you, I’m not just a science nerd. I prefer to be the science nerd, but I have actually been in the middle of a pitch battle where hundreds died.”

Minaku just looked in disbelief. It was as if she were having a hard time processing what she was hearing.

“When I was still just Lady Manwathiel’s – Cathy’s - bratty little ten-year-old brother we didn’t know that our grandfather’s new girlfriend was actually an Elven princess, and no one, including my grandpa, knew that he was a silver wizard. There are only a few silver wizards born every hundred years and there is only one wizard more powerful – a white wizard. There hasn’t been a white wizard since Merlin. When we were formally presented to Queen Maetheriel; my Grandmother Alainn’s mother who is, by the way, still very much alive at one-hundred and eleven years old; she gave each of us a magical gift. We didn’t know they were magical but Grandpa Brian, knowing the queen and expecting her to do something of the sort, had told us that if the Queen gave us anything and it sparked, not to worry and hold on. All the gifts sparked. That meant we were all draíochta – magic folk – and didn’t know it. She gave me a short Elfin blade. When I held it up I gave off a blue-grey aura. My grandpa, a silver wizard, is able to turn into a dragon and do magic without a wand. I’m not that powerful, but almost.” Minaku was standing, holding Kevin’s hands, looking at him in awe.

“Our childhood friend, Isla,” Kevin continued,” is really unbelievable, but my sister, Cathy, doesn’t like to let anyone know that she’s a bad-ass, kick-butt witch. I’ve

seen her take a three-hundred-pound southern redneck and barehanded put him face down on the ground crying like a baby for her not to hurt him. She and her husband, Turin, fought in the Battle of Flaitheas Scáth in Coillearnach. We all did. I'm not a warrior like you, but I can hold my own, and I really don't want you pulling a Metarí to save me. When this is all over I want to introduce you to the Coillearnach Kingdom as my wife."

"What!?!?" Minaku almost shouted.

"Did that come out of my mouth?" asked Kevin.

"It certainly did," said Minaku. "I heard it, but do you mean it?"

"It kinda slipped out," Kevin confessed, "but it's been what I've wanted to say since Mahx forced us to talk."

"It's hard to see myself as a professor's wife," Minaku admitted.

"That sounds so possessive," Kevin looked her square in the eyes. "I know you want to be a shaman and I want you to know your dreams, but I bet your father would agree that my people – magical people – have so much to offer to help you be the greatest shaman that ever lived."

"So where would we live?"

"Anywhere we want. With ley-lines and key ports, our ability to move around is limitless. I want to continue to teach, so we would have rooms at Coillearnach Draíochta Academy. We would always have a place at Ferguson Pálás; that's the beautiful palace my grandfather built for Grandmother Alainn deep in the forest. Of course, I'd want you to see the old castle in the Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth but we probably wouldn't want to live there. Then we could live here in Montana so you could practice your shaman arts and look after your tribe. With ley-lines and key ports you could do something amazing in Browning in the morning, we could go to the Academy after lunch, I could finish teaching a class in the afternoon and we could be back in Browning before dinner or eat at the academy."

“Yes,” said Minaku with tears running down her cheek.

“Yes, what?”

“Didn’t you just ask me to marry you?”

“Did I?”

Minaku stood almost frozen for a brief moment then saw the smirk on Kevin’s face. “You damn tease,” she said giving him a good slap followed by a passionate kiss.

CHAPTER 8

Mark insisted that he drive Kevin and Valiard to Paola. He could then watch for anyone following them and have the truck ready to return them to Tunnel Creek. While the three of them hiked out to the Tunnel Creek trailhead, the rest were organizing the Groups.

The Dwarven Garda commander, Golouth Longbeard, would lead Group A because he would be responsible for securing the front entrance as the different contingencies were returning.

Golouth had been a warrior since he became old enough to join the Garda an Ri – King's Guard. At four-feet ten inches he was a big dwarf. He spent his early years in a humani town where he ended up in a lot of fights because of being teased about his size. A kind humani gym teacher introduced him to weight lifting. He grew stronger and stronger until the bullies were afraid to get near him. When his family moved to McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth all he asked of his parents was to buy him a barbell set. He had attended the academy at Coillearnach. He had obviously met Torc and other draíochta. That undoubtedly helped him accept the help of the Torc and the Brotherhood. His favorite subject at the academy had been history and he spent a great deal of time reading about famous dwarven battles.

Golouth continued his weight training at the academy and by the time he graduated from the academy and returned home to join the Garda he could bench press over 300 pounds and squat well over 700 pounds. Even though he was now a grandfather, Golouth was still an amazing dwarven specimen. His shoulders were broad and extremely muscular with large trapezius muscles and enormous deltoid muscles. His biceps and triceps were so large that a big person with large hands still could not put their hands around his arms. His waist was quite slender and the calves of his legs

bulged against his leggings. He was known as an excellent leader and a very compassionate draíochta.

Group B was to be led by Sorg Prionsa because he was the most familiar with the area around the rear entrance. Group C would be led by Minaku and Mahx. Minaku would direct the bowsmen in the harassment while Mahx led the braves who would be their protection. If something unforeseen happened, they could both lead the warriors to the safety of the flaitheas scáth on Paola Creek.

Mark was surprised at how fast Kevin could move. As Kevin pushed forward at a breathtaking pace, Valiard quietly shared Kevin's history with Mark. He told how Kevin, a boy at the time of the Battle of Flaitheas Scáth in Coillearnach, along with two of his young friends, had risked their lives to turn the tide of battle inside Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth. The boys had been secretly trying to learn to fly on brooms and play Quiddich, a fictional game from the book 'Harry Potter'. They had actually figured out how to fly on brooms, even if they hadn't figured out Quiddich. As the three boys approached the battle they began to swoop down on their broomsticks and shoot plasma bolts at the Manawydons, destroying many and distracting many others who were then destroyed by warriors on the ground. A Manawydón, Valiard explained, is a mindless minion who is created by a powerful witch or wizard from debris and organic waste. It is fearless and relentless in its attack even if it has lost a limb or part of its body. "Despite his appearance and academic bearing, Kevin is, in fact, a very powerful wizard and had shown his ability in battle. He was the wizard dueling champion at the academy and is a blue/grey wizard," Valiard concluded, "which means that any draíochta would think twice before taking him on."

Their mission went without a hitch. Valiard decided that he should stay with the flaitheas scáth just in case the Brotherhood warriors had any trouble. Kevin quickly returned to the truck and, in less than six hours, he was back in McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth giving Mahx and Minaku coordinates and detailed directions to their safe haven.

It was time to begin. Each of the groups and their leaders had rehearsed what they were to do and how they were going to coordinate. At the agreed upon time they all left their respective entrance. They knew that they were being watched. Actually, they were counting on it.

Group A exited the back entrance and started their circular course giving the contingency of Group C an opportunity to set the trap. Out of sight behind them were two mercenaries. They were two of four who had been watching the secret entrance. They were caught a bit unprepared. Hastily the mercenaries had decided that two would follow the band and radio back to the other two. Their radios would reach their basecamp if they hiked to the top of the ridge so one could relay any important information without leaving the entrance unwatched.

At the same time Group A exited the back entrance, Groups B and C were coming out the front. Just as Mahx had found when he went out to follow Rotuva, there was only one person watching the front entrance. That was because they were close to their basecamp and could get help quickly. They did nothing as Group C started toward the trailhead, but radioed back to camp when Group B started up to the cirque. By the time that Socusdus' mercenaries had gotten on the trail and caught sight of Group B, the portion of B that was to come up behind the mercenaries watching the back entrance, called B1, had already broken off. Socusdus' men thought they were following Group B as they turned south at the cirque which, if they had kept that heading, would take them very close to Socusdus' camp. That, of course, drew lots of attention and Group C was almost forgotten.

Group B1 arrived on Grant Ridge before the mercenary who was going to do the relay. He lay bound and gagged with a guard while the rest of B1 moved carefully down the ridge toward the back entrance. It didn't take them long to find a very concerned mercenary. He was calling both the men following Group A and the man at the top of the ridge on the radio. Neither was answering. He could understand that

the two following Group A might be in an area where they had no signal or had to maintain radio silence, but there was no reason for the man on the ridge not to answer. He was no more than half a mile away with only trees to block his signal.

The mercenary stood up when he saw one of the Torc Allta walking casually toward the entrance. This, of course, was a purposeful act. Since the mercenary knew that the Torc had to have passed very near his comrade on the ridge, he lifted up his rifle. Even if the man on the ridge kept quiet to avoid detection by the Torc, he would have been able to use the radio after the Torc passed. He hadn't. The Group leader, Sorg, had been watching the mercenary spotter and counted on him wasting precious time trying to decide what to do. The mercenary put his rifle back on his shoulder, which told Sorg that he had decided it was better for him not to attract attention to himself. That moment's hesitation is all that it took. A Dwarven warrior and Torc Allta had the mercenary restrained.

While the Torc guarding the man on the ridge lifted him by his restraints and carried him down the mountain toward the rest of Group B1, the two mercenaries who had followed Group A were sitting on the ground bound and gagged. Even Golouth Longbeard had to admit that, if he had not planned on being followed, they might not have known. The mercenaries were good, but the Torc Allta who trapped them were better. The mercenaries never got a chance to discharge a weapon or key a radio, either of which would have let the mercenary waiting at the back entrance know that something was wrong. The Piikani in Group A hurried on to catch up with their comrades who were circling around the northeast end of the five-hundred-foot ridge that separated Tunnel Creek from Pinnacle Creek. They would follow Pinnacle Creek southwest and cross a saddle of Tunnel Ridge to come up behind Socusdus' camp.

The stage was set for the Search Group. Isla Metarí, Cathy, Tanrus, the four Torc Allta and their Dwarven guide waited anxiously just inside the back entrance for their cue. It seemed like days, even though it was only a few hours, before a Torc Allta

from Group B1 came to the entrance to say that the party had started and they should move out smartly.

Minaku and her archers were dropping all sorts of Indian ‘ordinance’ on Socusdus’ camp and it was causing chaos. Those of the Brotherhood band who were not archers, maintained a perimeter and carefully watched. Mahx, watching the compound with an 80-millimeter spotting scope, couldn’t believe that it took Socusdus’ men so long to figure out the direction of the attack. As soon as he saw one of the mercenaries point in the direction of the archers, he sent word for Minaku to fall back. It was a good thing that Minaku and her archers acted promptly. The mercenaries came out of their cave with a couple of mortars and started laying a barrage on the side of the mountain where Minaku’s team had just been.

The Brotherhood knew that they were no match for the mercenaries under these circumstances and followed the plan to the letter, which meant they beat a hasty retreat and headed toward the flaitheas scáth on Paola Creek. The south side of Tunnel Ridge is almost a sheer wall, so they had to go east along Tunnel Ridge until the incline was manageable. Once they got to road 1638, which is nothing more than a dirt track that runs from near the Tunnel Creek Trailhead to well up the valley between Tunnel Creek Ridge and Paola Ridge, they headed toward Paola Creek. As soon as they came to the bridge that crossed Paola Creek they followed the creek until Valiard suddenly stepped out in front of them. He had been watching for them to save them the time of calculating coordinates and finding the flaitheas scáth on their own. He had no doubts of their skills. He was just saving time.

The Brotherhood couldn’t help but admire their sanctuary flaitheas scáth. When they had been told that it was just a temporary flaitheas scáth only large enough to keep them for a few days, they were expecting something cramped and a bit along the Class-B motel model. On the contrary, their sanctuary was a large area that appeared just as the actual Paola Creek area outside, with a line of tepee between the

tree-line next to the mountain and a beautiful creek. There was a meadow beyond the creek. Kevin and Valiard had taken a few moments to learn about the traditional Piikani tepee. One of the traditions was to paint a tepee with the exploits of those who lived inside. Minaku stood with tear streaming down her face when she saw the tepees.

“Would you have expected anything less of your lover?” Mahx asked as he put his arm around the young warrior. She shook her head. This was so Kevin. “And look at that.” Mahx pointed to the middle tepee which was adorned with a large-breasted female warrior shooting an arrow.

“I’ll never live that down,” said Minaku through her tears.

“Dang, girl,” Mahx exclaimed giving Minaku a gentle slap to the back of the head. “Own it! That’s you! Be proud of it. Your brothers certainly will.”

While outraged, infuriated and super-frustrated mercenaries combed the mountains and even drove the roads, the Brotherhood inside the flaitheas scáth were able to relax, hunt and fish, and enjoy being who they were meant to be for almost a week. When one of the McAllistars came to tell them it was safe to come out, there was almost a sense of sadness. For almost a week they were able to be one-hundred percent Piikani, living and acting as their senses told them was right and true. They would take this experience and use it as a model to teach young Piikani, who were being put down and abused by the white man, how to be Piikani and live with pride in the traditions of their forefathers.



It was really tough going for the Search Group. They had decided that it would be easiest to follow Stanton Creek, across a rather steep but passable ridge to the head of Lost Mare Creek which they would follow down to the road which they would then

follow to Emery Creek on the west side of Hungry Horse Mountain. Wanting to get out of the area as quickly as possible, the Torc Allta took on their natural form. As long as the trail was passable to the giant animals, they could move at a trot which would be much faster than any biped could walk. It was the climb from Stanton Creek, over the saddle on the shoulder of Great Northern Mountain, to Lost Mare Creek that was hardest. The Torc Allta had to give up their natural form and take on their homo grandioso form because the switch backs were getting too numerous and the trail too narrow. They had, however, covered a considerable distance and could now relax their pace.

Despite the time pressure and the importance of their mission, everyone had to admire the magnificent scenery around them. They were in the heart of the Great Bear Wilderness in some of the most fantastic and rugged terrain in North America. These mountains were not as high as many in the Colorado Rocky Mountains but what they lacked in elevation they more than made up for in scenic grandeur.

Everyone was moving a lot slower and showing signs of fatigue by the time they topped the pass. They took some time to rest and eat. It didn't hurt that they had a magnificent view in both directions. They were impressed with the mountain-side they had just traversed and climbed. "Thankfully it didn't look that steep from down below," one of them commented with a chorus of grunts and moans of agreement.

Looking down the northwest side of the saddle the Dwarven guide, Trig Menilobin, pointed out an unnamed tributary to Lost Mare Creek just below. It was beginning to get late and the guide suggested that they camp for the night at the point where the tributary enters Lost Mare. It would be protected from the cold mountain winds as well as a place easy to defend.

Once refreshed, the group started the slow descent, following the small stream. The descent was just over 1,500 feet and was much less steep than their climb of

almost the same elevation. At the point where the two streams merged was the largest flat area any of them had seen all day. There was plenty of room for eight small backcountry tents.

Each of the members of the group carried a basic backcountry pack with tent, sleeping bag, clothing and food for the trip along with your basic survival gear. Mark had obtained and sent along five cans of bear spray. Even though it was unlikely that a group this size would get attacked by a bear, bear spray – which is a pepper spray on steroids – is more effective than any weapon and doesn't kill the animal. Mark had told them the story of a park ranger talking to a roomful of young males. The ranger had asked the young men who all were good shots. Every hand went up. He then asked them how many, with only one shot, would be able to shoot and kill a bear coming at them in an erratic manner at forty miles-per-hour. Not a hand went up. "That," said the ranger, "is why we have bear spray."

Trig gathered the group and gave a quick lesson on backcountry camping.

"We'll pitch our tents here," he said. "It is relatively soft but porous enough that water will soak into the soil if it rains instead of turning this into a shallow, muddy lake. Put your packs down here for the moment."

Trig stepped off a good distance and turned to the group that had been following him. "This is where we will toilet," he said matter-of-factly. "Poop and pee attract animals, especially bears." The group looked at each other. "We're going to use a modified kitty-litter method. That means that we will dig two or three holes and put the dirt from the hole in a nice pile next to the hole. When you have finished, just cover your poop with dirt." He paused. "Any questions?"

The Dwarven guide returned and headed off into another direction near the creek; again a good distance from the tent area. "This," he said when he stopped, "will be our cooking and eating area. There is fresh water nearby and we can make a firepit right here." Again he paused for questions.

“All food must be kept in those special containers I gave you. We will hang them from a rope strung high enough that a bear can’t reach them. That doesn’t mean a bear won’t get them. Black bears are excellent climbers.”

Trig showed no sense of humor as he continued with his camping instructions. Some of the group found that a bit amusing, but their amusement quickly ended when he started reminding them that these were things they wanted to do if they didn’t want to die. He took the job of guide quite seriously and he knew the very real risk that their camp would be visited by either a Grizzly or Black bear. He had told the group that bears know what we smell like, and they don’t like us, so we are as safe as we possibly can be if we keep anything which might attract a bear well away from our sleeping area. Since there would be guards posted to avoid attack by mercenaries, Trig felt a little more at ease. If he educated the guards, there should be no surprise visits.

Their camp was a marvelous small meadow up against the mountain on one side and totally surrounded by tall Subalpine Fir, Spruce and White Pine. They were only at an elevation of around 5,000 feet, so with the protection of the mountain from high winds the trees grew tall and erect. The creeks babbled and splashed as the water tumbled around and across rocks and boulders. The water was almost crystal clear since it did not come from either of the two glacier above them. The scene was pastoral and each of the team were lost in their own thoughts of someone with whom they wished to share it.

The Torc insisted that it was their job to take the night watch and set up two hour watches through the night. The group slept soundly.

They were up at first light. Well, they got up somewhere between technical sunrise and the time the sun actually appeared over the mountain. With a ridge 2,000 feet above them to their east and the 8,500 foot Great Northern Mountain beyond that, first light from sunrise was quite obscured. Only the Torc Allta on guard was aware

that the eastern sky was growing lighter. Trig insisted that they eat a substantial breakfast. It was not only important for energy but there was a good chance that they might not get another hot meal for a while. He knew that they had a lot of hard hiking ahead of them.

The mountains in the wilderness are crisscrossed with trails and Glacier National Park to the north, has over seven-hundred miles of trails. In fact, the famous Continental Divide Trail, that starts near the Mexican border and runs the width of continental United States to the Canadian border, goes right through this area. Those who have climbed fourteen-thousand-foot mountains on the trail will say that the trails through northwestern Montana are the most difficult. They may not be as high as their southern cousins, but they are steeper and therefore more difficult. Bicyclist, who have traveled the country say the same thing. The famous Going-to-the-Sun Road of Glacier National Park goes from 3,200 to almost 7,000 feet in sixteen miles. That's steep. The group of seekers were learning this truth.

It was in the neighborhood of 1,500 feet elevation from their camp to the road that went around Hungry Horse Reservoir. Lost Mare Creek dropped rapidly and became a part of Kyle Creek just before reaching the road. Since they were not on a trail, the steepness of the drop forced the team to make their own switchbacks, often crossing the creek. Nevertheless, following the creek was the easiest descent.

The road at the bottom was paved. This was cause for discussion and debate as to whether to risk having the Torc Allta take their natural shape so the group could cover the three or four miles in about half the time. The group finally decided that it was worth the risk. The Torc were happy with the decision because they were most comfortable in their natural form and it would reduce the travel time from almost two hours to around thirty minutes.

The Torc Allta made good time on the smooth roads and shortly they had come to Hungry Horse Mountain and turned north along Margaret Creek to a deep

ravine created by a intermittent creek where the coordinates told them they were to turn east up the side of the mountain. The mountain was heavily forested. About three to four-hundred yards up the streambed the group found an area big enough to set up camp and far enough from the road as to be fairly well hidden. With Margaret Creek just below them, there was water. The group rested while Trig checked things out and gave his approval. It would be a good place for base-camp.



What do you get if you leave three wizard academy professors and a Blackfeet shaman unsupervised? You also must remember, one of the professors is still trying to figure out how to play Quiddich. Another is a retired assassin and the third doesn't know a Chipmunk from a Mountain Lion. Just knowing that much you know the answer must be mischief and mayhem.

Valiard, Cornelius, Napikyáiyó and Kevin were sitting in the public house talking. Somehow talking about the beautiful mountains in northwestern Montana led to looking at a map which caused one of the men to notice Muir Creek. Cornelius Penmaster really wanted to see Muir's creek. He had read so much about John Muir that it seemed almost criminal to be so near and not honor him by visiting his creek. After a discussion that was as brief as four such intellectuals could be, they came to the conclusion that the creek was named for the famous conservationist because of his contribution to the national parks and not because he had been here.

"This Flaitheas Scáth is awesome," said Cornelius looking down at the topographic map, "but I'd really like to see more of the mountains I saw when we came here from Essex."

"They are magnificent just as they were created by nature," Valiard observed.

"They're just down the road," added Kevin with an almost conspiratorial smirk.

The four men paused and looked at each other.

“I’d love to take you on a tour,” said Napikyáiyó, “but I’m not sure we’re supposed to leave here.”

“Has anyone told us that we’re not allowed to go out of the Flaitheas Scáth?” Kevin asked.

“Not to my knowledge,” Cornelius was obvious on board.

“You two sound like some of our students when they’re trying talk around academy rules,” Valiard shook his head, but he didn’t condemn the idea.

“You know that Socusdus’ guards would see us leave,” Napikyáiyó wasn’t accustomed to the type of antics that would often take place when these three got together and felt obligated to point out some reason for not doing something foolish.

“You’re right,” Valiard agreed. For a moment Napikyáiyó thought he had an ally. “But they already know we’re here and the location of the entrance. So, what if they follow us to the road. We’re not going on any secret mission.”

“What if they stop us?” Napikyáiyó insisted.

“No problemo,” laughed Kevin. “our mild-mannered ex-assassin here can handle any number of them, but I don’t think we’ll need that.”

“Would you show us Muir Creek?” Cornelius almost begged.

The stage was set and soon the four men were observed by Socusdus’ watcher to exit the Flaitheas Scáth and head down the trail toward the road. The watcher radioed back to his base and soon two heavily armed mercenaries were standing on the trail ahead of the group.

“Hi, fellas!” called out Kevin as they approached.

“What are you four up to?” one of the mercenaries demanded.

“We’re going to see Muir Creek. Wanna come along?”

“No buuuuuu” the two men dropped to the ground. Cornelius Penmaster was standing behind them, wand in hand, smiling from ear to ear.

“I haven’t used that spell for years,” Penmaster laughed. “Actually, not since I was young and it was banned in Wizard Dueling.”

Valiard was also laughing. “Did someone say something about the protection of the retired assassin?” Patting Cornelius on the back, “excellent work, Professor.”

“Now what do we do with them?” ask a rather concerned looking Napikyáiyó.

“Don’t worry,” Cornelius reassured the distraught shaman, “they’re just asleep.”

“But still,” Napikyáiyó was not reassured.

“Napikyáiyó isn’t used to wizards,” said Valiard. “In the humani world these guys would run off to get help as soon as they woke up. Right?” Napikyáiyó nodded affirmatively. “In the wizard world we have options without hurting them.”

“Probably the easiest would be a memory spell,” Kevin added.

“A memory spell?” Napikyáiyó was still finding being around magic a bit daunting.

“Yes,” Kevin continued, “it is a simple spell that erases some or all of a person’s memory. We can send these men merrily on their way to reassure their master that we’re not up to anything.”

Trying to act like the western cowboy, Cornelius held the tip of his wand up to his lips and blew on it. “What is the saying ... ‘done deal?’” The wizards laughed. Napikyáiyó smiled weakly.

As the group was almost out of sight, Cornelius pointed his wand toward the mercenaries and mumbled an incantation. Napikyáiyó could see the two men getting up.

The idea of going to see Muir Creek wasn’t so much of a problem as how do you get to Muir Creek. One must cross the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. At this point and time it was quite wild and attempting to ford it, even with magic, would have been dangerous. The four, somewhat disappointed, sat on the bank of the river for quite some time admiring the mountains beyond.

“Those mountains are a part of the Lewis Range of the Rocky Mountains,” Napikyáiyó began. “They aren’t as high as some of the Rocky Mountains farther south, but they are wild and wonderful.”

“Just up that way is the Continental Divide, and if you go north from here you will find a place called the Triple Divide. The Triple Divide is a mountain peak where water falling on the west side ends up in the Pacific Ocean anywhere from Seattle, Washington to California. The water that goes down the northeast side goes into Hudson Bay and eventually out to the Atlantic Ocean. Water that goes down the southeast side follows the Yellowstone River to the Missouri to the Mississippi and right through the middle of the United States. It is so important to water quality in North America that there are scientists here almost constantly studying it.”

“That’s pretty amazing,” said Kevin with the others agreeing.

“And over that way is my home. My people have lived, hunted and gathered along the side of these mountains for many thousands of years. At one time, before the invasion of the white man, the Blackfeet roamed from well into what is Canada down to the Yellowstone River. All we have left in the US is an area about the size of the State of Delaware. The white men who created the park made their first entrance a place called Two Medicine Lodges. It is a holy place for us.”

The four men sat admiring the scene before them.

“Well, if we can’t go hiking along Muir Creek, let’s go get a drink.” Kevin was almost always the ring-leader in such matters. In this case there were no objections.

As the four walked up to the village of Pinnacle they spotted a tourist store. Napikyáiyó hadn’t thought about his three new friends being tourists, and he snickered as the three wizards headed into the store.

One would never expect three professors getting excited over tourist trinkets. It seemed so out of character. Valiard found a pretty handmade knife. It was touted as authentic Native America. Napikyáiyó didn’t have the heart to point out the “made

in Pakistan” inprinted on the blade. Cornelius picked out a hiking staff. That was the closest thing to local but since there were hundreds of such staff for sale around the park Napikyáiyó figured that they were carved by a laser and not by somebody’s hands. Kevin, being typically Kevin, came up with a t-shirt. Of course, it was made in China. They all had to laugh though. On the front it asked how you tell Grizzly Bear skat from Black Bear skat. The answer said ‘Grizzly skat is full of bells and smells like pepper.’ None of them, except Napikyáiyó, had any idea what that meant, but they laughed like it was the most hysterical joke they’d ever heard. When Napikyáiyó explained it, they laughed even harder.

In the end, Napikyáiyó put well over one-hundred dollars on his credit card. His three colleagues had no concept of money. He didn’t really mind because these three intelligent and powerful wizards were like boys on their first trip to Disney World. Napikyáiyó found their total lack of knowledge about life in the human world so exciting and so refreshing that the money was of no consequence.

Still chattering about their exciting purchases and thanking Napikyáiyó for his great generosity, they turned their attention toward the bar. This was something about which they all thought they had knowledge. A bar is a bar whether you call it a public house, pub for short, tavern or bar.

There weren’t a lot of patrons in mid-afternoon but Napikyáiyó could hear those who were there snicker at the four men. Kevin, Cornelius and Valiard didn’t seem to hear, notice or, if they were aware, care. They looked around and picked out a table off to one side so they could all gawk at their exciting new surroundings. The room was probably twenty feet or so long and about fifteen feet wide. It was made out of local logs with a large wood burning stove in the middle for heat and gas lamps hanging from the rafters for when the electricity goes out. Since electricity wasn’t a draíochta amenity the wizards found this curious. Why not just use the lamps in the first place? The furniture was classic rustic – old and used. They didn’t get a lot of

tourist traffic and the locals were happy with what they had. There were animal horns hanging on the walls, a few old pictures, a giant mirror behind the bar surrounded by partially full liquor bottles. They had a line of five or six beer tap handles, all Montana beers. To the side of the counter under the mirror were two large bright red “Coke” chest-type coolers that most people under the age of forty have never seen. The Coke coolers were used to keep the bottled and canned beer cold. There was an open door into the kitchen which looked like the original fixtures. A few of the patrons were at tables and seeming to be enjoying the cuisine, but most were sitting on a motley collection of bar stools. After watching the newcomers and snickering, they turned back to their food and drinks and ignored the four men.

A man wearing blue jeans, a plaid shirt and an apron that had been folded over and tied around his waist came to take their order. Cornelius spotted his cowboy boots and was quite impressed. As the three wizards gave their order, Napikyáiyó wanted to hid his face. It wasn't that he was ashamed of his friends. He didn't want them to see him laugh. Their order and the exchange with the barman had the entire room in stitches.

“I'll have a pint, please,” said Valiard.

“A pint of what?”

“Oh,” Valiard gave the barman a ‘what-planet-did-you-come-from’ look. Everyone knows a pint is a pint of stout. The barman returned his look and Valiard said, “a pint of stout please.”

“We don't have stout,” the barman was actually being friendly but you could see him controlling his frustration and urge to laugh.

“Oh,” another long pause as Valiard looked at the tap handles. “Anything dark?”

“Moose Drool or Cold Smoke,” the barman replied.

“What strange names,” Valiard laughed.

“Both are excellent,” said Napikyáiyó.

“Moose Drool sounds intriguing,” Valiard decided.

The barman looked at Cornelius. You could tell that he was wondering what this strange looking man might want.

“I’ll just have a Pimm’s and tonic,” said Cornelius cheerfully as though he had made the barman’s life easy. The snickers had turned to patrons trying to stifle their laughter.

“A what?”

“Pimm’s and tonic?”

“Never heard of it.”

“Oh, my” Cornelius looked to Napikyáiyó desperate for help.

“Give him a gin and tonic,” Napikyáiyó interceded. The barman smiled and turned toward Kevin.

“You have been very kind and patient with foreign guests,” Kevin said graciously.

“We try,” the barman smiled.

“So I’m betting that I cannot get a Paddy’s neat.”

“You’re right.”

“Any scotch neat will do.”

“So far you were the easiest,” the barman smiled broadly and turned toward Napikyáiyó.

“Diet Coke, please,” said Napikyáiyó grinning.

“That I can do!” exclaimed the barman.

The show was over and the room went back to its hushed conversations.

“You know what I noticed,” said Kevin. The other three waited. “Everyone in the bar laughed. I mean, we were rather pathetic. But I never felt that their laughter was anyway mean hearted. You have to admit, we must have been pretty funny.”

“Yes,” Valiard agreed, “they were all really rather polite. We are so out of our element.”

Napikyáiyó got up and walked to the bar where the barman was filling their orders.

“Do you have fried mushrooms, poppers and such?”

“Sure.”

“Would you bring us a selection when you get a chance. I’d like my friends to experience some real Montana bar food.”

“No problem.”

The drinks came quickly and the four men talked while they waited for the bar food. They had all sorts of questions for Napikyáiyó about life in Montana. The three wizards were fairly clueless about human life, even though both Kevin and Valiard had lived for a time in a city. This was so far from what they knew or expected.

Conversation at the table was put on hold when the food arrived. The barman arrived with a large platter piled with fried mushrooms, fried onion rings, wings, mozzarella sticks and a bison slider for each man. After explaining each of the offerings, he paused a moment and beamed at the appreciation being shown by his strange guests.

With Napikyáiyó looking on with as much pride and enjoyment as the barman, the three wizards each grabbed a slider. They had never tasted bison.

“Oh, my,” exclaimed Cornelius, “this is excellent! This is outstanding! This is phenomenal! My compliments to the chef.”

The barman still beaming, and now almost overjoyed, said, “my wife’s the chef.”

“My god, man,” said Valiard, “why don’t you weight a thousand pounds? My friend’s exclamatory outburst is a true understatement.”

By this time the barman was so overwhelmed by the praise and compliment to his wife's cooking and his bar that he didn't know what to do or say. He looked at Napikyáiyó several times for help only to get "they're right."

As the four men enjoyed their drinks and food, the barman spoke softly and in an animated manner to a couple of the regulars sitting at the end of the bar. His encounter with Cornelius, Valiard and Kevin had made his day and would be a story he would probably repeat for years to come. Having heard about the compliments about her cooking, the barman's wife stepped out of the kitchen to get a look at her admirers. Upon seeing her, the three wizards stood up and gave her a polite bow. Not knowing what to do or how to respond she blushed and slipped back into the kitchen. Napikyáiyó noticed that the woman was Blackfeet.

It had turned into a wonderful afternoon. Kevin offered to buy a second round if Napikyáiyó didn't mind paying until they got back to the Flaitheas Scáth. Napikyáiyó didn't mind. In fact, he was having so much fun watching his new friends, that he didn't care. He did expect his credit card company to wonder if his card had been stolen. He didn't generally put this much on it in months.

Sadly the mood in the bar changed dramatically when two of Socusdus' mercenaries walked in. The look on the barman's face told the four that these guys had been here before and it had not been pleasant. They sat down at a table and the barman almost ran to take their orders which came in loud obnoxious outbursts of demand and profanity.

The two men kept looking at the group from McAllistar. It was pretty obvious to the four that the mercenaries had been given strict instructions not to talk about what they were doing or anything about the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth, but if looks could kill.

The four men knew that they should leave not only for their own safety but to avoid bringing trouble on the tavern owner and his wife. They were waiting for their

check when the mercenaries got their food. They had both consumed at least two pints of beer in that short time and they were being even more obnoxious. They started yelling profanities and obscenities at the barman and his wife.

Kevin could see the anger building in Valiard. “No magic,” Kevin whispered. “We don’t dare use magic.” Presidio wanted out and it was taking every bit of Valiard’s effort not to deal with the two obnoxious mercenaries.

Suddenly the mercenary who was doing most of the talking began to speak in a high squeaky voice as though he had taken a long drag on a helium balloon. Cornelius Penmaster was sitting in the corner and was now working very hard at looking innocent. He had an impish, satisfied look on his face.

“Penmaster?!?” Kevin looked shocked.

Valiard seemed to relax a bit and even find it amusing as he watched the other patrons start snickering and laughing. The mercenary was livid and screaming even more. The more he screamed the worse his voice became.

“Oh, yeah,” said Kevin. “watch this.” Only the others at the McAllistar table could see Kevin point his wand at the mercenary who was now purple with rage.

The mercenary had stood up but didn’t look particularly stable. “Lack of coordination,” Kevin whispered. The mercenary started to lean on the table and completely missed, falling on the floor. That sent the room into hysterical laughter.

Valiard, although joining in the laughter, looked at his two friends. “You guys are going to get us into trouble. That dufus has a gun.”

The laughter in the room stopped abruptly and everyone looked on in horror as the fallen mercenary, with the help of a very embarrassed comrade, got up reaching for his pistol.

“That gun?” said Penmaster. He wasn’t in the least perturbed. He was having fun. The mercenary pulled his gun and the barrel drooped pointing at the floor like something you’d see in a 1950s cartoon.

“They both have guns, smarty,” said Valiard watching the second mercenary go for his gun. Not even those at the McAllistar table saw Valiard move, but the mercenary pulled out a squirt gun. The patrons were laughing so hard that they were gasping for breath.

Poor Napikyáiyó didn’t know what to do; laugh, cry, be frightened or sit back and watch the show. He decided on the latter. “Do you guys always do this type of thing?”

“Heavens no,” laughed Kevin. “We will get into mischief from time to time but never anything this much fun.”

“It reminds me of my academy days,” said Penmaster. “Look, Ma, behind the head.” The once staid and proper professor of ancient history had put his hand behind his head with only the tip of his wand – pointed at the mercenaries - being visible to his companions. His companions turned their attention toward the mercenaries and found them moving in slow motion.

As much as the patrons were enjoying the show, the barman and a couple of his customers grabbed the mercenaries and threw them out the door.

“You know they know it was us, and they’ll be waiting for us,” said Valiard laughing.

“Awe, then it will be your turn,” said Kevin.

“I think even Presidio would find it hard to do much more to them,” Valiard smiled.

The entire bar was a buzz. Napikyáiyó paid the bill. “Lovely afternoon, barkeep,” called the three wizards. “Do you put on that show every day?” asked Cornelius.

“No!” called back the barman. “I hope that was the first and last showing.”

Outside Napikyáiyó and the wizards saw the two mercenaries waiting across the road.

“Hi, guys!” Kevin called out cheerfully. “want to walk back with us?”

“You guys had something to do with that,” one of the mercenaries said spitting out his words like venom.

“We most certainly did,” said Cornelius.

The mercenaries started to reach for their guns.

“Guns are on the bar floor,” said Valiard.

One of the mercenaries went for the long-blade knife in his boot. Before he could get it out there were two squirrels, each sitting on a pile of clothes.

“If they knew it was us,” said Penmaster grinning, “you’d think they would have learned.”

Kevin and Valiard each picked up one of the piles while the squirrels scampered away into the underbrush. Cornelius put his arm around Napikyáiyó’s shoulders. “And you don’t have to worry. They’ll change back in a few hours and have to walk home butt naked.”

Kevin and Valiard had just returned from putting the mercenaries’ clothes in a dumpster as Mahx and Minaku came walking down the road.

“We’ve been looking all over for you guys,” Minaku was obviously very upset.

“I’m so sorry, ...” Kevin found himself apologizing. He realized that he had never before apologized to someone because he was concerned about what they might think of him. Was this part of being in love?

“Sorry my ass,” Minaku continued, “do you realize how much danger you four were in?”

“I think I put Montana in danger,” Napikyáiyó said shaking his head and trying very hard not to laugh.

“What?” Mahx asked, “from Presidio?”

“No,” Napikyáiyó couldn’t control his laughing, “from Penmaster!”

Mahx and Minaku gave Napikyáiyó a strange look and then turned their attention to Penmaster. He stood there looking innocent. “You’re kidding,” they said in unison.

Napikyáiyó, totally enjoying their reaction said, “Nope.”

“To be honest,” Kevin noticed Minaku ready to say something about his honesty but she stopped. “I think we did piss off a couple of Socusdus’ mercenaries, but not to worry.”

“Why not!” Minaku demanded.

“Because they were so humiliated that they would never admit what happened.” Kevin responded as the other three snickered.

The four scoundrels headed home to the Flaitheas Scáth laughing and talking about their adventure and, of course, the treasures Napikyáiyó had bought them at the tourist shop. Mahx and Minaku followed still dumbfounded.

“You have to admit the behind the head shot was good,” said Penmaster. “I was going to bank one off the bar mirror but the barman threw them out too soon.”

“You can do that?” asked Napikyáiyó.

“Sure,” Penmaster laughed. “I have a little mirror in the corner of my classroom. For some reason the students have never noticed it, but I can see them when I’m facing the chalk-board and I’ll bank a spell off the mirror occasionally when I see them being mischievous behind my back. I’m pretty good at it.”

Napikyáiyó just shook his head. “My favorite was the sagging gun barrel,” he went on. “who did that one?”

“That was mine too,” said Penmaster.

“I thought the voice was hysterical,” said Kevin. “The angrier he got the squeakier and funnier his voice.”

“What in the hell did you four do?” Mahx demanded.

“Just had fun,” Valiard said. “We needed a break from the tension.”



The search group camped above Margaret Creek for over a week. Each day they would hike a different part of the mountain. They began to wonder whether they had misinterpreted the poem which brought about some long and sometimes almost angry discussions, debates and arguments around the fire in the evening. Cathy sent a note to Mark by pigeon. Since he wasn't living in the Flaitheas Scáth there was little fear of Socusdus getting ahold of him to find out where they were. As far as Cathy and the others knew, Socusdus didn't know Mark or that there was anyone outside the clainn in the Flaitheas Scáth. Even then, Cathy didn't give Mark their exact coordinates. There was a Y in the road just a few yards north of where they get water. She asked him if he would bring supplies to that Y.

The Torc Allta had been dutifully standing guard every night even though one would have thought they were a million miles away from any people. After about four nights they started reporting feeling like someone or something was watching from the forest. They could never find anything when they investigated, but the Torc Allta's instincts are rarely wrong.

One night the Torc decided that they would set a trap. The plan was that well before sunset two of the Torc would conceal themselves near the camp and the guard would pretend to go to sleep. This, they hoped, would give whomever was watching the sense that they could draw closer to the camp. They could then capture them.

Their plan worked. A large dark figure that looked like a shaggy Torc Allta moved out of the woods and closer to the camp. The Torc sprang from their hiding place and jumped on what turned out to be a large bear. It had to have flitted through

their minds that the bear gave up awfully easily.

“You be awesome strong,” the bear said with the four Torc on top of him.

“I’ve never met one like you. You’re not humani.”

“No. We are Torc Allta,” replied Winston, “who are you?”

“I be Latimer, guardian of Makóyi Mountain.”

By this time everyone in the camp was on the scene.

“Let him up,” Isla Metarí instructed. “I recognize that accent. I bet Latimer is a Hogboon.”

“Many thanks to the lovely dwarven warrior,” Latimer said not waiting for the Torc but standing up with them still hanging on to him. There were four very shocked Torc. The bear could have stood up and shaken them off any time he wanted. Latimer acted as if he didn’t notice. “Be she a friend of Mokakiápi?”

“I met Mokakiápi,” Isla Metarí replied.

“Your sweet voice belies bad news.” One could almost see the sadness on the bear’s face. “Latimer has not seen Mokakiápi for a long time; since he gave his friend a ride to the Flaitheas Scáth.”

There was a long pause. It reminded her of telling a family in the hospital that their loved one had died. “I’m afraid that Mokakiápi is dead,” said Isla Metarí as gently as she could.

The big bear hung his massive head and a moment later there sat a young Hogboon in tears. “I knew I should not have let him go,” said Latimer. “He was such a gentle Dwarf but that evil creature was always about looking for him.”

“Have you seen that evil creature around here?” Cathy asked.

“Once it came awful close to Mokakiápi’s cave. It is a terrifying creature. It makes Latimer’s bear look tiny and a Mountain Troll look small.”

Isla sat down beside Latimer and put her arm around his shoulders. He sat with his head between his knees and sobbed. All of them realized that Latimer

actually knew where Mokakiápi lived but they knew that they would have time later to ask him about that. Now they needed to allow him time to grieve his friend.



Latimer had been born and raised in these mountains. As with most draíochta children, he and his friends talked about magic, and for the boys animagism was always a hot topic. A number of his friends had learned how to take on an animal form. To be an animagus is a learned skill; unlike the metamorphmagus (shape shifter) for whom it is hereditary; and a difficult skill at that. While the metamorphmagus can change into any form at will, the animagus can only change into one animal. That's a part of the difficulty of the skill; viz. learning which animal. Despite thousands of years of observation and research draíochta academics still have no idea why the animagus cannot choose their own animal and what factors determine their animal. As with everything else in magic, it is a matter of the manipulation of quantum energy and the ability to focus on the sensation of the animal form; i.e. being able to consciously conceptualize the new form and physically feeling what it is like to be that animal. This latter was undoubtedly what helped Latimer.

Latimer's mother died when he was only seven years old. He never knew his father. They were well out in the wilderness when his mother died. Latimer had two choices: try to find his way to the Flaitheas Scáth or stay and learn to survive in the wilderness. He was a smart Hogboon and, even at seven years old, knew that trying to find his way through the mountains to the Flaitheas Scáth was suicidal. When he went with his mother it was always a three-day walk.

The young Hogboon concentrated on imitating what he remembered his Mother doing. He had plenty of food for a short while. His Mother had taught him the basic foraging skills but there was still a lot he didn't know and some of that, he

could admit later, was because he hadn't been listening when his Mother was trying to teach him something.

One day Latimer was out foraging. He spotted a nice berry patch in a clearing on the side of the mountain. He knew that huckleberries were great. Thimbleberries and gooseberries were both good. Mountain Sorrel needed to be cooked. Chokeberries were survival food, if they were ripe. The seeds will make you sick. And no one would think of eating a snowberry. That would be like eating a candle.

As Latimer approached the berry patch, which looked to be huckleberry, a Grizzly stood up. When you're barely four feet tall and facing an animal that is almost eight feet tall, you really feel small. Who knows what clicked between them? Unbeknown to Latimer, the Grizzly sow had lost her cub and for some reason sensed that Latimer was an orphan. She ended up adopting him and teaching him bear ways. Perhaps she could sense that his spirit animal was a bear. Because of his age, Latimer didn't think a thing of soon being able to communicate with his Grizzly momma, and before he knew it, he was thinking like a bear and had a sense of being a bear. That's when he first changed. He stayed with the sow until she had another cub. That's normal for bears, but the bear cubs are usually only two years old, not almost nine.

Between what he had learned from his mother and what the Grizzly sow taught him, Latimer lived quite comfortably. He had combined the two worlds into an almost seamless lifestyle. For example, it was easier to prepare food and eat as a Hogboon. Besides, his Grizzly form was soon much too big to enter the cabin built for draíochta who were barely four feet tall. He found it much easier, more comfortable and a lot more fun to move around the mountain as a Grizzly. It also advanced you well up the food chain.

Latimer was, as a Grizzly, ambling along a mountain ridge looking for berry patches when he heard a scream of pain. He went to investigate and found an old dwarf laying near a creek with a log on his leg. Latimer didn't think of the fear that

his form would cause. He quickly lifted the log off the dwarf's leg, stepped back and changed into his Hogboon form.

"I didn't mean to scare you," said Latimer.

The dwarf smiled, "your kindness was worth the short-term discomfort."

"What happened?"

"I was walking along the path up above and stepped on the log, not over it," the dwarf looked a bit embarrassed. "It slipped, I fell, and it came down on top of me. And if you hadn't been nearby, I'd still be trying to get free."

"Glad I could be of help," said Latimer. "My name is Latimer. What be yours?"

"I'm Mokakiápi. And where do you live, young Hogboon?"

"I have a cottage just over the ridge. Where be you from?"

"I have a cave just up the valley."

"I'm surprised I haven't seen you before."

"Well, I'm not always around," said Mokakiápi. "I spend a lot of time up by Nínaistáki. Besides, if I saw you as a bear, I would be sure to give you plenty of room."

Latimer smiled.

Mokakiápi tried, without success, to get up and let out a yelp of pain.

"Is it broken?" asked Latimer.

"I don't think it's broken but I'm not going to walk on it for a while."

"Let me give you a ride to your cave." Latimer changed into his Grizzly form and, as gently as a Grizzly bear can, put the injured Dwarf on his back.

That was the beginning of a long and enduring friendship. Mokakiápi had never told Latimer about Earrach or the flaitheas scáth entrance in his cave. It wasn't because Latimer wasn't the most trustworthy person Mokakiápi ever knew. It was to protect the young Hogboon. In this case ignorance was safety.



Latimer was more than happy to show Isla the location of Mokakiápi's cave. He showed great deference toward Cathy – Bhean Manwathiel – as due her station, and he fit in well with the men, but Isla Metarí was his idol. If one of the others said that it was evening and time for dinner, he would look at Isla. If she said it was morning and time for breakfast, it didn't matter to him what the clock said.

As it turned out the group had been past Mokakiápi's cave several times. It was less than a fifteen-minute walk from them. It was hidden behind a large boulder on the side of the mountain and required making your way along a narrow ledge.

Tanras' staff – Tagaim – did not detect any magic. That was curious since the cave opened into a small room and there was a magic portal at the back of the room. Somewhere, somehow Mokakiápi had figured out how to cloak magic. That was why they kept passing by. That's also why the Ceann a dhualgas hadn't found him.

Isla suggested that the Torc and Trig Menilobin find a place nearby to camp while she, Cathy, Tanras and Latimer went further into the cave. If this was the entrance to Earrach's Flaitheas Scáth she wanted Latimer to get to meet Earrach. He had been such a dear and faithful friend to Mokakiápi that he deserved it.

Passing through the portal was no problem. Like the portal between the beehive hut and Tunnel Creek, it was merely a matter of stepping through. Actually, Isla and Latimer were the only two who could just step through. It was not made for big people.

Behind the portal was a larger room. It had a bed, table, chairs and other furniture and household items. Tagaim gave no indication of any magic in the room.

"Guess we're going to have to start searching," said Cathy.

"No," said Tanras, "it's behind the cabinet."

"How do you know that?"

“Because he put a cabinet in front of the beehive portal.”

Tanras was right. This time, however, the portal did not open into a room. It opened into a tunnel that was barely tall enough for Isla and Latimer. Cathy and Tanras spent much of their time crawling. The tunnel went for several yards with turns and obstacles. Suddenly Tagaim began to vibrate.

“Go raibh maith agat,” said Tanras.

A few yards further was a large chamber. The four seekers searched for any sort of magical passageway. Tagaim said it was here, but they couldn’t find it. Then Cathy remembered what she had been told.

“I am Sealbhóir Eochair. Crann na beatha go deo,” Cathy said in a loud voice.

One of the walls of the chamber showed a spot of white which grew and expanded until there was a large opening. Looking through the group could see a sunny meadow. When they stepped through the opening they stood in amazement. There was the most magnificent tree they had ever seen. There was Earrach!

It is hard to describe the size, magnificence and beauty of a Crann na beatha and Earrach was no exception. She stood several hundred feet high and the diameter of her canopy had to have surpassed a hundred and twenty-five feet. The trunk supporting such a canopy was massive. Earrach’s branches were far greater in circumference than the trunks of most large trees. Some of her leaves were so large that they could enfold a dwarf. Her canopy was marvelously geometrical and her mere presence gave one a sense of awe, strength and well-being. There are really few things as beautiful as a healthy tree. Here before them stood the hope of life, the mother of all mother trees.

“You may come closer,” said Earrach. “I have been expecting you.”

The four realized that they had been standing there just staring. Of course, they didn’t think about Earrach being aware of their presence.

“We were afraid that we didn’t understand Mokakiápi’s clues,” Tanras finally spoke.

“He did an excellent job guiding all of you.”

“All of us?”

“Yes,” said Earrach in a voice as gentle as a passing breeze. “he led you, Isla, to find Metarí and learn of your ancestry and destiny. He taught you the password, Cathy, and led you, Tanras, to Napikyáiyó so you could find the clues Mokakiápi left.”

Isla found herself again in the position of giving bad news. She wondered how this marvelous tree, who had known Mokakiápi her entire life, would react to the news.

“I’m afraid I have . . .”

Before Isla could finish you could sense the giant branches droop a bit.

“Yes, I know. His last thoughts were of me and I could feel them.” There was deep sadness in Earrach’s voice.

“I’m so very sorry,” said Isla Metarí. “I was there. He didn’t want us to pursue his killer. All he wanted was for us to find and protect you. I’m so sorry it took us so long. We left you alone.”

“I know you did your best,” Earrach said. “I was aware of your sense of urgency and concern when you realized that I had spent my life with Mokakiápi and was now alone. Your sincere concern for me gave me comfort.”

“I think that I know how Higad destroyed the Ceann a dhualgas,” Isla Metarí said.

“That’s wonderful. I never had any doubts of your abilities.” Earrach paused. “Tanras, you want to ask me something. You want to ask to take Mokakiápi’s place. And you will. Mokakiápi felt that you are a fine Iarrthóir and worthy of the honor.”

“Thank you so much,” Tanras almost whispered. He felt so humbled by this magnificent being and began to wonder about his skills and power compared to Mokakiápi who had planted the tree and protected it for three-hundred years.

“Don’t be afraid,” Earrach said aware of Tanras’ fears, “I’m sure Mokakiápi was right about you. I can sense great strength, knowledge and, above all, honor.”

A wave of gentleness and encouragement passed over Tanras. It was as though the tree had reached down and caressed him to calm his fears.

“And this young hogboon must be Latimer,” Earrach said.

Latimer stepped forward and bowed. “At your service, great Earrach.”

“Oh, you already have been of great service, and I am sorry that Mokakiápi was not able to tell you about me. I hope you understand that it was for your own safety.”

“Yes, m’lady,” replied Latimer without raising his eyes.

“Then you should raise your head and look at me. If you desire, I would be happy to have you stay with Tanras and me.”

The Hogboon looked up. Tears were running down his cheeks and all he could do was smile.

“Did you bury my love?”

“He was cremated,” said Cathy, “and we will bring his ashes to you.”

“I would love that,” Earrach responded. “I would very much like him home with me.” There was a pause. The bond which Isla and Cathy had suspected was even greater than they thought.

Soon Isla, Cathy, Tanras and Latimer were sitting among the roots of the giant tree listening to Earrach’s story. Cathy couldn’t help but think of how much Cornelius Penmaster would love to be with them learning Earrach’s history. Cathy did her best to listen carefully so she could take the story back to Cornelius.

“My mother, Lilliletta, sent my seed west with the McAllistars when they fled the

white humani invasion in the 27th year of the reign of Roren Rí. She had entrusted me to Mokakiápi who planted my seed when Roren Rí built Ruklidome. He was like a proud father and took wonderful care of me as I grew.”

“Even most draíochta do not understand that all of plant life communicates, thanks to the mycelium. Besides my magical senses that tell me what is happening outside my flaitheas scáth, I talk to the other plants. I knew when Tanras and Cathy asked the tree to cut a branch for Isla’s magic staff. The tree was quite impressed with the sincerity of your promise. We can tell when they are just words a wizard utters and when they are spoken in truth. In fact, I don’t think animal life communicates with nearly the sensitivity as do plants. Humani don’t even listen to each other most of the time,” Earrach laughed.

“Mokakiápi was as clever as he was wise and compassionate. When he created the entrance to this flaitheas scáth he made it small so that it would not be easily passable and he put a spell on the cave so that it cloaked the presence of magic. That alone saved us a number of times.”

“He was like a doting father and I loved him very much. We spent close to a hundred years without the slightest worry. That’s when Nearin came to warn the McAllistars about the McKintry and Morganians.”

“Mokakiápi’s staff was a branch from me, so it was like I was with him whenever he traveled. He loved the Blackfeet and especially a modern-day shaman named Napikyáiyó. There were many times that he thought Napikyáiyó was leath draíochta and he wanted so much to bring him to meet me, but the Ceann a dhualgas was hanging around more and more and Mokakiápi did not want to endanger his friend’s life. I was so happy when Napikyáiyó became good friends of the McAllistars.”

“We were a bit concerned when the first white humani moved into the area. They are so different than the indigenous people and draíochta. They think only of themselves and give very little thought to the nature around them. We didn’t know what

to expect when they started building the dam on our beautiful river.”

“Thankfully there have always been some, like Dr. Demer and Napikyáiyó, who still retain the old sensitivity the rest of humani seem to have forsaken for the sake of what they deem to be wealth. Dr. Demer still has the ability to communicate with plants and other animals, but he doesn’t realize it. It is what he thinks are instincts.”

“I wonder . . .,” Earrach stopped in mid-sentence. “I just had the most marvelous idea.” This caused everyone to sit up. “I am going to send three leaves back with you; one for Dr. Demer, one Napikyáiyó and one for his daughter, Minaku. I sense that she has the power to become a great shaman like her father. If they touch the leaf and they are leath draíochta, the leaf will turn into a scarlet cloak. If they are not it will turn into an orange cloak which, when they put it on, will enable them to communicate with nature. Over time, if they use the cloak often, they will regain their natural abilities.”

It was decided that Tanras and Latimer would stay with Earrach while Isla and Cathy would take the leaves and return to the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth. Earrach gave Cathy what appeared to be a crooked little walking stick from her branches. Like Mokakiápi’s staff, it would enable Earrach to go along, so to speak.



Back at the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth all were anxious to hear about Earrach. Of course Isla, Cathy and the others were also anxious to hear about what happened after they left. Minaku told Isla and Cathy about the painting on the teepee, in private of course. Other than Cornelius, Valiard, Kevin and Napikyáiyó disappearing for an afternoon, everything had been quiet.

Isla and Cathy presented Mark, Napikyáiyó and Minaku with their leaves. All three had orange cloaks. Isla explained how Earrach and the others all wondered if the three of them might not be leath draíochta, and, if not, if they wore the cloaks, they

would regain the ability to communicate with nature as their species originally had. A long discussion ensued about whether or not a humani could decide to become draíochta. There was no physiological difference between a witch/wizard and a humani other than the witch/wizard uses a great deal more of their brain power. Mark was the only one who was happy being a “dumb humani” although he had to admit that his being able to communicate with plants and other animals was rather exciting. He was happy to leave the magic to his draíochta friends. Minaku and her father, on the other hand, were quite willing to be guinea pigs to see if you could teach old humani new tricks. While for most it was a theoretical discussion, for Kevin – who was still trying to figure out how to play Quiddich – it became a challenge. His biggest problem was how do you get them to use more of their brain.

While Kevin was driving poor Minaku up a wall trying to get her to use even more of her brain, which would be hysterically funny to those who knew that her IQ was already pushing 200, Isla had retired to enjoy some quiet time alone with Sorg. For that first night they were able to shut out the world around them because they both knew that sooner than later they would have to face the reality of Isla Metarí having to face Socusdus and his Ceann a dhualgas.

“What I really want to do,” Isla was saying when they came to the point of confronting the future, “is take on the Ceann a dhualgas somewhere well away from Earrach. That way, if I fail, the monster still doesn’t know where she is.”

Sorg didn’t want to think about Isla failing, but he knew that it could happen. Even the thought of the remotest possibility of her failing left him in a state of panic. He knew that he had to overcome that if he was going to help her in any way.

They batted around several ideas until Isla decided that the easiest way was for her to go toward Socusdus’ camp and call him out. She would take one of Valiard’s shields since there was a good chance someone would try to shoot her. But she figured that Socusdus would be driven by rage at being humiliated by a young female dwarf and

driving need to find Earrach. Knowing that he wasn't going to get her to give up the location, he would undoubtedly send his Ceann a dhualgas.

"How do you propose getting behind the creature?" asked Sorg. "Higad supposedly dropped from a tree."

"I don't know," Isla admitted. "I can't help but think that I can move faster or am more agile than a giant creature."

"Okay, so you get behind it. Do you think it's going to say 'okay, hop aboard?'"

"I have no idea, . . ." Isla paused. "Wait a minute. Do you think that the wizards could cause the beast to fall?"

"How would that help?"

"If I knew it was going to fall and it fell in front of me, I would have a good chance of getting on its back before it got up."

"Oh, that's risky!"

"Tell me what part of this entire scenario isn't risky."

Sorg had no answer for that. The idea of purposely taking on such a beast seemed suicidal at best. But Sorg knew that this confrontation was going to take place no matter how much he wished that it didn't. It was better for Isla Metarí to have whatever advantage she might be able to create.

Isla talked to Kevin and Valiard about her idea of making the beast fall. They felt that they could do that much. Kevin, in his usual outlandish way of thinking, wished that they knew some fairies who could fly around the beast several times with a rope making it more difficult for him to get up.

"Actually, there are some Tuatha Dé a couple of days south of us," said Sorg. "We've never been friends. I mean, how many friends do fairies have? But I'd be willing to bet that they want to save Earrach and get Ceann a dhualgas out of the neighborhood as much as the rest of us."

"If they would wrap the Ceann a dhualgas's legs and arms, it would not only

cause it to fall, but make it difficult to get up, giving Isla time to get situated,” Valiard concluded.



Gadin Rí sent an emissary to talk to Tuatha Dé (fairy) queen Chepi. The Tuatha Dé had lived among the Salish tribes for many generations before the Dwarf arrived. Gadin Rí knew nothing about the clainn except that Chepi Banrion had been the queen for as long as anyone could remember. When Sorg said two days, he was thinking about walking. With Mark behind the wheel they reduced that to a couple of hours. Of course, finding and getting permission to see Chepi Banrion was something else.

In the meantime, Isla Metarí, the academy wizards and two draíochta physicians focused on how Isla was going to heal the Ceann a dhualgas’ supramarginal gyrus. It was a taxing exercise at best, full of frustration, answers creating more questions, all with the realization that, once they figured out how to heal the beasts supramarginal gyrus they had to figure out how they were going to perform the procedure. Obviously the Ceann a dhualgas wasn’t going to stop and let Isla have a go.

If they were going to find a spell or create a spell to heal the brain, they had to know the problem. They needed to know if the supramarginal gyrus was not working (1) due to disease, (2) because it had been shut off, (3) it had been removed, or (4) it had been damaged. They fairly quickly discarded two and three. Both of these would have to have been acts by the creator and that creator would have to have had some serious medical skills. There was no evidence that the creator had any medical skills. Besides, only Higad seemed to have figured out that this was the beast’s weakness, so the creator probably would have no reason to think about shutting down this portion of the brain. That left disease and damage. Most probably both of these possibilities

would have happened while the brain was in the original person's head. That most likely contributed to that person having been particularly evil.

This being the case, both disease and damage should respond to the same healing spell. That meant that the next step was to figure out a healing spell. The group thought about casting spells and realized that Isla had never used a wand and may not be able to use a wand if she had the skills. That, of course, led to the idea of potions, but there was the problem of administering a potion. The physicians of the group, of whom Isla herself was one, turned to the physiological foundation. They knew that dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and endorphins were the 'happiness quartet', and that oxytocin was the principal actor when it came to compassion and human relations. They needed to figure out how to administer oxytocin – or all four – along with a healing spell that did not require a wand.

"Actually getting these into the beast shouldn't be a problem," said Cathy. "They could be shot into it from a distance like they do with tranquilizer guns."

"Any one of the Brotherhood should be able to do that," said Minaku, "but, if you're using a magic spell, why would you need that?"

"Remember what I taught you about magic?" said Kevin.

"Magic is the modification of given or available materials through the use of quantum energy," Minaku recited.

"So if the beast has none of the happiness quartet in its body, no amount of quantum energy is going to make a difference," Kevin concluded.

"Okay," said Isla, "so we start by drugging him up."

"Well, I guess you could say that," said Kevin. "But I don't know the healing process in the brain."

"You can't actually heal a damaged brain," said Turin.

"Then what the hell are we trying to do?" exclaimed Valiard.

“When a brain cell is damaged,” continued Turin ignoring Valiard’s outburst, “it reverts to an embryonic state. In this immature state the cell becomes capable of re-growing new connections that, under the right conditions, can help to restore lost function.”

“Yes,” added Cathy, “and research have also found where brains have created entire new pathways for communication around a damaged area.”

“That’s more than a one or two step spell,” said Kevin. “Higad likely didn’t know about the happiness quartet, embryonic states or creating new neuropathways. He had a spell that, whether or not he knew why, worked.”

“Are we back at square one?” complained Isla.

“Could Higad have simply flooded the beast’s brain with love and compassion and the essential chemicals in it just happened to be there?” questioned Cornelius. “There are a lot of accounts of healing the brain or the mind in ancient history. If you can’t actually heal a damaged brain cell today, I’m sure that it was not possible hundreds of years ago.”

“Then we’re back to the idea of making sure there is plenty of dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and endorphins in the beast when you apply your magic,” said Kevin.

“How then am I to do the manipulation if I can’t use a wand,” asked Isla.

The room went silent. They could do all of the preparations necessary and come up with the best possible spell, but if Isla didn’t have the means and skills to cast the spell there was no chance of success. Nevertheless, Isla Metarí knew that defeating the Ceann a dhualgas was her destiny and that her ancestor, Higad, had not been a wizard. He was, however, known as a healer, warrior and great leader. Isla Metarí was a healer and warrior. Almost in a trance state she pondered what she knew and tried to put herself in Higad’s place. She had to rely on Kevin for the science of magic. That was extremely important here. Higad might have just been lucky to have

all of the necessary elements in place. She knew that she could either take the chance and hope to be so lucky or she could do her best to have all the elements in place.

Kevin had to have been thinking along the same train of logic. “I know it is very much out of character for me, but I think we might be over-thinking this.”

Everyone looked at Kevin in disbelief. Kevin, Cornelius and Minaku didn’t know when to stop over-thinking a subject.

“The physicians,” he said indicating those around him, “can tell us what chemicals need to be present and other essentials. What we need to do with that is find a way that Isla can cast a simple healing spell.” He paused to think. “I would lay odds that Higad didn’t have any fancy spell. He wasn’t a wizard. So it had to be simple and something that could be done without a wand.”

“Coming at it from that point,” said Turin, “saying that a brain cell cannot be healed is a human reality. What is to say that using magic; as you say the manipulation of available materials by quantum energy; cannot restore a brain cell?”

“Wow,” exclaimed Kevin, “now that’s thinking outside the box!”

“But he’s right, isn’t he?” said Minaku. “What he said makes sense. Theoretically you can make a brain cell with magic. Right? If you can theoretically do that, what is to say you couldn’t take a damaged brain cell and rebuild it?”

“So, if we get enough dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and endorphins into this creature to make sure that all of the necessary elements are present, what simple spell can you teach me that doesn’t require a wand?” Everyone looked at Isla like she’d just shot them down.

“You keep talking about the necessity of a wand,” said Minaku. “Isn’t a wand just a means of focusing the energy?”

“Yes,” said Cornelius. “but”

“But doesn’t the actual energy, the actual directions, or whatever you want to call it, come from the hands of the wizard?”

“I like where you’re going,” said Kevin. “There is an entire humani healing tradition built around therapeutic and healing touch.”

“So how could I apply that to the Ceann a dhualgas?” asked Isla.

“I haven’t had the slightest idea of most of what you guys have said thus far,” Mark said in a rather apologetic manner, “but I think you might have touched on an area where I might be of assistance.”

“Outstanding!” exclaimed Kevin.

“First of all, the healing touch practitioner must firmly believe what they are doing. That’s not an issue here because you all know the reality of magic and the power of the touch. Most of the success of the therapeutic or healing touch comes from the gentleness and compassion of the practitioner. You’re not going to heal this monster by slapping it on the back of the head. The question then, Isla, is whether you can touch this creature with love and compassion. Can you get past what it is and what it wishes to do?”

All eyes were on Isla. She sat quietly and contemplated what Mark had just said.

“I am a physician. Humani physicians are trained to put their dedication to life and healing above what they think about their patient. I have seen emergency room physicians save the life of vile and evil people because it is their role, their place, their calling in life to save life, not take it.”

“That’s what I figured,” Mark’s smile was warm and gentle, and filled with pride in hearing the true description of his trade.

“So, if I’m understanding this right,” said Valiard, “we need to find a healing spell which Isla can administer – not cast – by putting her hands on the Ceann a dhualgas in a loving and compassionate manner.”

“Actually” Isla smiled, “that makes a lot of sense. The very fact that I am acting in a loving, compassionate way; instead of attempting to cut its head off; should contribute to the healing.”

“Theoretically the creature then has two choices; change its ways and become a compassionate creature or cease to exist,” Minaku summarized.

“Exactly,” said Kevin. “Sadly we know that if it were to change, its creator would withhold the life-giving chemicals and it would die anyway.”

With some historic input from Cornelius, the task of coming up with the spell fell to Valiard and Kevin. The incantation was easy enough. “Tugaim grá agus comhbhá duit.” The more difficult part was enabling Isla to project the energy of the spell through her hands.

“Have you ever taught a student to create a plasma ball with their hands?” Cornelius asked the others. They shook their heads. “Well, we have to teach this young dwarven woman to create a plasma ball, or something similar. Once she is able to do that then she can easily replace the energy for the plasma ball with the compassion and love needed for the spell.”



Isla spent hours on end working on creating a plasma bolt. The concentration required to create something like a plasma ball in one’s hands without a wand is tremendous, and only the most skilled students were ever able to do it. After hours spent inside trying to create the plasma ball, she decided to sit on the edge of the ledge just outside the great entrance doors. It was all a matter of concentration and focus, but Isla had never used a wand. Doing magic with a wand requires a lot of focus. Doing magic without a wand was even harder. For hours at a time she could

be seen standing on the edge of the ledge with her hands at hip level about ten to twelve inches apart.

It was dusk. Cathy, Torin, Minaku, Kevin, and Mahx were headed to the public house. They invited Isla as they passed. She, of course, politely declined their invitation. As they were walking down the path toward the village, they heard a tremendous scream. They ran back toward the cave entrance. It had to have been Isla. What could have happened?

As they approached Isla turned toward them. She had a gigantic smile on her face, held her hands in front of her with palms facing each other, and suddenly there was a plasma ball. Isla laughed. "I did it!" she shouted to her friends. "I finally did it!"

The group surrounded the excited dwarf and stood in awe as she created a plasma ball time after time until there seemed to be no effort. Through the encouraging words and praise Kevin could be heard explaining that this was, indeed, the way it usually happened. No one, he was saying, could really say what they did differently. It just suddenly happened, and Minaku kissed him on the cheek and whispered, "shut up. No one cares. Just be happy for Isla."

After Isla got tired of making plasma balls, the entire group went on to the public house. Now they had a really good reason to go; viz. to celebrate Isla's success.

The Trio; as Napikyáiyó, Valiard, and Cornelius had become known; were already there and sitting at a table off in a corner. They had become inseparable. Generally, when they were seen together at this particular corner table, they were debating something or making plans for some adventure which usually got them in at least a wee bit of trouble. When they were in that mode they blocked out the world around them. It got to the point that whenever they were observed on the path between the village and entrance to the flaitheas scáth someone was sent to follow them. Those who were sent to follow and 'protect' them began to notice that Socusdus'

mercenaries had stopped following them. They had become frequent and welcome guests at the bar where they humiliated Socusdus' men. When he was around, Mark Deming joined the three and was known to provide transportation.

At first the Trio paid no attention to the group until Kevin; who had become a peripheral member since Minaku entered his life; interrupted to tell them the good news. The entire pub became a celebration honoring Isla. She was, in fact, a little bit embarrassed when everyone present insisted that she show them her new skill. Sorg was so proud of her that he declared an open bar; at his expense, of course; and had the kitchen keep a steady supply of food.

Napikyáiyó, while quite impressed with young Isla's new skill, didn't understand why making a plasma ball was important since nothing seemed to faze a Ceann a dhualgas.

"For Isla to change the Ceann a dhualgas' supramarginal gyrus she must use a spell. To perform the spell would normally be an easy matter of aiming the wand and reciting the incantation," Cornelius explained. Napikyáiyó understood that much.

"Since she won't be able to use a wand, she will have to put her hands on the beast's head by the supramarginal gyrus, which is just above and behind the ears, and send the energy directly from her hands." This is where they were losing the shaman.

"There are only a couple of wizards powerful enough to do magic without something – wand, staff or ring – to direct the energy. Cathy's grandfather, Brian Prionsa, is the only wizard alive whom we know can do magic barehanded. Our hopes are that having her hands within inches of the supramarginal gyrus, she will be able to transfer the energy of the spell without a wand. Having her learn to create a plasma ball in her hands is simply a means of teaching her to transfer energy through her hands. We have absolutely no idea what it is that enables the new wizard to do this. It is something that just suddenly clicks. By having Isla learn to create a plasma ball we have hopefully enabled her to send whatever energy she chooses through her hands. We

are also counting on Isla's own natural love and compassion to be that 'little extra something,'" Cornelius held up his hands in the sign of quotation marks, "that will make the spell work."

"Why does she need an incantation?" asked Napikyáiyó. "Did you give it some special power?"

"No," laughed Valiard. "The incantation is like talking out loud, or talking your way through a process." He paused a moment. "I have a feeling you've never seen a wizard duel."

"Sounds interesting, but no, I've never even seen a human duel."

"Have you seen a boxing match?"

"Yes."

"The boxer throws a punch with one hand while defending themselves with the other. Think of wizard dueling as being similar but to get your right arm to do a right jab you have to say 'right jab.' That's the incantation. The successful wizard dueler listens very carefully to the opponent as well as watching," Valiard started to laugh.

"There is a true story of how Cathy's grandfather, Brian Prionsa, defeated the long-time reigning dueling champion only shortly after he learned that he was a wizard.

The story goes that afterwards the champion was annoyed, not at being defeated, but being told to go easy on the new wizard and then not being told that Brian didn't need a wand and he didn't have to verbalize the incantation. The poor champion had been at a horrible disadvantage. There are a fair number of powerful wizards who do not need to verbalize the incantation, but they think them. The incantation is the directions for the spell."

"I think I've got it," Napikyáiyó smiled. "If I wanted to turn Cornelius' hair green, I would need a wand to direct my energy so I didn't miss, and an incantation to say what I wanted to happen."

"Basically, yes," both friends responded.

“So since Isla has never even used a wand, you’re having to teach her to bring the energy for the spell to her hands. You’re hoping that the sheer proximity of the energy in her hands to the supramarginal gyrus will do the job. Her incantation are the directions. What does it mean?”

“Oh, Tugaim grá agus comhbhá duit is our draíochta common-tongue for ‘I give you love and compassion.’ Pretty straight forward, wouldn’t you say?” smiled Cornelius.

Napikyáiyó looked across the room at Isla Metarí who was laughing and smiling, holding tightly to Sorg Prionsa who was beaming with pride. A sense of sadness washed over him. In many ways this was like a group of soldiers the night before a great battle. Skills were honed and confidence was at its peak, partying like it was the last day because, for some, it would be their last day. The old shaman had no doubt of Isla Metarí’s great skill or the power of the magic of the elder wizards who were guiding her, but she was facing some of the most horrific magic and unimaginable evil. Even if she succeeds, she could die. He noticed his daughter, Minaku, and Mahx standing near her. How many times, unbeknown to him, had the two of them offered their lives in exchange for the common good? In truth, no one was safe in this battle.

Sensing his friend’s pain, Valiard reached out and put his hand on Napikyáiyó, “Don’t go there, my friend. They will be fine. You must believe that.”

“Magic?”

“No magic,” Valiard searched for words – for a way of explaining. “I hate seeing armies teaching young warriors to believe themselves invincible. Those who use the armies for their own wealth and benefit do that on purpose to get the warriors to do things that common sense would tell them is ludicrous. At the same time, it probably saves a lot of young lives. Those who command the armies aren’t doing it to save

lives, but the self-confidence and self-belief does tend to help them survive. We must believe.”

Napikyáiyó just looked at him. “Believe what?”

“We must believe that these young people will succeed and survive. Evil grows strong on fear. We cannot imagine anything other than their success. If we don’t, evil will win because we will hesitate and falter. Our fear will become self-fulfilling prophecy.”

CHAPTER 9

The only possible explanation of why the stately procession of fairies did not receive attention from the humani is that humani are so certain that draíochta do not exist that their brains shut out reality. This is not an uncommon phenomenon among humani. It is not uncommon for a humani to be walking down a street and walk right by a family member without seeing them because their brains were preconditioned, convinced that that family member was not going to be on that street at that time. Since the humani are accustomed to using, on an average, only ten to fifteen percent of their brains the brain filters out a high percentage of the informational signals it received from the various receptors. Humani filter out an extremely high percentage of audio signals. In many cases, when it appears that a humani is ignoring you, there is a good chance that they simply do not see, hear or smell you because of this filtration system.

The other possible explanation is that anyone who might realize that they saw a large company of fairies would correctly assume that other humani would laugh at them or think them mentally ill. Since both of those are seriously upsetting to the average humani, the person simply avoids the possibility by not telling anyone what they saw.

Fairies come in a variety of sizes and shapes from Pixies and Brownies to Will-o'-the-whisp. In European mythology fairies have been blamed for everything from stealing children to causing deadly diseases. Fairies are a group of youthful and pure spirits. They are considered to elevate to high levels through their impartial and loving service; lower to “sylph” and higher to “elf”. There is, however, no evidence of such metamorphosis. In fact, the notion upsets and insults not only the fairy but the sylph and the elf.

The Tuatha Dé of the Swan Clainn live in the Bob Marshall Wilderness to avoid conflict with humans. Sorg and Mark had been able to drive to the Meadow Creek Landing Strip on the South Fork of the Flathead River well south of the Spotted Bear Ranger Station. They parked near the Meadow Creek Falls. From there they continued south on foot along the Flathead and were finally intercepted by some members of the Swan Clainn at the foot of Black Bear Mountain. It took only the mention of the Ceann a dhualgas to get Mark and Sorg an immediate audience with Chepi Banrion, and she was very pleased that Gadin Rí had sent his son to make their case.

Impartial and loving service or not, Chepi was not anxious to be on the same continent with a Ceann a dhualgas, nevertheless within feet. Sorg explained that they had found Earrach and that she was safe for the time being but that it was only a matter of time before Socusdus found her and sent his Ceann a dhualgas. The death of Earrach would obviously be catastrophic. He explained how Isla Metarí was a direct descendent of Higd Rí and would be the one to take on the beast. The Swan Clainn were important because of their flying skills. The plan did not call for them to actually engage the monster. Only Isla Metarí would physically engage the Ceann a dhualgas.

Chepi Banrion understood the horrible domino effect that would take place if Socusdus found and destroyed Earrach. To her there was no real choice. If they did not help the McAllistars there would be no hope thereafter. At least they would have a chance at survival if they helped the McAllistars.

Chepi gathered her clainn and asked for volunteers. There were so many that she had to have a lottery. Twelve were chosen. Watching them you would have thought they had won the prize.

“They have no idea what’s ahead of them,” Chepi said sadly. Mark and Sorg would have loved to have called the whole thing off, but they needed these brave

fairies. “I’ve never actually seen a Ceann a dhualgas but I met an elf many years ago who encountered one. He said that it was the most terrifying experience of his life. Your young warrior must be pretty awesome.”

Sorg wanted to cry. “Isla is a young dwarf from Coillearnach who became a physician. She had never touched a sword until she came here to visit.”

“You’re kidding me,” said Chepi. “Please tell me you’re kidding me.”

“Earrach seems to believe that she and Metarí are the right ones for the task,” said Sorg. He went on to tell the queen the entire story.

The next morning the twelve “lucky” fairies, Sorg and Mark stood waiting for the queen to come and say good-bye. They were not prepared for what was to come.

Chepi Banrion emerged from her chambers in full armor and carrying a magnificent sword. The Pauldron, couter, faulds and poleyn of her armor were all gold while the rest of the armor was highly polish silver. A cape of white linen hung from her shoulders. She stood facing the group like a warrior, with her feet about shoulder width apart, her golden blonde hair blowing gently in the breeze and her hands resting on the hilt of a magnificent sword in a fashion that belied training and experience. The group stood looking in awe.

“We have lived peacefully in these mountains for almost three hundred years. I was banrion when Roren built Ruklidom. I hate fighting and killing, and it has been centuries since this blade tasted blood, but I remember. I remember the horror and the fear and the anger and the death. As the banrion of this clainn I will not send my young people off to face such horrors alone. If they must go, I will lead them.”

A cheer went up from the crowd gathered to see the warriors off.

The Swan fairies are actually a slight bit smaller than the dwarf; about the size of a humani five-year-old. At a shrill whistle from Chepi, a herd of horses came galloping up. They were about eleven to twelve hands high. In the humani world such animals would have been classified as ponies, but for the fairies they were the same

proportions as a fourteen to sixteen hand horse is to a humani. They were all white. That's when Mark realized that they weren't horses. They were unicorn.

Mark stood looking at the beautiful unicorn standing before him. Sadly, Mark was large even for a humani, so it would have been better for him to carry the unicorn. He didn't want to appear unappreciative but there was no way he was climbing on that poor animal's back. Seeing his consternation, Chepi Banrion pointed her ring at the unicorn, mumbled an incantation and soon there was a magnificent draft horse standing beside Mark. It must have been at least seventeen hands tall. Mark called his thanks to the queen, who simply smiled and gave the signal for the group to move out.

While the group started up Spotted Bear Creek, Mark headed off north toward Meadow Creek Falls at a cantor. The draft horse was magnificent and seemed to enjoy running along the trail. Mark had been told to simply tell the horse "go home" when he got to the truck. It was such an enjoyable ride that he almost wished that he didn't have to take the old pickup the rest of the way.

Chepi led the group through a maze of valleys and passes to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River well south of where it intersects US-2. They followed the Middle Fork up to the highway and then caught a series of pack trails and old forgotten roads so they could stay off the highway.

Mark had pushed the old Ford hard to get to the McAllistair Flaitheas Scáth ahead of the fairies. It was just enough time for the dwarf clainn to prepare to receive their guests.

"There is no way that Socusdus isn't going to know about our visitors," said a concerned Cornelius Penmaster.

"That's good," replied Isla Metarí. "It will give him something to worry about."

When Sorg arrived with Chepi Banrion and her warriors, the guards were ready and opened the entrance portal so they could enter without dismounting. One would

have thought that Cornelius had had time to coach the guards on the fine art of bowing, for the guards gave Chepi Banrion the most gracious and magnificent bows.



As the stately procession moved up Tunnel Creek Socusdus' mercenary guard did a double-take, putting his binoculars back to his eyes in disbelief. One would have thought that Socusdus' mercenaries would have been accustomed to all things magical by this time, but evidently not.

A tall, well-built soldier in dark-green camo, Kevlar vest and brown beret stood at attention. A dumpy little man, whose bulk was pressing hard on some of the seams of his black cassock, sat in a burgundy wing-backed chair facing a coal fire.

"What is it, lieutenant?" the man demanded without taking his attention from the fire.

"Thought you should know, sir," began the soldier. "There's quite a parade coming up the valley. Tiny people on what look like horses with horns led by a tiny woman wearing medieval armor." He paused. "And Sorg is with them."

"Dia a stór, níl!" the man muttered under his breath.

"Sir?"

"Is the woman beautiful with creamy skin, long yellow hair and carrying a sword that's almost as big as her?"

"I don't know about the sword, but she is blonde and quite beautiful. Her armor is gold and silver."

"Diabhall!"

"Sir?" The soldier obviously didn't understand the draíochta common tongue.

"Fairies!" the man spat. "What the hell is Chepi doing here?"

"Do you want us to . . ."

“I don’t want you to do anything!” the man yelled.

“Sorry, sir, it’s just that they’re”

“You guys still don’t get it, do you?” the overweight wizard said shifting his bulk sideways to give the soldier a disdainful look. “That fairy may be small and probably five or six hundred years old but she is quite capable of reaming you a new one, and any one of those dwarfs can take ten of you without breaking a sweat.”

That definitely annoyed the soldier, but he kept his stance as well as his composure. Some of the mercenaries who had worked for Cocman had made their way to Socusdus. The lieutenant had heard their stories about the dwarf who threw mercenaries around like rag dolls, magical animals the size of a rhino and the lion-man who could kill with a touch. His own men had been humiliated by a bunch of guys in green tights and a band of Indians who seemed to just disappear into thin air. In truth, the only reason that he was still there was that he was afraid to leave. He knew that he wouldn’t make it to the highway alive.

Socusdus had turned his attention back to the fire but his mind was swimming with possible explanations for the sudden appearance of the fairy queen, Chepi Banrion. He waved off the soldier, who was still standing at attention, and began to ponder the change in situation. There were stories among the Morganians in North America about a fairy queen who had brought her clainn to the new world to escape the wars in Ireland. Just before her appearance in North America she had allied her clainn with other draíochta in a pitch battle against the Morganians. The Morganians had won the battle but at great cost due to the fairy queen. She was spotted later in the new world; identified by her armor of gold and silver. Socusdus knew of the Swan Clainn but he hadn’t known that Chepi Banrion was the fairy queen of ancient stories. This put an entirely new slant on the situation. Chepi had obviously allied herself with Gadin Rí. What were they up to?

“Martinson!” Socusdus yelled in the general direction of the door.

The soldier immediately appeared; standing at attention, “Sir!”

“Double the guards and be sure that those idiots watching the back entrance of the Flaitheas Scáth don’t get bushwhacked like the others. Send a man to the top of the ridge as a radio relay. Send a tent with him. He’s to stay there and those watching the back entrance are to check in with him every thirty minutes.” Socusdus paused. “Oh, and give the order that no one is to engage anyone from Flaitheas Scáth unless it is by my order or self-defense. And send Liltippin here.”

A short while later a tall, slender man wearing a black cassock and dark blue hooded cloak, entered the room. Liltippin was one of a handful of Morganian wizards who accompanied Socusdus. While they never mentioned it, the mercenaries were afraid of these wizards and didn’t like being around them. Liltippin was considered almost as scary as Socusdus. The mercenaries were certain that Liltippin had only two expressions on his thin, bony face; disdain and a sadistic smirk.

“M’lord,” said Liltippin standing several paces from Socusdus and lowering his head slightly.

“Come here,” Socusdus invited him in the closest thing to a pleasant and friendly voice. “We have more problems.”

“I saw Chepi Banrion and her company,” said Liltippin. “She looks like the fabled fairy queen of the Battle of Doire.”

“You think?!” Socusdus gave the wizard a sarcastic look. “You know very well that it must be her. How many fairy queens do you know who wear gold and silver medieval armor?”

Liltippin stood silently.

“I dare say she’s not at the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth for a social visit. And that means we’ve got even bigger problems.” Socusdus paused, looked around to be sure they were alone and then switched to the draíochta common-tongue. “I hired these humani mercenaries just to hold off the McAllistars until I can destroy Earrach and

get away. I don't expect them to survive, but, with Chepi in the mix, they aren't going to give me enough time. I'm going to need more wizards."

"I've heard there is a colony of Morganians living in the hills near a large human city called dull-ass tepus," said Liltippin.

"What a horrid sounding place. Go find them. Tell them that if they help me destroy Earrach, I'll give them her flaitheas scáth. Anything has to be better than a place called dull-ass."



Sorg led the way through the Flaitheas Scáth entrance grinning proudly at the dwarf guards. The unicorns, aware of the momentousness of the occasion, began to prance as they moved slowly through the meadow and village. The people gathered along the trail and cheered, bowing deeply as the fairy queen passed. Chepi Banrion smiled and called out warm greetings in the draíochta common tongue. "Beannacht oraibh go léir" – blessings to you all – she called to the crowd as she sprayed them with rose petals.

Isla Metarí, Minaku, Cathy, Turin, Mark, Napikyáiyó, Mahx and the three professors stood on the terrace in front of the great gate watching the procession approach. The Torc Allta had assembled on the terrace and were making last minute adjustments so as to make the best impression upon the fairy queen.

"Are they riding unicorns?" asked Mahx in amazement.

"Yes," said Cornelius. "fairies and elves are about the only draíochta whom the unicorn will carry."

"She offered me a unicorn, but she turned it into a draft horse because I was so big," said Mark. "Does that count?"

“I dare say it counts,” Kevin laughed. “And look at your valiant Sorg Prionsal!” he directed his comment at Isla who blushed and grinned broadly. Sorg had moved from leading the way to slightly behind and to the right of the queen. Even from a distance you could see the joy on his face as he sat astride the prancing unicorn.

“I hate to bring this up,” said Mahx, “but are some of you the official representatives of Coillearnach?”

Mahx laughed as the group from Coillearnach became flustered and started to run into the cave to change into more something appropriate for such a stately occasion. His laughing stopped abruptly when Mark reminded him “and who is representing the Piikani and the Brotherhood?”

When the procession reached the terrace, several young dwarves proudly stepped forward and stood at the unicorns’ heads as their passengers dismounted. Sorg slid quickly from his mount and hurried to Chepi Banrion offering her his hand.

The great hall was a buzz with excitement. All of the chandeliers and torches were burning brightly. The walls were lined with the banners of the Swan and McAl-listair claimns and everyone dressed in their court finery. Gadin Rí and Ara Banrion sat on their thrones. The Coillearnach contingency stood to one side dressed in their finest court attire. The three professors wore their scarlet – a term used for the formal academic gowns worn on special occasions – while Cathy; a member of the Coillearnach royal family and would be presented as Lady Manwathiel; wore a cream-colored evening gown with matching train and sash of the Coillearnach tartan. Turin wore a traditional Elven doublet of Kelly-green, breeches, stockings and high leather boots with the most magnificent Elven cloak in the colors of Coillearnach. At his side hung a replica of a famous Elven magical sword. The group encouraged Isla Metarí to dress as her friends first saw Isla Metarí; viz. full dwarven leather armor with a floor-length scarlet hooded cloak, her white hair hanging freely over her shoulders and Nat'lunda at her side, the ancestor and heir of the famous Higad Rí.

Next to them stood Minaku, Napikyáiyó, Mahx, Mark and members of the Brotherhood. Kevin and Cathy had helped them. Minaku wore a beautiful yellow buckskin dress covered with beadwork, a multicolored fancy shawl and high beaded boots. Napikyáiyó, Mahx and the warriors of the Brotherhood wore traditional loin cloth and beaded leggings with the most magnificent buckskin shirts. The Brotherhood warriors wore war bonnets. They were a bit hesitant but Napikyáiyó insisted since they had definitely proven themselves in battle and were respected and admired by all. Napikyáiyó did his hair in the traditional three braids with eagle feathers stuck in the bun.

Mark surprised everyone. There was no way he was going to wear what Turin was wearing. His argument was good. Such formal dress was never a part of the Montana white mountain man. The French traders and mountain men were generally good friends of the local tribes. The Blackfeet had different names for English and French white men. Their names for the English weren't always the nicest, but the English generally acted superior and weren't very nice to the natives. The French, on the other hand, tended to take on native ways and even dress. Even though Deming is an English name, Mark insisted that he dress as a mountain man who was a friend of the Piikani. He wore the traditional Blackfeet loin cloth, plain leggings and a plain linen collarless shirt under a felted wool rifleman hunting frock that was belted with a multicolor sash.

Those awaiting the queen's arrival barely had time to be sure they were prepared when Sorg stood on the balcony above the great hall and called out to his parents. "Your majesties," he paused a moment, "May I present her royal majesty Chepi Banrion of the Swan Clainn and her entourage."

"Fáilte! Fáilte!" cried Gadin Rí in Draíochta Common-tongue, "Is é mo theach do theach!" (Welcome! Welcome! My home is your home.)

Sorg held his hand, palm down, at shoulder level. Chepi put her hand on top of his as he escorted her down the circular stairs. The crowd applauded and curtsied or bowed as the fairy queen passed. She was smiling broadly.

Just before they walk onto the balcony, Chepi had taken a moment to change. Instead of her armor she now wore a strapless satin evening gown that was so full at the bottom that it trailed a good two feet behind her as she walked. It had a lace train, embroidered with gold. Her golden blonde hair hung freely to her shoulders adorned only by a simple gold crown with a giant emerald in the front.

Gadin and Ara descended from their thrones and met Chepi at the bottom of the steps to the dais. They greeted each other formally with curtsies and bows followed by genuine hugs. Gadin escorted the two queens to chairs which had been moved to the main level of the dais.

“If I may, Your Majesty,” said Gadin, “you have met our son and many of our people. I would like to present to you some of our friends.” Chepi smiled and nodded her permission.

“I know that you are friends of the Salish nation. On this side of the mountains the Piikani, a tribe of the Blackfeet Nation, are our native friends. I would like to present their shaman, Napikyáiyó, who has been a trusted and valuable friend in these difficult times. With him is his daughter, Minaku Píítaa, who is also his apprentice and a warrior with the most marvelous group of Piikani braves known as the Brotherhood. Also with Napikyáiyó is Mahx Beebe, another member of the Brotherhood and valued friend of the McAllistair Clainn. I’m sorry that I do not know the names of the other members of the Brotherhood who are present, but they have performed unbelievable feats of daring and bravery, saving our people on more than one occasion.

Napikyáiyó and the Brotherhood approached to meet Chepi. Most of them did not know what to do so their bows were awkward and their courtly manners totally lacking. Chepi didn't care in the slightest.

"Don't worry about that courtly stuff," she said as they gathered around her. "old draíochta like us just love it. I'm sure you do things just because they are a part of your history and culture but are no longer particularly important. What's important is that I get to meet such brave and distinguished members of the Blackfeet Nation. I do hope you will give me some time later to ask questions. My Salish friends still remember how the Piikani used to 'visit' and 'liberate' some of their ponies." They all laughed.

"Your Majesty will notice that we have an inordinate number of humani within the flaitheas scáth," said Gadin. "these humani have become good friends and an integral part of our community. One special friend is a physician from the North Fork who befriended us when others only made fun of us. Your Majesty, may I present Dr. Mark Deming." Chepi's face broke into a great smile as Mark stepped forward.

"Don't tell anyone," Chepi leaned forward and in a stage whisper, "but I remember when your ancestors came to this country. In fact, I remember when your ancestors gave up European britches and took on the native loin cloth and leggings."

Mark smiled and in an equally theatrical whisper, "Thank you, Your Majesty, but I must admit this is the first time I've ever worn loin cloth and leggings, but, if they elicit that wonderful smile, I'll wear them every day."

"Oh, my, sir. You are a charmer." Chepi blushed and smiled.

"I'm sure you saw the cuideachta of Torc Allta as you entered the mountain. They came to us through the friendship of the Coillearnach Clainn. Our dear friends, representing both the Coillearnach Clainn and the Bridget-Prince Fionn Hospital, have become a part of our family. Dr. Turin Mar'sil is the physician who successfully

treated the cancer of one of our children, and his wife, Lady Manwathiel Mar'sil, another BPF physician who is the granddaughter of Alainn Banrion and Brian Prionsa.”

Cathy and Turin approached and greeted the fairy queen. “I knew a Justin Rí and Maetheriel Banrion many, many years ago.”

“Justin Ri died many years before I came into the family,” said Cathy. Chepi expressed her sadness at the news. “Maetheriel Banrion is one-hundred and eleven years old and still going strong. When we were packing to come west she had to try everything, including sleeping on the ground in a tent.” Chepi laughed and clapped. “My grandfather is the prince consort. He and Alainn Banrion fell in love when I was a teenager and thought I was humani. Maetheriel gave up the throne to Alainn, and I married Turin two years after the Battle of Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth.”

“One of the really sad things about the draíochta world is that we’re not very good about keeping up with old friends,” Chepi said sadly. “You must help me reconnect with my old friend.” Cathy promised that she would help and the fairy queen leaned forward and gave her a kiss.

“Besides these wonderful young people, and the brave Torc Allta you met, we have also received assistance from the faculty of the esteemed Coillearnach Academy. They, as the others, have become valued and trusted friends – Professor Valiard Armgrom, professor of Defences against the Dark Arts; Professor Cornelius Penmaster, professor of Ancient History and an expert on clainns from Ireland; and Professor Tierna Kevin Beaulac, professor of Science of Magic and grandson of Brian Prionsa.”

The three academics stepped forward and bowed graciously.

“My goodness,” said Chepi, “I’ve heard so much about your great institution and now to actually meet three of its professors. It is a great privilege.” There was some brief chitchat and the three were starting to return to their place when Chepi suddenly exclaimed, “Oh, my! Wait! Tierna Beaulac, grandson of Brian Prionsa. You

are the young man of story who, with two friends, actually flew brooms over a field of Manawydon and threw plasma bolts down on them.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Kevin appeared almost embarrassed.

“You must tell me what it is like to fly on a broom,” Chepi was laughing and clapping, “and did you ever figure out Quiddich?”

“It was awesome,” Kevin’s face lit up with the memory. “There are a lot of modifications required before they can be ridden like they do in Ms. Rowling’s book, but I must admit I think of it often.”

“What’s stopping you?” insisted Chepi.

“About twenty years.”

“Aw, come on. I’m pushing eight-hundred, and it hasn’t stopped me.” Chepi laughed. “Besides, the older you get the fewer are those who can tell you what to and not to do.”

“That’s an excellent point,” Kevin grinned like the cat who ate the canary.

“Why do I get the impression, young Tierna Beaulac, that somewhere there’s a broom being designed and a Quiddich field already picked out.” Chepi smiled as though sharing a secret. Kevin just gave her that mischievous little smirk he has when he’s been caught. She knew. Kevin gave the queen one of his best bows as he moved back to his place.

“Shortly after our friends from Coillearnach arrived we also received an Iarrthóir named Tanras. He is currently with Earrach,” Gadin explained. “That was the beginning. To make a very long and complicated story short, a young dwarven physician was a part of the group from BPS Hospital. My son, Sorg, was quite smitten by her and they were soon on adventures together. One such adventure led to the discover that this young Dwarf, Isla, is a direct descendent of the famous Higad Rí, who is the only known draíochta to defeat a Ceann a dhualgas. Earrach had chosen Isla to be her Cosantóir and led Isla to the grave of Metarí, whom I am sure you

know. The two of them are now one, and it is my great honor to introduce you to our champion, Isla Metarí.”

Isla Metarí stepped forward and curtsied. It was an awkward move dressed in leather armor. When Isla Metarí stood back up she stood like a warrior, with her feet at shoulder distance apart and Nat'lunda in front of her. Chepi just stared for a moment and then stood up, walked over and hugged the young warrior.

“Metarí will not remember me, but I was a good friend of her grandmother and grandfather, Roren Rí. I knew her when she was born and I wept with her grandparents at her death.”

Chepi stepped back and curtsied deeply before Isla Metarí. “You are our hope, young Bhean Isla Metarí. History will never be able to express our indebtedness to you. My fairies and I will do everything in our power to help you succeed.”

And so with the formal introductions completed the party began. Chepi turned out to be quite the party girl. With a glass of the famous Dwarven jagerbeir, which one of the servers made sure was always full, she moved through the great hall with fluidity and grace. She didn't just hang out with those important enough to be on the dais. By the time the evening was over, there probably wasn't anyone who hadn't had the chance for a private conversation with the fairy queen. She talked to the guards and chatted up the serving staff. She made it clear to Gadin that she wanted an opportunity to visit the people in the village and spend more time with the warriors who would have to back up Isla Metarí when she faced the beast.

She had told Cathy “fate made me banrion. I'm not sure, if I had had a choice, it would have been my choice of jobs, but I'm determined to do it right, and that means be a true part of the people. If I must make decisions about and for them, I need to truly know them.”

“Grandmother Alainn is like that. The Torc Allta guards and house staff are family,” Cathy told her. “There are a few politicians who are a bit haughty but they know better than act that way in front of Grandmother.” They laughed.

“Politicians are the same the world over,” Chepi shook her head.

“I knew absolutely nothing about court life. I was a typical humani city girl. It wasn’t until later that I learned what it meant for Turin to ask my grandfather’s personal Torc Allta guard, and the daughter of the Torc Allta commander, to walk me home.”

“Wow,” exclaimed Chepi, “that boy had it bad!”

“Yeh!” Cathy blushed and smiled.

If there was any group that one might say she favored it was the girl’s club; Isla, Cathy, and Minaku. After the party ended the four of them were off in a corner swapping girl stories and talking seriously about what was to come. Of course Chepi got the low-down on all of the boys.



After two days of planning and practice, the time for action had come. The first to exit the Flaitheas Scáth was a large contingency of Dwarven warriors dressed in full battle armor with many of them carrying magic swords. Standing at the front carrying the famous Dwarven battle axe, Maraí, was Sorg. They took up a position facing Socusdus’ camp and stood. They were followed by the Torc Allta who made a long line on the trail. The size and movement of the Torc gave the twelve fairies the opportunity to exit unobserved and take up their position on the west side of the trail. Minaku, Mahx, Valiard, Mark and a small group of the Brotherhood also used the Torc as cover to move south to take up positions on the flank of the battlefield to be. Kevin went with the fairies and found a place where he would be close to Isla.

The next to exit were Gadin Rí and Chepi Banrion. They were dressed in full armor and riding unicorns. With a special honor guard, they took up a position just up the mountain a bit where they could see, and supposedly command, the armies below.

They knew that they were being watched. A small band went out through the back entrance and dispatched the observer and radio relay person so that they didn't have to worry about any of Socusdus' soldiers coming up behind them. Unbeknown to the army assembling in the valley, Socusdus and his men were all out watching.

The last one to exit the Flaitheas Scáth was Isla Metarí astride a beautiful unicorn that was draped with the colors of each of the claimns and the Piikani. She wore the most exquisite armor, a gift from Chepi, her long red hooded cape, and held Nat'lunda out in front of her. She took her place in the middle of the line of Torc Allta and they began to move southward.

When Isla caught a glimpse of Kevin, she knew that she was in position. The procession stopped. The unicorn turned toward Socusdus' camp and moved just beyond Tunnel Creek.

The academic trio had decided that the one thing that either frightens or throws a warlock off his game is to see something he can't do and/or can't explain. While self-levitation is obviously not unheard of in the draíochta world, it isn't something which just anyone can do. The incantation "leviosa" is learned by first year academy students and used with some minimal frequency throughout a wizard's life. However, the incantation "ardaím" is about as rare as a white wizard. Kevin wasn't even sure his grandfather could do it.

When Mark was fairly certain that Socusdus and most, if not all, his mercenaries were watching, he used a mirror to signal Isla and Kevin. Isla had Nat'lunda begin to spew silver and light blue light into the air above them as she called out in wizard voice, "Ardaím!" With that Kevin levitated Isla off the unicorn and set her on the

ground. She never moved a muscle, except for the unseen muscle action required to keep her balance. She stood facing Socusdus' camp.

None of the draíochta had any doubts that this was well above Socusdus' skill level. They knew it wasn't going to scare him away, but it had to significantly unnerve him. As far as he knew he was facing a draíochta more like the famous Brian Prionsa than a total newbie. This would cause almost imperceivable but very real hesitations that could mean the difference in the outcome of events.

Kevin had taught Isla wizard voice and had devised a way to amplify it in the direction of Socusdus and his soldiers. There would be no doubt that everyone heard what she had to say. He had picked his position relative to the position of the observer who was always stationed to watch the entrance to the Flaitheas Scáth.

"Stand up and be seen," Isla demanded of the observer. There was a brief moment while the observer decided what he should do. After seeing Isla's grand entrance, he decided that the best thing to do was to comply. "run and tell your master, Socusdus, that Bhean Isla Metarí awaits and he is to come before me immediately. If he does not come quickly, we will visit your camp again, and this time we won't be as nice."

The soldier turned and started running up the hill toward the mercenary camp. Of course, there was no doubt that Socusdus heard her demand and was soon standing on the hill just above her.

"This is a foolish thing for a young woman to do," Socusdus tried to look unperturbed.

"If that is the case, why are you perspiring so much? It isn't hot. Are you afraid?" Even the McAllistair people wondered how she knew he was sweating.

"Afraid of a girl?" Socusdus was trying to push her buttons, but it wasn't working.

“If you had really thought you were just facing a girl you would have purposely insulted me by sending one of your Morganian lackies, like Liltippin, instead of coming yourself.” She paused. “Oh, but I forgot. You sent him to Texas to get more Morganians to help you.”

Socusdus’s shock was almost audible, as was the surprise of her comrades.

“And by the way, it isn’t dull-ass, tempus,” Isla laughed, “it is Dallas, Texas.”

“Those two fossils over there trying to look regal,” Socusdus pointed toward Chepi and Gadin, “did they tell you about my Ceann a dhualgas?”

“That’s why I’m here,” said Isla. “Do you know Hagrid Rí?”

“Of course,” said Socusdus.

“You lie,” Isla laughed. She was right. He lied. She didn’t know how she knew all these things, but she was right. “Hagrid Rí is the only draíochta to single-handedly defeat a Ceann a dhualgas. And you know what? I’m a direct descendent of Hagrid Rí . . . a somewhat powerful descendent of Hagrid Rí. That’s why I’m here.”

The theatrics had, in fact, had their effect, but Isla Metarí’s knowledge of what he was thinking, his fear, his sweating, was totally unnerving the otherwise powerful wizard.

“I also know you have summoned your Ceann a dhualgas which will be appearing any moment. You are too frightened to do anything else. You know that your mercenaries have no chance against us. That’s why you switched from English to Draíochta Common-tongue when you were talking to Liltippin. You didn’t want them to hear you admit that you have no confidence of them winning a fight and that you only hired them to slow us down. You are truly heartless. You would purposely sacrifice these young men’s lives on our blades and axes.”

You could almost hear the murmur among the mercenaries. They had all heard the stories of what happened in Ruklidome.

“Ah,” Isla Metarí continued, “do you hear that murmur. They’re paid to fight with the reasonable expectation of winning. They’re not paid to commit suicide in a fight they have no way of winning. They know they’re going to die if they stand by you.”

“Shut up you little bitch,” screamed Socusdus.

Isla Metarí’s laugh in wizard voice, amplified by Kevin, was deafening. “The powerful wizard whom his men fear is coming unhinged.”

“Damn, Isla,” Kevin whispered to himself, “you need to be working in the psych department.”

About that time the Ceann a dhualgas appeared behind its master. It was the body of a Mountain Troll, standing a good twelve feet tall and probably weighing the better part of 2,000 pounds. A tiny head with totally vacant eyes sat on top the massive body. The physician in Isla immediately wondered if this creature ever had a supramarginal gyrus. She could see why it terrified people but for some reason Isla Metarí did not feel fear.

“Look boys,” Isla Metarí called out, almost taunting, “your master has called in his big gun. Have you boys seen it before? Did you know that your master made that creature from the body of a Mountain Troll, the brain of a totally evil person who committed the most heinous crimes, and some poor person’s beating heart.” She paused to let that sink in. “To keep it totally faithful to him, he must give the beast a pill or an elixir each day. The pill or elixir is made up of chemicals necessary for the beast to live. If the beast tries to betray the master, it will not get the pill or elixir and will die. That’s sort of the way he controls most of you, right? Obey him or die?”

“Shut up,” Socusdus screamed again and attempted to cast a spell which she immediately deflected.

“Naughty, naughty, evil wizard,” Isla Metarí said. “I bet you boys are wondering why you would not win with such a monster on your side. I bet you didn’t know

that these poor stupid creatures don't do battle. Nope. They don't fight. They kill and destroy, but if you attack us or we attack you, he'll just stand there. So I hope you weren't expecting help from him. If you want to survive this stand-off, just put down your weapons and stand up. Or you can wait to see who wins and take the chance you'll die then."

Almost immediately men started standing up.

"Get down," Socusdus demanded. "She's tricking you."

"No, no, no," Isla Metarí yelled. "don't even think of using your wand on those men. They're out of the situation now. It's just you, me, and your big buddy."

"You know that once he gets ahold of you, you will tell him where Earrach is," Socusdus worked hard at regaining some confidence and the upper hand.

"True, but he has to get me first."

As more and more of Socusdus' men were dropping their weapons and raising their hands in surrender, Socusdus stepped to one side and let the Ceann a dhualgas pass. Socusdus had not noticed that the entire time he was focused on Isla Metarí, the Brotherhood were shooting arrows into the neck of the giant. The Ceann a dhualgas had brushed them off like a mosquito, but each of the hits contained a cocktail of the "happiness quartet". If the creature's brain had a supramarginal gyrus it had just received a big load of happy juice that Isla was going to put into action.

What Isla and the others had not anticipated was that the beast stomped instead of walked. It must have lifted its foot a good three feet off the ground. That was going to make the hog-tie a lot more difficult, if not impossible. But there wasn't time for recalculations.

The first group of fairies were going for the arms. Despite the lack motor skills that tend to accompany low intelligence, the beast was able to get ahold of one end of the rope and swing it with such force that it sent three fairies tumbling into space out of control. The second group used the beast being focused on the first group so

attempt to tie the legs. As feared, the tromping made it impossible to get both legs together. The first group had lost their rope. Besides it would have been too heavy for only three fairies. They turned their attention to helping the group trying to secure the giant's legs. In a magnificent display of bravery and flying, two of the fairies literally flew alongside the giant's ankle as he brought it up and forward, and looped around the ankle twice as it was descending. All nine remaining fairies pulled with all of their might. The giant began to fall forward.

As soon as the monster hit the ground, Isla Metarí jumped on its back. With all that was going on, the Ceann a dhualgas did not seem to realize that Isla Metarí was there. She was holding on by squeezing his head with her hands and wrapping her legs around his neck.

In a gentle voice, though amplified for all to hear, Isla Metarí was heard to say "Tugaim grá agus comhbhá duit." (I give you love and compassion.) The creature stopped struggling. A second time she said, "Tugaim grá agus comhbhá duit." Isla Metarí moved so that she could see its face. It also turned its head so it could see her. She looked into its eyes and was shocked. There she saw peace. There was sadness but there was no fear; no anger. The Mountain Troll has no language but it attempted to verbalize. It didn't need to. Isla could see in its eyes ... 'thank you'. She stroked the giant creature's head. It closed its eyes and died. Isla Metarí started to cry. As a part of its creation by a person so cruel and evil as Socusdus it must have existed in torment. For a brief moment it had known compassion and love. For a brief moment it was free of its torment. Isla Metarí hadn't killed the creature. She had set it free.

The attention of everyone in the valley was on Isla Metarí and the Ceann a dhualgas. Fortunately, Minaku happened to look over at Socusdus. Realizing that his creature was being bested, he pointed his wand at the two. Minaku had never notched an arrow and fired so quickly in her life. Aware of her actions her colleagues looked

up, but by the time they had a chance to see what was happening Minaku's arrow hit its mark – Socusdus' neck – and the wizard fell.

A great cheer filled the valley. Like her ancestor, also a healer, the dreaded creature had been defeated by love and compassion. No one had any idea of where the handful of Morganian wizards who had been with Socusdus disappeared to, but no one really cared. They were gone. The mercenaries were happy to surrender and even happier that they were allowed to leave. Mark made them each pay their share of hiring school buses to pick them up at Pinnacle. They had a choice of being dropped at the train station, bus depot or airport.

The party in the McAllistair Flaitheas Scáth went on for days. Trig Menilobin was thrilled to be given the honor of returning to Earrach to tell them the good news. He took Mokakiápi's ashes to be buried at Earrach's roots.

Sitting around the long table on the great hall dais Kevin couldn't keep from asking about Isla Metari's knowledge of Socusdus – the sweating, the fear, the private conversation with Liltippin.

"Okay," Kevin finally blurted out, "this has been bugging me. At first I thought that your knowledge of Socusdus sweating and being afraid were just good, educated guesses but then you obviously blew him out of the water by exposing his private conversation with Liltippin. I think that blew us all away. How did you know about that?"

"I don't really know," said Isla. "It was like someone was whispering these secrets in my ear. I can't really explain it."

"Uh, I think I can help," Cathy looked a bit sheepish. Everyone turned. "You see, I sneaked out and stood on the mountain above Gadin Rí and Chepis Banrion. I had Earrach's walking stick with me. She had told me to always have it with me. When I was watching thing unfold below me the stick spoke to me. Well, it wasn't really auditory. It communicated with me. It was Earrach. She told me to point the

walking stick at Isla Metarí and hold it there until the battle was over. I didn't hear anything, but I am now wondering if Earrach was using the walking stick and me as a conduit to Isla Metarí."

"How would Earrach get such information?" asked Mahx.

"And I thought draíochta used so much more of their brains than humani," Minaku, who was leaning up against Kevin, poked him in the ribs. She sat up.

"Fungi!"

"Fungi?" was repeated around the table.

"Yes," she smiled at Kevin, "I paid attention in biology."

"Okay smarty," Kevin poked back, "give with it."

"Mycorrhiza is the symbiotic association between a fungus and a plant. The term mycorrhiza refers to the role of the fungus in the plant's rhizosphere, its root system. The fungi rhizosphere is called mycelium and it has been learned that plants communicate with each other through this system. For example, they have found that a mother tree – the dominant tree in an area – may learn of a plant that is struggling and actually send nutrients."

"That's right," Cathy exclaimed. "Earrach told us that between the mycelium and her magical senses, she knows what is happening in the world outside her flaitheas scáth. She even said that Mokakiápi carried a staff made from one of her branches so she knew what was happening around him. She gave me the walking stick so she would have the same line of communications through me, and she must have used it to give Isla information about Socusdus."

"How about that!" Isla Metarí sat thinking about what she had just heard. "Earrach helped me save her. Or did she save me."

"I'm guessing that she knew I would be nearby," added Cathy, "and that's really why she sent the walking stick with me and not you."

“Whatever,” said Sorg, “Socusdus was dumbfounded. You had exposed him in front of his mercenaries and he didn’t think he could take you. He didn’t know that you don’t know one end of a wand from the other. His Ceann a dhualgas was his only hope of getting away alive.”

“I wonder if Earrach had anything to do with my looking at Socusdus as he was starting to use his wand.”

“Naw,” said Kevin giving the Piikani maiden a squeeze, “I think that was just your keen senses. A moment later and . . .” Kevin didn’t finish his statement. It was a happy time. No one wanted to let their imagination go there. Everyone knew what would have happened had Minaku not been observant as well as perhaps the finest archer alive.



A week later Chepi Banrion and her fairies had returned to their home, Mark had returned to the North Fork, and Socusdus’ stronghold had been destroyed. The wizards had gone to return it to its natural state, or at least make it so Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth) could easily take over and rebuild it.

They were amazed at the great number of high-powered weapons and ammunition that had been amassed in the bunker.

“Luckily for us,” said Valiard, “Socusdus underestimated the power of his mercenaries. Even with my shields this stuff is capable of doing a lot of damage and killing a lot of people. They could have held us off a lot longer than Socusdus thought. If he had been able to get his mercenaries inside the flaitheas scáth, we would not have had enough shields to protect everyone. I hate to think of how many would have died.”

“Sometimes I find myself a bit embarrassed at our warrior history,” said Sorg. “Dwarfs have always been a peaceful creature but because of our skills and tenacity in

battle, which has almost always been against Mountain Trolls, we have the reputation of being a fearsome warrior. But this stuff makes us look like loving pussycats.”

“Humani should make this stuff illegal,” added Turin.

“They can’t get a working gun law,” Kevin sneered. Those who knew about the humani world all expressed their agreement while those who knew nothing about humani looked shock.

“How are we going to destroy all this stuff?” asked Turin.

“I suggest a magic furnace,” replied Cornelius.

“Won’t this stuff explode?” Turin pressed.

“Probably under normal conditions,” said Kevin. “Cornelius’ furnace might not be a bad idea. It could probably manage the explosions.”

“What would you think of turning the entire bunker into a giant magical furnace?” Valiard suggested.

“That sounds like an excellent idea,” Cornelius said standing by the door, “but let’s explore some more of this place before we destroy it.”

The group moved from room to room. They noticed the personal things the mercenaries had left behind. They had been given the opportunity to return to the bunker to gather their personal belongings. They left guns, uniforms and non-essentials. A partially played game of chess sat waiting for the soldiers to return and continue. Nearby another mercenary must have been reading when he was called to action. He left his book face down open to the page he had been reading. Beer and soda cans were everywhere with the occasional coffee cup.

Sorg discovered a little writing desk in a corner of the day-room. An unfinished letter home lay on the desk. Since none of the mercenaries died, the writer must have forgotten that he had started it in his hurry to gather his personal belongings and catch the bus to anywhere else.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm doing fine but this place is freaking me out. I wish I had never signed on, but there's no getting out now. I'm not allowed to tell you about where I am or what I've been doing, but believe me this has to be one of the strangest places on earth. There are some midgets here who the boss says could take us any time they want. They're awfully short and only have a big nasty ax but the boss says to leave them alone. We were attacked by Indians. At least they looked like Indians. We have the biggest arsenal of high-powered weapons I've ever seen, but the Indians kept us pinned down with bows and arrows. One time we chased them and they just seemed to have disappeared. The boss was furious and had us running all over the county looking for them.

The boss is something else. His name is Socusdus Pendragon. He's a fat little man who wears what looks like a black priest's robe. He doesn't talk to us or come out to see us. He sends orders with a lieutenant. There are some others like him. They're all scary looking. They call themselves warlocks. I don't believe in that stuff, but what these guys can do with their bare hands is terrifying. We had a man decide that he had had enough. One of the warlocks caught him leaving. They had a way of squeezing his neck that killed him. Most of the guys here are as big and as strong as me. That's why I figure I'm stuck until this job's over. I'm not taking any chances with these weirdos.

We live in a bunker built into the side of a mountain. One of the guys said that the boss made it with magic. I think he was smoking the wrong leaf, but it is pretty comfortable. The mountains are really neat, but I miss the ocean. The food isn't bad, and we're allowed to go to a little town that has a bar and restaurant. Some of the guys have been pretty mean to the locals, so we're not really very welcome.

A couple of days ago a group of little people came riding up the valley on white horses. Someone said they were unicorns. Honest, Mom, I don't snort that stuff. There was a woman wearing gold and silver medieval armor. Lieutenant Martinson said that the boss is really bent (he never finished)

Socusdus' rooms were tucked well back into the mountain on a third level. There was no doubt that the man did not intend to have company. There was a dining table with one chair, a single wingback chair by the fireplace, and a single bed. There were two doors into the room apart from the entrance. One led to the bathroom and dressing room. Socusdus was not a clothes horse. His wardrobe consisted of two black cassocks, a black winter hooded cloak, a spare pair of boots and a pair of red house slippers. There was also an academic robe of scarlet material faced with myrtle green silk with Socusdus Pendragon, Craig Ollscoile na Draíochta embroidered inside.

"That's a top draíochta university in the far north of Ireland," said Kevin. "I had heard that a lot of Morganians go there. This is the doctoral gown for science."

"He was a Moganian version of you," quipped Valiard. "I'd say the school must be very friendly with the Morganians to admit and graduate a student with the name Pendragon."

If they had looked through the other door first the gown would have made sense. The second door led to a laboratory. While the entire room was filled with tables and cabinets covered with vials, test-tubes, piping and bottles of chemicals and most likely many things we don't want to know, there was a central area that was obviously a focal point. Kevin stood and studied the area.

"He did a lot of work in this laboratory but this was where he spent most of his time," said Kevin.

"How do you know that?" asked Turin.

"It is the most worked," replied Kevin. "look at the stool and the floor. This area has seen a lot more action than the rest. Also the pile of notes and books all within easy reach of this stool. I would bet he spent hour upon hour perched on this stool."

"He was definitely into alchemy," Kevin continued, still carefully studying the work area before him.

“Oh, my, yes,” exclaimed Cornelius. “Look at his books: Philosophum Lapis, Alchimia, Matera Prima.”

“Translation please,” said Mahx.

“The first book translates as Philosophers’ Stone, which many of us believe is actually a rare earth, if it exists at all. It is used to make the Elixir of Life which gives immortality . . . as long as you keep taking it, and turns base metals into gold,” Kevin explained.

“Alchimia translates into alchemy and Matera Prima is another name for Philosophers’ Stone,” Cornelius concluded.

“Is that stuff real?” Mahx looked curiously at the books and the bottles on the table.

“Many still believe that it exists,” said Kevin holding a flask up to the light. “Nicolas Flamel was a real person who lived in Paris in the 14th or 15th century. His life is well documented and people believe that he found Philosophers’ Stone – matera prima. He was far, far more famous after he died than he was when he was alive.”

“Do you think he found matera prima?” asked Valiard as he rummaged through some of Socusdus’ books.

“I don’t really think so,” Kevin replied still studying the contents of a beaker. “Unless you believe that Harry Potter is real.”

“Harry Potter?” Mahx looked lost.

“Rowlings had a lot of things right about us in her books and she wrote that, after Voldemort came so close to getting the stone, Flamel decided to destroy it and die.”

“I’ve never read Harry Potter,” exclaimed Mahx.

Kevin, Cornelius and Valiard looked at each other and then at Mahx. “Never read Harry Potter!?!?”

“Seriously,” said Kevin, “this guy was some chemist. Here is his elixir to keep Ceann a dhualgas alive.” He picked up a large book. “This is his journal of his search for Matera Prima. He too figured that it is a rare earth that is somehow magically altered. Humani alchemists have no chance at finding it because they don’t know the magical element.”

“He has some interesting ideas,” said Valiard leafing through the journal, “what do you say about taking this with us?”

“Sounds like a good idea.”

“Then let’s turn this vile place into a furnace and bury it forever,” said Cornelius looking around in disgust.

“You’re absolutely right, Professor Penmaster,” said Kevin.

The small group was heading down the mountain toward Tunnel Creek and the entrance to the flaitheas scáth when the ground shook. They turned and looked in the direction of what had once been Socusdus’ stronghold. There was a flash of flame and then a belch of smoke that lifted far into the bright blue sky.

CHAPTER 10 – PostScript

One might expect that after such an adventure life would have seemed dull and boring. That was far from what happened. The new relationships brought together tribes, clainns, humani and draíochta.

As she had promised, Isla Metarí gave Cornelius an “audience” to ask Metarí all his questions. He was thrilled as the two spent most of two days sequestered. Metarí told him all about life in Ruklidome and about the wonderful leadership of her grandfather, Roren Rí. She told about how they traded with the Piikani and Salish and lead the most peaceful existence one could imagine.

“When we would go to trade with the Piikani I would play with my best friend, Sohkapíni,” Metarí told Cornelius. “The tribe always camped near the mountains at the top of the canyon. Her name means ‘big eyes’ and it fit her. She was a beautiful girl with walnut skin and those marvelous big eyes. By the time we were teenagers she was tall and willowy. I always envied that. Of course, by that time, the boys were noticing her, and we talked a lot about boys. We also talked about girls being able to do things which our parents only let our brothers do. Her parents wouldn’t let her have a bow, so she made one for herself. She could outshoot any of the boys, and that, as you can imagine, made them furious. Sohkapíni taught me to shoot a bow, but I was never very good. She always said that was just because the bow was made for a big person. She was going to help me make a bow for my size.”

“My two brothers, Thusedred and Kulgath, and my Uncle Mustack all left to start new communities. We may not have used modern environmental terminology but we were quite cognizant that our growing numbers were putting pressure not only on the flaitheas scáth but on our surrounding resources. We weren't having any trouble but Uncle Mustack wanted to be proactive. He was my father's younger brother

so, with grandfather very healthy, there wasn't much chance of him becoming king. He was seen by some as a foolish adventurer and by others as a hero.

“Mustack and Kulgath left about two years before I died. They went north and started a clainn near a large lake the humani call the Great Slave Lake.

“Kulgath sent letters home. He told about living in beautiful mountains on the south side of an extremely large lake. They had left McAllastair Flaitheas Scáth at the end of May and didn't arrive at the lake until the end of September. They had already been facing frequent snow so they were anxious to find a place to winter. They quickly built some log cabins and while half the group started hunting and gathering to fill a winter larder, the other half started working on a cave.

“They didn't have the comforts of home - McAllastair Flaitheas Scáth – but they were sufficiently warm and had plenty of food. Kulgath said that the winter was just a bit colder and snowier than home. There were extended periods of time when they could not leave the cave so they spent their time enlarging it. By spring they had such a good cave and loved the country around them so much that they decided this was the place to stay.

“They made friends with some local natives. The locals taught the dwarves how to make boats and fish. As a thank you, the dwarves made metal arrowheads, which helped immensely with the efficacy of the native's hunting, as well as knives.

“The last I heard they had dwarf and other draíochta joining their clainn. My uncle Mustack was elected Rí. They created a port key so that other families could join them. I wanted to go visit but I wasn't allowed.

“The year before I died, Thusdred headed south. He found a lovely place about two months walk from here. He said that they found a place in some beautiful mountains. The local indigenous people call themselves Nimi'ipuu. Thusdred said that being able to speak with the Salish helped them communicate with the Nimi'ipuu. They

became good friends when 'Thusdred's clainn started trading metal arrowheads and blades."

Because her stories and accounts were so interesting, a number of draíochta asked permission to sit and listen to the interviews. The news that there could well be at least two more dwarven clainn in the west electrified the entire community. At first Gadin Rí was embarrassed that he knew nothing of these settlements but, after getting over his embarrassment, he joined in the talk about re-connecting with them.

"You know, I'd bet that there are a lot of draíochta from those clainns who live and work in the humani world," said Sorg. "Well, Great Slave Lake is still unbelievable wilderness, but I bet the southern clainn is not too far from a humani city. That would mean that some of the clainn members would have access to and know how to use a computer."

"Metarí said that the southern clainn had settled among the Nimi'ipuu," noted Cornelius, "and we all know that the white humani gave them all new names, so we're going to have to find the old names."

"No problem," said Turin. "Like Sorg said, many of us work in the humani world around computers all the time. I'm sure that we can find the modern white man name for the Nimi'ipuu."

"My guess," added Mark, "is that the clainn is in southern Idaho."

"Could we use the computer to send a message?" asked Sorg.

"In a way," replied Turin. "We could put some posts on social media and some other sites. We could even put the message in the Draíochta Common-tongue. We could get lucky."

Cornelius was thrilled with all of the information Metarí had given him. He spent hours organizing his notes. His dream was to write the definitive history of the Crane na beatha and Dwarves clainn in North America.



Before Cathy, Turin, and the others returned to Coillearnach a large group went to visit Earrach that included Gadin Rí, Ara Banrion, Isla, Sorg, Cathy, Turin, Kevin, Minaku, Napikyáiyó, Mahx, Mark, Valiard, Cornelius and, of course, the faithful dwarven guide, Trig Menilobin.

Latimer met them at the old campsite near Margaret Creek. As the Grizzly bear approached, much to the dismay of all those who had not been there before, the Torc Allta ran toward the great animal and jumped on it. The group stood and watched the tussle which ended with the bear lying still for a moment, and then standing up with the Torc Allta still hanging on saying “you be as strong as ever, but not as strong as Latimer.” Cathy ran up and hugged the great animal and then whispered something in its ear. Immediately Latimer Orkney appeared as a Hogboon. He bowed deeply and apologized for his behavior.

“They be my dear friends,” he explained. “That’s how we first met. I got too close as a bear and they jumped on me. The lovely dwarven princess came to my rescue.”

Latimer led the party to the flaitheas scáth where Earrach lived. Isla Metarí introduced those who had come to show their respect. Earrach was thrilled to have the company and be able to open her flaitheas scáth to visitors. She had a wonderful time answering their questions and having them explore her home. With the help of Tanras and Latimer, Earrach had increased the living area inside her gigantic trunk to be able to house up to twenty people. She loved the idea of being able to meet more draíochta and maybe even some humani, if they were willing to accept her.

The urn containing Mokakiápi’s ashes had been buried up against one of Earrach’s giant roots. Each of the visitors places a small token of honor on his grave.

Minaku came around a corner and found her father holding onto one of Earrach's roots and crying. She could hear the great tree speaking gently to him. Feeling her presence, he turned.

He didn't apologize for crying, but rather shared his feelings with his daughter/apprentice. "Do you realize that this wonderful tree, this tree of life, confirms so very many of our Blackfeet beliefs? It validates our belief in the oneness of all living things. The ability of plants to communicate at great distance makes me realize how humani have lost – or given up, or rejected – our ability to communicate with nature. And I try not to be angry that the white man forced us to give up such belief and our ability to communicate. I really believe that at one time, long before anyone kept records or passed down stories, we talked to the trees and plants and other animals, just like we're talking to Earrach now. I have lived my entire life firmly believing that all of nature's creatures and plants and even the mountains are one and at one time communicated. Earrach confirms, validates, that belief, and I cry because I know that humani have traded their souls – their ability to truly be a part of nature – for what they thought was power."

"I'm so glad you feel validated. Humani, however, are never going to believe us until they accept that they're not the center of the universe."

"The way you speak the truth does make a difference," said Napikyáiyó. "The more doubt you have in what you are saying, the less impact it is going to make. If you truly believe what you say, you are much more likely to get others to at least consider what you say. We must stop trying to make our traditional spirituality sound like Christianity so that we don't upset the white preachers and their followers. We must strongly and unconditionally encourage our people to return to, or at least explore and learn about, our traditional faith."

Tanras and Larimer walked to the road with the visitors. They had used the van and Mark's pickup which were parked by the fork in the road. Tanras again thanked everyone, especially Isla Metari, for saving Earrach. He was extremely happy being her Cosantóir. When he wasn't enjoying hearing Earrach share the forest news from the mycelium network or exploring the phenomenal wilderness, Larimer was teaching him about being a bear.



The port key near the Tunnel Creek Trailhead, through which the Torc Allta had been transported to Montana, had been kept activated. It was very risky at first but Alainn Banrion had insisted as long as there were draíochta from Coillearnach there who were in danger. The Coillearnach end opened near Cigam. After Isla Metari's victory it provided a convenient way to travel between the McAllistair and the Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth.

Since the Brotherhood continued as a secret organization; their work among the humani being far from done; and the humani, Píikani or otherwise, would not understand a flood of magic folk arriving for a wedding, Minaku and Kevin decided that they should get married in Coillearnach. They would have loved to have been married in Montana but they realized that it was a lot easier and better for the family to transport any Montana guests east to Coillearnach.

It was decided that Minaku and Kevin would go back first and get things ready. Napikyáiyó, Mahx and all of the other guests would arrive later. This, Kevin thought, would also give Minaku some time to be the real center of attention. He remembered how magical it had been for him when his family arrived in Coillernach. That's what he wanted for Minaku.

Even Kevin was in for a surprise. Lidon, a Torc Allta with whom Kevin had grown up, was one of the four sent to collect Kevin and Minaku in a landau at the

Port Key terminal. He had told Arno and Maldor, Kevin's two childhood friends who flew the brooms with him in the Battle of Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth. Arno was a very successful chef with a restaurant in Chattanooga and Maldor had taken over the inn in Cigam for his parents and was the Mayor of Cigam.

All of Coillearnach knew about the crisis and adventures in Montana and Alainn had done her best to keep everyone updated. Unbeknown to Kevin, Cathy had slipped back and told Alainn and Brian about Minaku. It wasn't just going to be Kevin coming through the portal. Put all of this together and the couple were going to be met by four Torc Allta dressed in their formal finest, two of Kevin's childhood buddies – one being the village mayor - and transported to Ferguson Pálás in a royal landau through Cigam.

Kevin had just finished explaining the port key to Minaku. He took the staff, which was the port key, made sure he had a good hold of Minaku, and said "Coillearnach". Instantly the two were standing in the woods near Cigam. Even Kevin stood speechless with his mouth open.

Standing nearest the terminal was Lidon. As soon as Kevin and Minaku appeared he called "Airm i láthair". The Torc Allta snapped to attention. Lidon bowed deeply purposely focusing on Minaku just to tease his friend a bit.

"M'Lord and M'Lady," Lidon said in a very formal voice, "her royal majesty, Alainn Banrion, and Brian Prionsa, bid you welcome and request the pleasure of your presence at Ferguson Pálás." With that said one of the Torc stepped smartly to the side of landau and opened the door while one stood next to the step to assist Minaku and the other climbed into the driver's seat. Lidon stepped forward and extended his arm to Minaku.

Kevin just looked, then said "time pause in the action." Everyone but Minaku knew what he meant. Lidon dropped his formality and gave Kevin a hug as Maldor and Arno came running up.

“Geez man,” exclaimed Maldor, “you guys are all that anyone talks about in the inn. I’m afraid I’m going to lose business if you guys don’t go back and find some other adventure to keep Coillearnach talking.” Everyone laughed.

“Of course, as you might expect, they talked more about Isla, Cathy and this young lady than you,” Arno added, “but that’s okay. They’re prettier.” Again laughter.

“Speaking of prettier,” Maldor said turning his attention to Minaku, “you must introduce me to this beauty.”

“Back, wolf,” Kevin teased. “This is Minaku, and she’s spoken for.”

“By you?”

“That’s enough,” Kevin laughed. “Lidon, this man is boring me, shall we continue?”

Lidon, along with the rest, laughed heartily and resumed their formal positions. Minaku watched all of the stop-action antics with amusement, and wondered how they could so easily switch.

Minaku, Kevin and the two friends were escorted into the royal landau and the driver headed off toward Cigam. Minaku had heard all about Coillearnach from Kevin and the girls but it was still more than she expected.

There were quite a few people lining the road through Cigam. Kevin knew that the real crowd would be at Ferguson Pálás. As the great house came into view so did a sea of draíochta. They could hear the cheering begin as the landau drew near. Minaku looked in wonder and Kevin was having a wonderful time watching her reaction.

His grandparents must have been waiting inside the door, Kevin thought, since they appeared on the porch before the landau pulled up. Torc Allta formed a corridor from the landau to the steps. Rachael, Alainn’s longtime confidant and lady-in-waiting stood slightly behind Alainn, while Manwë, Brian’s valet, the head of the household staff and perhaps Brian’s closest friend, stood slightly behind him. The couple were

dressed in draíochta formal but the color was the light blue of the Blackfeet flag. Hanging from the pálás were a Blackfeet and a Coillearnach banner. Kevin could not have asked for a more magical welcome and he could feel Minaku's excitement.

"Oh, how I wish father could see this," Minaku said squeezing Kevin's arm.

"He will," Kevin reassured her. "He will. People here love this type of thing. We can do it every day without getting tired of it."

That evening, over a beautiful supper served on the veranda overlooking the ravine behind the pálás, Kevin and Minaku talked about wedding plans as well as the arrival and formal presentation of all the guests from Montana. Kevin and Minaku were concerned about the logistics. Maethoriel, on the other hand, was just plain excited. She had been doing this type of thing all of her life, and loved it.



Over the next few days Kevin gave Minaku the unofficial, behind the scenes, up-close-and-personal tour of Cigam, Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth, the Academy and the surrounding mountains. He knew that the clainn would be open and friendly, but they seemed to go far beyond that. They also seemed to fall in love with the bright and beautiful Piikani woman. She didn't have to worry about being too smart. They loved her. Kevin noticed that the Queen Mother, Grandmother Alainn, and even Neala seemed to find time to get off alone with her for some girl talk. It was bad enough that one of her best friends was his sister, but he was sure that his Mother and two female cousins would get their turn. Was it a girl thing?

Of course, Minaku had to tease him about the content of those private talks. He wasn't too worried. He was sure that Cathy had probably told her about all of the really embarrassing moments in his life.

She had to explore every inch of the castle, and, of course, the Queen Mother insisted upon going along. Maethoriel had taken a very special liking to Minaku and was especially intrigued by her being an honest to goodness Indian. She had hundreds of questions about what it was like to be a real part of the land, to be indigenous. Did it feel different? Did she realize, was she aware, that she lived what most of North America would never experience? Kevin was not surprised to see a deep bond developing between them. Before it was over Minaku had promised Maethoriel that even if they had to sneak out, she would personally take the Queen Mother into the Montana wilderness where they would sleep in a tepee and cook over a fire and the boys could just sit on it until they got home. Maethoriel thought that was marvelous.

They were visiting the apartment where Brian had been sequestered while they sorted out his heritage. Minaku was looking out one of the windows as Maethoriel shared the story of how they discovered he was a silver wizard.

“That’s the very window Brian would stand at and blow kisses to Alainn,” said Maethoriel. “That’s the balcony of what then was her apartment right there. To this day they do not know that I knew their secret signals, the staff helping Alainn sneak in here, and his going to that window every night. I can’t tell you how much I cried. I really had no choice, but it broke my heart to cause them so much pain.” She paused and thought a moment, “of course, had I not been so diligent in my duties we would never have learned the truth about Brian Prionsa and Moricon would probably be ruling Collearnach today.”



Coillernach Academy sits in a large meadow overlooking a lake at the far end of the Coillernach Flaitheas Scáth well out of sight of the village and castle. The front of the school is a long, three-story building with six large columns and a large

oak gate in the middle. There are no windows on the ground level but on the second and third levels the building is lined with windows. These are the faculty rooms.

Kevin's rooms were on the third floor in this building and overlooked the courtyard. They were little more than a sitting room/office and a bedroom, but they were quite comfortable. He had a fireplace for heat. He had never had any reason to have a kitchen. He ate all his meals in the commons. Kevin found it very amusing. He took Minaku to the faculty dayroom where all of the old men sucked in their stomachs and did their best to impress Minaku. The undergrad dorms weren't so bad, but the graduate dayroom was just like the faculty; viz. the boys wanting to impress the beautiful young Indian maiden.

After visiting the class rooms, lecture halls, laboratories and dorms, Minaku was most impressed with the library. It is a large and extremely well stocked library especially for such a small school. The building is a very large edifice with a steep pitched roof. There are large full-length windows. Between each window and on either side are small flying buttresses to help support the extremely tall walls. Inside there is a giant reading room down the middle with book stacks extending from the outside wall between the windows. Iron cat walks with spiral stairs at the end of each stack provide access to books on the upper shelves. Rows of tables placed parallel with the stacks fill the reading room. The tables are heavy trestle tables with ornate carved legs. There are ten Windsor arm chairs at each table. Down the middle of each table is a shelf containing pens, pencils, ink, erasers, note paper and a place to put books. While the reading room has twelve massive chandeliers, each table has three small lamps. By each window is a small private writing desk.

Standing in the doorway to the anteroom of the library, which contains the librarians desk, office and stairs to the lower level storage area, Minaku admired the beautiful library. It was filled with students. There were a couple of small groups, some were sitting and reading while others were obviously busy on a school

assignment with mountains of books around them and writing notes on tablets of paper. Others were scurrying up and down the iron stairs and catwalk holding pieces of paper and looking anxiously at the spines of the books they passed. All of the writing desks by the windows that Minaku could see were taken.

She knew that something was missing in the school and it took her most of the day to realize there were no computers. She saw science students sitting at a lab table using a slide rule to make calculations. Most humani her age had no comprehension of a slide rule. For Minaku it was like going back to school in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

The students wear gowns to class. The undergrads; those who have not graduated from the equivalent of high school; wear a version of the bachelor gown. Graduates wear gowns according to their academic level. For lectures the faculty wear what is commonly called “undress” in England and Ireland. That looks much like the American master’s gown. For special occasions and at the evening coimin those with doctors degrees wear their scarlet.

Coimin is the evening meal shared by everyone at the Academy. Everyone from students to staff to faculty to Headmaster Schaunessy share the evening meal together where they are brought up to date on events in the school as well as clainn. It is what might be called a semi-formal affair. The dress is formal but the atmosphere is relaxed and collegial. The faculty does sit at one large trestle table with the Headmaster in the middle but that is the extent of any segregation.

Minaku had had lunch in the faculty lounge above the entrance to the dining hall. The dining hall had been built in the mid-eighteenth century, so it is made from enormous limestone blocks. Despite its height, there are no flying buttresses needed here. Like the library, the roof is slate and steeply pitched. The faculty lounge is a good forty feet long and almost twenty feet wide with a giant fireplace. Overstuffed

chairs surround the fireplace while tables for four are scattered around the rest of the room, especially in front of the line of windows across the front of the building.

Cornelius, Valiard and Headmaster Schanessy had joined Kevin and Minaku for lunch. Minaku had a hundred questions about the academics, teaching methods, subjects. At dinner the two sat at the faculty table at coimin.

What most humani in North America do not understand is that in most of the world; including the various draíochta academies, schools and universities; the master's degree means that you are a master of your subject. It is considered the terminal degree. A thousand years after the first doctor's degree was awarded, there are still universities where the head of a department or school has a master's degree. The doctor's degree is considered an additional academic degree and reward for special contributions to the field. As far as Headmaster Shaunessy and the other Coillearnach faculty were concerned, Minaku was an academic like themselves. She was given a master's gown with a hood in her school colors of brown and gold with the velvet being social science cream. She realized that as much of an outdoors, mountain girl as she was, she was very comfortable and very much at home in the halls of academia as well. Little did she realize that in the very near future she would be wearing this gown every day because she would become the school's first humani faculty member. She would teach basic social sciences, understanding the humani and do research with Kevin.



Several days later the port key between Tunnel Creek and Cigam was probably the busiest magical passage way anywhere on Earth. Mark arrived with Napikyáiyó and Mahx. Isla, Sorg, Gadin and Ara arrived with Golouth Longbeard commanding a small honor guard of dwarven Garda. Chepi was accompanied by four fairy guards.

Each of them, as they arrived, received the same fanfare and the warm, friendly welcome of the Coillearnach clainn.

Ferguson Pálás was not big enough to house all of the visitors so after all had arrived there was a grand procession to the castle in Coillearnach Flaitheas Scáth. As Captain Lawrence had done so many years ago, his daughter, Captain Neala, stood at attention before the entrance and called for it to be opened so that the carriages could pass.

Kevin couldn't remember the castle looking so grand. It was covered with the colors and banners of Coillearnach and all the visiting clainns. He was surprised to find that his parents, aunts, uncles and cousins had arrived and gone directly to the castle. Queen Mother Maethoriel was the consummate host, as usual. Even the large family dining room wasn't big enough for the group, so they moved into her audience hall.

It was like a giant family reunion. Kevin didn't realize how big his family actually was. His parents, aunts and uncles all worked directly or indirectly with the foundation. Angela, his younger cousin, had also attended the Coillearnach Academy and now worked with the land protection unit of the foundation. Angela is a kick-butt attorney, an above average witch as well as a phenomenal backcountry expert and environmentalist. One summer she and a friend decided that they wanted to visit the Kendall Island Bird Sanctuary. If you don't know where that is, find Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada, locate the Mackenzie River running nearby, and follow the river north to the Arctic Ocean.

For some time Angela had been the youngest of the cousins. She had a little sister, Meredith, who was born when she was about fourteen. Meredith is now a second year at the Academy. Unlike her cousins on her grandfather's side of the family, she had always been around draíochta and magic. By the time she got to the Academy,

and being related to Cathy and Kevin, she earned the nickname “Harietta Potter” because of the adventure and mischief in her life.

The wedding was a magnificent affair. Maethoriel, with Alainn’s blessing, ran the show and pulled out all the stops. Even though Kevin had no interest in royal titles, many considered him a prince since he is the grandson – albeit by marriage – of the reigning queen. As a compromise, Kevin permitted the use of the title “Tiarna” (Eng. ‘Lord’) at court occasions. Minaku would thus become Bhean (Eng. ‘lady’) Professor Minaku Pííta at formal events.

The ceremony was in the meadow between Cigam and Ferguson Pálás so that anyone who wanted could attend. Maethoriel didn’t tell Minaku but she talked to Napikyáiyó and they came up with a ceremony that honored both the Blackfeet and Coillearnach traditions. Minaku didn’t think anything of Maethoriel insisting that she wear a Blackfeet dress because Maethoriel had been the one to insist that she honor her people by wearing her native dress at court. Nor was she surprised to see all of the Brotherhood members at the wedding dressed in their Blackfeet finery with feather headdress. What she was not prepared for was, after the Coillearnach grand entrance, Maethoriel raising a cloaking cloud to reveal several of the Brotherhood drumming and her father take his place next to the queen. She started to cry. Oh, how she wished that the tribe could see this. Here was pure love and mutual respect. It was not a case of some traditional act from an historic Piikani wedding merely being attached as Minaku and the others had so often witnessed. This wedding was a beautiful melding of the two cultures showing love, respect and admiration for both. Maethoriel spoke in Draíochta Common-tongue with a translator for the Piikani guests and most of Kevin’s family who, although they had been around Coillearnach for a number of years now, still could not speak the common tongue well enough. Napikyáiyó spoke in Blackfeet with a translator for the guests who were not Blackfeet.



It was a beautiful day. Tanras was sitting in a crook of Earrach's roots. Tanras has just returned from visiting the McAllaistar Flaitheas Scáth. It had been three years since the destruction of the Ceann a dhualgas and Tanras had returned to the flaitheas scáth every month to pick up supplies and gather news. He was filling Earrach in on the latest news.

"Oh, and Isla is pregnant," he said, almost having forgotten.

"Pregnant!" exclaimed Earrach. "Isn't that wonderful. It seems like just yesterday that they were getting married."

"Time flies,"

"Do they have any plans for Ruklidome?" ask Earrach.

"I think they've decided to leave it alone. Having Isla and Sorg's wedding there caused them to realized that it was really a security nightmare. With all of the humans that now wonder through these mountains, they really need to stay in the flaitheas scáth just to avoid conflict."

"Speaking of conflict, Mahx is the new leader of the Brotherhood."

"Really?! I know he'll do a good job."

"Yes," agreed Tanras. "Napikyáiyó was a bit disappointed that he didn't want to become a shaman, but he had to admit that a good leader for the Brotherhood is more important."

"Is he still teaching school?"

"Oh, yes. Can't give up your day job," Tanras joked. "Who would ever suspect the local school teacher to be the leader of a group like the Brotherhood. The word is that they haven't had nearly as many problems the last few years. Most of the tribe's problems are still with the US government breaking the treaties. What they need are a stable full of lawyers."

“I saw Lady Manwathiel.”

“Cathy! What’s she up to?”

“She came to visit Isla,” said Tanras. “With Socusdus gone, they decided to leave the port key open so folks can visit back and forth. She said that Professor Penmaster published his history of the McAllistair Clainn and it’s a big hit. He wants to come back to Montana and do a book or story on you.”

“Me? All I do is stand around,” Earrach laughed.

“You do a bit more than that,” Tanras smiled. “And, she said that Professor Armgrom has added an entire class on the use of compassion and love in the defense against the dark arts.”

“That’s wonderful!”

“Of course, from what she’s heard, a lot of it is studying Isla Metari’s approach to the Ceann a dhualgas and researching how her logic and approach might be applied to other situations.”

“That sounds excellent.”

“Yes. It is evidently an advanced class.”

“What about her brother, Kevin, and Minaku?”

“They’re doing fine,” said Tanras. “Kevin is still working on a flying broom and playing Quiddich. He and Minaku have turned out to be quite the academic dynamic duo.”

“Oh, how’s that?”

“Minaku is actually doing some research with Kevin at the Academy. They’re still trying to figure out why humani who can use a much higher portion of their brain – like Minaku - cannot do magic. Evidently, they’ve concluded that it has something to do with the mind-opening that Kevin’s grandfather had to go through because he was a draíochta who had not been trained as a youth. She’s also helping him teach

quantum physics and magic. They do lectures together. Cathy said people are begging to attend their lectures.”

“That’s really exciting news.”

“Somehow they still find time for Minaku to teach at the tribal community college and spend at least half their time here.”

“I wonder how long they’re going to be able to keep up that schedule.”

“That’s a good question,” Tanras laughed. “Speaking of unbelievable schedules, I got a chance to talk to Napikyáiyó.”

“How’s he doing?”

“He’s fine,” said Tanras. “You remember how he went back to the reservation after meeting you and started teaching classes on Blackfeet spirituality and being Blackfeet. Well, the classes are so popular that there is a waiting list. Minaku is helping him with teaching the Blackfeet language. Mahx is teaching a section called ‘the way of the warrior’. Napikyáiyó not only has Blackfeet from Canada and the US, he has non-Indians taking the class. Some universities are actually giving their students course credits for taking his class.”

There was a long silence as Tanras watched the clouds drifting overhead.

“Is that all?” asked Earrach.

“Oh, no,” exclaimed Tanras. “Did you know that Cathy and Kevin have a young cousin named Angela?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Well she’s evidently a kick-butt attorney with the BPF Foundation’s land preservation, an environmentalist extraordinaire and an avid backcountry traveler. She also has a little sister named Meridith who is a second year at the Academy. Between Penmaster’s book and a bit of influence from ‘aunt Isla’ the sisters have decided that they want go looking for the Canadian clainn during Meridith’s summer break this year.”

“Make sure you tell them that they must stop by and visit me. If they find the Canadian clainn and I can find a Cosantóir,”

“Do you have a seed?”

“I have two,” Earrach said gently. “I know it has been your dream to plant a Crann na Beatha seed, and you really deserve the honor, but I don’t want to lose you.”

“I couldn’t leave you, either,” said Tanras. “Maybe if everything is still calm and peaceful around here, I could go with the girls or I could go meet them.”

“That’s a good idea. You could actually realize your dream to be the seed bearer but let someone else be the Cosantóir.”

Tanras folded his hands behind his head and leaned back looking at the sky. Life was good and all the draíochta clainns were enjoying a well-earned time of peace.

TABLE OF TERMS

Term	Definition
Akasha	The term akasha has been around for a very long time. Its origins go back to Sanskrit where it is derived from a root <i>kāś</i> meaning "to be". In all religious and philosophical traditions it is an infinite space. Ervin László in <i>Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything</i> (2004), based on ideas by Rudolf Steiner , calls it "a field of information" or " universal consciousness ." While still much of a mystery, Akasha appears to be more endless space of the universal consciousness. The idea that it contains an etheric compendium of all knowledge and history has yet to be confirmed, but extensive experience by Draíochta wizards and Humani meditation masters gives rise to it being depicted as the edge of the Buddhist sunyata (emptiness) where one might encounter others from any time, as in the novella Ryuhiko where Ryuhiko meets his father on the edge of sunyata. Sunyata can also be translated "spaciousness".
Banrion	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for " queen " – usually placed after the person's name as in Ara Banrion and Chepi Banrion.
Bhean	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for " lady ". This title is used with adult women of the royal household, except for the queen (banrion), such as a princess or the wife of a member of the royal household. For example, Cathy (Bhean Manwathiel) is the granddaughter of Brian who is the Prince Consort. Cathy is treated as a princess because her step-grandmother is the queen and so became Bhean Manwathiel when she turned 18. If there is another title, such as Dr., then Bhean is put immediately before the first name.
Bridget-Prince Fionn Foundation	In the book <i>New Prince of Coillearnach</i> , Brian and Alainn create a foundation in honor of their deceased spouses; Bridget Ferguson and Prionsa Fionn. The foundation has two divisions; the BPF Hospital, which is a free research hospital that serves both humani and draíochta and the Land Preservation division that buys land near parks and wilderness areas to keep mining and other destructive commercial businesses away from fragile ecosystems. In this book the North Fork area where Dr. Deming lived, was about to be taken over by greedy developers who would not only destroy the environment but put lots of local people out of work. The BPF Land Preservation team outbid the developers, put local people in charge of the land and designated much of it wilderness, which protected it for the local people. In other situations, the BPF Foundation will help develop jobs related

	to the land they save often improving the economic health of the local community.
Ceann a Dhualgas	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for the vile monsters that are created to seek and destroy the Crann na Beatha. It requires a powerful wizard to create one of these creatures. The first one was created by the evil wizard Aonolc in order to destroy a Crann na Beatha (Tree of Life) because it kept him from enslaving humani. They are made of a giant body; usually that of a Mountain Troll; the brain of a person who has done a particularly evil and vile deed, and a heart still beating. The Ceann a Dhualgas does not participate in battle. It simply seeks and destroys Crann na Beathaa, but it will, of course, destroy anyone who gets in its way.
Cigam	Name of the village Brian Prionsa created when he built Ferguson Pálás. It became a safe haven for draíochta who did not live inside the Flaitheas Scáth.
Ceannasaí	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “commander” . Ceannasai Golouth Longbeard is the McAllaistar garda commander.
Clainn	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “clan” . The term can be used to describe a community or kingdom, such as Clainn Coillearnach, which describes the entire Coillearnach kingdom which consists of all types of draíochta. It can also describe a particular group of draíochta as in Alfred Clainn Torc Allta.
Coillearnach	The name of the clainn of Elves as well as the kingdom of Draíochta that extends along the Appalachian Mountains. Although many types of Draíochta live in the kingdom and its Flaitheas Scáth the clainn is Elven.
Cosantóir	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “protector” . If an Iarrthóir (seeker) is a powerful wizard they may become the Crann na Beatha’s protector.
Crann na Beatha	The Tree of Life . Crann na Beatha is a magnificent magical tree. They are often one-hundred, twenty feet in diameter and almost five-hundred feet high. It is the mother of all vegetation and uses its magical properties to protect all life on earth. Some believe that it is the manifestation of the spirit of Unci Maca, Grandmother Earth.
cuideachta	Traditionally a company of 100 soldiers or warriors. In modern times a cuideachta is 30 to 50 soldiers and commanded by a captaen (captain).
draíochta	draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “magic folk” .
Ferguson Pálás	The palace near the village of Cigam which Brian Prionsa built for Alainn in the New Prince of Coillearnach.
Flaitheas Scáth	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic)

	for “ Shadowrealm ”. Shadowrealms are dimensions created and sustained by magical means. Generally, but not necessarily, the Flaitheas Scáth reflect the landscape in which they are located. For example, the McAllistar Flaitheas Scáth looks like the valley below Mt. Grant. Shadowrealms are typically accessed via an entrance connected to the Earth or another. Many shadowrealms are connected through ley lines and ley gates.
Garda na Rí (or Garda)	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ King’s Guard ” Sometimes shortened to Garda.
humani	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ human .” (Homo Sapiens)
Iarrthóir	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ seeker ”. The seeker is generally a wizard who dedicates his/her life to searching for Crann na Beatha and protecting them.
leath draíochta	A magic person, draíochta, who has one or more relatives (generally a mother or father) who is humani. Contrary to the myth created by the book Harry Potter, leath draíochta, are not looked down upon or scorned. Actually, all of Prionsa Brian’s children and grandchildren are leath draíochta. Prof Kevin Dulac is a very powerful blue/grey wizard and his sister Cathy is quite powerful.
mo grá	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ my love ”
Morganians	Followers of Morgana Pendragon, born in 607. She is also known as Morgan(a) le Fey (fairy) but there is no evidence of that. Most histories say that she is the half-sister of King Arthur. In the book New Prince of Coillearnach, Moricon was the great-grandson of Morgana. His grandfather was the child of Morgana and a secret lover, Soselius. Moricon survived 1,400 years on hatred and the Elixir of Life created from the Philosopher’s Stone. He took the name Apollyon – the destroyer. Morganianism became a cult of evil wizards who desire to rule the world.
Nimi’ipuu	Tribal name for Indian nation known by non-natives as Nez Perce .
Nínaistáki	The Blackfeet name for Chief Mountain . It is still a sacred place for the Blackfeet people. One can understand when they see it. It is located just off Montana highway 17 known as Chief Mountain Highway a few miles south of the Canadian border. For some reason the park service drew the park boundary right through the mountain leaving only half of it in Blackfeet territory.
North Fork	A very remote area along the North Fork of the Flathead River. The people there have no electricity, telephone, etc., and prefer it that way. The road into the area is gravel. They fear

	that if they accept modern roads, electricity, etc., McDonalds and Walmart will be right behind. They don't want that.
Piikani	A tribe of the Blackfeet Confederacy. The Blackfeet today stretch from Glacier County, Montana, well into Canada. The modern Piikani live in Glacier County. At one time the Blackfeet stretched from Yellowstone into Canada. About 3,000 Piikani live on the reservation.
Prionsa	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ Prince ”. As with other royal titles, Prionsa generally follows the first name as in Sorg Prionsa McAllistar.
Rí	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ King ” – usually placed after the person's name such as Gadin Rí McAllistar.
Sahkáikahtomi-wa	The Blackfeet name for the McAllistar dwarfs.
Salish	The name of the tribe, also known as Kalispell, who live in the area around what is now Flathead Lake. Lewis and Clark called them the Flathead.
Sealbhóir Eochair	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for the one who holds the key to a password or gate.
Tamamuhara	A tribe of Indians in north-central Mexico who are known as perhaps the world's greatest runners. They have very successfully isolated themselves from the outside world. They called the Spanish invaders the “bearded devils.”
Tiarna	Draíochta common language (closely related to ancient Gaelic) for “ Lord ” as a royal title. The title is given to adult males of the royal family and may be used addressing a prionsa (prince). Kevin, grandson of Alainn Banrion and Brian Prionsa, is considered a prince. Unlike other titles, it goes before the first name. If the person has another title, such as Dr., it is Dr. Tiarna Kevin Beauloc.
Torc Allta	Torc Allta are an ancient clainn of shape-shifters from the time of the Elder Race. Their natural form is that of a were-boar but they can take on humanoid form. When they take on their humanoid form they are generally red haired with almost florescent blue eyes. While the book Nicholas Flamel says that they were destroyed, the clainn is actually very much alive. In Clainn Coillearnach they serve as the Garda na Rí, a position of which they are quite proud.