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KIL. WISH/WISHING AT THE EDGE:

!*!

CHAOS & ELVES; FOREST DEFENDERS & ...MAGIC

##...A NOVEL BY RATH AVENS

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"Come to me - Children of the Green Dream for I need your innocent wishes."

Crossing New Boundaries...

This is a true story, though some of it has not transpired - as of yet.
The outcome of the Final Battles is unknown and undecided.
Delay increases the chance of failure and contributes to greater suffering.

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Much of the first half of the book comes from actual experiences. Many of the characters in the book are real people or composites of several people. Some have their original forest names and some do not. Some of these characters went on to lead large organizations or international protest campaigns, some stayed in the trees and some went underground (maybe).

Call to Healers, Peace Lovers and all Animals:

Elves move now in the night. They take up positions, they watch and they prepare to sacrifice for Nature's Survival - which is all of our lives into the future. If, you believe in keeping violence to a minimum, then you had better get to work fast. Prepare to put your life on the line that your mouth talks so much about: the line of Truth - of knowing when a situation has gone too far and something has to be done. Gaia manifests her own defense. The beauty and promise of Nature call strongly to those who know it well. It is time to choose sides or to forfeit your input about what happens next. If you can't choose the Fields of War, then help us with money and love. Work on your friends and relatives. Build support (food, gear, safe-houses) for what has to happen.

"Wishing at the Edge" takes you behind the frontlines of Eo-defense, to a time (2007?)

when thousands of people have moved to rural forest areas. They come to defend the wild and biodiversity – both within themselves and around them. They come for survival. Urban areas are exploding in violence and despair as the USA crumbles into chaos. Refugees clog the roads and threaten to overwhelm endangered areas.

Healers, youth, Eco-commandos, and the young officers of the militia move cautiously toward mutual acceptance and tenuous alliance. Every event and encounter is fraught with danger, espionage and assassination. Into this mix, step Hazel, Sasha and Jarred. Each of them has a powerful network of supporters who work openly or behind the scenes to exert influence and gather information.

Two "good" magics seek unification toward a purpose: to guide the Volkentrough - the collective last wish of all species. Complex forces arise to seek their own wishes. Wildryns – spirits of extinct species and all the children lost to toxics, abortion, and hate - are trapped on the Earth. These Wildryns wait for the time of their optimal release. But dark **shadows** of evil strive to undo the plans of others and to control the power of these tortured souls, for their own designs.

Hazel's group – the Eco-Commandos - have stopped commercial logging and attracted many young forest defenders. Now, they hope to win local elections and begin the restoration of the ecology. Sasha's group – the Network – is playing all sides in this dangerous game. They are mostly young people who live in militia zones, but they tend to favor the healers and the forest defenders.

West of coastal Northern California the militia has consolidated its power. Two powerful factions vie for control. The "Young Officers" group wants peaceful coexistence, but an older "Fanatic Christian" faction is determined to establish itself over the whole region. Weapons are being stockpiled in preparation for a showdown. The Eco-Commandos split up into missions in Colorado and San Francisco. Hazel and a friend travel cross-country in Northern California to a council meeting with powerful militia leaders. All three groups run into difficulties, but manage to accomplish at least part of their missions.

Hazel, Sasha, and Jarred end up lost and hunted in the forest. **Shadows** close in on them. Rescuers find them and they head toward the election-day music festivals. Traps block their path and more high drama unfolds before the day is done. Sacrifices are chosen and mistakes barely avoided. Sasha leaves his friends and strikes out on his own, in hopes of sparing them grief and hazard.

Forces of fate and magic converge at a stony hilltop. Ships transport troops as the Federal government moves to nullify the election results through force and occupation. Storm clouds brew and emotions fill the sky. A moment of destiny builds to its multiple climax. Awareness of the situation grows until a spontaneous awakening is triggered. Most people come to realize that they have to defend the places they live, since there is nowhere left to go. The refugee flood is slowed down.

Straw Men burn in the night sky, as beacons shine from one community to the next, proclaiming solidarity and friendship with the new ways. All things come together; friends trust each other, and miracles of courage and hard work save the day. Across the planet, highways of commerce and greed are thrown down. Soon, most people recognize that technology or complex machines that do not serve basic needs of food and shelter are inherently wasteful and evil.

Many of the young forest defenders and eco-commandos die, but overall violence is kept to a minimum. Joy and confidence spread and a helping hand is extended to refugees.

You have to trust the magic and believe in how we are using it.

“Only through ‘make believe’ can we find the power of Make Believe, the power to change our narrow view - these dead end ways. Trust the Elves, we have to I believe. Become one with all things and all times. Each moment is the accumulation of all evolution, all struggles. Come, we can have fun in our company together, while we create a new way of being and a new view of life and time and ...love. I’ll show you how to climb giant trees and you can show me how to wander aimlessly through the woods, in love with all life.”

Hazel leaped on Jared knocking him backward into a pile of leaves and soft branches. “What do you say, Renegade Militia, are we a team? I’ll have to kill you if you say no, you know too much.” She yelled out as Jarred flipped her back over, but then she kept rolling and ended up on top again. Before he could say yes she was kissing him long and holding him tight. He held on for a long time, knowing how much needed to be done and how easily they could fail or lose each other.

Every joy and every sadness... every wish of safety... and every certainty of doom filled their hearts. But as they rose to leave, Hazel felt a lessening of the dread and confusion that had stalked them these last few days. Having made it this far, strengthened by the companionship growing around Jarred, Sasha, and herself, Hazel appreciated the new skills she was developing. Skills she would soon have to rely on. She pondered what to do at the music festival and wished hard for Anaya to be there. She had to be able to answer these questions, make sense out of the dreams. Wearing her grim determination lightly, Hazel gathered in her thoughts and energy as they climbed down the steep ridge trail where Sasha had gone...

As they came up the ridge from their camp, Hazel was wondering how many more miles to the Klamath Road. Sasha stood up from a log by the road and smiled, saying, “It’s not much farther, a couple miles downhill...”

Look the horses!!” -- From Book Two: Chapter VIII.

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Introducing a book on Forest Defense, Magic and Honorable Resistance:

“Wildryns are trapped spirit energy or souls as humans imagine them. We think they are Elven, but there is something wrong in Eald and in other magical planes. Someone’s powerful wish is holding the Wildryns at particular places on Earth. There may be human souls caught up in this, perhaps children who died in the womb or from toxics, hate or murder. I cannot find an answer to this riddle, yet I must, and I can’t come and help you now.” Anaya, the Elven Forest Guardian faded into mist like a sound in the fog.

This is the Great War - the eternal Struggle: whether the light or the dark will unbalance creation. Will there be a future of life restored and respect for the circle? Or will the Dark spells of greed and delusion triumph in oblivion?

Unless we embrace and join our light and dark natures we will miss the path of balance and there will be no tomorrow, no third chance. Darkness gathers and laughs at our confusion. Consequences commence. Yet, the crack of the Eald-Edge - that place of happiness and love in struggle - is still in your reach. Search it out now with your heart or remember our warning.

The origin of all things came from the First Wish:

Let there be Light.

The Second Wish came, for there must be darkness for there to be light.

Creativity and a bit of Divine Vanity, brought the Wish of Life... and thus that of Death.

Soon, Beauty and Diversity bargain with Chaos for immortality as the **Nebyakin** and the **Shadow Spirits** conspire against Purity.

Tanyaka. The Earth Elemental wishes for a self-generating Gaia Defense, so the elves drew magic unto the Ley Lines. Patterns evolve aligned to the Universal life Force. Rei-

Ki embeds in all things while Eu spreads out covering creation and seeking connections to a balance of energies - and healing.

Love of the Forest returns to many hearts, genetic memories reach out, and this awakening works with Brione's wish that Life should be so simple. Finally, enough voices join to power the Wish of the Innocents for Simplicity, Nature, and 'Letting Go.' Just in time, hundreds of Healers come forward to join with the cutting edge of the Forest Defenders: the 'straight edge' Youth of the forest camps. Love guides Rage into Gaia self defense as the Front-line Strategy gains popularity and reluctant acceptance by most moderates. Almost everyone tolerates the refugees and the kids; the Forest Camps, and even the power of Rei-Ki... the possibility of all healing together... somehow.

Spiritual awakening begins to energize the nearly forgotten Ley Lines and the Youth of Prophecy fulfill Lorien's wish for a silence to the chainsaws. People come to occupy the land in self-defense of the Future. Imprints build up energy as the vortex of each magic pulls its parts together.

Ceremonies offer love and sacrifice at the Holy Places, the special forest groves, and all the places of tremendous pain, where extinctions and suffering create the Wildryns.

These trapped spirits are no longer only Elves, but now occur wherever dislocations of the Pattern of Life cause unnatural death and elimination.

Love seeks to ward the dangerous imprints, but planning and timing tend toward entropy (Chaos) as nothing is certain in the End Times.

Imbalance remains as a great cosmic cycle turns with Earth's struggle. Nebyakin watch as **Shadows** spread their devious plans and tricks. The Gods have few wishes left. Perhaps they are only as strong as their Myths.

..."**Come to me - Children of the Green Dream - for I need your innocent wishes.** Follow the Gray Path with Elven Lore... and you shall find your role. Bring your friends who can balance the Three Motivations: the Self, the Tribe, and the Future. This is the time - **the Hour of Decision** - for those who fight for all species. This is the Battle of the Future. And this is your specie's last opportunity to re-route the path of evolution - to etch new patterns into a planet's fate. Walk with me... that slim path of chances, the Edge where Unconditional Love touches Unconditional Sacrifice. Somewhere in our Dreams, the Gray Path breaks through the trap and creates La Tierra Luminoso."

Wolves circle warily as her spirit shell guards The Innocence...

Owl's green eyes speak words of finality. Claws of predation sink deep into Bear's shaggy shoulder: "The Nature of Things is to seek life. The Web of Life patterns your awareness of Right Connections. Intimacy is the carrot and Chaos the stick. When you have seen my death, your heart will burst with the knowing.

Magic and Chaos are the two components of Existence. Chaos tends to disrupt, to interfere, to trick, to corrupt and destroy. Magic is a neutral force which tends to energize the Nature of Things and the Patterns of the Future. Beware the Agents of Chaos - those who would steal the magic - when Faith abandons Conscience.

The Patterns of Life recycle nutrients and energy on Earth. I designed the Patterns with a piece of each God's heart. These are only borrowed. Each cycle, a new Chosen must earn the right to renew the Offering of the Gods. I set the elves to guard the Patterns... and like you they maintain that vigil unto death... or worse.

Humans let the "Glory of the Mad Child" trick them beyond the Patterns of Life. Now they wander a course aimed at Shadows. The Patterns are threatened! I made a mistake that I cannot fix without your help. Humans have lost most of their Elvish ability, but they - above all creatures - still dream and think into the future. That is your magic.

Shadows reside in all things. Ignorance and denial amplify Chaos.

The Shadows separate themselves with the Lost Magic. They manifest Fates. The Magic and the Beauty, which the Gods created, have worked too great an enchantment. Even the Gods forgot their **Shadows**... Chaos potential multiplies the longer you deny the Sacrifice of the Chosen. Your delay questions the very Nature of Things. Hasten, for the Magic evolves, and its momentum redefines its needs and its requirements. Vortexes of unfulfilled wishes clash with the Magical Defense - the Patterns of Life. Great or terrible Imprints demand expression. I cannot say whether the Union - the Great - or the Sacrifice - the Terrible - shall prevail.

...The Nature of the Vortex is to be appeased.

Actions create side-effects unless 'The Root' is consulted. Realign the Powers or else, edges will multiply and corrode deeper into your consciousness. Destroy the Lines of Greed, which lead **Shadow Wishes** to the Portal. **Darnovoi** seeks the Dominion of the **Nebyakin** - an end to Life and Magic. – *Goddess Lorien of the Wildwood, Mountains and Springs*

...Listen to the leaves' whisperings... kiss the wind... Listen to the cries of the Earth and be the trailing wails of a vanishing specie. Reach out your toes to feel the edge of the abyss - where the Great Imprint draws cataclysm. Forget everything you 'know.' Discard all attachments and possessions. Follow your nose to the intersections of greatest pain. Offer your life – at the very least!

Join those fighting for all species and... A chance comes to wish forth an Imprint: One that brings together the Light and the Dark.

Only then can new patterns emerge - in time - and, 'There shall be a re- establishment of the Original Nature of Things.' That is the Prophecy. -- Brione's dream of The Wild Woman, '0004'

******* Dedication --** This Book is dedicated to Erica the "Painted-Elf" who saved my life (at least twice) and who could have been my love; ESPECIALLY to the only true love of my life Ms. Anonymous (Butt-Winds); and ultimately to those individuals who are an inspiration to all things:

Martyrs:

Augusto Cesar Sandino (Nicaragua); Diana Oughton, Terry Robbins, and Theodore Gold (Weather Underground, New York); Ana Mae Aquash ((Dakotas/NovA Scotia);

Dalal Mughrabi (Palestine); Fernando Pereira (Holland/New Zealand); Michalis Prekas (Kalgogreza, Italy); Loula Abboud (Lebanon); Petra Schelm (Hamburg, Germany); Chico Mendes (Brazil); Christoforos Marinos (Piraeus, Italy); Eduardo Massari (Beleno) and Maria Soledad Rosas (Italy); David Gypsy Chain (Texas and Grizzly Creek); Naya Bryan (Santa Cruz); Bartolomeu Morais da Silva (Brazil); Beth O'Brien (Portland, Oregon); Alex Lemun (Chile); Dorothy Stang (Nun murdered in Brazil); Nicolas David Neira Alvares (Colombia); Zenon Diaz Necul (Chile); the indigenous and campesino martyrs of Bolivia and Ecuador, the guerrillas of Colombia; Khava Barayeva (Chechnya); Wafa Idris (Palestine), Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (Palestine); Amanat Nagayeva and Satsita Dzhebirekhanova (Russia/Chechnya); Ayat al-Akhras (Palestine); Hiba Daraghmeh (Palestine); Nek Mohammed (Afghanistan and Pakistan); Hanadi Tayseer (Palestine);

And the following incarcerated comrades:

Ana Lucia Gelabert (Cuban-American); Irmgard Möller (Heidelberg, Germany); Marilyn Buck (Native American); Ted Kazinsky (Montana); Helen Woodson (Texas); Ibai Ederra (Spain); Robert Thaxton - Rob Los Ricos (Eugene, Oregon); Sara Olson (SLA- California); Jaan Karl Laaman; Thomas Manning; Richard Williams; Jeffrey Free Luers and Craig Critter Marshall (Fall Creek, Oregon); Tre Arrow (Oregon/British Columbia) and all those who risk life, limb or liberty to stop the senseless destruction of Earth that we all depend on....

See complete list at: <http://www.u-blog.net/wishedge/article/prisoners>

Or visit: Earth Liberation Prisoners at: <http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk/>

*In these times we are in, there is but one path.
If the animals could vote and the Future had a voice they would understand
what we are fighting for.*

******* BOOK I**

******* WHEN WORLDS MEET**

CHAPTER ONE:

Elves, Healers, and Eco-Commandos

Herein lies what is known of the Elves and their Queen, Lorien - Goddess of the Wildwood. These stories are like dreams, and this is not unusual when interacting with Elves. It is a turbulent connection we share with them - two worlds - once connected and now so different. Even for We of the Woods - magic is confusing - almost beyond our grasp - something felt and experienced, but not easily described. One minute the sense of the magic is everywhere and then suddenly events or destinies collide and something even more amazing is created from the Sacred Things and from Spirit !*!

Understanding what has been and what will be remains a mystical challenge. To you who are stepping into our world * welcome. Enter the place where Time and Music fill the space between the Colors of Light and Love. Silence your eyes and let your Spirit find its way toward the Light - Truth - beyond the pain. Come and share our friendship and practice the Craft. Leaving behind your human ways is a slow and painful sacrifice. But it is one that must be endured if you would know the way and sort the wishes. Hesitate not at all...great joy and the fellowship of the Wild awaits your acceptance and your commitment. Try it. Why not? What else is there to do?

Become an Elf, be strong... and be aware... and you will see.

As The Dirt Settles Into Your Clothes And Skin:

As Your Hair Tangles And Collects Thorns
And Seeds; As Your Body Eases Into
The Tranquility And Peace Of The Bubbling
Creek.... The Wind In The Trees;
The Stars Shine Back Into Your Clearing
Eyes And... The Silliness Of City Ways,
Dissolves Away - As If ...It Never Could Have Been.
Connections With The Wild Seep In
And Grow Deep Within Your Soul. And
You Are Free, Feral and Alive.
You Can Never Be Alone Again For...
We Are One: Wood Nymphs and Faery
Pranksters; Butterflies, Sparrows
Mushrooms...Earth Is Alive-Resisting - And Teaching..
We Are Remembering Each Other.
Listen And Pray For The Elves To Enter.

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Welcome A New Day - A New Way Of Old.

For All... Blessings: To * Be!

An Eco-Social Defence - E S D

An ancient Raven with a broken beak got me lost in the woods one day.

It wanted to scare me into listening. It squawked:

"Nobody thinks about the creatures dying off forever. You - so called - Radicals - Seekers of the Root - you can't figure out how or what to fight. Why don't you spread your wings and fly out of Denial toward a little more Paranoia. You can't just wish the world to be nice. Vague wishes often hurt: a nice world for lightning bolts or anaerobic bacteria is different than

one for mammals and mushrooms. Humans were supposed to divine how the world works not reduce it to rubble trying to figure out their egos. What kind of world do you want, how will you get there? Why don't you ever explain what your strategy is, or hopes to accomplish? Since you ignore the animals and life that beg you now to fight like crazy - while there's still a shred of use for sacrific... think up something that's a little more than symbolic art. Try this: Eco-social Defense. Decide, either by lottery or by virtue of eco-need and practicalities, a couple counties that make sense to occupy, settle and apply whatever it is you believe in. Publicize your plan and the target sanctuaries - places where people should relocate to. Raise money: bake sales, panhandling, hard work, or spin some chump change out of a fat cat like Soros or Ted Turner or Woody (if he gets fatter). Set up land trusts for low-impact eco-communities. Start building and planting trees, learning and teaching simple - living skills, and fighting (nicely) to defend the ecology of your sanctuary.

When enough people get there you take over all political offices and institute your radical 'bright' ideas. Then work on neighboring counties. I know it's hard to abandon some struggles and places... but would you rather lose everywhere or win for sure in a few places? There are a dozen important counties in the West that would each require only five to twenty thousand new voters in order to dominate their politics. The State may try to stop you, or circumvent the Will of the People, but you'll have thousands of direct action die-hards to enforce your own law.

That Raven still scares me. I can't stop thinking about ESD or coming up with something that makes sense - a way to live in this world that's outside denial and selfishness. The ESD plan makes sense, because it is already happening on its own (Humboldt, Eugene, etc.). Many of the areas the Raven suggests we take over are likely to be swamped with refugees if the country slides much further into chaos and martial law. Without this plan, the ecology of these endangered regions is seriously threatened.

...A strange bird, but I kind of liked him, shabby and perfidious as it was...

Who's paranoid?

"ESD "Squawk!: "Eco-social Defense , "**Caw, Caw**"

Refugees

Gods! So many refugees from the floods and nowhere to go, with violence in the cities. Those summers of '06 and '07 the roads were clogged with bewildered folks. Some tried to get up into the hills, but most couldn't make it. The rivers were running wild and high.

Our story was a common one, of those who thought they were ready. It's hard to really prepare when you've no idea what to expect. It helps to keep repeating: food and shelter, food and shelter...

We set about to live deep into the forest. Alina and Sunshine knew much about gardening, wild foods, and food preservation. Fanghorn was only twelve, yet quite proficient at stalking with his bow. Ermine and Peak were young pros at security, planning and recons... We practiced making jewelry and talismans from the unique objects we found in our wanderings.

We found a nice summer campsite on a lush little stream. We hunted, grew hemp, and

built natural material yurts. We often traveled to the Fairs and Gatherings selling or trading our homemade jewelry and raingear. People liked our pamphlets on the Elven Predictions and the Way of the Goddess. Sometimes we talked to people about how the Rednecks and Elves could live together and create a better world.

A New Magic shall arise amid the rubble of a dying world or perhaps not dying but only the passing of the world as we knew it.

I cannot see all who travel the Path nor what trials they must suffer, for a Disturbance - an unbalanced Power - seeks good but is untested.

I know this for it will be a part of me, coming from my life or out from my life's changing. It will grasp and cling, yet with love and belief - the Savior will shine - the Portal will dim. - Jarrel - Witch of Scarlet Glenn

CHAPTER TWO:

NETWORKS OF LIGHT

***** OUR STORY BEGINS:

Her Elven name was Anaya. For thousands of years she was the Forest Keeper of Lorien. Most of this time she sat in meditation at the heart of the ancient grove where Lorien had taught her the Patterns of Life and the Nature of Things.

The last five years she had followed a group of young forest defenders. From afar she came to know them well as she shared their hard times and their moments of victory and celebration. These young people and thousands like them believed so strongly in the need for action that they came together in circles of friendship, tribes, permanent affinity groups where bonds of love and trust grew out of closeness and sharing until a new magic was discovered.

They believed in the Elves, in the Powers, and in themselves. Most of the world was beginning to thrash through a difficult transformation. It was this traumatic transition period from one world to another, which the real Healers feared would consume many lives unless they acted decisively. And so many healers and people who had vision came to the forest camps and the scattered communities of the Northwest. They embraced Eco-Social Defense, the front-line strategy and pretty much whatever the youth told them had to be done. A deep cultural revolution began to take hold. Even many locals who used to blindly hate the eco-freaks embraced this new way of peace and coexistence. Together they began to learn a "green survival"... maybe the world could still learn.

Anaya first recognized that this particular group of forest defenders were the Chosen at EWOK II. As she looked up at the **protesters' tree village** high in the Redwoods and heard Brione and Amnesia talking to the moss and reaching out their love, she knew beyond doubt. And Aire with Redwood needles all matted in his curly black hair could surely be an Elf, except they never have dark hair. Maybe New York Gnome? The

Sheriffs could rarely spot him whether he was hiding in some logging slash or even walking right behind them. They were unraveling hidden, Elven Lore and Anaya wondered how long before they became aware of her. Even though the Chosen rarely talked about their new feelings and insights, the Forest Keeper withdrew her presence somewhat, waiting until they were ready.

We are rising up like a Phoenix from a Fire,
Brothers and Sisters spread your wings and fly higher
We are rising, we are ri... s...ing...
We are opening. We are o oO... pen...ing

The following year Anaya kept her watch as the Chosen grew and learned more about the struggle ahead. Despite the interference of the Ego-Cult, the love and excitement of the Forest Defenders attracted many young people to the cause of Eco-Social Defense.

The word spread and this new kind of kinship and Spirit-Power was contagious. Anaya returned to the Sacred Grove to connect the vibrations and discern the paths they might take.

It was no surprise to the Elves when the following summer a moratorium on most logging was hastily agreed to. There were so many defenders contesting every timber sale that neither the government nor the corporations could afford enough security forces to continue business as usual. There were worse problems elsewhere. The collapse of the Global Economy was sucking the USA into a chaos it would never rise out of. And people knew it - society was drifting in hopelessness. The riot threat and a turn toward uncontrollable violence were on many people's minds.

So far everything had been peaceful, in the North Coast region. A lot of logging equipment was destroyed here and there, but few injuries or assaults occurred. Tension was building and Forest Defenders put effort into reaching out to all people.

One poster read:

Dear People of Lorien: we the Forest People - your neighbors - ask for patience. None of us, alone, can change what is happening. The government and even common sense have misled many people. Excessive consumption, economic growth, and trusting the corporations were mistakes. Blaming each other will help no one. Fear will divide us if we don't resist our programmed emotions. Calm and hopeful cooperation can win the day. People continue to move here for sanctuary and to save the forests. Most have good hearts and seek only refuge, purpose and peace. You find life's meaning in hard work, church, and security for your families. We work hard surviving and defending what we love. The forest and everything living there is Sacred to us. Without healthy ecosystems few will survive the hard times ahead. Road building and clearcuts have taken the Salmon away that could have fed us all, but it's not too late to begin the restoration of this wondrous land we are so fortunate to live in. Changes are not easy. We have to believe in a way for all who love this region to live and work together. Our dreams need patience and a sincere desire to understand each other, or they will fail. No alternative avoids all violence and discomfort. Don't condemn any group for the rash actions of a few individuals. The government will discredit or kill forest defenders. They want division and people afraid of each other... but it won't work this time. Creative and future-looking people from all perspectives will grasp what will be and what has to be done to get us there. Isolation and our Ranger Defense will stop the government from intervening in our experiment in cooperation if we are united or at least restrained. As an act of trust and good faith, Forest Defenders and the Eco-Commandos will begin a cease-fire and no

new lands will be occupied within Lorien. The Logging and Mining Moratorium will be enforced. Electricity may not be available and transportation will be disrupted. But we will still have our fertile soils, our forests and our spirit to sustain us.

Come and visit our camps and farms. We have food at our table for anyone who cares about peace and sharing. For Autonomy and Survival. -- **The Forest People: El Norte Command**

Peace held on in many places that Fall and Winter. The Free-States took root and made their history. Food donations were abundant and a wild variety of shelters popped up across the land. A few truck drivers were injured when they resisted confiscation of their loaded log trucks. Three young people died attempting to bomb a major electric substation near the Siskiyou-Lassen boundary.

Anaya knew what would happen next but much of the world was turning gray to her. Something was wrong, something changing the possibilities. Something she couldn't reach.

And Death stalked the very heart of the Wildwood. Decay and the toxic hate of souls lost to evil's touch, reached unto the edges of the Sacred Groves. **Shadows** grew bolder, lingering, waiting...

Elvenkind knew their final hour approached. In need they would make their final offerings and go back into the land and elements they came from. Always passive and nonviolent except for a few roads and bulldozers, the elves waited and watched as humans destroyed the forests and killed each other. Lorien, Goddess of the Wildwood, found her powers fading as did other of the Minor Powers. Magic was being drained into some spell or wish of infinite complexity. The Wildwood was dying with its magic. Elven children all died at birth and the souls of these tortured ones were trapped for some reason. These are the Wildryns of which little is known.

Now, perhaps too late, Lorien guides the Forest Keepers to work with humans who in their heart of hearts desire to live simple and heal the planet. And the Wild-Fire went out to people's dreams so they relived the journey and struggles of a thousand generations of their ancestors... and what life was truly about through time and change. The **Shadows** were pushed back for now and fears subsided, allowing everyone a pause to think before they wasted their last chances... *Their Last Wish.*

Hazel parked her mountain bike next to Kith's and lay back in the grass and weeds next to the snag of an ancient Douglas fir. Years of living wild out in the forests brought her many new skills, but the one she valued most was just being able to settle down and become part of your surroundings: Soaking up everything and tuning into the details around you.

You could never be alone once you knew Nature, she thought, as she watched the woodpeckers chipping away at the old tree above. It felt good to be a Forest Defender, to be in these times, doing something... seeking a way that was beneficial... She let her thoughts drift and Nature surround her.

The sound of footsteps roused her from peaceful daydreams and she pushed herself up on one elbow to watch Kith coming around the corner of the road. She couldn't see too well through the branches but the dark ruffled hair and the dirty Carhart woods pants assured her that it had to be him. She knew almost every stitch on the numerous patches that barely held his lucky pants together. It wasn't that he liked looking sloppy. She knew, he was just too busy to care much about appearances. Besides, he still thought that he had her to help out in that department... he used to have her that is.

She wanted to find out what had happened at the big meeting, but she also wanted just to listen and to be there for him... As for the chasm that threatened their friendship since they had broken up a few months ago, well, she wanted that chasm to mend, but she felt that it was out of her hands now and probably for the better. She started to get up as he approached until he launched himself down next to her and rolled over on his back holding his head like he didn't know whether he wanted comfort or to end it once and for all in a mighty squeeze.

"Hey, Kith, why so glum?" Hazel asked, her green eyes seeking to hold his and capture a glimpse of his true feelings. He didn't exactly answer unless you count his eyes, which rolled up and then closed tight.

"Oh, yeah, the meeting, how could I forget?"

And then she added automatically and not the way she wanted:

"You didn't walk out on them again, did you?"

Though only twenty-four years old, she had been to more meetings and endless attempts at contrived consensus than almost anyone. She chided herself for the way she had asked Kith that last question, the tone she often used without thinking, the tone of authority that she couldn't shake... the thing that got her in trouble enough times... and with Kith and a few other guys too. Fortuitously, a spunky chipmunk scampered up to them and stood with its head moving from one to the other as if accusing them both of being silly and human...

Hazel wanted to shout at the innocent creature: "Why do I have to be the one who knows everybody and all the factions, the splinters - and knows them so well too? I'll do anything - whatever it takes - but Gods! It's really weird, like being Chosen by circumstance with a pile of crazy pieces trying to put themselves back together. She looked closer at her 'old' friend, her soft eyes trying to speak kindness and wanting him to talk... about the meeting, anything, but Kith's attention stayed absorbed with the chipmunk who he watched intently as if she wasn't even there. He knows I'm here for him... Open eyes kept insisting...

Kith still didn't answer and Hazel rose up slightly to face him. The chipmunk scurried away at the motion and Hazel sat picking the pine needles and twigs out of her long blond braids. Kith stopped watching the chipmunk running away and moved closer to Hazel's side. Finally, a slight smile broke across his face. Tensions eased away and she knew he was happy that she had waited for him.

Kith spoke as he rubbed her knee,
"Do you know it seemed like that chipmunk was

trying to tell us something.
He probably felt my grumpiness and wanted to remind me
how animals are supposed to be."

He sat up too and put one hand on hers,
"No, I didn't run away from the meeting.
And I guess it's a good thing I didn't. Same old problems though:
People's fears holding them back and their egos keeping them apart.
When will we ever let go of the old ways?" he
said.

Weariness showed through his cynicism. He shook his head and stretched his arms
up as Hazel came closer giving him a little hug before she jumped up and grabbed his
hand to pull,
"I know, let's go to the cliffs by the beach. Come on,"
and she pulled him all the way up without much reluctance on his part.

Gliding swiftly along the forest trails they knew so well, the two friends enjoyed the
smells of the trees and the sounds of little birds chirping busily about their ways.
Kith felt comfort to be out in the solitude with just Hazel. Sometimes they were so right
for each other. Then other times... He remembered a year ago when things seemed
simpler if crazier. The two of them used to ditch everyone else and head out into the
wilds... to be alone in their special places. Laying in the grass at the forest's edge, half
sun, watching small white clouds cross the blue sky. Easily letting problems disappear...
holding each other till sunset and imagining it would last forever.

...And when they first met: She was so young, yet wisdom in common sense imbued her
every act. Vitality and youthful invincibility fairly poured from her soul. It was easy to
believe that anything was possible with Eve (Hazel's old forest name) high on the forest.
"I loved her as the Goddess immanent - strong, confident, innocent yet wary. I was
captivated. To me, the rest of the world held spellbound when we were alone and I
looked into the well of youth that glimmered from deep in her dark eyes. We connected
easily from the start - brother, sister, friend, could-be lover - it was the magic that
surprised me most. I thought my search for a magical soul mate was a lost cause, a
fantasy. But there we were walking away from the sabotage strike, stealthy, naturally...
in tune with the land and the howling storm, the lashing rain...

We knew then how lucky we were to find each other: Two rebel souls with such passion
for the magic of dark stormy nights, old forests, and companions in danger. Together
without fear, we were good at our work. We drank deeply of each other's essence,
doubting only how long the Fates would leave us... so comfortable.

A wish... it pushed up through his thoughts, "**For us...**" And then he stopped... letting it
go. They had decided already... And he wondered why those **shadow** thoughts kept
trying to insinuate so forcibly.
Skirting the sand dunes, they followed along the edge of the forest, until they got to the
higher ground where they could get out to the cliffs. They could see far out into the
gray-blue sea and down the coastline to where the lighthouse stood.
Gulls circled and Hazel threw a pinecone out, seeing if they would go for it.
"It's a beautiful October day. So, warm. I wonder when the rains will start this year. The
rains mellow people out. Gives you focus... for awhile anyway," Hazel said, hoping Kith

wanted to talk, here in this place they had always treasured... Green eyes seeking his blues...

He just sat there staring out at the ocean. Then he started laughing and shaking his head, and laughing some more. She came over and knelt behind him, squeezing his shoulders where she knew he was always stiff.

"You, gonna let me in, or is the joke on me?" she asked, squeezing extra hard for a second. He looked back at her a little as he reached up to touch her hand.

Pushing some stray hairs back behind his ear he said,

"Remember how funny we were a couple years ago, like always looking for trouble... and Aire getting new people all excited about direct actions, tree-sitting and all rearing to go, ready to do things they never would have considered. And pulling it off!"

"Oh yeah, I stayed out of most of those actions. It's a wonder nobody..."

But Kith continued, "Well, I started thinking about that drunk logger who came into camp in the middle of the night with a half full bottle of whiskey and he started yelling 'Are you all Crazy, I mean are you crazy or what!' and Katia just standing there looking at him."

Hazel grinned and started to laugh, saying, "Katia didn't know whether to call for help or just watch him, when Aire and D-fly came up with a guitar and said:

'Howdy, know any songs?'"

Kith nodded enthusiastically and continued,

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"And we played song after song: rap, country, Goddess chants. And the logger played some cool songs too, while we finished off his whiskey. The last thing he said was, 'You are all totally crazy, yep, but, you're all right.'

We told him to join us and I think he did show up at some forest action last year."

Kith finished the tale and resumed his lookout, staring blankly into the distance of the gray-blue waters.

Hazel paused and came around to sit on a rock by his side.

"So, what made you think of that old story?"

"Oh, just trying to think of funner times when we thought we could do anything ...

And it was all more of a game."

"Like, performance art and creating chaos here and there," Hazel added.

He didn't seem too stressed out she thought, but she was determined to stay upbeat or at least solutions-oriented. So, she held back from mentioning some of the hard times they had shared back in the day: cops and jails, and people getting beat up.

"It was great," she said truthfully as memories of the two of them in love also tried to come out. "But look at all we've done. We never really believed we'd get this far so quick."

She breathed in the salty ocean air and enjoyed this moment in the sunshine. The day was waning and a few clouds gathered on the horizon.

"So, come on, tell me what's up, buddy."

Kith smiled and squeezed her hand, knowing she was watching him and reaching out.

He sat there a while longer, listening to the silence and the waves down below.

"Well I better tell you. There's good news and bad news. You already know about the music festivals. It's all set; they'll be at those spots that we picked out last Spring. And the watershed councils are totally rad. There's thousands of people camping responsibly - believe it or not - up on Elk River and at old Mrs. Walker's ranch. All over the place, people planting trees and mending fences. Old people, from everywhere are joining in - restoration projects, helping new-comers... I swear, it sounds like we'll win the elections."

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Hazel butted in saying, "Just in time I'd say. Things might fall apart any day, down south you know. Go on, what about Defense and our plans?"

"Hummmmn," Kith sighed.

"Well, Brione and I tried to talk 'what ifs' and contingencies, we really did. But Namoiia and Daniel drug on and on about caution and waiting. They're paranoid, still worried cause they don't trust us or else they figure us radicals will ruin the public image of the movement. Shit, most people are as ready as us for... well, for something to happen. Oh, yeah, the Militia.

They've pretty much taken over inland. I don't know if they cut a deal with the Feds or what, but there are thousands of refugees in Haymarket and maybe more in Redwing. So..." He hesitated, looking awkwardly at her.

"So... what?" She demanded.

"Namoiia proposed that a woman Forest Defender with ties to the Eco-Commandos be our representative to the Militia meeting... someone peaceful, but strong willed..."

Hazel gave him a stern look and said flatly: "Who is it?"

He grimaced a little and leaned away saying softly, "You, Hazel..."

"Who!?"

"I agreed at the time..."

"You what? I told you I didn't want to do that!"

"I know, I know. I'm sorry..."

"Arggh," was all she said as she got up and pretended to karate chop his neck.

Right there - that spot that hurts him...

As she turned away, Kith said,

"It was late... I didn't want to argue with them anymore... never again if I can help it.

Come on Hazel, you can go with someone else. Just don't worry so much."

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She tried to calm down, but her green eyes were still burning intense when she turned around and said with a sting, "Don't tell me what to do. Don't tell me not to worry, and next time...don't speak for me..."

Damm it!"

And then letting her breathe out, "Oh, Kith I'm sorry. Let's not fight.

Why are we always like this?"

"It's my fault... I always..."

"Shhh," she whispered and came closer, leaning against him like a board.

He waited a moment, rubbing his head into hers a little. He pulled her hair back away from her face and gave her a slight smile,

"Hey. Cheer up. Brione got me a note saying we're still on for Blacks Meadow.

Tomorrow... no more phony meetings. Just us Forest Defenders for awhile."

She nodded and tried to think positive. A shadow seemed to blur her thinking and she pondered his words: easy for him to say... 'Cheer up.' He's off to Denver with Miya, while I'm stuck here...

...Friends gathered in a circle... A face of wonder within the lights... an Elf who looks familiar. Power in the Forest... coldness descending, enwrapping...

Kith trembled, a shiver running down his back.

He opened his eyes wondering why Hazel was mad at Miya.

"What did she do? Who was that?"

Hazel opened her eyes and quivered as she looked at him. Gulping a deep breath, she said,

"Oh Gods... that's weird."

"I felt something too," Kith added. The wind started to blow and their emotions spun wildly.

"Hey, there's a really dark thunder cloud out there."

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Lightning flickered briefly a few miles away. The wind blew hard through his hair and he remembered storms. Sneaking out his window, ten years old, to climb a tree or up on the roof. Wanting the lightning to come and it would. Or so it seemed to him and his young friends. Wind and rain howling and the three of them loving it: Talking about wishing up a better world or just messing things up for fun. Getting back at them...

And later, going camping for months with Aire and Tim; Making shelter in wild storms deep in the wilderness; Loving the wild powers of Nature; Being an animal, free for awhile: Encounters with steep canyons and ancient trees along the way. He felt Hazel holding his arm and a few raindrops blowing down.

'I ... lucky, I didn't get killed', he thought. But the excitement - the thrill - was there. It kept him going even though he longed for all of them to just be together... on the farm they always wished for. Horses and all set for the winter.

"Horses," he said out loud.

"Kith, let's go. It's late," she said, shaking his arm again.

Mixed shades of greens and muddy browns glistened in the light rain as they traveled back the trail and down the hill toward their bikes. Hazel was thinking about all these feelings and the image of Kith surrounded by cold, evil... **shadows**.

She slowed her bike and waved goodnight as Kith rode on alone, down the hill toward Aire's cabin. A sensation passed suddenly and Hazel realized something else. It was time for her to say good-bye for a long while, to her little farm and this whole neighborhood of friends and supporters. Time to say farewell to the only home she had known the past four years... the only place she had ever felt secure.

From here on out, it would be nothing but high security: safehouses, restricted communications, and lots... and lots of trust, faith, luck, wishes...

"Is everything falling apart or coming together? So much tension and ego tearing at people, couples, groups. The desire to come together in these troubled times. I guess it takes the energy level up so high, we all end up haywired - looped."

Searching for joy, her thoughts went back to the Base Camp she had just visited. All the young people were so tight, and they knew Rei-Ki now too. Anarchist - Punk, riff-raff kids. Practically half of some camps were really serious youth under twenty-years old, serious but definitely light-hearted! She smiled at remembering the young girl admonishing an elder to put waste into the correct recycling bins. Respect, yes, but deference to age - not likely anymore.

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"Maybe I'm losing touch with them. I know how they feel inside: a generation or two of broken families, dissed by all the lazy Baby-Boomers they could never look up to. Nobody to look up to, only a dying landscape of endless Yuppie-dom and plastic culture, life and the End Times all speeding up at them. Now choosing their own culture, voting with their feet - since democracy in America is such a joke. 'Life is magic when you start to break free,' is their new motto. They consult the healers and they listen to new voices, hearing, clearly, the call of the Forest and Nature's simple ways." And she wondered if maybe, Brione's wish worked there too like her wishes now guided the Core Group of the Forest Defenders.

"Well, youth aren't waiting for nobody ever again. They are the vitality that spurs on change. Society provided no outlet for kids to engage their creative intellects - their passion for action. They made it happen on their own. Boredom saved the day or the forests at least, so far. Not really so difficult for them, in a way, since youth had nothing to go back to. They just walked away, in disgust, as far away from the Old World and its pitiful claims of 'techno-glory' as they could get. They found the magic in each other and

in just the simple things around them, living in Nature - no attachments - just living and sharing joy.

The Healers have joined them now... and witches too! They're all working together, to keep the peace, relieve stress, and who knows. Something's up, I know it. I'm sure it's got to be good. Probably everything will work out and come together nicely if we just let it happen. People are going to do what they want to do.

That one Healer, the one with the powerful eyes and the freckles, she told me: 'The Three Fires shall burn as One. Love guides rage into a pattern of Gaia Self-Defense. Patterns of defense connect to Earth's design. Gaia calls youth to come and transcend the mistakes of the past - to show us the way. The Healers come to follow the young. Healing and ancient ceremony bring strength to their cause.

The meaning of the New Trinity reveals itself as alive, living here in the Forest Camps. Send us the refugees, and ...all your "lost birds." We will heal each other and learn a new way of sharing: Nature, Simplicity, and Letting Go.'

Hazel wondered why she wasn't more nervous and very concerned. Somehow, it felt right. Everything: the meeting, Kith, the plan. Of course, they were committed at this point. There aren't many choices once you know what you want. A strange moment of clarity passed and she knew: vibrations set patterns in motion. Ripples have unknown effects.

And then she felt that quivery feeling again like she had felt at the beach cliffs with Kith. The freckled face of the healer flickered before her eyes and she had another vision:

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Happy, crowds at the Music Festivals, waving their hands... Brione waving someone... away?

And then it was gone, though she thought maybe the Healer's face changed at the last second and something was strange about her ears...

“**Visions**’ ...or it wasn't exactly a vision, more like a feeling of something about to happen or... I don't know, but at least that one wasn't so scary like the **shadows** around Kith.”

She had never had visions like these, but she had heard about many people experiencing them more frequently lately and weird dreams too. She used to think it was all mostly made-up or crazy. Things change in spurts and the truth is almost always ridiculed at first...like the plan.

A year ago when they first discussed the secret plan, she thought they were all crazy, especially Dingo! But now, it seemed everyone supported it. And the Ranger Defense! Deterrence against attacks... maybe, or... provocation, violence, ambushes...

"One more month, Gods! Can the Coalition hold that long?"

Well, Brione would be there, she thought. She's the strong one, hard-core to da bone. Hazel shook the raindrops off her hat. She thought about warm tea and Angela inside the house. Sleep... trying too hard not to think about visions and journeys to come. She sucked on her upper lip, teething it slightly, as she often did.

Hazel put her bike under the roof and was startled out of her drifting thoughts... a clear realization dawned in her that she needed to dream, needed to let it out. Her time had come, a time when you know you can accept... You rise to the occasion... you cast doubts aside and trust to friends and wishes.

"Brione knows. She tried to tell me about wishes and how things were changing."

Hazel pondered the nature of the changes that she was only vaguely aware of and then she relaxed and pictured Brione's face: beautiful, wide cheek-bones, and big brown eyes. Eyes that looked like they wanted to play with you, always twinkling, and mischievous, of a harmless, teasing sort. Such a tomboy in many ways - daring the guys... lanky, wiry, sexy.

Brione's hair was so short now... No more colors or streaks showing, just her old medium brown look. Part of her look. Still getting taller too. Gods! Brione... Expectant and conflicted, she tapped lightly on the driftwood knocker before she opened the door to the cabin. A greeting to Angela passed unspoken when she saw her friend's finger pursed at her lips in a warning to be quiet. Angela's toddler lay across her mother's lap with its head back and mouth open. Angela's dark eyes rolled and Hazel could only guess at how long a time it had taken to get the child asleep, and still not quite in bed. Syanni or "Dulce Mulci," as Angela was fond of calling her one-year-old daughter, was always a handful. Her mom learned patience through the late-night wakings, the cries and worries. Now she needed all of her mothering skills to wean Syanni off the tit without wearing herself crazy.

Angela was one of the strongest spirited persons Hazel had ever known, but she could see that haunted look that didn't need explanations between friends who were this close. Hazel knew that the counting-the-days and the imminent pain of separation must be hell on Angela. So, Syanni had to be weaned in a few days because her aunt, Abuelita Rosa Herrera would soon arrive to take the girl north to a safer place. Who knew how long it might be before things settled down again?

Hazel quietly passed Angela in the rocking chair to get a clean mug from the counter by the dripping sink. The herb was stored just to the right of the window where a multitude of small plants and a few cuttings competed for kitchen space that most people preferred to keep clear. Dirt crumbs and dead leaves... She looked over all the solid brown-tinted jars that kept the herbs fresh: Yerba Buena, Yerba Santa, Raspberry leaf... mullein. She settled on the new Chamomile batch that had just arrived from down river and their friends' farm near the coast.

A bit of Willow Bark went along with the Chamomile into the tea-ball. The kettle simmered as usual on a cool fall evening and Hazel found there was still plenty left for her tea with some left over. She considered the small blue bottle with the tincture of Absinthe and Mugwort, but finally decided that she wouldn't need any help dreaming this night.

It seemed like an awful lot was still left to be decided, but she didn't really feel in turmoil about anything specific. Well, except that is for Kith's volunteering her to go visit the Militia leaders ...Or first! She was off to try and reach these violent leaders of the mostly fundamentalist militia and then to quickly get them all to agree on a safe meeting place... and an agenda for cooperation and trust.

Hazel pointed to her cup, offering to get some for Angela. But Angela shook her head, no as her gaze went back down to the baby. Syanni turned over slightly and the "little 30

one" let out a small sigh as she fussed and nudged her head around in the instinctive search for milk and comfort. Angela rose smoothly and scooped the not-so-lightweight child up in her arms as she headed for the back bedroom.

Alone and tired, Hazel sipped her tea without honey this time. And she wondered if she should be trying to talk Angela out of going on the next mission with the Eco-Commando unit from Canada, a professional but sometimes rowdy group who had been down south in Lorien for a series of expert training sessions. The three weeks of training were over and now they were getting ready to tackle a couple of hard-core power-plant attacks on their way back up to the Northlands.

The hand-worn picture frame hung from the pine shelf boards. The photograph of the child's father showed a thin teenager in a cutoff t-shirt with a red and black bandana tied to his bare arm. Ramon's large masked face beamed at you and made you smile back because you couldn't help but feel his warm open smile – even through a mask!

Another smaller black and white photo curled slightly where it stuck into the side of the larger frame. It showed a young Ramonito waving his hat and smiling with his Sandinista comrades - out the back of a truck. The same truck from which a young Ramon would impossibly escape a fiery death only a few days after this picture had been taken. Tragically, the scene had repeated with many civilian and army trucks falling prey to the terror attacks of the counter-revolutionary Contras. With an easy disdain for national, international and World Court laws the USA continued this highly illegal operation of intervention against one of the poorest countries in the world; A country that only had a few million adults in it; A country still suffering terribly from ten years of civil war, a century of exploitation of Los Pobres, major earthquakes and hurricanes yet to come.

One couldn't look at Ramon's picture and not be hopeful, but Ramon had been missing for two weeks and worse yet, Angela was about to jump in and take his place with the Canadian Commando unit. And she hardly even knew them or how to do the newest techniques for directed-charge settings and timers. Hazel almost bit down on her lip as she chewed on it and shook her head, perplexed. "Compassion seems crueler than doing nothing sometimes, I swear. I'm supposed to be developing my decision skills, but I spend most of my time learning when not to butt in... Or at least how not to butt in on other groups."

She admired Angela's drive and determination. The girl had talent and stamina too. Now though, she faced a difficult inner struggle and her poor friend would have to fight to control that cold touch of revenge.

Brione had said twice "Not to worry...Hazel... Absolutely O.K."

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But Hazel guessed that the underlying feeling that bothered at her incessantly was the unfairness: The endless unfairness of Ramon's disappearance; All the sacrifices that many of them were about to make; Angela having to risk it all again when so many others shirked away irresponsibly. It is often the few who will dare anything that push prophesy along and make the big difference.

She poured more water in her mug and went over to the sink to fill the kettle with spring water from the tap. A few more sips of the weak tea and Hazel decided there was no way she could be compassionate to Angela and to herself at the same time. The whole thing was just too hard for her to be objective about. From her studies of the similarities between Witch Craft, Rei-Ki and Machiavelli she heeded well the maxim: "There can be no hidden subjective attachments when you do compassionate action or you risk creating an avoidable wrong."

"There has to be a way forward in-between doing nothing and creating catastrophes. But I can't hardly even think of a decent wish, except to wish that Brione is right, that all these things have to happen and we just have to breeze through the gaps in our plans... ..But what about the holes in our armor?"

The tea and the whole day were having their relaxing effect. Since Angela didn't come back into the main room Hazel let the warm feeling settle through her. She yawned wide as she sat down on the futon nearest the stove and took off her shoes. In minutes that could have been hours to such heavy eyes the dreams came on and then later there were dreams that weren't dreams.

One hand clutched the comforter but that's not what she saw. It was a lucid vision and behind it, so ghostly, was the slow-fading image of Angela. Older-looking, the mother sat in the chair rocking as she waterproofed her boots like they were her baby...

The cold dark metal of the large pistol mirrored by its shadow in the dark-stained wood of the nightstand: A coldness that soaked up the candlelight.

A middle-aged woman, not too old, stood by a stone wall against a backdrop that had

no perspective. Time swirled when the woman sang. Winds that you knew came from another world howled and yet the woman's dry wispy hair barely wavered. She sang out strongly as if against those winds, her mouth wide and her back straight. Words in an ancient tongue danced with meaning and visions of thundering horse hooves.

The woman's eyes grew hugely insane and the pounding, pounding, tearing hooves ripped gouges across them. The pattern that is made from meaning danced in her eyes

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too and then they looked down and beheld that the swirling vision was also the arms of a boy reaching out and the thrashing hooves of the wild horses were really the sharp movements of the boys hands reflecting new patterns and shaping, flowing, a weave of light strands.

Young hands of great confidence followed the trails of the light web and then they followed him, back and forth they went until a great display of patterns revolved in space with intricate symbols spinning there and turning inside out, faster until it all began to fold in, encasing something, a sound and then just the tiniest hesitation... The spell fell apart with a stronger thump and Hazel moaned as the shudder passed through her. Her body squirmed when she felt part of her consciousness returning, but still her eyes and her dream consciousness stayed riveted on the fading symbols' glowing outlines. Hazel tried to absorb those symbols. She intuitively knew that something here had meaning or a use of possibly great importance.

An echo came off the thump of the spell's death and then it was all there bright and clear again for a moment. She felt the echo of the boy's hesitation again too and she recalled her own moments of doubt that had happened over the years at the wrong time or the worst possible time. All the times she let her internal dialog slow her reflexes and nearly create deadly hesitations.

The Voices of children laughing...came again just as an explosion of colors cascaded out from the burning symbols... In that light Hazel saw the children dancing in abandon as they sang and then their chanting revealed for only a split second a thing or maybe a feeling that sought life...It twisted and yearned for expression ... a sense of turmoil, layered with uncertainties. Not simply the struggle of the Light and the Dark. No. ...and not the obvious, determined to join with the mysterious... Something from the gray or from the patterns around that part of the vision emanated a presence.

Hazel felt keenly its desire to speak about the patterned meanings of this event that Hazel shared with it. And she was as certain as anything in her life that this presence wanted her to understand something. A vague impression that "attitude was important in de-coding these riddles" was all she caught hold of as the scene shifted distinctly. Mixed messages drummed on at the edge of her awareness as the lights rose up with the ghost-images of the children. The name "Wildryns" came into Hazel's head. She didn't know what it meant but it had to concern the children who were dancing upward right before her eyes. Of that she felt sure.

Rapidly all color began to drain away and the zero-perspective flatness returned as a looming door swung toward her closing... Something else yearned for its own awakening there in the shadow of that closing door. She didn't like this thing that hid its boldness and its ugliness. It made her feel as if the thing could casually look into the

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scarier parts of her persona –parts she also liked to hide... And then a picture of overlaid eyes filled her brain. A different door closed somewhere else or some time-else. For the briefest second it seemed that she experienced total pain and abhorrent evilness... then she felt an unexpected power.

Hazel realized she was awake and repeating the words:

"The same old Illusion that keeps parts not even aware that they are missing - separated - yearning."

She remembered... the young face looking at her through the silver mist and her own questions mirrored back, like he said, "You're doing good. We'll find a way... work together."

...Eyes opened from warm covers, "Who?...What do you..."

She mumbled to herself, not her dreams:

"Nope, mmmm. Not ...Not even going there ...again."

A faint presence faded in the West, as they turned the last sharp curve, going north. Bumping along a dusty ex-logging road, Brione enjoyed the darkness: Scars hidden in the deepening night. The truck came to the highest spot on the road and then it rolled on downhill into a cool touch and the stillness of the older forest's moist sanctuary. Brione could relax now and gratefully she took a slow deep breath of the fresh mountain air. She watched the stars through the tree branches and thought about all the other nights like this one: the crazy "Earth-Night" actions that they were famous for. "Where are all those funny-folks?" she wondered aloud.

The driver swerved suddenly. The truck running with only its parking lights on, she couldn't tell for sure if it was a Raccoon or a Possum that they had nearly struck, but it did make it across to the side of the road. A flicker of rage glared from the animal's eyes -whatever it was- as it disappeared off the steep side of the road. They managed to ride the deep rut with one tire almost off the edge until they could get safely back on the

34 roadway. They smiled without looking at each other: those smiles of shared relief from a close call, in mutual safety... and survival. They each gave thanks as well that they had made it to the drop-off un-molested.

Brione closed the truck's door and bent down to lift up her backpack.

The driver looked back for her 'all OK' hand signal and the truck pulled away as she dropped off the side of the road. A short bushwhack brought her to the right trail for Black's Meadow.

She paused, breathing quietly and listening.

Nineteen years old and more active in Forest Defense than anyone, Brione still truly beamed with innocence. A child veteran she was and a mature young woman who brought the truth out in whoever she spoke to. Old people, loggers, anyone would almost always listen to her. They knew she cared about them too, and not just her own friends or the trees. People never questioned her sincerity because she really did want to hear what everyone had to say. She never interrupted others and her words lacked the bite or the tense reactive feelings that typically caused communication to breakdown into pointless arguments.

Brione came to these woods often: A place where they had fought many battles to save the ancient forest, the watersheds and the salmon. You could clearly see the battle lines of those wars, the scarred beauty. Stark contrasts of dry, brushy clear-cuts that ended abruptly at the face of towering green walls – walls of three hundred-foot trees, which marked the point where they had finally silenced the chainsaws.

It was dark going down the path. Across muddy skid trails left by bulldozers, and around the canyon turn where the giant ferns thrived, Brione's long legs, conditioned through years of action - guiding, swept her along with ease. The full moon rose high enough to light up the forest. Soon she made the turn-off and crossed the ridge down the last hill.

Taking care on the disturbed hillside, she came down to the hollowed-out base of **Venus**, a giant Cedar tree where she had slept many nights. Water trickled softly nearby

as it traveled from a small spring down through the underbrush to the creek bed. Occasionally the pure silence of the place was broken by the sound of large raindrops falling randomly onto green leaves. These giant trees harvested some of their own water from the mists, which drifted through their upper branches. Right on cue the staccato chattering of the resident flying squirrels echoed in through the branches followed by the swoosh of Owl's wings as he glided purposefully through the grove of trees.

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Brione stood near the tree resting and soon all thoughts of going over her notes again or of writing in the journal dissipated into the night sky. She loved the darkness and the solitude of night time in an ancient forest.

"Not tonight," she whispered to the thousand-year-old tree as she caressed its shaggy bark with her palm and fingers.

After a few minutes of quiet and meditation, she lit a small bees-wax candle and set out her sleeping bag. With the sound of branches rubbing high above her in a light breeze, Brione slipped into a deep, natural sleep. Safe there in the womb of an old friend, she dreamed.

She remembered thinking: "Do all kids grow up playing in the woods and streams making friends with the land," as she ran through her dream and across the rickety footbridge after her younger sister, Branwyn, the two of them sliding down the steep dirt and forest litter path to the stream. They watched bubbles and sticks dropping down waterfalls then off they would go with the water's course their guide. Always the two of them jumping rocks and showing off. Spellbound by a moth or a snail, amazed at all the variety of life. Feeling the magic calling... and afraid to listen, but yet drawn there... wanting to learn more... to be different. Raindrops freshened, making the colors glow. And everything... and life, should be so simple.

Then, despite the **Shadows**, or maybe because of them... hiking for weeks, hauling heavy loads, chased by angry loggers. Some friendly ones too, some who saw...and not just a few of them. Some loggers and locals knew how much the forest defenders loved the woods too, just as they did.

"There was that one young boy from over around Willow Creek. He was named Sasha and he often came to our forest camp at Dillon Creek...or was it only twice that he really spent much time there?"

She woke, saying to herself: "He would be older now... and what?" Then she rolled back over listening to the hummingbird nearby. She snuggled in her warm sleeping bag, visions of her younger sister Gabriella swimming in the river and an arm reaching up to pull her in... Her friends coming to the meadow tonight.

A little frown twitched as she wondered:

"Will I ever have kids?" Skitter-scatter sounds from the little tree mouse who always cleaned up around Venus, reassured her and she drifted off, a smile back on her face. As the morning's fog-mist started clearing from below the old growth canopy, Brione made tea and ate some huckleberries. She still felt awe whenever she came to this ancient grove. It always felt like home here beneath Venus and her companion tree

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Pluto. Many centuries of struggle and growth had created massive trunks as big around as a cabin. Fire scars etched their way upward carving deep into their sides, extending nearly fifty feet above Brione's head. The shaggy trunks of the ancient tree disappeared hundreds of feet higher, where branches bigger than most trees split off into their own worlds.

And the Imprint... Resting back against a large burl of the tree trunk Brione drank tea and felt at ease even as the flood of memories that lived in this place coursed just beneath her immediate attentions. All the emotions and exhilaration of their long

struggle to save this tree, this life-place, from the chainsaws. A place of Power, where battle lines crossed... other Lines of magic, a place where commitments guard against excess and energy circulates through a fountain seeking life and an endless returning. She finished breakfast and bent over to push the small fire together. A change in the draft caught some green twigs on fire and in the process Brione ended up inhaling a little of the thick blue smoke. The fumes made her eyes water. Something shifted. It was there. That old feeling, coming out of the forest, calling to her, a Power she no longer feared.

A face with a strange presence about it... Three people standing between tall rocks. Miya... looking weak and fading...

She stayed open to the feeling, not pulling back at all, and this opening up sent a wave forth, out from her. She shook her head, trying to be sure as the forest responded to her once again. She could see with new insight and understanding. She saw new things and she could see herself through other eyes. The Forest Power watched her.

The young activist saw the life-story of her whole land flowing through her: Venus sprouting, struggling, maturing, dreaming. Roots intertwining down and under the hillside, holding, working together, communicating, growing.

"Remember details, be specific, its all there..." was going through her mind as she stared, brown eyes drawn to the base of the hollow tree.

The side of the tree growing by her foot was split into two massive roots. One went straight down the hill. The other root that curved below her was polished and beautiful with a fat, spiraling knot growing out of it several feet high. She saw the texture of the many color shades embedded within the wood and she found herself squeezing the root. Curiously Brione reacted as she felt the fibers... moving! The root moved, she thought. Her vision shifted back and then awareness became more ordinary.

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She looked again: a wrinkled bump, rising, stretching up, alive. A person but also a root. Brione closed her eyes. She relaxed gathering her center and "looked" out with her other senses as she often did while out hiking in the dark. The confidence from practice... balancing fear, intuition, sensitivity, and need. She spread her senses out around herself probing lightly with her whole being. Calm thoughts projected a willingness to flow together with this place she loved, and all its scents and stirrings.

"You are ready. This is real, dear Brione. Welcome to the Edge of Eald, my forest home," said a voice like musical water.

"Who..."

"I am who is here: Anaya the Forest Keeper."

Duff drifted down from the branches above, like blessings or gifts from some critter always busy about their work. Sprinkles of dry needles landed on her head and shoulders as Brione opened her eyes.

She started to fight that slightest of urges, the wish rising up inside, when she heard: "No. Go on. You can use caution and not let it use you."

"For understanding?" Brione asked, eyes wide. She blinked and wished for guidance, for answers.

"What do you really want?" Anaya asked.

That voice, first of water, now leaves blowing and brambles budding, Brione thought. And she tried to 'not-think' and just let feelings open.

"I want to be sure. Sure that our path is fair, just... hurts no one..."

"Be direct, be modest at first," Anaya said, as a curious smile played on her face.

"I wish you to tell me about the Magic." Brione focused and let her mind clear out all doubts.

Anaya uncrossed her arms. She stretched with a flowing dance-like motion and sat

down across from Brione. As Anaya reached out to take her hands, Brione saw the oak leaf tattoos, glowing in that other vision she had acquired. There and not there. Twining up Anaya's shoulders and even under her dark red hair the patterns spread. She tried to

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see the face, but Anaya's voice held her riveted to the elf's eyes – dark blues and swirls of gray, deeper than the ocean.

"It's not easy to do. Reaching humans gets harder every day. But we have to try. I know you can do it. You have been doing it for awhile."

"Watch my eyes as I speak. Look beyond me... through my eyes. Listen with your heart... and your whole being. Listen, eyes. Hold the vibrations and separate them. Vibrations... Suspend your memory, step outside your social programming. Breathe deep and slow... as you sink into another time – across the Gulfs of Now - an endless time when your whole existence is enmeshed with the world of Nature... Eyes, listen, memory, time, enmeshed...

Running with the tribe, drums pounding... running. Survival... love... pounding.

Time. Stories passed around the fire... Survival, the hunt, battles, the ways.

Together proud; strong, hunting. Sustaining the Life-Grid with ancient culture.

Connecting song to all things. Weaving, spinning, being the web. Creating, remembering the relations, the sighted... Food, Shelter, Art - from Earth, Fire, Water, Spirit." ...and the rhythm of the chant kept beating, throbbing in her head ...

"Yes! I see it all..." said Brione, as the spell broke over her and she knew the stories, felt the failures and learned the hardest lessons.

A new voice sounded to her... the tinkling of millions of tiny bells...

"For most of time, magic (intentions linked to purpose and belief) was equally dispersed throughout space. Longings developed desires linked to glory until foolishness became too great for even the Gods to resist. Gods and Goddesses entered the planes of existence and drew some of their magics unto them. Delighting in their creations, these deities sought to outdo each other in crafting greater diversities. But even the wishes of the Gods can come back on them, and they tempted the Nature of their own existence. Thus Chaos entered the Portal and established itself in our portent equations - the structure of our existence. Chaos is not evil, but is taken advantage of by the Shadows of evil folk to hide and abide their spells and tricks. We cannot live long without Chaos – it is like unto a viral decomposer, cleaning up our messes. There are greater dangers to consider.

Lorien, Goddess of Wildwoods, favored one of the creations that sprung forth from her handiwork - the Elves. She struck a deal with Chaos that Elves might live forever.

Reactions arise from wishes and bargains. The **Nebyakin**, you would call them the 'Fallen Angels,' they came into the edge of Lorien's wish and a spell wove itself into the patterns of our evolution. If I could change things I would, but this may be the Time of Doom. For the **Nebyakin**, **Shadow Gods** of Retribution, Greed and Madness - the

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unholy Trinity - they take Power from Chaos now. Their hidden spell of Dark Prophecy tied the energy of Lorien's love of the Elves to **Nebya's** hatred of all things pure and innocent. Elves live on, but humans continue to cultivate greed even in the face of their extinction. Your race has traveled far away from 'love of the land' and even further away from communion with the animals of your family. This extreme alienation from I who birthed you weakens my magic and bodes evil.

I waited too long. Today's ego, division and illusions, plague my efforts and so few hear the call of the Earth as strong as they should. The Gods evolve to the myths created in their name. The Balance shifts and powerful imprints of magic and action are drawn into existence. Any moment the entire nature of your whole world and all existence is likely

to alter irrevocably.

That is the story we live.

Now, before I tell you why I have come, I will grant your wish. You want to know about the Magic.

There be three types of magic: ELF Lore which is closely connected to the Earth, the soil, plants and animals. Through this you can feel what is happening to the life force for many miles around. The forces of nature connect with you: the brambles will open for you and close behind you; the animals will enter your thoughts and know your needs. All elves and a few humans with our aid can learn to use this magic. As you develop your skills, each individual will find a power they can tap into. A place where their magic is drawn.

Anaya can send dreams and thoughts through the soil and into the sleep of people not surrounded by metal. Some adepts can become an Elk-Deer, a bird, a mouse, a mosquito. For you, Brione, it will come from your voice.

The second type of magic is mostly practiced by human wizards and seers. This usually requires the blessing of a Power or a Goddess who grant protection as you draw from other planes of existence, especially the magical realm of **Darnovoi**. For most of these wizards all is vague and uncontrollable - feelings and wishes of limited usefulness. Sometimes a young person or a young adult of considerable innocence will be focused enough and control their wishes, so that great magic may be created for periods of time. It never hurts to make a reasonable wish, just don't expect much quickly.

If you wish harm or go against the Nature of things, you risk great peril: Sorcery. No protection will help you then and your whole existence will be eaten up by those Dark Wills that inhabit **Darnovoi**. Such are the times you live in...

The third magic is called Volkentrough or the Collective Wish.

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Creatures and plants all do this magic as a part of their being. Often it is manipulated toward evil. Rarely has it been used consciously or aggressively. This magic pulls power from all things and all planes, usually slowly in small bits. The elves believe that it can be used to restore the Earth if enough species cooperate and focus their wishes for good."

Lorien's presence dissipated like sound in the fog... muffled echoes...

Anaya sat holding Brione as the dreams repeated over and over, opening up to understanding, familiarity... power.

Bit by bit, color by color, awareness returned to Brione.

Sun-shafts came, streaking through the forest canopy. The normal sounds of forest life resumedShe felt good, if a little drained, and her other vision had faded, though small awareness flared, now and again.

She felt Anaya stroking her head; Life and energy filling her up. The words in that strange voice of tinkling bells echoed off her recollections of whom she had been ...yesterday. She had got her wish - to know about the magic. But she could see how all wishes have danger.

"This is just the beginning of my learning and my encounters with magic," she thought. She looked up at the face that held her. Was it young or fresh? No, not really. Relaxed, but something old as bark and wise too.

"What do you see? Who do you see?" Anaya said.

Visions of the root, the magical flare from that other world, went racing through Brione.

"People see what they want to see. Some see evil and are drawn to it, some see beauty and are afraid."

Anaya wished gently until Brione rose up stretching, asking:

"Where are we going?"

"Blacks Meadow... and places," Anaya motioned and started back up the trail. Brione picked up her things and followed; going with the flow, accepting, and drawn by a slim silver thread toward interactions of extreme consequence.

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They hiked all day, covering a great distance it seemed. Small, leaf-strewn trails and springs that Brione had never encountered despite years of being in the same area. Time hardly existed as they enjoyed the wild country together, talking about trees and herb and how the magic worked. Anaya reminded her of her Mother when she talked about her attraction to certain color shades... or the twinkle in her eyes when Brione would finally grasp some concept they were discussing.

She remembered how rare quality time out in Nature with her Mother had been while growing up. Mother always busy with the Real Estate career or fighting with her Father. And pushing, always insisting Brione succeed: "Make the most of your talents, daughter. Only trust yourself," she had harped so frequently, that the words still rang in her head sometimes..

While stopping to eat some Puff-Balls and wild Filberts, she confided to Anaya, "Mom was so shocked when I stayed with Dad after the divorce. She still doesn't believe in me or what we're doing in Lorien."

Closing her eyes, she wished hard that her mother would read her letter and take it to heart, before it was too late.

Near the top of the canyon, they paused to rest. The sun kept sinking lower, but few shadows were present. For the first time that day, Brione thought of time and wondered about her friends, the gathering. "It must be late," she thought and then she hoped that the meadows were nearby. They left the trail and Anaya ducked under a giant fallen log. A tingling sensation surrounded her and a slight disorientation took hold. The air changed. It felt thicker - alive with magic and life, moist, clean... like another world, a sacred place.

She looked around at the beautiful green canyon they were in.

"It seems so secret, so hidden, like no human has ever been here," she said to the canyon walls, as bees and butterflies buzzed around her. She saw the ten-foot-high sword ferns, varied ground covers, mosses, and the tiny flowers and succulent leaves, all glistening from a fine mist. A small waterfall splashed off polished boulders. She opened her vision too far again, and the magic light flared brightly. She looked up at Anaya with a whimsical frown as she tried to wish her sight back to normal.

"It gets easier. You'll get used to it just like you're getting used to me."

Anaya called as she disappeared up behind the waterfall.

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Brione smiled and let out a laugh, agreeing with Anaya and wondering what Hazel would think of Anaya's sense of humor. She had this weird feeling that there was a lot more to everything than she had known. Herself, the Militia, the plan... Anaya's plan? She skirted the pool and headed up around the boulder where Anaya had gone.

Above the waterfall, she reached another smaller pool where Anaya sat in meditation. Water trickled out of the large rocks above them and Brione felt drawn to drink from one of the larger rivulets that poured out between two polished green rocks.

Implications of what water means to...

"Water. All water is sacred," she heard herself thinking. A realization of how that was the problem... or the symptom. If we could just hold one thing sacred: the Earth or the air or the water... then all would be protected.

She looked up knowing that Anaya wanted to talk.

"Until last winter Solstice, I had a plan. The vibrations and the Patterns of Life revealed a way for us to stop the world. I am still following that plan, but since the Solstice,

patterns have changed and become increasingly chaotic. A powerful wish that is not Elven, nor of the Gods, is loose and affecting the whole world. Even our meeting, this talk, is in some measure a part of the Disturbance. The wish seems to come from everywhere. Humans, a few at least, are connected to this, but I can no longer sort things out. Even intentions escape me."

And then Brione realized the words weren't in her head anymore.

She could hear Anaya say: "I need your help. Come let us meet your friends."

Who is the "Elf"? ... Who can feel "Behind the Mask?"

In "Her" Mirror, are we all Zapatista's "Pixies" now?

Growing in Concrete compost ...Tracing stories in living leaves

A million suns shedding light ...Giving soul to the vision

Breaking concrete ...opening gates

wishing up participation ...Multitudes together, finally...

Gathering unity in the harvest

Gardens growing ... dreams

A smile across ... a moment in time

Reflecting faces round us

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A model of love ... A feeling of beauty

Re-assembling our selves ... In new pattern

Power beyond words ...Beyond what is guessed

Solutions... shaped ... One branch at a time

Atop a living ladder ... protecting / protected

Our own answers to ...Creations call.

The low clouds lifted and the bluish moonlight cast shadows through the partial fog.

The forest edge shifted in the murk and all was quiet.

Fifteen years old and very wise in woodcraft, Sasha drew on the Earth around him as he reached out trying to get a sense of the forest. A hundred yards separated him from his expectant friends and he thought maybe he could pull it off this time.

"...A few ancient trees guarding the north side, lots of thick, brushy Huckleberry and Salal. Everything dry and crunchy in the late autumn, just before the rains begin... Owl somewhere nearby." And he almost wished he could look through those crystal eyes of Owl.

"But that would surely give me away. There they are... a presence of two, near a rotting old log at the meadow's edge – excitement pulsating as usual... and alertness, of course."

The horse felt his remonstrations to stay put for a while and to follow along after him when the urge rose or the tasty browse insisted. A horse with a mind of its own. They both knew the game and the limits.

Sasha relished this playfulness, though he really did want to sneak up on his friends this time. Their powers often matched his own. Trevor, so sensitive to every wish, and Taryn - sharp senses and the quickest reactions he had ever seen.

"A young wizard and an illustrious ninja Earth-sprite. Goddess, the tricks they played... and always a clever trap or two..."

A few more steps and Owl hooted almost right in his face, even before the dry branch cracked.

"No choice, I guess," he thought, as he sent out a greeting wish to them...

And too late as Taryn said: "Come on out Sasha."

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A clever smile to Trevor as her small hands flashed messages.

"Oh well," he thought. They really loved to tease him and to show off their own

considerable skill. Usually, he enjoyed it and this time was no exception. After all, they were the core of the Youth Vanguard... and they shared all their feelings, if not quite every thought.

Owl hooted his call again and then soared down across the moonlit meadow. Hunting Mouse or possibly just a quieter place with less noisy, juvenile magic and so many wishes.

They greeted each other with warm hugs. These three always shared excitement together. It felt great. Hugs lingered, not really aware that their height differences mattered a wit. Awkwardness a part of life... they were already way beyond ...that! Giggles followed whispers until they settled down and synchronized their breathing. Turns came for each to guide the healing down through a friend.

Life and love poured out of the night sky. The tingly release passed by Sasha's outstretched hands and pulled worries and unhealthy attachments away from his friend.

Trevor's aura radiated strength with that peculiar peak it often exhibited throughout the red-violet spectrum.

"Sizzling," Sasha thought as he felt strongly the pureness of intent and the power of a piercing intuition. The Eu force – the cleansing of Compassionate Truth - encountered few disturbances, hardly a doubt nor even an inclination to fear anything.

"No wonder my small friend, lurking behind that sheepish look and baggy clothes, has such potent wishes," thought Sasha who felt the comfort of giving and sharing closeness with these friends.

Trevor took in a last deep breath and slowly exhaled. He enjoyed the Rei-Ki effect and felt the remnants of Eu sparkling from his own fingertips as he tied his medium length, brown hair back with a braided hemp strand. Sasha wondered a-new at Trevor's colors of white and green. The hemp strand and his bracelet too, dyed to a darkest green with bright swirls of white woven tightly into faint patterns. And... suddenly words traveled mind to mind:

"I pledge to employ only healing wishes of white magic, in service to Earth and the spirit of Tanyaka's firm love."

He smiled at his friend, not actually shaking his head and they made the sign to each other. Outward facing palms and supplication to nature... the power to act: A duty of 45

responsibility. Smiles almost shinning through eager, happy expressions, Sasha knew how much they each enjoyed all these little rituals that kept springing up in the forest camps. The rituals were anything but solemn, they were the easy part and variations were spreading quickly among youth everywhere.

The Goddess-like image of the elemental appeared in Sasha's vision and he smiled welcoming Tanyaka to their circle.

Taryn came over from the big rock and rubbed Sasha's shoulders and squeezed his thick neck.

The three stood facing each other in a small circle. Faint moonlight added blurred shadows to the scene there beneath the trees. The lightness of their well-honed spiritchant dimmed the shadows more:

I am the Love that prevails; I am together with all creation;

I am Biodiversity's Magic; I am the Power to restore the Balance of Life;

I am the power to renew Earth's potential; I am the Rei-Ki of Earth's Wish.

Taryn entered into the symbols of their faith, vibrating. The love from spirit and power united in a positive wish of healing. A soothing release came as Eu washed down through Sasha's head. She added her young love and guided the alignment of his energy field, chakra by chakra.

Small worries pulled away easily, but at the Heart chakra, she pushed both hands to the

side. There sat the darkness... spirit connected to his destiny - she couldn't touch that. Taryn didn't ever want to visit that Raven-thing again.

'Don't worry,' Sasha thought back at her... "I'll deal with it."

Their intrinsic essences touched as an emanence of love - a 'no-tricks,' accepting love - reflected and continued to emanate as the flow slowly balanced and returned to eminence. The 'higher sky' looked back approving of these youthful intentions and their timing. Her tall, thin body - wiry and able - stepped back slightly and she wondered at his protective force. His eyes probed deep into her aura and then drew back sharply from her radiant Trinity. The Trinity of Nature, Simplicity and 'Letting -go.'

He sent thoughts to her:

'I'm sorry, to push you away, but I can't go there yet. There are pieces missing, for me... and,' then out loud he said: "Come on you all. I want to talk about your most recent visits and haunts. We have to make more sense out of what's happening."

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Trevor said: "Let's sit below the Grand Fir. I like that spot with the big root."

Together they settled around the large weathered root. Detached from themselves - and their busy human minds - they sat quietly for some time. Looking out from under the ancient Fir's large, drooping branches they could see the open meadow under a half moon's light. No fire wasted or wanted. Most of the time, friends of the Network practiced the 'new straight-edge' fashion of not wasting anything, of not wanting what you don't need - especially if it had an impact on Earth. Youth, and a few older forest dwellers, embraced this vigorously and took great pride in living a minimal impact - in moving away from being... so human and consumption driven.

Sasha broke the silence and said:

"Taryn, I'm really glad that you can handle relations with the forest camps, so well... and, I'll be busy with the Militia... for... well..."

"I know. Its no problem Sash..."said Taryn.

"Trevor, I hope you can keep floating to wherever you're needed. It's impossible to predict what'll happen first."

Taryn started to speak, but Sasha put out his hand toward her and continued:

"Listen. The Network is stronger than we imagined. Its like people are part of it without even knowing it."

Trevor nodded, but it did sound pretty weird, to all of them, hearing it that way.

"The Healers are their own network and they encourage ours in a subtle, centering way. Reaching deep into open hearts, they encourage people to do what they feel... and feel what they do... and to seek the expression of Life's Joy in everything."

Sasha paused, so Taryn said:

"The Healers find ready acceptance now, because they truly work in support of the Front-line Strategy: ESD, Ranger Defense, and an end to electricity. With acceptance, everyone opens to healing. Then trust and confidence slowly work their way in and a free space begins to clear around us. Space to be. Space to feel safe - knowing your autonomy will be respected. In that situation people demand the right to find a place that's right for them; A space too for being real and easy with your friends. This makes it possible to share space with your larger group - to know where most people's wishes are coming from - to create and cultivate a commons and a village culture. A blend of old

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and new culture forms, shaped in simplicity and creativity, with abounding love and excitement galore. Awe and excitement just at the effort... every moment a victory, and no great, enduring expectations about tomorrow or the next season."

Sasha said:

"The New Trinity harmonizes many wishes, it's true. But where is it heading? The

elections, and uprising?"

Taryn looked at Trevor who seemed inclined to let the usual blabber-mouths, rattle and prattle on, so she said: "I know that the timing is so vague. Even the Healers admit it. They help keep the earthquakes from shaking loose... And so far, they guard violent excess to a minimum. In China Cat Free State, I overheard some random thoughts from one of the few male healers, right before he caught me eavesdropping on him. He was thinking how dangerous - it seemed to him - for the Healers to embrace unconditional trust, and to follow through on their plan to 'Let Go' of all restraint... to trust 'The One' that all their love is sent to..." and Taryn paused noticing Sasha's blank stare as he drifted off thinking about his mother, the Raven's eyes... and the anniversary of that night, his birthday, last year.

The silence around him clued him in, and he looked up with a half smile saying:

"I'm sorry, drifting off as usual. What did you say after the part about the Healers plan to trust the One?"

Said Taryn:

"It's O.K. The Healers are sending all their love and wishes to the Trinity of the Re-Balance: For light in the darkness; for understanding among all people of the need and inevitability of Gaia Self Defense; and the Wish of the Innocent: that life should be so simple, few possessions, simple tools, food, shelter, and caring neighbors. Restraints on violence are gone. The Earth's wish sprouts in vibrance, and forces draw toward conflict. They encourage all people to align their wishes with the one called 'The Sorter.'"

Trevor jumped in, "Sasha, you're always saying how everything is kind of the same thing at the root and that we delude ourselves with fancy words and overly clever redefinitions.

So, is the "One" of which the Healers speak the "Sorter" or is it the "One" true

Trinity? Maybe the Sorter finds the right Trinity..."

Sasha's expression went momentarily blank as he sat there with both knees pulled up under his chin, thinking. Taryn's lips moved silently as she also worked on the puzzle of words and concepts. Then she threw out her hands with the fingers shaking the way they all did in circle meetings to show that they agreed in general – they called it twinkling with their fingers. Her eyes shown with bright excitement as she spoke rapidly, "The One probably is the Sorter though I've also heard of someone called 'The

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Savior' too. And the One must sort out the trinities and bring them together. But it's still confusing the Hell out of me. The Light in the Darkness could be Love or Rage... or even the 'letting go'?"

Sasha wanted to slow Taryn down a bit because he thought she was on to something and he didn't want to miss any of the impressions that her words were giving him.

He said, "The Light in the Dark refers to the Wildryns."

And the way that he said it with his eyes narrowing with a serious intensity to match his nodding head; his friends could tell that Sasha didn't want to speak further on that particular subject.

"Well, hmmm," said Taryn mostly to herself as her stream of thought continued, "Life being simple could also be the Letting Go, non-attachment or even Love... I guess. It all starts to sound the same, but I bet there's trick if you get too extreme in condensing things down.

Who are the actors in all this – the change agents?"

Those words did trouble Sasha some and he started to speak when Trevor jumped in again:

"I really think that Gaia Defense is the Earth's wish or Tanyaka's as the elves' stories refer to her."

Sasha was obviously still bothered as he said: "Alright I agree with Taryn that we

shouldn't overdo this reducing – dare I say 'sorting out' - too much, but I do thank you for your efforts. Gods! I've spent whole nights figuring all these trinities forwards and back. I know there's a key to understanding mixed up somewhere in all this. I don't know...there's something with the elves and the Earth that confounds my vision and our path. Similarities are important, but discrepancies, anomalies, things or people out of place – those can be even more important We've got to keep our eyes open and alert to what we're missing... what we're letting slip by."

Sasha couldn't stop drifting off in his thoughts about the three magics and the different meanings of "The Fires." He also couldn't remember something that he had meant to bring up. In this state of wandering thoughts he blurted out, "I should go talk to the Healers."

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Taryn noted the hint of anxiety in Sasha's voice. He looked kind of frazzled, but she felt his calm determination underlying his strength. She knew that he carried knowledge and instruction - messages far older than his days. Though she did think he acted a bit too cool and distant at times - even from them, his closest friends.

She paused while considering all that, and to give Sasha a moment to collect his thoughts, as well. She liked watching Sasha when he was thinking. It made her think of her friend Steve and how lost guys looked when they let down their guard enough to show you their fears.

Trevor caught her attention and she smiled and nodded for him to go ahead.

"There's a detail, maybe it's minor. Dunno. I've got someone inside the eco-commando's front group. Her name's Madrone. She's an old friend of the group. The only problem is she wasn't around when they set up the secret plan. Apparently, it is never discussed, at least not directly. So, we have few details. Commando teams are already well in place and require no further contact. Their mission goes ahead no matter what. They cannot be recalled. The secrecy around this plan of the eco-commandos may be tricking us into making too big a deal out of it. The numbers involved and the equipment movements don't suggest a super big operation. It will probably be a couple powerline hits, a railroad tunnel, or maybe another dam. There are still a few water diversion targets left in the region."

Sasha fit this in to his outline of the situation and he turned toward Taryn who said:

"I might know something of what you mean about a problem with the Elves. Some of the older forest defenders are drawn deep into Elven Lore. They, like us, are beginning to live fully in the world of the animals and of the forest. They feel deeply the sorrow of the plant spirits and the torment of the Earth itself. But there is another type of sorrowful longing that touches many people who study the lore. The Elves and their Goddess, Lorien, are weak and draining away. They wish things to move fast, almost recklessly, as if some terrible storm were about to catch them - out in the open, unprepared.

I think they are about to take some great risks, because they don't have a choice...they have to make something happen before their power disappears. And the forest defenders, especially the eco-commandos, have to be ready now for whatever erupts out of the elections that are only a few weeks away. They are smart and unencumbered with ego or factions – at least the core group is- but overall their covert intelligence setup leaves a lot to be desired. Compared to ours anyway.

They are up against the best there is: the CIA, rogue ex-CIA, militia hit-squads and their own fifth column spies and double agents. I think we better start helping the Forest Defenders more - even openly - if we have to. We could leak them info, knock off some

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of their security problems or... Well I'm sure you have something up your sleeve Sasha, or probably already in motion.

We have to remember that the Forest Defenders don't fully trust the Healers to hold things together much longer. After all, it was the Healers who held back change and kept Lorien's call from reaching enough people sooner. The Forest Defenders or at least those who are deeper into Elf Lore worry that things are being pulled out of sync... that the End Times rush on quickly with factors and dynamics that we haven't had time to divine or digest. Something or someone is missing from the picture, the debate or the plan..."

Taryn saw that Trevor wished to speak so she left it at that.

"Well I like the Forest Defenders and the Eco-commandos. I feel better in the forest camps than in Haymarket, though the Militia does have much better horses. It's the Elves and Elven lore that some are worried about: Stories of tricks and using others for their own ends. The secret plan falls into the mess and, well, you know some people, always looking for a problem, a new fear, a scapegoat for their own doubts and insecurities."

Taryn looked at Sasha and hoped he wasn't bothered, but instead he appeared intrigued by Trevor's revelations, like something new fit together.

Sasha said:

"It could be the **Shadows** sowing discord. I know I feel it too... intentions clouded by so much tension building and no way to escape this time around."

Taryn answered him, "I've spoken privately with healers and seers who tell me that the Elves and even the animal-spirit guardians, don't trust the Volkentrough - the collective last wish. They say it's too vague or too wimpy. I think the safest way to deal with **Shadow** is to just continue our efforts at infiltrating every group and pay attention, but don't jump to conclusions or judgments just yet. We shouldn't tip our hand before we have to, but we shouldn't hesitate at all when the time comes either.

The Healers work tirelessly. Always seeming low-key and out of the limelight, but they help in many ways. I had a vision that their ultimate wish is to bring the Sky People, all the rainbows, New Ager types, and green moderates into harmony of expectation with the Earth people, to further the cause and to fashion a new hope. I believe, they will defend even the eco-commandos if they must.

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There's talk of a great spiritual awakening that begins with opening the Windows of Denial and seeing the pain humans have caused. Then when enough minds accept a future of simplicity and basic needs community, it sets in motion a consciousness raising that may trigger the Prophecy of the Chosen."

Trevor squeezed her delicate callused hand with his smaller one. She felt his excitement buzzing at the imminent prophesy and the wishes they might craft. In a soft voice that knew only kindness Trevor said:

"This is all true, but... umm, it is getting loony a lot of places too. The people in the towns on the coast fight over little things and turn trivial issues, like leaves instead of toilet paper, into a big deal and harsh words. Without the healers' love and the obvious joy of all the young kids who hang out being ever so respectful and helpful to everyone ...I think some groups would tear each other apart. In-fighting, back stabbing, egomania; its not at all like in the forest camps where its all easy going and rooted in peaceful dreams. Its not like Haymarket either, where people know their roles and what they're about. On the coast everything is haywire: rumors and hair-splitting." He pulled on his hair and made a face to demonstrate the feeling... and his frustration.

Taryn winked at him once and said lightly: "It's the buildup to the elections and the looming collapse in the south. I guess no one wants to say clearly what they stand for or what they'll do. Like stomach growls, that's what I think. Some kind of a final power grab is brewing and everyone's afraid to trust very far. A feeding frenzy of fear, stalks

the edges of every action, every purchase, every thought and friendly hello. But somehow, I don't imagine it will ruin the Revolution and stop the Regeneration from coming together. It's mostly a few 'high in the saddle' leaders and the usual rumor artists. Maybe in the end, this will all serve a purpose, and not the one **Shadow** contemplates either. Sasha?" and she hesitated expecting him to say more.

"Well, you two have been busy. I'm not too worried either, but if we don't anticipate how best to act on our wishes, then cracks and problems could grow.

I have a Prophecy from the Healer Usi. He swears the words appeared on a burning piece of paper he had thrown on the fire.

It says:

'One leads the Chosen through the false myths, and then shall crumble the un-holy trinity: Madness, greed and retribution. The Elements shall claim three...'

That's all he could read, though he admits there was a bit more to it."

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Trevor gulped which closed up his open jawed expression. Taryn starred wide-eyed the pupils of her brown eyes widening to match the darkness.

"Yeah," said Sasha..." I guess since I've already got my damned role in the Wildryn's Prophecy, I might as well try being a Myth killer too."

"So..." Taryn butted in, cutting to the quick. "So, we better wish you well on your journey to find some myths and maybe you can bring the Elements into people's awareness too – and before it's too late."

Trevor said: "You might need a little help and more friends than just us."

Hands sought each other out as they sat there quietly. Wishes for good luck on Sasha's quest went out in variants of the same model. Trevor wasn't sure if he should wish Sasha to find the elements or the other way around, and it might matter. Wishes are tricky business.

Sasha reached out with his wishes. He sought the dreams of those who would aid him and then his youthful enthusiasm got caught up in his friendly assurance that,

"We can work together."

The wish and the emotion echoed back at him from far away... from another person's startled awakening. Madrone, Hazel, Kith and even a few hardline militia received bits of this wish and some random feelings from Sasha.

Laying back on the ground, he enjoyed the silence of his ears and sensed the tail-end of some wish flowing nearby... ripples working into where they could. The half moon went behind the higher ridgeline and they looked up through the branches at the star sentinels. Three sets of eyes that had kept watch through many a dark night. Young eyes, calm, and well centered for their age.

They talked late into the night about how weird it was that even twenty four year olds couldn't easily leave all their baggage and attachments behind. How much easier it was for younger forest defenders to cut loose and forget totally about Babylonia and all the silly, shinny, stuff of the old world.

Taryn couldn't help but tease Sasha a little:

"Oh yea, I almost forgot the most important news: Brione said to tell you,

'Hi dude,' and she had a certain look to her eyes when she talked about you."

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Sasha laughed heartily at himself, at Taryn's insinuation, and he remembered like it was yesterday, when he had spent several days at the Abo gathering up by Scott River.

Forest Defenders from all over had come together to share and to do skill workshops.

Brione had been around everywhere he looked. Gods! The time that she saw him wish up real magic.

Careless and such a show-off his mother and Jarrel had both said. "One of the few times

that those two were ever much in agreement on anything," he thought to himself as he tried to remember what he had just been thinking about before Brione got in his head.. He wondered if Brione would be at one of the Council Meetings where the Forest Defenders were seeking to meet with the Militia. The meetings ought to happen soon and might if Jarred would only..." And a gentle breeze touched him with an almost song, and he remembered as he held back on that half-made wish:

"I have to be cautious now, and stop wishing vaguely or without choosing a well thought out direction."

Taryn reached over and touched his arm. She said:

"And don't think too hard about Brione - we wouldn't want your wish glands to burst or bring her here so suddenly - straight across all Eald, breaking a long list of natural laws – the boundaries of magery, and... And,"

Sasha silenced her nicely with a sour look, and he didn't even want to wrestle with this Ninja, not with a long ride home still facing him and his pride already a bit ragged.

"Oh, I should keep a list,"

"Lists?"

"Yeah, a list of all your stray wishes and near blunders," she winked to keep him from getting serious on her, "but that's against Network policy isn't it," said Taryn as she continued and made a little face at Sasha, and then at Trevor too, so he wouldn't feel left out. But their smaller friend was resting in his mild snores – snuggled up next to the root he loved.

"Sasha, there's a deep cover, intelligence operation going ahead, if I got the plan straight from Trevor. A friend of mine, Steve, is trying to get into a group that is operating in SoHum.

They might be a new renegade militia or some secret cell of Swanson's. Madrone gave us the lead on this danger, she thinks a guy they call Scar-Face is the top gun and she said it might be very important. I hope we can trust her...She's close to the Elves and... well Steve is close... I mean he's a friend of mine so, I wouldn't want anything to happen, to him, to the mission, I mean."

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Sasha thought this was probably his only chance to razz Taryn, but he let it slide. Something told him that this was very important, a threat that he would hear more about. And it was late and time to rest a bit before the sun came up and they had to split. They wrapped the discussion up with a few final details concerning some of the missions, which the Network had planned in the next month. They chose a time and place to rendezvous again in a few weeks. Then they both rose, as if by cue. Taryn came over closer to him and took both his hands in hers. He looked at her closely and that hard spot crept up on him, that feeling that he could make it all work out right for everyone.

She looked back firmly and said as she squeezed his hands:

"Take care Sasha... It's not all up to you."

And he wanted to share more with her, but he didn't say anything as they hugged each other warmly, just a neutral: "Good night friend," and they hugged again briefly before they pulled away and turned to the task of fixing up their sleeping places.

Trevor dreamed of sneaking along the banks of the Kama River with the sounds of a music festival... and a giant salmon leaping out of the water as the white horse neighed nearby... Taryn's dreams were more restless with the scene of a very moldy ruins amid the forest that made her think of death until she saw Madrone amid seven pillars with a great flaming torch that burned high up into the night sky.

Sasha had a series of pleasant dreams of hiking in a forest in the light rain and fog and flying over smoky skies until the bloody severed hand reached out from monstrous jaws

and everything went very dark...

...The Vortex reached out from a flat-black sky. It howled and then the Darkness blinked, as the Raven opened her eye. He started to tumble, but at the last moment she pulled back just barely enough to assay his most powerful wish from obliterating everything ... the one, the wish that she hoped to control when it finally actualized – and the Light takes the Darkness.

He floated, a small boy, with no doubt about him. Young eyes flashed a pure intensity back into those bottomless eye sockets – the Void of the Raven's Heart – where now only ego and white righteousness pooled in anticipation. He let the words of her come, though he knew them way too well already.

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"You must think of yourself, your task only! I taught you. I sacrificed for you, and I devised the plan of our spell - the conjuring that you alone can control. You are the pinnacle of our Clan's pursuit. Power to save the world and to shape it.

I tell you, young mage, stay clear of the gray-ways of the Elves and their ilk.

Trickery lies in that gray neutrality that claims to speak for all things in all times. In this world there are only users and the used. Remember the Light of your Mother's death. Follow the Light and listen only to my guidance.

Do you understand?"

He fought the urge to respond which would only add to her madness. His small body drifted ... soon the great wings stroked the airs, beating down on his brain. He held that anger at the Earth and his frustration at the Green Canopy – the mystery that humans must accept without understanding - And he let go...

Morning had barely dawned when they called out to him:

"We'll see you in Haymarket, soon." And they sent him a little "wakawuuh" howl as they turned away. He watched them head down the wooded draw in the faint light of a new day.

Birds sang up in the branches above his head and a gentle breeze added to the pleasantness of the morning. Sasha wanted to be going along with them, cross-country for a quick visit to another forest camp, some campfire songs, and touching base with friends and the Network.. But he had other pressing obligations... crucial responsibilities.

He started to head toward his horse with pictures of his friends healing each other and laughing together still lingering from his dreams. "Lists..." popped in his head. And then he remembered he forgot to tell them about the symbols.

He stopped, hearing the horse nearby, and reached out his thoughts to Taryn. He felt her energy field still open to him, wavelengths connected. Concentration focused and he tried to make it clear: "I need Reiki-aligned symbols for the Fire of Love and the Circle of Life."

He kept on walking and shrugged, not entirely sure the message had reached understanding. It didn't really matter, he had enough other dark couriers and eyes

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seeking sources in his name, or one of his names. All power to the Network, he joked at himself and to the horse.

He stroked the white horse's huge neck as he watched an Oriole land on the branch near him: A little head bobbing in search of needs and danger. He thought it might sing, but it flew away with a quick flutter and only a slight 'puweeep, peep.' He felt the lack of his friends' presence acutely and he wondered why.

Why so much now? He'd see them again soon, probably in just a few days. But Gods, he relished these times of getting away, and just the three of them sharing their gentle dreamtime, healing, and always a bit of gossip, naturally.

Of course, he worried over Jarred, his almost father and the popular, Mayor of Haymarket. How would all the factions in the militia sort themselves out? It seemed hopeless. Trevor's news of General Swanson rang warning bells, as actually there was no news. The last two operatives sent to infiltrate the General's compound in Redwing had never reported to anyone - as far as Sasha knew.

No news is not always good news.

I hope Jarred will be stubborn like his mother and stand up to those puffed up fanatics. Gods!

And damn! It's hard to be patient or even tolerant with some Christians. And then he wondered about that wish, as a cold spot turned inside of him once again. The ghost of a large Raven passed silently across his way. No shadow did it cast, but he sneered some at its ever-constant chiding. The cold spot pulled hard on him for a second and then slowly grew less bothersome.

"Go! Go on, oh Raven of the Void," he muttered.

He wished she would fly far ahead and not spoil this fine morning. A strange brew of feelings sifted through his heart. He felt alone again, if not really lonely. Silently he spoke with himself. "It's just that I can't even talk about any of this with anyone. Anyone except Taryn and Trevor... well there's Damon, but he's only thirteen. It's even hard to speak with my friends. Operations and gossip's one thing, but I almost never get to talk about what's really upsetting me... though I bet they know some of it.

Everything's going to move so fast now... It could happen any day, maybe before the elections... That's only two weeks away..."The horse pawed at the ground trying to remind him to keep scratching her ears, or something.

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Sasha gathered the reins and rested them on the saddle horn as he carefully checked over the horse and tightened up the saddle a notch. He loved this amiable white mare which he had borrowed for a few weeks from Jarred's friend Nathaniel. He knew that he should not let on about his feelings to the horse, or it would go to the beast's head. But Sasha usually followed his intuition more than his brain so he spoke to her anyway, saying: "This might be our last ride together, 'Old Girl.'" And he gave her a last scratch behind the ears. "I think you are going back to Scott River in a few days. Yes, back to your cool mountain home, with maybe even some snow, soon."

He stepped swiftly up in the stirrups and settled comfortably on her back.

The two moved off, headed towards home at a slow-paced stride. Sure-footed and responsive she was, but Sasha knew from painful experience, that pranks could enter her sweet demeanor - and without any indication or warning. Occasionally, he had to duck under low hanging branches that the horse just happened to drift near to. Test or jest he couldn't say for sure... and he hesitated to employ magic, not wanting to scare the horse or to give it undue access to his thoughts.

They were almost to Militia territory when they startled a large bear as it came around a brush pile. They looked at each other, a strong stare of compassionate judgment, like a teardrop hanging from a smile. Bear knew... Their Nyd - that inner spark of determination - had similarities: a path of protection and sacrifice - pleasures pushed back to better prepare for the future, or in Bear's case - the long Winter.

Sasha rode on not wanting to bother the Guardian, especially, at this season when they tended to be individualistic and a bit selfish. He motioned the horse to speed up and they cantered down the path that now turned into more of a road as they approached the way to Dave's farm.

Usually, they would be living at the old ranch house this time of year and helping Dave burn up all the firewood. He thought of the great meals they had cooked up there and the royal mess that often was the main course. Three bachelors, as luck or fate would

have it, and none too keen on cleaning up.

Dave liked things clean and reasonably tidy. Jarred hardly ever asked much of Sasha, but he did insist that it was Sasha's duty to clean up after dinners, at least until he learned to cook better. And so he cleaned sometimes and didn't mind at all. Though he much preferred splitting wood or writing in his journal and drawing the symbols that he pulled out of his strange, vivid dreams.

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"Still rather early in the morning," the boy thought. So, he passed on by the ranch, deciding, just barely, not to bug Dave for breakfast. Besides, he really wanted to get back to Jarred by the afternoon, like he had promised.

They swept wide, around the pastures and headed due East, the horse felt the rider's urgency. She took the bit and ran free - swift and sure. Sasha fell into the trance of her motion - the rhythm shrinking the miles... A meeting... two. A Calling... and the tone of his thoughts began turning a warning gray... like the inevitability that he had to be ready for.

A lazy sigh released itself. Hazel thought how great it felt to take the day off with her friends... in the woods. She lagged at the back of the group heading up to the meadows. The first big rain hit last week, but today it was warm, almost cloudless.

The excitement sparked between them and she attended lightly to those vibes.

Shadows tried to work some resentment at her view of Kith and Miya acting silly and extra lovey. **That** didn't bother her much and the little **Shadow** gave up. She only wished they could all stay together. "Not such a great idea, those two taking off to Denver with so much work here in Lorien," she mused as a vision cancelled out without a trace against her determined focus... A pathway cleared through the brambles of those busy thoughts and the worries too... Though the words, "We can work together," kept rambling around in her head like a whisper from a dream...

They hiked up the old road. Five sets of boot prints tracking along the same route that they had driven on the way to forest actions a few years earlier. They reached the sharp turn in the road where the clear cut ended and were faced with a forty-foot drop off into a washed-out gully. The road was gone, along with most of the canyon that they remembered.

Said Aire: "I doubt they'll ever fix this road."

They all reached the edge of the drop-off looking downstream at the devastation.

The mudslide had picked up enough debris to scour out one side of the canyon, pulling giant trees loose. Further down, Hazel could see piles of trees, tangled and caked with mud and rocks.

"I don't know about the road. Somebody should get up in here soon, and do a lot of new restoration work before it blows out worse. Plant grass or hemp, anything,"

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Miya said these words gravely. And a sadness lingered on her almost always cheerful expression.

Kith shook his head and spat out bitter words as he left,

"This used to be a good spawning area for Salmon and Steelhead. Too much work to restore it now, and a dozen more blow-outs due this winter if the rains come hard."

They left that spot and soon found a way around the washout. The picture of the washed-out ravine lingered with them as they hiked. No one wanted to talk about it or about the weather. Two years of terrible summer drought complimented by two unusually cold winters had everyone who cared just a bit on the edgy side. The weather was a touchy subject. Global warming threatened and coastal areas braced for the worst of it.

Hours later they came out of the forest and into the clearing near the ridge tops. This was their favorite place where the Redwoods ended with the fog belt and the scenery changed to scattered Firs and Oaks in-between great rolling expanses of dry grasslands. Tan browns of the dry season awaited for the green wet... and then the white cover that would soon be coming with the cold of the short winter days.

"Black's Meadow," Hazel said softly as Madrone who had been quiet or way out in front all day, sidled close in for a hug. Eyes contacting... Memories... Crazy stuff way up in the trees, they both thought, as they stared into each other and relived those experiences. All of them had memories together and apart from each other here.

Madrone spoke then, "So many people came to be here with us, most didn't stay ...or not for long at first."

"Hey. Does somebody want to help me with the fire circle?" Hazel said, and Miya moved Hazel's way, as the others left to gather wood for the fire.

The sun started to set by the time they got the fire going and unpacked their things. They were warming up and eating some snacks when Aire approached lugging a big stuff sack.

"It's an old stash someone left up here. The bucket was cracked, but no holes in the bag. No critters," he said as he proceeded to dump the contents out.

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"Canned goods barely rusting, soymilk, Chai mix, and what are these?" Asked Miya. She picked up a shiny pink and turquoise food bar and tried in vain to bend it. She offered it to Kith who yelled out, "Ouch!" His teeth bit hard, but the flat brown slabs were just too hard.

Hazel had seen this effect before and she exclaimed with some astonishment,

"Oh. My gods, I don't believe it! Tsunami Survival Bars. These must be five years old, at least."

Aire laughed remembering how only one person really liked them.

Kith - loving even a corny performance - almost looked sad that he couldn't taste something from "back in the day," so Hazel, trying not to laugh, said,

"Don't worry, they really were terrible. Yam pulp and milk sugar something."

He made a face and checked his tooth, throwing the bar over to Aire, who just barely caught it in the bag. Aire dropped the bag by his pack and said:

"More to haul out, I guess," and then he stepped over Miya's legs and looked at his guitar case. He changed his mind, feeling a little tired and wondering where in the world his other friends could be.

'Sage couldn't come, but I'll see her soon,' he thought, '...Maybe on the trip south.'

Hazel sat down by the fire and looked over at Aire, saying dramatically:

"You're the hero again, you know. Saving bears from tooth decay."

They weren't exactly tense, but everyone felt the future rushing at them and all the small doubts and worries. The fire crackled once, and the logs settled down lower into the fire pit. Madrone pushed a few of the larger wet logs closer to the flames so they could dry out more.

After tossing another dry branch on, she kicked the fire down and looked around at the woods asking, "Where's 'Bri' and Amnesia? They ought to be here by now. Is anybody worried about that, or what?"

"We could howl for them," Kith offered and then he let out a short howl that didn't seem to travel very far. The five friends sat there contemplating the fire and all the decisions and changes that were so imminent in their lives: Friends who might not ever see each other again.

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Hazel saw the first evening stars emerging against the velvet blue sky. She let the cool

evening air and the quiet take away her thoughts. Vision or consciousness shifted... They all turned sensing a presence. A soft green glow seemed to shift at the edge of the woods.

There not... there.

A lone figure approached the fire circle. The slightly weird "hoot, hoot" assured them. It was a friend. Brione came forward briskly, smiling and happy. Hazel ran up and gave her a tight hug and a kiss. She held her friend out at arms length saying,

"What is it? What happened? I feel something... It's your eyes, Bri!"

But Brione kept laughing and stomping her foot. Shaking Hazel's arm to get her quiet, Brione said loudly, "Yes, yes. I want to tell you all about it. It's wonderful..."

And she winked at Hazel. "Allies! But, wait. Slow down everyone.

Can we just mellow out, please? Remember we came here to give thanks and say farewells."

Brione sat down at the fire where Aire lit a sage wand and passed it on. Bri looked at Kith and Miya and over to Hazel, who made, the usual, funny eyes at her. A hand pulled her down by the fire and she took the sage, smoke welcome and useful. "All right. Whenever you're ready...dear." Hazel squeezed Bri's hand and took the sage. They all sat down by the fire. The smoke and smell cleansed and purified their intent. They held hands and raised the cone of power. Each of them, in turn, welcomed the Woodland Deities and invited the elves to join them. The Four Directions were blessed. They sat quietly, harmonizing their breathing to each other and the vibes that were present.

Usually at this moment they would sing a song together, but tonight they were all drawn as if by some other will to relate experiences from the forest and the unusual sensations that came more often lately.

Aire went first telling of a recent close call: "As I ran away from a bunch of security guards up by Patrick's Bar, I went under that rickety old powerline that goes up the mountain behind Zobo's Hostel. I lost track of the rest of the commando squad. I just kept running, paying no mind to hills and gullies. The trail became a blur. I felt suddenly queasy, yet physical pain didn't register anymore. The only way I can describe

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it now is well it was like becoming one with the forest but more like something entered me. Inside. I finally regained my senses and lost that weird feeling.

It was hours later, though I didn't know that at the time. I came stumbling out of some Black Huckleberry brush pulling stickers off of my clothes. As I straightened up and started untangling a twig from my hair I realized that I recognized the place I was in. I couldn't believe I was all the way up by Albee in those magical old orchards. It seemed impossible because that's like twenty miles from Zobo's!

But I was safe, in fact I felt invincible, like I could run another twenty miles without even knowing it."

Aire seemed finished and Miya, cleared her throat wanting to share:

"It's our awareness of Nature and the power of our love for the forest. It just keeps increasing. Sometimes I feel like I'm going to explode... like I want to explode. The place inside me here,"- and she held her hands cupped in an oval, facing her solar-plexus, near her womb - "that used to feel so hollow and the magic all gone. I don't feel empty now... I let go of something and now the Forest is my friend.

Sometimes I walk alone in the woods, and I swear like something is right next to my ear whispering. When I stop fighting it I realize I can see better, hear better. I find forest ways I've never been before, and I know where danger lies. And you know me, I usually don't believe much in, well ... things like that actually happening here, or not to me.

I usually can't talk about my feelings like this. I think of things like magic as metaphors,

though I want to believe. I often hold myself at night and wish earnestly that we might have a sign or get aid from somewhere I don't want to die. I don't want us to fail either." The circle grew quiet except for the hissing of a green log on the fire. Brione sensed more than she saw the pair of blue-green eyes, off a-ways in the woods. And she could imagine Anaya being joyful and amused. Miya stared into the fire watching the flames dance and her fears and anxiousness slowly went away. Though she was somewhat shy and small framed many around that fire circle had seen Miya's inner strength come forward when it was needed. Dangerous actions and long hikes where Miya never complained and as often as not ended up the leader at the end with some kind of "third wind" pushing her to get it over with.

Kith felt pained because he wanted to comfort Miya but knew that she didn't really want or need that. He looked at Miya and then -with a thin smile in Hazel's direction - he cleared his throat and spoke next about his experiences with the shifting reality which many of them had encountered.. He told of the dreams he had recently and of the strange - too real - vision that he and Hazel had shared at the beach.

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"One of the visions looked just like this here - all of us gathered, round the fire in a circle - but there's a glowing face with us..."

"And the **Shadows** descending," Hazel added.

"Oh, yea the **Shadows**, how could I forget... They come into my dreams too... talking kindly, promising..." Kith, his face grim, tried to go on but the train of thought slipped away.

"Fear not the **Shadows**, for they are powerless if the Chosen are of one wish."

It was Brione's mouth moving, but the sound of the voice was more like thunder mixed with strong winds blowing high in the trees. Everyone looked at Brione, who just stared into the fire. A strange color played about her eyes and she wished... The Opening. She caught the picture of her friends, petals of a giant Lotus Flower, ready... and opening out and upward from Earth: Anticipation building... an irresistible force. Hazel started to sing, which truly surprised them at first, since no one remembered her ever singing solo before. Soon they were all caught up in a chant that they had never heard.

But the words found a home within their hearts:

"Fairies, my friends; Elves of the Wood.

Streams, of the Song; Airs of my breath.

Will you rise now; Dance the Visions?

Fire, my Spirit; Open to you."

A hush fell over the forest and the clearing where they sat. Feelings of utter peace flowed over, and over, them. They sang together wonderingly. The words were mostly un-intelligible, but they absorbed the message none-the-less. All of the visions that they had experienced or shared flowed through and betwixt each of them. Brione's newgained lore of the forest and of Anaya entered her friends' consciousness to reside there forever. Strength reached out through the hands that they each held and they felt the warm fire on their faces.

Her worn wool cape dropped away as Hazel rose upward from the ground. She hovered there above the circle where the others sat. She still sang while the rest of them listened awestruck. Hazel's blond hair flowed back, away from her, but there was no wind just an uneasy stirring. She kept rising, growing larger and they felt power building up around her. Then a soft light began to radiate out from her body and a sense of healing touched them. Dizzying colors of the forest swirled and rose upward to merge with the soft constant glow as it moved out from Hazel.

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The last thing anyone remembered was a radiant presence, hovering a few feet above the circle. And the meaning of Lorien's "Patterns of Life" burst inside of them as the eyes of a Goddess opened. A million years of Love flowed deep... And they learned of the truths that they would need in order to avoid unnecessary suffering.

They experienced emotions that they had never imagined: a strong blind Rage stood alone in the Fields of Suffering. Frayed and beaten, it battered against the winds of war. The simple, sad Truth held high in that determined Rage's fist. But the allies that Rage awaited never arrived. No rescue was forthcoming. And so, with Truth and allegiance mired in Dear **Shadow's** Hate, a panic of fury whipped then, until finally beaten aback... blinded and trapped they were.

Now they saw in their minds how only a few warriors remained of all those who could care enough. Only a few remained who could wish themselves to endure the pain without being consumed by the "white fire." A Love that showed all its aspect. Total pain so terrible if you held on too tight to it. A place of flowing... a love... that feels hard in the moment but spreads through time to sow the foundation roots of Healing. It was resolved then and none of them could deny their destiny to join those warriors – to stand in the Fields of Suffering with that very Rage...

Normal sounds of the forest returned. Brione looked across at Kith.

His eyes were blank but the faint smile on his face told of joy and peace...

Of a sudden, his eyes came alive and she saw that questioning look that all of them wore. Brione had felt the same when she first learned about the magic: stronger, but not sure what to do with so much more understanding. "The more you know the more complex it gets and the more skill your wishes need to get to the point - to avoid traps - and give nothing the **Shadows** could use back at your efforts. Almost too much to keep in your head."

They sat there: kind of scared and amazed, accepting but not totally sure yet. A kind of frustration that now that you know something you have to use it, wisely, earnestly... forever....

Aire was looking up in the trees, humming a tune Brione had never heard. Like almost everything now, it was new, yet somehow familiar.

'Hazel?' Brione thought...

"Oh Goddess I hope she is OK."

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She started to get up to go to her friend, but stayed herself, seeing now that Hazel was breathing fine, that actually she was snorrrring there happily curled up next to Miya. Miya kept stroking Hazel's head and rocking back and forth a little. Time passed. The three-quarter moon came up behind the ridge, and Hazel's body shivered from the chilly breeze or perhaps also from the difficult transition back to the world of her friends and... starkly a **vision** slashing, like a knife, into their existence:

"I blew it this time ... I promised them.. Brione. At least I can get there by morning and walk out with them. I've got to let them know about Namoia... I never thought the egocult could act on their insanity..."

The loud roar of a motorcycle, Amnesia down- shifting as he hit the corner, down low and tight. A big truck... fire on the hillside.

They all had a metallic taste in their mouths. For a moment the **shadows** seemed menacing and darker. Hazel knew this situation and she grasped the need for leadership. As steady as she could manage she announced: "We must close the circle and give thanks for our gifts."

They focused then on the fire and the words that were necessary. One wish went out from them. A clear wish for guidance and a way to put their powers to use. Willingness to sacrifice and do whatever was necessary to secure the land... to see a world where

suffering might decline.

The cone of power lowered, the circle was closed. Whether it was their resolve or the sensation of vibrations they still felt, it was suddenly like a great pressure was removed. The **Shadows** drew back, shrinking.

Brione had just tossed a few sticks on the fire and Hazel was about to put on a larger log when she stopped and turned around. Down a ways by the biggest fir tree she could definitely see vibrations pulsing now. She looked at Brione, who nodded her head slightly and gave her the little "friends" smile they used.

A slender figure approached the group of Forest Defenders sitting or laying around the fire circle. The thing on two legs moved slowly, hesitated and took a few more steps. They all turned to look at the featureless shape that twinkled faintly and stopped at the edge of the firelight. A soft crackle came from the fire, which had burned down lower with the evening's passing.

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The flames suddenly shot up brightly as the logs burned and then they caught glimpses of a nose, a cheek, a glint of light off of sharp teeth and a warm smile that exclaimed an almost childish excitement...

A voice spoke softly, "I am **Anaya**. The Forest welcomes you."

Again, for the second time that night a presence touched them – a sense of tranquility mixed with conflict, like Nature. And even many days later some of the Chosen recalled the paradox of that sensation: a part love and beauty and a part violence and danger, like being hopelessly lost out in some wild woods where you wish you could simply stop everything and enjoy the beauty, but the terror won't let you.

Everyone except Brione backed up closer to the fire. Brione turned and looked back at her friends. She held on confidently to her wish of the "Opening,"

Then with both visions she returned to gaze at her newest friend. The amazing Anaya wore a short tunic of buckskin, now, where earlier in the day Bri didn't remember whether Anaya or herself had been wearing clothes at all. And the Elf's long red hair was shorter, nearly cut close. A single long braid trailed down her back. Looking wider, she still saw the gnarled root, but now also the life force, and molecular transfers...

Again she looked back at her friends, who seemed frozen as they simply stared in wonder at the strange painted designs of zigzags, spirals and oak leaf patterns that now pulsed vividly across Anaya's face, arms and legs. Anaya's tattoos stood out for all to see. Brione reached out her hands while wishing at Anaya. The Elf, tingling with her own excitement, clasped Brione's hands firmly in her own and wished back at Brione as she nodded slightly.

Brione's voice rang clear and strong with no doubt at all:

"Well met Anaya. Friends this is our new ally. I met her this morning at the Venus tree. She has come to help us, and to ask for our help in return."

They were crowding around her now, but the suddenly bewildered elf didn't like that so much. Anaya was thinking, "The men smell strange and the fire ...why do they..." the burning wood was no comfort to her. Suddenly, Anaya leaped up high onto a large weathered stump and squatted looking down with a bit less concern. The humans began to settle down too and they formed a semi-circle between Anaya and the fire and waited.

In a gentle voice she addressed them, seeing the understanding growing there, before the words arrived:

"I am the Forest Keeper for many Crow-flies. I serve Lorien and Life and I think you do too. I have watched you and your friends for many years. It is good to speak with you,

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to know you here. You may think of me as an elf, and so I am. We guard the forest from

outsiders and all who would do harm to our homes, our sanctuaries, or the special waters. We hear and speak with the animals and the plants and the spirits of the forest. I come to you now to support your cause and help you to understand the visions that you have witnessed.

May our friendship spread until all species walk together."

Miya spoke eagerly to Anaya, "Do you know what happened?

Were you watching us?"

Anaya shrugged her tattooed shoulders and gave Brione a look of 'Oh no!

How do I commune with these humans and so many questions.'

She lowered her head and closed her eyes for a moment. Anaya seemed to be drawing herself inward and Hazel felt her thoughts being drawn in too. A pulling, with some of her confusions whisked away and new possibilities made more evident. Doubts felt more obvious too, sorted and not so twisted about everything like they usually were.

Anaya lifted her head back up and opened her eyes as wide as she could. Startled memories replayed among them all... memories of the last moment of their visitation, the face of Lorien. Anaya's eyes were indeed those of Lorien. The spacey transition period washed over them again, though less intensely this time. Their sight shifted out of that "other-world of color vibrations and the queasy newness of it all.

Anaya smiled at them and her gentle voice came to them:

"I could tell you many, many things and some details about where your paths may take you, but it will be easier, in the end, for you to accept for yourselves what you already know will be. You are 'The Chosen.' The Goddess blesses you and sends me to guide. Tonight you have touched the Other-World of Nature - the Edge of Eald - as you have done before in the woods without realizing it exactly. Now you must believe in those feelings. Use the Power that you have together and with those who would join with you. I believe in you. The vibrations and the harmony are about you. True hearts that know their limits are precious and that's why we are here. Pray as you like, but the Gods are dying. Wishes will have more power now, for you can focus the spirit power and link each wish to great effect."

Anaya rocked back on her heels looking up at the stars. She stood there her slim but muscled arms crossed, then crouching down she sprung backward and ran up the hill shouting: "I go for gifts. Sing some songs by the fire. I won't be long."

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And she was gone into darkness.

Sitting there by the fire, Hazel felt certain that they all experienced the same feeling: letting the vibes and wishes work through them. A goodness, a closeness, knowing what they would do, knowing that together they would make it happen. A new level in their friendship developed with bonds enwrapping them tightly. No words were necessary.

Hazel let her attachments drift away and opened her heart.

Brione hummed a beautiful, eerie gypsy song while Aire and Miya played the big drum and the Tabla. She held on to the last note of the song as the drums trailed off.

The elf stood there, near the circle, playing the same tune on a small bone flute. She finished and stood smiling hugely. Anaya rubbed her temples as she squatted down closer to them.

Firelight reflected off of the elf's delicately carved flute, as it swayed from her neck on a cord of braided hair and the Eald lights... kept calling.

"I am so happy to be here with you. I was tiring of the just-watching time."

The Elf walked around the circle and stopped beside Aire.

His whole face smiled as he reached his large hands up and pulled his thick black hair back behind his ears. He looked kindly at Anaya with his expression and body language relaying, "Well, what's this?" ...And, "Let's go, come on now,"

The small sliver of Elf that was there inside of him and hidden in the forest too, filled in the void that was left from shedding some of his human attachments. The Elf reached her tattooed arms around him and they hugged. She took the flute from around her neck and presented it to him on her out-stretched hands.

"This is for you, Aire of the shaggy hair. You will bring the musicians for the Festivals. And music will sound more beautiful than ever before."

Aire held the flute carefully in his hands and Anaya slipped the cord over his head as he bent down slightly to make it easier.

She came next to Madrone who gave her a funny, tough-kid look, masking a tiny bit of fear. "Madrone of the Mesas, I have this rounded stone from the Sacred Waterfall. It will help you share the warrior spirit you live with. Together, accepting each other in respect and need, you the Chosen shall find the right-balance. But you, Madrone, have the fire. The raging desire to take a stand, to quicken. Thousands like you are coming here soon and they will learn quickly."

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Madrone took the stone, turning it over slowly in her hand, and then slipped it into one of her waist pouches. The elf stepped close to Madrone, and they slowly melted around each other, hugging. They all saw and understood the faint flare of magic that passed between the two bodies.

Next, Anaya approached Brione, whose blushing face radiated enough joy to fill a whole planet. "Brione who knows my Woods so well, I lend you the pure shadows of my oak leaves."

Anaya reached out her hands and her long fingers locked onto the underside of Brione's wrists. Brione squeezed back as Anaya gripped her tightly. Then her amazing elf-friend brought each of Brione's hands up to her dark lips and kissed them slowly. A glow spread up Brione's arms, and Anaya traced her fingertips down Brione's face and shoulders. Beneath her skin, the color and the meaning rose upward - the same painted designs that covered Anaya were now visible on Brione. The shapes and patterns pulsed. You could see the magical flare outlining oak leaves and then it twinkled out - back to where it came from.

"As you travel the North Coast and up the many rivers, beguiling with song and voice all whom you shall chance to meet, the symbols of the Woodland will help you when you need to slip away without being seen. Many secrets shall come to you."

Hazel closed her eyes. She drew a breath deep into "all her little fears" and she wondered what gift might come her way on this crazy night. She wondered about all of this, but she had no doubts about Anaya. The Gods were with them, and this reassured her. She opened her eyes to see the Forest Keeper standing quite near her. She decided that she liked Anaya's deerskin tunic, the reinforced stitching, herbs tucked in a pocket. She also liked the Elf's physique and her easy-open attitude that was having such wonderful effects on all of them.

The Elf's voice said:

"The Goddess feels drawn to you, and you to her as well, I believe. She asks a lot from you Hazel. She hopes that you will continue with your plan to meet with the other armies of this region. Some will aid us if you succeed."

Anaya stepped back a pace and pulled a small bundle from behind her back. Feelings of danger swept briefly over Hazel and she actually relished in it, knowing the powers of her present company. She was curious, but as Anaya unwrapped the leather from around the bundle, she saw the cold gleam of an edge reflecting firelight ...and the sharp point of a knife aimed at her.

"I give to you the responsibility and the challenge of my flint knife."

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Hazel looked uncertain as she carefully took the knife from the Anaya's hands. She looked at the Elfish designs on the carven hilt and the fine stone edge of the weapon. "Why? Why me?"

Anaya placed her hands over Hazel's and they stood there a moment, the ancient blade clasped between them. In a firm voice Anaya said:

"I know you struggle with the use of force, and you fear that violence will undo all we have worked for. But you alone can show us the dangers... and the limits. I must tell you ...You will kill a man with my knife."

Hazel turned her eyes upward and shook her head, "No!"

Anaya released her hands and smiled serenely at Hazel.

"Do not worry over-much. New friends will aid you."

Hazel nodded somewhat solemnly, and held the bundle, while Anaya fashioned her a belt and a temporary sheath for the flint knife.

Standing back to look, Anaya said to all,

"Some people are so lost that they only understand force. And sometimes even good people will not believe their heart or eyes until the risks of imminent violence are made obvious. There are times when it is difficult to judge what the situation calls for. This is not a game or any minor event in history. If we fail, the greatest period of suffering will ensue, as the **Shadows** devour most life.

The ends that we seek to avoid determine the means of force, which are necessary to achieve that avoidance. Be patient and positive and you will see."

She completed the circle, stopping in front of Kith and Miya. From tip-toes she gave each of them a kiss on the cheek, saying: "Your love is good. It adds to your strength, your will to survive. Maybe even your luck!"

And then did Anaya clap her hands and stomped one of her feet exuberantly on the ground.

Brione, smiled, wondering if Anaya was experiencing 'Being in Love' as she sorted the vibrations from Kith and Miya's auras.

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From inside her tunic, Anaya pulled out a foot long stick of Yew wood. Minutely carved details wound around both ends of the object. The scented smell of fresh Yew filled the air. Anaya looked at Kith and Miya and said, "I will miss both of you, for you will be gone the longest and far beyond these forests." She reached her arm out and handed the stick to Kith.

"Take this carven staff to the mountains near Denver. There you will contact the Elves of the Pine Forest. They will aid you at the time of the Ranger Elves. Secrecy is of utmost importance."

She turned away from them and then hesitated before turning back to face the two lovers:

"I see that you, Kith, will anguish over returning here in time, but if you can accept the ultimate sacrifice, then..." And Anaya seemed to grow weaker as she put her hand to her head and her tattoos sparked weakly. She looked at Kith. He seemed to sense the depths of those blue gray eyes, and connections to his future - the importance of all their acts.

"You will save my life and I yours... Arrgg, as if the **Shadows** weren't enough to guard against... the disturbance... the Wildryns."

Hazel watched, concerned and suddenly not quite so sure that everything would be so easy. The elf took a moment to collect her strength or to repulse whatever affected her, and then she turned and looked directly at the rest of them. There was concern on her face too, and it seemed to Hazel that there might be more that she wanted to tell them. But the Forest Keeper walked past the group - away from the fire. Miya and Brione called out to her when they realized what was happening. But Anaya seemed wholly

oblivious. Already she was off bounding up the steep hillside toward the forest. In a blink she easily jumped high up on top of an ancient stump. Anaya's eyes gazed back at the Chosen as a cloud passed from in front of the moon. The strange moonlight cast an ominous flat starkness on the scene. Anaya whispered out to their thoughts: "I must go now to rest and plan. I know not when I shall see you again. Share your dreams and I will try and contact you soon. Heed the visions, but know they are but possibilities at best; on occasion laced with **Shadow** lies. Go with caution, but make haste when needed. You have the skills, the gifts, and the blessings. I pray they may be enough."

And she faded out from view like a wisp of smoke on a rising gust.

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They didn't talk much the rest of the night. Some of them dozed fitfully, catching bits of livid dreams. Hazel couldn't sleep and just lay there snuggled in her sleeping bag next to Aire. She gazed widely, opening to the magic of the night sky and listening to the forest sounds. The Milky Way became the Spiral of Life, and things danced before her senses. She felt good lying there near her friends. It seemed like circumstances were controlling them, but "it's not really a trap as long as you're aware and don't lose or give away your critical reasoning," she mused.

Feelings gushed out of her: the magic pulls at you and as tension builds, potential rises, until you can see feelings, feel colors, know right intent, and ... sort out your optimum role in the shaping and the whirling of a New World's arising.

Fire Flowers

In Polish mythology, fire flowers are mystical blooms. To find this powerful plant the seeker had to enter a forest before midnight on the Eve of Kupala. The flower would climb up the stalk of the fern, and precisely at midnight it would bloom so brightly that no one could look directly at it. In order to harvest it a circle had to be drawn around it, and the seeker had to deal with demons trying to distract him/her from doing so. It was said that if you answered the voices, or faltered during the task, it would sacrifice its own life. Anyone possessing this flower gained the ability to read minds, find treasure, and repel all evils.

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CHAPTER THREE: TO BE CHOSEN

Stop the World:

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Not an easy task for enough of us. Fleeing the burning cities, looking back at the fields and paths of their memories gone forever, she prayed, "May the grass grow over our footprints someday. May the Earth be free."

Harsh prophets fall silent in the fires of their truth revealed. The dead will explain to the dead: the what and why. We are fated to beget a new and violent tribe: free from the evil and the 'happiness' that festered here, so long ignored. "Let us go,"- and the Earth was laid open to us by a Sword of Flames. *** **Visions of The Weasel, Underground in '01**

Kith and Miya hopped a train to Denver the next afternoon. They made sure to pack a small oxygen tank, just in case the rail tunnels turned deadly again. Several people had died recently from extreme heat and the lack of oxygen while going through the Loveland Pass tunnel. Their mission was risky but extremely important. They not only carried information on new electrical system targets, but they had The Staff to deliver and the Wildryn's to locate. Friends, both Elvish and human awaited them in the Rockies.

Vibrations travel far and wide. **Shadows** know patterns too.

Aire hooked up with Sage and Willow, two old friends from Mad River. He tried to find Amnesia but no one had seen him, not even Brione. He wanted Amnesia to do a few things for him, but he had to leave right away and couldn't spend much time searching

around for his wild friend.

"Brione will find him. She was counting on him for the concerts next week. He'd never let her down."

Aire tumbled these and other thoughts over in his head as he pulled up to the Cafe where Sage and Willow were talking to some talent agents about the Music Festivals and some gigs they wanted to line up...

He got out of the van and looked up at the sign – "The old Whistle Blower Coffee and Tea Emporium," he said to himself. Walking up the steps, he turned around at the door and looked out at friendly Ukiah - Gateway to the Redwoods. A few small timber mills were still operating, but most of the town and the whole region was economically depressed. Campgrounds were full and new ones opened weekly. Few people - campers or locals - had much money or much hope. A funky peacefulness prevailed for the most part –a legacy of the North Coast area and its long history of "back to the landers" and hippies getting along with and rubbing off on the locals and workers. The peace of the

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region had survived the paranoid silliness of the big pot growing years and methamphetamine use had finally declined which helped tremendously!

Across the way, a tent city spread and he could see a few tourists and some refugees. Hard to tell which was which anymore. They seemed to be buying and trading stuff from the Barter Fair. The sounds of folk guitar music drifted his way and maybe the faint odor of Sinsemilla too. He smiled and started to turn when the door to the cafe opened and a hardcore punk woman shoved past him on her way out to a nice Harley. ...Their eyes met briefly and then he entered the cafe.

The two music agents were just rising to leave, so Aire paused near the counter and casually perused a local newspaper.

The paper carried the headline: ***"Refugees to Deluge North Coast!"***

Aire could just make out Sage's voice above the murmur of the Cafe's other customers. She was saying: "Sure. All right, fine. You check on them. We can't promise much up front, but there's a good chance we can compensate any bands that commit ahead of time." Sage finished talking and shook hands with the two men as did Willow who didn't look all too happy.

Aire passed around the other side of the cafe and sat down next to Willow giving them both a wink and his usual big smile. Willow snickered and looked away from him staring down into his empty cup. Aire glanced around the restaurant once and nodded his head slightly to a group of Forest Defenders who sat a few tables away.

Sage pushed her cup toward Willow: "Have some of mine. It doesn't matter, Silly..."

Willow ignored her, but he did take the offered cup and finished it. Sage frowned at Aire slightly and was about to retort Willow's attitude when Aire said, "So, come on and tell me what's bothering you all and then we better get on up to the crash pad. We can make some calls if the phones are working."

Aire got some more hot water into Willow's cup and tried to coax a little tea out of the used bag.

Sage answered first: "It's the usual, money up front or maybes. But I got a good feeling, cause those guys are nervous. I've heard lots of bands are packing it up, ditching these middle men and just heading to where their people are: in the Free States."

"We're gonna have to go south to the city," added Willow.

"Something is going on, and we better tap into it fast."

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Looking around and lowering his voice he asked:

"Have you heard from Cassandra?"

Aire just shook his head a little and stirred the tea. He passed two quarters to Sage

saying softly: "Safe two, South." She thought it over for a moment while trying to get Willow to look her way. Then with a nod of her head, she got up and went to the bathroom. The phones were working and she thanked the Goddess. Messages left, she used the bathroom and came back as they were getting ready to leave.

They piled in the van, reorganizing the boxes of produce that they were transporting. Aire rolled down the window and removed a thin red ribbon from the radio antennae. He saw Willow looking at him as he started up the van. Opening his car door Aire leaned way over and pulled a small black box from under the bottom of the van. He tossed it to Willow and pulled out on the highway.

The message read:

"Full ship 695 Central. Moon 9, You all want to Rave! Cool and last call. So love if naught. Token Ztak, code moon 13- Cas sand Ra"

Willow said, "Well, we've heard now I guess. I knew we'd be going there."

He handed the note to Sage who was pulling out the codebook for that month.

"I'll have it in a minute" she assured them as she flipped through the pages.

"**BEEP... BEEEP...beep**," sounded from inside Sage's pocket.

She dropped the book to pull the pager out of her pocket and said, "Oh, shit... we'll have to skip the pad and head straight south. There's a Code 1 north of town and we just got a purple for the backup safe house. Get us out of here."

"Let's go for it." Aire stated and a pretend wicked smile lit up his face as he gunned the old Dodge down the nearly empty freeway... empty going south anyways. Sage and Willow moved things around in the van trying to get a bit more comfort as they settled in for a long drive and a few other dangerous possibilities.

Straight south at seventy miles an hour, Sage wondered at all of the northbound cars as they zipped past the long lines of steel and glass, plastic and people.

"North away from the city... Where are they all going and why?"

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Miles and miles of slow moving vehicles many with lots of stuff piled up on top of them. Then she saw that many of the cars were actually off to the side of the road and broken down or simply abandoned. She pondered whether this might be her last trip down south and what it would be like now in the city... the city where she had grown up not so long ago.

The Veil Parted... Dreams Becoming

An Arch-Mage hovered, eyes speaking: "The tree is a symbol of life and growth.

The state of the tree gives a clue; Where your direction will test your luck."

Winds of change and wild, unsettled feelings.

"Water is the symbol of creativity, of birth. Fire is... Power... Brave Spirit... paid for.

Go, test your fire: Spirit honors sacred, life -sustaining acts.

Yours is the magic of good, a selfless compassion.

May you triumph where so many have failed and perished:

You are the Chosen..." **Thraldyn speaks to Aire: The Year of Revealing.**

Up and down the coast they traveled on a last minute tour to drum up support for the elections. Brione was starting to enjoy the traveling and even the hours she spent singing to the growing crowds. The tour group didn't know exactly what to make of all the enthusiasm that they encountered. It was getting harder to judge objectively what most people really felt. People wanted something beautiful to believe in. Everyone seemed positive and ready for change up on the North Coast, but to Brione it still seemed like a fairy tale and impossible that they could keep the momentum rolling. "When will something go wrong? When will the euphoria wear off?" she thought as she felt something pointed poking into her backbone.

Angela tried to hand her the phone, but could only jab it in Brione's direction.

Brione took the phone giving Angela's tears a worried look as she answered: "Hello?"

Her friend's blurry, red eyes stared at her and they were both practically holding their breath.

"Hey, Brione, how are you doing? Everyone's talking about you. Your voice is magical and the whole scene is so incredible... Only three weeks till the elections..."

Brione watched as Angela wiped her eyes on her red cotton shirt.

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"D Fly, 'Big deal,' or what? You're going to be the Mayor. Did you call to tell me the latest gossip or, well, this is a secure line. I'm not supposed to use it for very long at a time."

"I love you Brione... the three of us were together for so long..."

Brione interrupted: "The three of us...what?"

"He's dead, Amnesia's dead." The phone said to her.

"Don't tell me that, how do you...."

"I found him this morning down below Hi-way 36. His motorcycle was totaled and there was orange paint on it. I'm calling to warn you. Others are missing too. Be careful... Bri, I have to go... see you.... when I can... bye.

"D-Fly!"

"Bye Bri, tell Angela I love her and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"D-Fly..." And she just stood there, the electronic "blip, blip" sounding for no one...

Shocked, sadness building, and a little anger beginning to boil in that one spot. She dropped the phone on her jacket and fell to her knees, holding Angela. They cried hard, digging their fingernails into each other as they held on, till it hurt. Their sobbing and anguish echoed off the tall trees around them: The Silent Witnesses.

Teardrops fell. Moldy leaves composted there beneath their knees. Bugs and worms worked their magic. A large bird dropping fell next to Angela's palm. The two women forest defenders sat in the leaves holding each other. Both of them were so drained that they could barely stand up.

Angela helped Brione up with a pull on her arm. And they looked at each other as they took a few deep breaths.

Brione could just barely control her rage, and she laughed menacingly,

"They'll be sorry for this one... they'll be sorry..."

And she clenched her fists holding back hasty wishes for now.

"...Remember the little waterfall, the pure water."

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And her thoughts went back and forth. First Anaya and now her father or some guy on the radio, "I'll tell you one thing I know, all that shimmers in this world will surely fade."

Going south, Aire and Sage handed out info-flyers about the vote and the Music Festivals. Willow usually kept watch at the van while his friends circulated information and talked to people. Chaos was spreading, but unevenly. Some areas still had bargain gasoline at four dollars a gallon. Other places looked nearly abandoned, broken windows and burned out stores. Smells that weren't familiar, but much more common each day.

Sage shrugged off her expectations with a glum smirch of her lips as they pulled into the city. She guessed that it should be no real surprise to see life slower here now too. "The Edge is definitely off the rush-hour, shopping-crazed mania that was so common a few years earlier." The wealthy were still around, but unemployment grew daily despite massive Public Works programs. Long lines of hollow-eyed faces waited for food handouts or the chance to work. Police and National Guard were evident, though their full force was yet to be deployed.

Sage turned the van into the narrow alley. A large metal door rolled open and a man motioned anxiously, waving them into the dark warehouse. They just squeezed the vehicle in as the door shut behind them.

Raindrops pounded on windows that were now painted black or covered with plywood. A dim light shone toward one end of the huge space where a small door stood slightly open. Everywhere else, it was dark.

Two figures approached the van as Aire and Sage got out. Sage, her mass of dreadlocks tied back with a scrap of scarf, came around to the front of the van where Aire waited for the two who approached. She gave him a "what's up look." But she was solid, dead serious, "good ole"-by the book - Sage. She wasn't cocky, it's just there's a certain confidence that comes knowing that you're a seasoned martial arts expert with a friend in the van waiting to blow it up, along with the codes, and the Feds, or anyone else trying to ambush them.

Aire turned the flashlight on and off and then aimed the light directly at the two men. In his deepest voice he let out a, "Yo, K2 Donut hunt."

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Then he looked closely at them: worn, black leather pants and jackets covered in chromed buttons. The two stopped, chains rattling and jingling against their leather. The tallest one, with dark skin shining back at them, held a sawed off shotgun aimed at their feet. His head was shaved in patches with long black dreads hanging down here and there. A pair of dark unreadable eyes went from Aire to Sage and back as the white gleam of teeth appeared in his widening smile.

The biggest eyes that Sage had ever seen widened further with a sense of recognition, though she was sure that much still remained hidden there too. A slight New York-Jamaican accent greeted them: "Aire, Damn! Mother! It's good to see you, Bro!"

Tossing the shot gun, safety back on, to his smaller friend, he grabbed Aire's arm and they head-butted a few times before Aire jabbed him in the ribs hard and then dodged away from the black man's spin kick feint.

Sage and the other Punk backed up a pace watching each other carefully while their two friends played at wrestling by flashlight. Aire grunted as he barely escaped a head lock. "For a big, dumb black dude, you think pretty good on your feet. Dr. Dee, you gonna need the doctor when I'm done with your punk ass, illegal alien, chicken shit excuse for a..." and he couldn't finish as he rolled under another well-executed lunge.

Circling around Aire, Dee switched to an arm-swaying Capoeira rhythm. Picking up the speed, he replied: "I always told you, you got more rhythm and style than any honky-tonky, Jersey-Gringo-Space Cadet, I ever met.... but street fighting well that's..." And he caught Aire's legs with his and swung him down hard.

He brought his face close, announcing: "That's, Match Point, set, out dude!"

They rolled over laughing as Sage gave them a long "Shhhh!"

"Hi, I'm Spook," said a skinny kid with long stringy hair and scarification marks running diagonally across his cheeks. He reached out his hand to shake Sage's, but her frown barely reminded him in time and he added, "Oh, yeah... Welcome - CD 911 - Denali."

Sage smiled and shook his hand. She followed him towards the open door, only slightly impressed that he had remembered to finish the coded greeting for them.

"Always watch the details," Hazel always says.

Aire and Dr. Dee got up and lumbered after them, arm in arm, still poking and testing.

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Willow lay back in the van, considered the Walkman and the I-Pod, but canceled that desire remembering Sage's Rules!

"Well at least I can stand down a little and just relax here. Maybe there is a Rave."

When they all got to the kitchen Dee pushed a chair their way and opened the fridge, to

pull out a couple of cold home-brews.

"So, what are you damned revolutionaries doing now up north? The stories are so wild. Either you've joined with the militias and taken over everything or else you're surrounded and about to be wiped out. The moderates down here are certain you've gone too far and they only hope the government crackdown doesn't sweep them up too. They're all worried that you all will cost them the elections, but that's how they always are. We'll win the elections easy, but that won't mean a piece of cop shit when a million refugees arrive from down south along with the long arm of Martial Law."

Aire took a few sips of the beer and wondered where to start:

"Well... Brione is touring the region and crowds are going nuts. People get the feeling like they have to tell the truth - to open to honesty - when they see her and hear her voice changing the vibrations - freeing them to act - to overcome fear.

They speak up and we're collecting lots of info and spreading loads of love and hope. Hope for what, I'm not sure what we're expecting."

Dr. Dee nodded saying: "We've heard all about Brione... It's almost like a panic. She's radiant and folks are drawn to her... for whatever reason people are going north - for the Festivals and to stay. Organized groups, some Ranger Elfs probably, and all kinds of well-prepared Survivalists are leaving now."

"What about the elections?" asked Aire.

"They'll vote by mail and if things work out they'll come back... maybe. You wouldn't believe all the people on the road, taking back-ways, riding the rails, hiking over the mountains pushing bicycles. The New Gypsies, and organized runaway kid gangs, and the Rainbow Family announced a call for regional gatherings... gatherings forever, this time. All kinds of rumors and counter rumors: Julia Butterfly sightings and everything you can imagine."

Aire seemed to realize, of a sudden, the real magnitude.

He said:

"Wow! Phase I of Ranger Elf is about to happen..." A pause as he swallowed again.

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"I think by election time there'll be uprisings and total collapse in SoCal."

Spook checked the sediments in the bottom of the last bottle as he passed it around and then he said: "The earthquake was the last straw. It's happening fast."

Aire was thinking deeply: "More time, I wish we had a little more time. But..."

Said Sage:

"We had plenty of time... It's not our fault..."

Dr. Dee leaned forward his hands folded as if he were praying and said:

"It's going to go beyond our hands soon. Spontaneous groups are doing actions.

The Bay Bridge was totally demolished. Big time... three days ago."

"The secret plan may help a different way. I see..." Sage let this slip before she realized it - a rare slip up for her. Pictures of new possibilities and problems went through her thoughts and she made a mental note of some information that needed to be shared, privately and soon.

"Sage, Spook, let's go check it out. Do the Rave."

Dr. Dee motioned for them...

Aire looked at Sage.

She said: "Sure... Willow too I guess."

And she wished that Aire and everyone would stop dumping on her for always being a stickler... for knowing when rules are needed... "Well they are needed most of the time. But not all of the time..."

"Its beginning," Spook said to Sage and to the skyscrapers, as he held her hand, jumping over some road repairs, almost to the place.

"Nowhere to run... Nowhere to hide."

Sage laughed as she sang and jumped pretty high, clicking her boot heels hard.

He caught the flash in her eye and let out a "Yeah..." that said it all...

Soon they were Ravin'...and Jammin. Very late... and never a word about rules...Not when the music and the jams rule... and life looks very short... forever not so far away.

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How can I tell you what it is to be a Forest Defender in the woods, on the run. To be the sound of the crickets, to fly like the wind, alive in Nature ? Seek out wisdom in simple stones and fragile herbs, and in the cries of wild birds. Listen to the whisperings of the wind and the roar of water...if you would discover Magic.

For it is here that the old secrets are forever preserved ... Awaiting... wise use.

All The Way Out There (Em D Em)

May the shoes that you walk in be weathered and worn

Em C D

Shoes that you walk in be strong

Em D Em

May your feet take you far as you walk on your journey

Em C D

All the way out there and all the way home

All the way out there and all the way home

May the seas that you travel be filled with wonder

winds' constant breath fill your boat's heavy sail.

May you always remember the land that you come from

all the way out there and all the way home.

May you walk with the fathers, the mothers and daughters

Walk with all of yer sons.

Walk with the power of elders behind you

and the generations to come

and the generations to come.

Yes'n all the way out there and all the way home

Always... com...ing home

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"We'll never fit all those in the VW," Hazel said, looking at the large wooden boxes on the storage room floor. Dingo looked up from putting a lid back on a case of rifles and said, "It's only these two boxes and those three smaller ones, marked Ammo. The rest is 'Engineering' supplies for Rangers headed north."

Angela helped Hazel load the first box and then they managed to get the rest situated with dirty clothes and kids' toys sprinkled over the top to make it look less conspicuous.

Over the mountains, not so far as the Crow flies, a large, double rotor Chinook helicopter landed. A former logging chopper but now it had been donated to the militia and their friends. The owners didn't need it much anymore what with the logging moratoriums and their own mills having been burned to the ground a few months earlier. So, it was kept busy hauling people and weapons rather than the huge oldgrowth trees it was used to.

Dust blew into the eyes of the ground crew as well as the cammo-clad soldiers who ran to open the bay doors of the craft. A tall man with a silver 'H' on his cap, saluted back and shook hands with the pilot. "Glad to see you Craig. Looks like a good load," said Jarred. Craig still hadn't looked him in the eye. Jarred suppressed a groan and waited expecting another voice to silently warn him again. He said to Craig "When's the next..." He paused again seeing the pilot's eyes squinting a bit.

"The next shipment?" he finished, definitely sensing something wrong now.

Craig could not bring himself to look Jarred straight in the eye, but he said coolly, as if he had a lot on his mind: "This might be it Jarred. At least as far as I know."

Jarred saw it then – the beginning of the end for his hopes and a hint of betrayal that he couldn't dismiss anymore. With a deep furrow on his brow he asked: "What about Bravo II? Their ordinance - the heavy stuff - was supposed to come soon, before..."

Craig said, "They're not coming... things change... orders ...contingencies."

And he looked into the bay and said to the soldiers hauling out a box:

"That's all, leave the rest."

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He turned to Jarred and stuck out his hand saying:

"That's it, gotta go."

Jarred looked inside at the four boxes toward the back. Skull and crossbones were stamped in black and the name Redwing was marked in red along their sides.

He stood there firm, refusing to shake the hand offered him.

Craig removed his cap and looked at the ground as he wiped the sweat and dust off his neck with a red-white-and blue bandanna. He stepped closer to Jarred when he saw no one was near.

Leaning closer yet, he whispered:

"Watch the Eagle... Feds."

Jarred tried to grab his arm as he turned away, but the pilot shook him off and climbed aboard. "Not a good sign," Jarred thought as he stood watching through the dust swirl.

The huge chopper pulled away from them. It turned and headed east.

The logging moratorium and the cease-fire seemed to be holding. New groups of people arrived daily. Some were well organized and had connections, land or at least their equipment. Others needed help getting plugged in. The healers worked hard keeping folks out of sight. Election jitters were building and they held wish circles in all the camps, praying that everyone would be calm, no incidents.

Forest Defenders kept to the woods and avoided confrontations. Many joined stream restoration projects organized mostly by elderly folks. Some believed these projects would eventually create jobs, food, and tourism. Idealism was high, and the 'realists' kept quiet for now. Funding for restoration projects came from donations, grants, and some local government money too. In a few regions money came from the Resistance Gas-Tax. Many groups had demanded the gas tax as a condition of the cease-fire, but few gas stations complied... at least not willingly.

Ranger Defense was not always a clear part of the Eco-Social Defense program (ESD). ESD counted on large numbers of people moving up permanently to vote, homestead, build communes and do mass direct action.

Ranger ELF sought to assure that the federal and state governments restrained themselves from major intervention in County affairs. Some letters to officials threatened to unleash Phase I if any assassinations or troop movements were discovered. Just before the cease-fire, a demonstration was held. Eco-commandos and apparently some militia units as well, demolished a large number of very expensive

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electric transmission lines and substations. Most of this was done in the greater Northwest region, but enough attacks were done near cities across the country, that no one doubted their strength or resolve.

The Ranger-Elf deterrent was so successful that many Forest Defenders wondered how it could have been done years earlier. The expense of repairs and security plus the effect on the stock market would have left the government little choice but to accept reasonable demands.

By election time, Phase II of Ranger Elf would be ready and publicized. Following a Phase I attack on utilities and infrastructure Rangers would fall back to safe houses in a second city. If government attacks continued, or Ranger communiqués were not

published in newspapers, then a series of new targets would be engaged, thus Phase II. Dozens of competent teams were in place and more equipment was being acquired. Ganja farmers and several rich Liberals hedging their bets, in case their condos and mansions burned, donated millions. L.A. Gangs started making more money dealing guns than on drugs.

Phase I was about to commence. Hope remained for zero deaths, but reality would no doubt mean casualties on all sides. Theory and 'the real world' rarely coincide easily. ESD and Ranger ELF were great ideas. At least the Forest Defenders were prepared and following some kind of plan. But timing makes a difference, and this - the Fall of Babylon - was going to do things, and teach lessons according to its own organic Nature. The Resistance and most people were just along for the ride, but it helped knowing what to look out for.

The whole country falling apart just before a major election, made it seem that Phase II might be irrelevant. With freelancers and the militia joining in the fun, it looked like a new national fad had matured into a new way of life. 'Composting technology,' especially expensive, corporate gizmos, evolved into the tension releaser of the Millennium. In the end this saved many lives. Things work out funny sometimes. Or where does humor fit in?

Good intentions that are spread too wide can hurt and be twisted. You'll trick yourself into thinking you've solved a problem or are even remotely aware of a situation, when reality comes a sneaking up on you. Gliding the edge around your foolish sense of understanding. And... slapping you hard with your own hand.

"Who can find the **Shadows**, when the sun feels so good!"

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Sage felt a little weak and slightly burned out - that tweaky no sleep space, and rhythms still throbbing. Still, she was glad for the diversion. She looked around the room again and liked the blood pumping through her body. "Dancing always loosens up the body and mind, it's as close to meditation as I get in these crazy times lately. Where the hell is everyone?"

Aire and Dr. Dee pushed through a doorway right as she spotted them. She gave them that impatient look she had down perfect.

"Let's go," she said, pointing at her wrist, unsure whether they would hear her much after all the noisy music ... and it blasting for hours.

When Aire got closer, giving her a hug, she said softly, "It'll be light soon."

Sage looked around again at the big room. Willow came jogging up to her shaking his head.

Dr. Dee asked "Seen Spook?"

Sage shook her head sideways and Willow said, "No, I looked everywhere."

Dr. Dee looked surprised and suddenly much more serious. But all he said was, "Tha's creepy, I had a funny feeling... Maybe..."

Sage grabbed Aire's arm, saying gently but with gravity weighing on her face, "Come on. Now!"

They made it back to the warehouse with darkness still lingering in the fog. Wasting no time, they soon had most of the cargo on board. As they brought over the last load Sage went down the list : "twelve, thousand-dollar sniper rifles; twenty full-auto Belgian assault guns; ten thousand rounds of ammo; twenty fancy scopes; night vision gear; and five-hundred pounds of Semtec plastic explosive. There's a lot more than I thought ... wow, what are those?"

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Dr. Dee looked up at her with a pleasantly devilish smile and tapped on the case he was

sliding into the van, "Stingers, surface- to- air, fully operational. I'd use them soon. This is probably all you'll be getting, at least from the city. If you hit a jet or two now, that might keep them away for a long time."

They closed the door to the van and started to climb in. Sage reached for the money pouch and then looked at Aire. Details were rushing at her and she didn't even stop to think about the sense of foreboding - a **shadow** she knew was there.

"Get in back. You dweeb! Can't you remember anything? Willow's the straight looking one, and put that funeral parlor emblem on the side of the van first.

Move!" She yelled as Willow fired up the motor.

Barely pausing for breath she leaned out the window to Dr. Dee,

"Here's all we've got."

He was smiling shaking his head as he motioned to the guard by the door.

"It's just shy of twenty thousand. We'll make up the difference..."

Dee put his hand over Sage's, saying, "This one's on me, get out of here..."

The door rolled open and Willow put the van in gear.

Dee stood there as they pulled out. Sage thought she heard him say,

"Good luck you crazy kids... think of us down here... headlines."

They pulled out of the alley, turning the lights on as they hit the main streets.

Sage crawled in back, after handing Willow his official looking cap.

Police cars screamed by and a military chopper passed overhead.

Willow noticed a man on the corner in a leather jacket looking him over when the explosions shook the air.

Sage wished it wasn't what she thought and the van kept rolling along.

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I'm not trying to generalize, but everyone seemed to be "Sideveshk." An Elvish saying that kind of means "dreamy-trapped." I guess the change that was coming was so big, that inside, most people felt it would be unbelievably horrible and violent. Like a giant evil tidalwave of every nightmare - the **Great Shadow**.

And perceiving only ultimate evil, they had to come up with miraculous and opposite solutions: salvation, heaven, Rainbow-Love, sudden global enlightenment. Practically, everyone was like that. Most Rainbow Family people actually had a better grasp of the limits and the hard learning period that a new world's rising would inevitably require. During the chaos times, some tuned -in people learned pretty quickly the world is gray - never black and white, except maybe in death or climax. You do need to be sure which direction you are working toward: the light or dark. All you have to work with is the gray stuff, though you may have to borrow from the black if you have no options. Beware those who only see or want the light: they are the greatest danger. Blinded... easily deceived since they can't tell a shadow from a spirit.

All of life is connected; air, water, trees, animals, people, everything.

We are a web with each strand important. When one is hurt, the strength of the web begins to fade. Love and respect is the key. It is not "our" Earth to possess; it is "us" Earth to protect. ~ One Earth, One Family, One Body, One Life, One Love ~ In defense, respect, and love for all life : Julia Butterfly, 1998.

When I preach to the choir, I may inspire and that's magnificent ... But that's not the complete picture. ... Those other people's mentality has to be transformed, before we're going to see an end to clearcuts and mudslides, before we see an end to the oppression and destruction of Third World countries because of our greed. The only way we're going to see that change is by transforming the people who have forgotten how to feel. ... [some people] feel more for their cars than they do for Earth. We don't need cars; we need the Earth: clean air, water, and land, for every species on this planet ... we don't need cars, fancy houses, jet planes or any of that.

We are destroying what we need because of the things that we want... We want things... and deny the pollution ...it comes from the disease of people forgetting the feeling and understanding that we are connected to everything else....the degradation, destruction and lack of respect practiced by this society.

We will destroy ourselves trying to conquer the Earth. People understand this deep in themselves, but they feel so

powerless to change ... It hurts and to feel the connection means to bring up pain. What others are doing to the Earth ... to the forest, they are doing to you. Life was not created with politics. Life was not created with private property boundaries; it was not created with separation.

We have to take away this government. There is no evolving this government into something good because it is inherently bad. Life was created where people understood love and they did not do something to hurt their body, their body being Earth, and each other ... to stop this cycle of destruction and reverse it, we need a complete revolution. When people revolve... go in a circle... they are going to revolve back to where we started from [elegantly primitive, basic needs agrarian society] before we allowed ourselves to be led in the wrong direction.

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El Nino is Earth having to speak up a bit ... some people still don't wake up, so then the Earth's gotta take a 2x4 upside your head and that's what it's taking. It's getting louder, louder, and it's starting to hit more people upside the head. Our society is going to have to collapse, otherwise we are still hoping to build it up. It's going to have to collapse. That is what we need, and yes, it's going to bring about some horrifying realities.

I totally stand behind the concept of the first step being: no more roads. Not one more road anywhere. We can't revolutionize people's consciousness all at once, because they have not all had the 2x4 upside their head ...yet. It's a beautiful way to live, being free ... without a car. Stop building 'death-sentence' roads into roadless areas; stop killing the trees, which are our lungs ... if we can all connect into the universal love of the universe, then anything is possible. ... I love garli.c

-- **Julia Butterfly, Tree-top interview, 1999. (Day 420)**

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CHAPTER FOUR: A CHALLENGE OF SHADOWS

From Forests dark with ancient boughs

From mountains tall and stony,

From the wind whispering gustily,
through ridge-top sentinels.

We draw together strands of Elven-majic,

Flowing from the Eald - the ELF Wilds.

Centered in love and Earth,

We wield this magic in her defense.

(Chanting)

Fire growing, sun is glowing

Fire growing, sun is glowing

Glowing, flowing, down on me... Welcome Sunrise

"The only big question mark is the Militia," mused Angela, who knew Hazel was in no good mood this morning.

"Do we have to talk about that? Let's wait until we hear more from their Command. So far, it's just a few contacts with lower echelon officers," Hazel said as they swerved a bit, avoiding one of the many new -sprung potholes - artwork for a world that needed reminders – it seemed.

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Angela took Hazel and the road into consideration and decided to concentrate on safe driving and keeping an eye out for those unmarked cars.

Angela enjoyed the drive and hummed a tune as she remembered the first time she was in the region. The wild country inland was spectacular, and Redwing wasn't so bad. At least not a few years ago before everyone there went Militia and thousands came from all over the West. She hoped their zone of control was not too great and wished somehow that the land had not been abused.

Hazel rested her head on her arm and thanked Earth that Angela quit talking about the rendezvous with the militia. She knew that they didn't really need Militia support. But neutrality, separation... yes. That was crucial.

The rusting old VW purred along with its new mechanics, past farms and restoration crews. Hazel watched the country-side going by, feeling a little lonely just then.

Thoughts came of Kith gone for the Goddess knew how long and far away with Miya in

Denver.

She wiggled over and tried to get more comfortable, but her knife got in the way. She pushed it back some and remembered Anaya's words to her: "You will kill a man." She knew violence was happening all over the place and her definition of self defense was widening considerably. Still, to actually do it herself... the victim would have to cooperate. She started chewing on her lip again, thinking about doing it, and stopped, seeing her reflection in the window. A sudden hard bump brought her out of her daydreams, as Angela cursed the road again. The boxes bounced and shifted a few inches.

It's fortunate that Hazel could rest, not knowing that Brione held word of dark treachery and danger. Militia members from Western outposts attended music festivals where Brione and other Forest Defenders played and sang. Brione's voice and the magic gift from Anaya compelled some of them to come forward to tell their stories. And talk they did, with fear in their eyes and their bodies shaking. Tales and rumors of dissent within the officer corps of the militia. Some wishing to join the Forest Defenders in a loose alliance, others wishing no good. Several said they thought the old generals, the hard-line Christian fanatics, would soon assassinate our leaders and brutalize Forest People base camps.

Brione feared the worst and knew Hazel would be very disturbed. No one had heard a response to the Forest Defender's request for Council with Militia Command. Red alert messages went out to forest people living near militia outposts. Tension was building; so

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many things could go wrong. Brione checked out the window again, hoping to see the VW van pulling up.

"Are any of us safe?" she wondered aloud... She closed her eyes and wished as hard as she could that leaders of the militia would love their neighbors and do no harm unless they were attacked.

The dinner dishes done, she put the kettle on. Then she changed her mind and added more water, hoping her friends would show up soon.

"I should save them this last granola cookie, but I's always hungry when I'm nervous." She said this while still looking out the window into the darkness... Or maybe it's the winter coming, she thought. My body is craving, like it's storing up for something...

Tall, well built, a friendly face, but one that knew hurt. Square cut jaw, handsome overall in an unassuming way, true kindness showing through most times. Jarred Smith was confident, but meticulously humble and helpful. This leader usually wore a casual camaraderie - that spoke of equality - except when giving orders or under fire.

He looked older than his thirty years. Not an easy life, with all the lumber mill closings and foreign competition driving down wages.

He believed the American Dream when he joined the Militia. Now, with all the chaos in the world about to lash out at everyone... He wasn't sure what he believed anymore.

He gave a stiffer tug and pushed his heel down into his newly issued hiking boots. A strange feeling lingered, more cobwebs, but something sweet and pure in the voice, as if he was waking up and someone asked him: "What will you do?"

...Can you love your neighbors?"

"I just want security for my family and friends." The words just came out.

Then he shook his head wondering why he was speaking out loud to himself.

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Prosperity and possessions meant nothing anymore. He couldn't stop thinking about General Swanson. How can people rant and rave about restoring the old days - the old ways - ways they would define for everyone else no doubt. Power. Power to control

others, to control Nature and at what a cost!

Just then came a knock and the door opened. Sasha stuck his young face around the door and said quietly, "I hope I'm not a bother, are you ready to head down to camp?" Jarred looked up at his fifteen-year old roommate: A tall boy, with soft features and those almost ghostly, deep-set eyes. He loved the boy's always-upbeat attitude. It was hard to think of Sasha as any sort of bother.

Sasha Shevchenko, the son of his dead Mother's closest friend. The two women - a peasant and a 'disappeared' General's wife - had fled the chaos of the 1990s in Eastern Europe. Together towing along a baby and a sixteen-year-old Jarred, the Gods only knew what wishes had managed the four of them this far and gained them some measure of security.

They were on their own now since both women had disappeared mysteriously in some kind of explosion or meteor impact that eerie night last year on Shasha's fifteenth birthday. And since then they had done alright one supposed. Considering how busy they were, and absolutely, no certain idea about children or teenagers. So far it all seemed too easy. Sasha was bright, cheerful, quieter and less moody than the other young men he saw. Polite to perfection, and their bonds of loyalty went deeper than Jarred had seen in his life of broken alliances and shifty characters. Their bonds were beyond even his imagination, but of course he couldn't really know this yet.

He wasn't used to paying attention to his feelings. They had always caused pain. A heart is a risky thing in war.

"Sasha what should I do?" Jarred asked. Hiding not a thing and knowing that the response would be straight forward if blunt, nearly bordering on naiveté. Jarred rarely ignored his young friends advice, though figuring out what to do with it, that was the trick.

Sasha responded eagerly, gray-green eyes bright and clear as if he never once doubted anything in his young life.

"About the younger men who want peace?"

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Well I know you're tired of dogmas ...and a compromise with Forest People is OK. So... You are going to speak your mind tonight at the military security briefing. Right?"

Sasha looked at him closely for the first time. This man was the only shot – the only chance in Hell – that anyone in the Network or the North Coast had to survive the coming collapse of the government with honor. Jarred was also about the only chance that Sasha had of family or someone he could trust who was over 17 years of age.

Jarred looked like he didn't sleep so well last night. Like life, the General and all the petty problems in Haymarket were taking a toll. Sasha wanted so badly, to tell him more: To get all of it off his chest, and his conscience. Complications lead to doubts if you let them, his Mom used to say.

Jarred stood up to leave. He reached out to Sasha and held him by the shoulder saying: "Listen to me Sasha. Either way we will be putting everyone at risk. After the meeting tonight, we have to be careful. Anything could happen. You hear me? Keep alert and if we get split up, you go back to the farm and find Dave and Will.

No arguments. Please, Sasha, I can't stand thinking something will happen to you."

Sasha looked into Jarred's eyes seeing the fatherly love he had known only from this stranger's heart and remembering all the things Jarred had done for him since Sasha's mother died. He never knew his real father. His Mom said that he had loved them dearly, but his father had got himself in the way of trouble once too often... long ago, before Sasha was even born. The only man that Sasha had ever respected was Jarred, though he knew the 'deference and phony respect' game well enough to get along and even get even with some of the worst scoundrels. The boy learned fast and made

connections that few adults are very accomplished at.

"Don't worry about me," said Sasha, "Just be sure what you want, and don't lose your resolve. You always tell me 'stick to your guns boy' and 'don't back down from a bully'. Come on we'll be late," and Sasha was pulling him out the door and down the trail.

Walking down the steep trail Jarred thought about the forest creature - part Elf, part tree - that worried his dreams lately. The words in the dream were like Sasha's words:

"Your strength shall be tested... stand for what you believe in or else." He shrugged, wondering if some madness was coming over him.

Visions ...of his friends and young Forest People dead in a snowy forest flitted through his mind as he tried to think through what he would say tonight.

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Bodies in the snow, a horse and two riders, danger surely.

Sasha saw the young boy crossing the hill toward them.

"Hi Trevor," Sasha called quietly.

Both of their hands were moving, designing messages.

Trevor nodded his head to Jarred and whispered in Sasha's ear, and then he was off and running, wildly down the steepest part of the trail.

"Your own network, eh Sasha?" said Jarred.

Sasha lowered his voice to a whisper as they turned the corner by the Field Headquarters' tent. "Code 1. Everything's normal, Trevor says.

The young officers are all coming."

As the meeting hall came into sight, Jarred's spirits rose. He saw several of his friends talking casually and laughing at some new joke. He approached them warmly, saying hellos as more people arrived.

They went inside the tent to the meeting area where Garth Linborn was bragging to the General,

"Ha! They aren't the only ones with spies. Money will..."

Jarred was hoping Garth would keep blabbering, but the General rose as the officer corps entered and greetings went around the room.

In his typical gruff manner General Swanson yelled out:

"Let's begin this meeting with your reports. Outposts first, then urban."

The gruff general looked bored or maybe disgusted with some of them.

Jarred listened as reports were given about activities around the outposts and the mining operations. He paid close attention to any revelations about how people felt, really felt, underneath the veneer of confidence and bluster. He noticed the General's cheek twitch the second time someone mentioned peace and how most people really needed more time for crops and firewood and less for patrolling and such.

Jarred gave the final report:

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"At Haymarket things go well, the population has doubled this year, people are adjusting to the newcomers, but another wave of refugees would overwhelm us. I'd like to hear more intelligence reports from the south, we've heard rumors of food riots in major cities."

The general was waving him to get on with it.

"We're trading a lot with organic farmers in Lorien. Their seeds for our home-brew."

A few smiles spread around the room.

"Life is pleasant. If we work hard and keep the peace, we might make it even with more refugees. God forbid. I have to tell you that there are many different groups and different viewpoints in the Hayfork region, but all of us and many in this room have a common wish.

Yes a wish. For no involvement with the Feds, no violence, and to observe the logging

moratorium, for now at least."

The General was clearly irritated. Garth and Lieutenant Fox fumed, on the verge of yelling.

Jarred finished saying, "Most people accept the lack of electricity, caused by the Eco-commandos, but power won't be reliable much longer anyway. The time has come to talk to the Forest Defenders, see if working with them can further our cause."

The last few words were drowned out as the murmuring turned to an uproar and Fox yelled at Jarred, "You punk traitor are you a pot head or just chicken?"

The General's got a better plan."

The General pulled on Fox's arm as Nat, Jarred's friend from Scott River, stepped forward toward Fox saying, "I respect the forest defenders more than those yuppies in the city. They live simple, some out in the wilds, all close to the land. Some even hunt. They're no threat to us... They'll be busy dealing with refugees that we drive away.

The sick smile on Swanson's weathered face combined with Fox's head shaking: No, No, tricked Nat into saying:

"There's forty-thousand people traveling up the coast for some kind of music festivals. Who cares! What are you afraid of Fox? And you?"

He turned toward Garth who was about to jump at him.

Garth froze just before General Swanson's hand reached his arm. He glared at Jarred who was covering up his trusted combat knife with his jacket.

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Garth spit at Nat who yelled out as his worried friends dragged him away,

"You're just afraid your other daughter will run off with another Forest freak."

Jarred saw the look on Swanson's face... The general knew he would lose here, right now if he pushed too far. But there was also a hint of evil in his face. The evil that drove him to twisted plots, he was even now hatching. Power, and the ability to use it.

Even the best can lose their hearts with too much power. General Swanson and his crowd, they had sold their hearts for nothing, long ago. All they had left were obsessions with the past, and a lust to conquer their fears; Fears that originate in the hate and insecurity at the base of their identity. The Great White, Male God sitting in judgment and granting his chosen manifest destiny to conquer and pillage the worlds of man and animal, plants and rock.

The General hammered the gavel, calling everyone to order.

"I want full reports from everyone on these issues. It's important. Morale and consensus are too important to overlook. We may be going to war whether we like it or not. Jarred was right about one thing: sporadic rioting has occurred in many places. Major train attacks have shut down food shipments to the north. It's getting harder to tell who is on which side."

He looked sharply at Jarred for a moment before his final words,

"We will meet with the Forest Defenders, Jarred. A wise soldier always listens. Information is valuable. This meeting is adjourned."

Later that night, Garth and Fox entered Swanson's cabin. The old general was lighting up a prized cigar, probably reminiscing about the Third Gulf War, and the bombing of Cairo. Ruthless and usually in control, tonight he was unsure and worried. Garth poured himself some Bourbon and checked the doors and windows before he sat down by the General's desk.

Swanson glared out at his two closest companions. Loyal, if a bit dumb and hot tempered at times. They would get the job done this time all right. He addressed them quietly, motioning them to lean closer, no longer trusting secret ears except perhaps in his own compound near Redwing. "Garth you take your squads and take out Nat and as many Scott River people as you can. Lure the Forest Defenders up there and make it

look like they caused it. I'm taking my guard with me we've got a stop to make on the way back to the compound."

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"Oh, and assign someone young, but bright, to keep an eye on that bastard kid of Jarred's. Sasham or whatever he goes by."

No words were necessary; they knew their missions and that the stakes were high.

Red Towers of My Sky,

I've walked alone through these dreams,
Beyond my vision, following me.
Here, when I'm getting ready for action,
I feel them, they comfort me.
Standing tall, bright, beckoning.
Before the Cat Wall, dark and highest.
That dark wall of the Other, the out there.
Beyond, above our human filth.
Is Great Eagle perched on high?
To save us from ourselves...
Children gone to madness,
Tragic, unnecessary.
No, we will have no succor, no aid.
Just our dreams, our wanting.
My door faces Red Towers before the Cat Wall
Shaping by that spectacle
Contrasts of Ego and what ought to be.
Dreams, sunsets forever, and I remember,
Close that eye, un-focus...
Seek the heart of the Towers, the Mountain.
...And a crack grows twixt the everyday lies
and the ought, is, coulds, widening and collapsing,
Until there is no time, ... only all the nows
And my heart is in the eye of the Eagle.
Jump, feel, know the wind.
Tower guides/silent purpose.
"Dream Breathing" about deep dreaming.
Power, old friends, and Dark Allies
who are now controlled - encircled.
Survival is old age... Blood pounding, fear riding,
Careful insanity is living real. Do. Evolve. Act up. - * **The Wanderer of Roble Hollow**

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Wishes of Power

Nothing is more powerful than a wise wish, but this skill has long disappeared except by chance or in a few secret enclaves in Western Russia, Chechnya and in the Alps near the border of Austria and Switzerland. There are two primary ways to craft a wise or powerful wish: youthful innocence wishing with rare sincerity or a very clear, simple and focused wish that avoids other wishes and complications. Most people do not believe in wishes and so it is rare for them to have any wish power. Their doubts and confusion set them to wishing vaguely for less or for more than they want – or have the power to manifest. Wishes start off strong and true among the gifted children, but of course no one notices because they mostly wish for love, for family peace or for food or treats – simple and normal; things they are, but they are also the wishes that keep love and traditions alive. As the Death Culture of the modern world gains power over children's thoughts and wishes, most people wish away their childish beliefs – their attunement with nature and their innocent love. Next they are subconsciously accepting the wishes of others. The trick is to hold on to your innocence and your belief until you can know what you really want and what your powers are. Then you can wish little things (health for someone you love, doubt among those who are bullies) the more specific the better. With confidence from small successes and your path of power cleared up a bit, you can begin to craft your wishes in a pattern that will bring you to the big wish. Once or twice in your life you can wish up something that has real and far-reaching power – even something that may go against the nature of things and change fate. There is some danger in this for it is usually irreversible. These wishes are best saved for desperate times – like we are in now, because at these times the veil between the worlds is thinner and many wishes are voided by circumstance. Big wishes can

attract attention from other wizards, sorcerers and other things of the dark that you would rather not know about... and which you could never face.

With good intentions and coming from a pure heart you need not fear too greatly and you can concentrate on directing the wish with true aim and compassion.

Hazel closed the old wooden gate, when the van pulled past her. She took a breath of the fresh hill air and climbed back in the VW, trying to miss the muddy spot where Angela had parked. "Don't forget to flash the lights twice at the first corner," she reminded her friend.

"Oh, blast, there's the van and the popcorn still popping," Brione thought as she dumped the popcorn into a bowl, hurrying to greet Hazel, her closest friend these last years.

Wiping hands on her dress, she opened the hall door as the Van pulled into the garage.

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Two people got out of the van as a dark figure closed the large door. That's probably Rowan on night security closing the garage door, thought Hazel as she looked up at Brione standing in the doorway, a dim light outlining her friend's slender, tall shape.

She jumped up the stairs and hugged Brione, who said giving nothing away:

"So, you made it, just the two of you?"

Hazel knocked the mud off her boot as they entered the warm house.

"Were you hoping we'd bring a whole tribe of the Mushroom Forest people?"

They both giggled saying, "Wanna party down sis?"

Angela joined them in another round of hugs and teased Hazel:

"I couldn't even find a partner for Hazel here, she's too serious."

Brione laughed as Hazel tried to tickle Angela back. Ducking into the kitchen, Brione grabbed some tea and snacks and they headed to the living room to settle down on some big pillows by the fireplace.

Hazel looked at Brione - a rare true friend during these past four years of craziness. She still looked seventeen, her hair short now and her angular face, so fresh and sweet, except when emotions flickered uncontrolled across her features. Years of dangers and being a family together, a warrior tribe. Now so much rested on Brione's shoulders, or her voice actually. She must be tired from the weeks of travel and performing.

Brione looked back into Hazel's eyes feeling the love and attractions, but there was plainly worry there too. Hazel always worries, she thought and asked more with her eyes than the words: "Everything quiet on the trip?"

"Of course we're safe. The drive was normal. A few black helicopters in the distance, but no checkpoint on the pass. I think they pulled out of Redwood Peak, since the towers are destroyed."

Hazel knew her friend. There was something she was holding back. She hugged Brione and rubbed her shoulders. Playing along she said:

"Tell me what news you have from the festival goers. Have you seen Aire, or Madrone?"

Brione picked up her guitar: "Shall we play a song first?" she offered, as she avoided the eyes of Hazel... Eyes she knew could spot her secrets easily.

"Tell me everything now. Come on, you're not usually like this. Bri?"

Brione made a face and said,

"Alright, we've heard from the Militia. Whoopee... Buy me a pizza!"

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The meeting is near Redwing, at a place we're familiar with."

Hazel was surprised, "In their stronghold? I still don't think I'm the right person for this. Where's Anaya?"

"No one knows," Brione and Angela both said.

"But you know it has to happen like we felt it, that night." Brione took a deep breath,

"We are the Chosen. We can't deny it, any of it. We have roles to do. I don't want you to go, but I have to believe you can pull it off. ... Think of all the things we've done together, Hazel-Nut!"

Hazel leaned closer to the fire, suddenly feeling events and responsibilities bearing down on them and her. It reminded her of the early days. Feeling foolish and wondering if they were going to get hurt doing some stunt, trying to save a few trees. And arguing about some better way, some way to get people to see how foolish they were and the consequences of action and inaction.

Brione gave Hazel a quick - mostly sisterly - kiss, and said reassuringly:

"Madrone will meet up with us in a few days. By the time we get back, Aire and Sage will be here and we'll all prepare for one crazy victory celebration."

Angela said "I'm ready!" and Hazel just turned her eyes up, not convinced they knew what they were doing, though it had to be done.

Brione started to play the guitar and Angela put another log on the fire. Hazel looked away from the fire and asked, "When do we leave?"

For a moment, Brione pretended like she couldn't figure out the chords to the song. Hazel was about to wish she could sing like Bri and sing the truth out of her, when her friend stopped playing suddenly, and with a wide-eyed, silly look of mock-shock, whispered,

"Tonight, in a few hours, get some rest. I'll pack up some things and get us ready."

Then switching to a Reggae rhythm she sang:

"It's going to be a long trip... Too much trouble in the world... don't you know..."

Wishes were made... vibrations felt.

And **Shadow** spoke to her dreams:

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Dust haze clouded the view. A warm wind blew up from the river valley below. Oak leaves crackled loudly as a heavy boot approached behind her. Something was wrong. Her friends were near, but others. She wanted to turn around and confront whatever it was. He laughed, disdainfully, so sure. She was frozen, too afraid to move. "Run!" He said. "Join the shadows. I'll have your heart for a wish, and then..." The sound was like the wind whooshing and time stretched as she saw the feathers, the shaft, the tip of the arrow. Blood on the snow, a drop on an oak leaf.

Hazel waked with a start and settled back as Brione patted her shoulder.

"I'm O.K.," said Hazel. "Only a dream I think, I thought it was Anaya. But he just laughed."

"Ssh, hush," whispered Brione. "Cover up and rest a bit more."

*Even the Sylvan Elves were blinded by Chaos to the full extent of the web of spells and evil wishes that drained the Earth Magic. Why were the Elves dying as humans slipped off the edge of madness? Spoiled children worshipping their Techno toys, never realizing what was at stake until their own shadows attacked them. * **The Lorien Herstories:***

Year of Refugees

Evil divides and ultimately devours itself: Good unites when egos devour themselves

"Damn it, a roadblock. Shit! Slow down Sasha," yelled Jarred, as he pushed the cell phone numbers frantically.

"Hello, Zebra Dog."

"This is Jarred 4217, Code Red roadblock at ... Kama River.

Speed up the chopper. Out."

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They pulled up to the barricade, stopping as two armed soldiers with unmarked uniforms started to walk toward them.

Jarred leaned out the back window, holding his I.D. and telling the soldier,

"Open the gate there soldier, I'm Jarred Smith, Mayor of Hayfork. I've important Militia business upriver."

Sasha saw the gun barrel poking out of the checkpoint's window as he felt the strong wish flowing through his body and soul. Their driver stepped full on the gas and the car leaped forward as machine-gun fire spit out of several guns aimed at them. The guard in the backseat next to Jarred managed to get his weapon firing into the guardhouse as they smashed into the gate.

Sasha ducked down on the floorboards as an explosion lifted the car sideways, flipping it over the barricade onto another vehicle. Only a little pain, but he felt himself slipping into darkness when Jarred's voice disturbed his drifting consciousness.

"Come on. God. You're covered in blood."

Sasha pulled hard on Jarred's outstretched arm and stood up, tottering a few steps clear of the wreckage. The young man looked scorched, Jarred thought, but a thoroughly unshakable Sasha said clearly, as he checked his bruised body:

"I'm O.K., it's our friend's blood."

Jarred felt strength about Sasha, the boy's words rang like steel against the tense setting. Shots rang in the dirt around them, as Jarred yanked them both toward a barn-like structure. Sasha still felt weak and dizzy, but he cleared his mind and wished them away from there as hard and earnestly as he ever remembered wanting anything. They crashed through the old barn door, as more bullets sent slivers of wood flying around them. Jarred managed to shoot one of the snipers, but they knew they wouldn't last long if many of the soldiers were still alive.

Sasha and Jarred both turned as the clumping sound echoed off the back wall... Sasha took one look at his friend and went to peek through the cracks in the old warped boards.

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Into Jarred's head he wished: "Horses."

A furious motion for Jarred to come quickly.

Jarred grabbed a couple horse lead-ropes as they crawled out the window.

Sasha felt the wish flowing in him again... Not his own either.

Around the horses he could sense something extra that he had only felt in dreams... a pattern to all biodiversity's genetic memory... combined with...

Jarred brought him back sharply with a shove of the horse rope into his chest.

Jarred knew fear as he said: "Take the Pinto, hurry." And he saw Sasha already swinging up onto his horse - not even bothering the halter.

A sound inside told them soldiers were breaking down the other door.

Jarred was on his horse riding through the gate, as Sasha held on tightly, arms resting on the galloping young Pinto's neck. Experienced legs held firm, but not too tight.

Down the trail with more shouts aimed their way too. Along the old road by the river they rode. Several rifles opened up on them from the closest house and Sasha's horse twisted and fell down throwing Sasha off, hard into the dirt. Jarred spun around automatically, on the White Mare and pulled Sasha up behind him.

The boy hung on tightly and wished again for safety - for aid from anywhere.

They could hear a truck gaining on them when Sasha speaking in a strange voice said, "Turn up the next canyon, it's a shortcut to the Scott people."

Jarred looked back at him wondering how he knew that. But now, they could hear a helicopter too and Jarred feared they would soon die.

Near the top of the ridge with the truck still gaining, bullets hit a tree right next to them as a blast shook the trail behind them. The pursuing truck careened down the hillside ablaze with black smoke pluming. Then the helicopter flew over and they could see the bright yellow "H" for Haymarket, on its side.

"Thank the God or whoever. It's about time we had some luck," said Jarred.

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Sasha, clutching Jarred's sides said,

"I thought getting away on the horses was pretty good luck...

Look there's someone down there."

Poking their way down the hillside they could see a young boy - about Sasha's age - who looked seriously injured. Sasha got off the horse as the helicopter passed low overhead. It went on, down below them, to land.

Something was burning there in the clearing...

"Are you all right?" Sasha asked as he helped the boy sit down on an old log.

Jarred handed him some water. The boy stared at Jarred with fear.

Jarred ignored that, and asked "What is it, what happened?"

"It was you or you people the militia. Seven forest defenders and myself came up here... an invitation..." The boy spasmed as pain wracked his body.

"When we got here machine-guns and mortar fire pounded everything around. All my friends are dead and many of your own people.

Why? Are you all crazy?"

The boy blacked out as Jarred held him and Sasha wished him to rest.

When they got down to the helicopter, Jarred's friend Captain Samuel shook their hands, as a medic took charge of the young boy. Samuel looked confused:

"Nearly twenty Scott river folk are dead. Tracks leading east suggest twenty or thirty heavily armed soldiers left a short while ago. Should we pursue them?"

Jarred started to answer, when he felt a shiver as he saw the bodies in the snow, the flesh burning. His vision altered. And he forgot about Samuel and Sasha.

...Blood drops on an oak leaf, a young woman in danger. The sound of cruel laughter.

And then he looked down at Sasha who was holding his arm,

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"Jarred, I saw it too. It's all Garth or Swanson. I can feel it. We've got to hurry."

Deep in an ancient forest grove, water bubbles eternally over mossy rocks, spilling into an emerald pool. Barely visible amid the shadows and shifting patterns of sunlight and vines sits a single figure. She is Anaya, Forest Keeper of Lorien, and responsibilities are bearing down powerfully upon her. Though tranquil in her lotus pose, strain is evident in the lines of her face, the slight crease of her forehead.

Subtle oak-leaf patterns pulsate rhythmically with her breathing. If you could look closely, you would see her body's outline shimmer and fade-out as she finishes exhaling, lingers and begins the next breath. She sees a young boy patting the nose of a brown horse and turning as the horse seeks to nuzzle his armpit. Great evil permeating and guiding around the boy. The bodies bleeding in the snow... Reaching out to him she encounters a disturbance and then a whirling noise cuts her vision off totally.

Anaya's awareness is pulled to a dark room where a young woman, Hazel, sits huddled next to someone in great pain... evil building around there too ... though it remains in the future. Anaya begins to vibrate as she rises, and smoky patterns increase their rotations as they weave outward. Infinitely complex symbols glow, pulling on all things.

Pausing to collect the patterns, she is suddenly struck by a wrongness in all directions.

Things not happening as was their nature to become. Something, she thought, something connected to a very powerful wish. But all blank in that direction.

She was about to travel to Hazel's aid when the beacon signal flared in Eald.

"At last, now time comes together to sort things out."

Though her image remained, wrapped in glowing patterns, Anaya was gone.

Dreams and warning went out. Everyone would have to fend for themselves.

Conscious, Creative, Curious.

Yes! Make-believe is part of revolutionary culture. It's fun. It's useful. Keeps one from burning out too far. It's great during stressful times, like right before an illegal direct action. We invite the Elves to share some time with us ... and we are safe. No one gets hurt or busted. Unless they doubt. Let's not talk of that.

I swear there is magic everywhere: in the sky, the water, your laughter, our song and dance. It's out in the forest as we howl our love and rage to the burning moon. Make believe the future. Use the magic!

Traveling by horse and foot it took Hazel and her companions three days to reach the hills overlooking Redwing and the Sacramento River... Angela had left that morning, off with her missing husband's Canadian Eco Commando unit. They all imagined that Shasta Dam and the irrigation works on the upper Klamath would soon be modern art in the form of blasted concrete rubble, twisted steel and clandestine smiles.

"Oh, Hazel, look Mt. Shasta - and what a view!" Brione exclaimed.

Hazel paused as she cut another piece of nut bread, "Yeah, I wish we could just go off traveling like we used to. Climb up to the snow on Shasta or go skinny dipping in the river."

She heard that forest voice reminding her to be careful what she wished for and how hard. Then she turned to her companions. "Eat some more bread everyone."

Tim and Katia, the representatives from So-Hum, took a few pieces and offered Hazel more goat cheese.

Brione drew her gaze from the distant mountain splendor and began cutting some leather strips for laces. She started to ask Hazel if she could borrow her knife, when she turned and saw her standing, the flint-knife glowing in her shaking hands. Hazel's face was blank, as if all the life were draining out.

Brione forced herself to look away and saw two figures approaching their secret rendezvous position. A hand signal assured her they were friendly.

"Madrone welcome. Who's your friend?"

The young man accompanying Madrone smiled weakly and handed Brione a note.

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As she read, she saw Katia trying to get Hazel to put away her knife.

"Neighbors and future friends, beware treachery. General Swanson's faction may try to kill Forest People leaders. Advise you to cancel Redwing Meeting and come with haste to Haymarket. We are sorry for this and will do all we can to make it up to you... Signed the young officers for Peace."

Just then came the twang of crossbows. The young messenger fell dead, two arrows protruding from his back. Brione yelled, "Get down!" As everyone flattened out, Brione crawled past the messenger and with her oak leaf tattoos, disappeared into the manzanita brush.

Nine men came forward carrying rifles and bows. They were dressed in fatigues, much as the young messenger whose blood seeped into the Earth at their feet. One of the oldest, a mean scar standing out on his cheek, kicked the body over and reached down to rip off a patch from the fallen soldier's sleeve.

"Damned Haymarket traitors," he cursed and spit on the corpse.

"OK, you hippie bitches or is that witches? We're going to search you real good and maybe have a little fun until the helicopter comes. If any of you make a sound, you're dead. Understand?"

The soldiers started searching the four captives and piling up their gear and clothing. When one of the soldiers tried to drag Katia away Tim rose up to intervene and was slammed in the head with a rifle butt and left to die bleeding his life away on the oak leaves.

Hazel was barely searched, her flint knife still on her belt, but she seemed to be in shock. Madrone was struggling with a large shaven-headed soldier. Cries from Katia echoed through the rocks, as a strange fleeting sound arose about them. It sounded like someone humming, and then they all stopped as they heard the words:

Illyearth, Illyearth: Goddess of Fertility, Field, and Earth;

Ellowyn, Ellowyn: Goddess of Prophecy, Magic, Wisdom;

Allystra, Allystra Goddess of freshness, renewal, quickening;

Lorien, Lorien of the wildwood, mountain peaks, and fen:

Come bring your Powers and visions to bear, reflecting truth for those who dare.

Lorien, Allystra, Ellowyn, Illyearth, three times I call Brione through Anaya.

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As Brione rose up from the rock where she crouched, a couple soldiers started to shout at her but then they saw two of their friends jumping off the cliff. Brione started to sing the song again, but there was a sudden blasting noise as two large helicopters popped over the ridge to the South and hovered over them.

For the Sin of inaction, when action is called for, is greater than the Sin of wrong action. Motives and intent are primary. Ponder not over-long as opportunity passes by. Act with wisdom in 'times of need' decisive with passion. Believe in your actions, don't exaggerate your doubts. Judging will come, history is looking back. - Brione and Hazel, hearing Sasha (remembering)

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CHAPTER FIVE: A TEST OF WILLS

Stop Wondering if there are Gods

Worship and serve the good in humans (kindness, creativity, love) and do honor to the good in Nature (food, beauty, sustainability, diversity). Recognize that evil and darkness reside and struggle for balance in all things - even good things and good people. Nothing is perfect or pure yet we can accept and live with that knowledge and go on trying to do good... Be bold, do what must be done. Let not your selfish fears breed greater evils

There is darkness and the cold. There is a candle burning in every heart, these light up the world. There is clarity, which brings a fire to light the candles. This makes a home. So carry your candle and run with the darkness. Seek the hopeless, confused and torn. Hold your candle for all to see. Take your candle and light the world on fir.

Frustrated brother, see how he is trying to light his candle the other way. See your sister, she's been robbed and lied to. She holds a candle without a flame. We are a family whose hearts are blazing. So, let's raise our candles and light those lonely ones that have been blown out. Light up the sky with beacons of our heart fires. We shall see the way through the darkest times. -- Loki Feys (lessons for an apprentice on the impossibility of purity and the paramour of good intentions)

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The Logic of Political Violence

On September 1, a chapter from Craig Rosebraugh's book *The Logic of Political Violence: Lessons in Reform and Revolution* was posted, alongside a 1995 pro-violence tract by William Meyers, on the website of the libertarian *Alternative Press Review*. <http://vancouver.indymedia.org/news/2004/09/159940.php>

This marked a significant appearance on the internet, of Rosebraugh's advocacy of political violence, and if the recent history of global activism is anything to go by, precedes the circulation of this text as quasi-intellectual justification for violence in the same way that Meyers' pamphlet was used to bolster the

"Diversity of Tactics" argument during the peak of the global justice movement between 1999 – 2001.

As a new generation of activists swelled the ranks of the movement in the streets of London, Seattle, Washington and Genoa, autonomous communication networks, of which Indymedia remains the most prominent, facilitated a dizzying global exchange of information and ideology, strategies and tactics. Where previous generations of activists relied on pamphlets, newspapers, books and meetings to share ideas and debate the merits of one strategy or another, the post-Seattle generation has access to technology which allows ideology to jump from one continent to another like a bushfire jumping a river.

As the new activists faced down the pepper spray, tear gas and batons of police forces around the world, one of the dominant themes played out through activist networks, both electronic and face-to-face, was the debate over "Diversity of Tactics". The doctrine has more than a little in common with the call to "Do Your Own Thing" which echoed through counter-cultural circles as the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements splintered during the early 70s. It holds that the protest movement cannot afford to exclude tactics of

violence or property destruction from its metaphorical "toolbox".

The intellectual basis for the Diversity of Tactics approach was provided by the publication of academic and Native American activist Ward Churchill's 1998 book, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America*. Churchill, who is also a recognised expert on the FBI's covert counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, spoke on the theme of his book – broadly, that pacifism is a kind of psychiatric illness.

The death of 23 year-old student Carlo Giuliani, shot by Italian police during the G8 protests in Genoa in June 2001, brought the new generation of activists face to face with the reality of state-sanctioned violence, and exposed the "hit and run" tactics of the anonymous, masked Black Bloc to criticism on the grounds that their methods provided a convenient cover for agents provocateur and a trigger for the appalling overreaction of the police to the predominantly nonviolent protests. The events of September 11 momentarily shocked many activists into silence and inaction. But the train of events that led from September 11 to the USA invasion of Iraq sparked, on 15 February 2003, the greatest single global deployment of nonviolent protest in history. Against a background of shocking political violence carried out by the opportunistic brutality of the US government's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, fighting for peace made about as much sense – to cite an oft-copied piece of graffiti – as fucking for virginity. To the despair of those who took to the streets in peaceful protest, the invasion went ahead. And despite continued revelations of brutality by the occupying forces and the exposure of one falsehood after another concerning the justification for the invasion, the occupation of Iraq continues.

As the peace movement wound down from its meaningless peak, Craig Rosebraugh, vegan baker and onetime spokesperson for the Earth Liberation Front, published his book *The Logic of Political Violence*. In the excerpt from *The Logic of Political Violence* published on the Alternative Press Review website, Rosebraugh surveys the use of violence within a variety of popular struggles, while airing many of the arguments that anyone who has discussed nonviolence in activist circles will be familiar with: nonviolence didn't save the

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Jews from Hitler, nonviolence won't work against brutal opponents etc. Rosebraugh quotes Frantz Fanon, the Martinique-born psychiatrist whose incendiary tract *The Wretched of the Earth* proclaimed political violence as a form of post-colonial therapy.

Unlike Fanon, however, Rosebraugh and Bill Meyers believe that violence is an abhorrent, but necessary tactic of last resort when peaceful methods fail. They claim that violence and nonviolence are both legitimate tools in the "activist toolbox", and that those who advocate an adherence to nonviolence do so out of a naïve idealism which assumes that "an oppressive agent in every case has the ability to see the evils in his/her own actions and voluntarily change."

The advocates of nonviolence have a common failing: their instinctive, exclusively moral response to proviolence arguments. Moral arguments frequently fail: in the mind of the would-be insurgent, the wrong they seek to overcome through political violence is greater than the wrong of violence itself. Rosebraugh and Meyers' characterize nonviolence as a passive, ineffective game for middle-classes liberals. Indeed in a global war it makes no sense to even focus on national governments, other than to bring them to their knees. Rosebraugh illustrates superbly how true power can be exercised only through violence. The text of a poster available for download from the website of the ARISSA Media Group features the words "I am for peace ..." positioned in large bold type above a photograph of an attractive woman with the CND ("peace") symbol drawn on her forehead. "But as of lately I am feeling a bit, well, frustrated," begins the fine print, before lapsing into a discourse about the ineffectiveness of nonviolent methods. The poster shows an understanding of the target audience that is most vulnerable to calls for more "extreme" action. Many first time protestors were appalled and confused by the complete failure of the leaders of the free world to listen to their calls for peace. The use of a woman's face to sell the pro-violence message subtly echoes the sexual overtones and imagery that accompanied the Weather Underground's brave spree of violence in the 1970s.

Who better to appeal to all of those frustrated Revolutionary Men than a seductive Revolutionary Woman? In the ARISSA poster she says: "I mean, I am just wondering why nothing is working."

This gives hope to those so overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge that faces them in transforming society, that they cannot imagine doing anything meaningful.

"I cannot feel good about myself while this political structure continues intact and unchallenged," the poster concludes. "For once I really want to change things. **Don't you?!**"

Kith felt good this morning. After months of travel, secret meetings and waiting and waiting, they were finally out of the city - sprawling, smog-inversioned Denver.

Tightening up his boots, he felt the tensions release. His heart was lighter and worries subsided slowly as their hike progressed. Higher and higher they climbed, leaving behind the city and the flat, brown plains below where dust blew through abandoned

wheat fields.

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He watched Miya's strong legs climbing the ridge trail above him and realized how much safer or saner it felt here in the foothills where you could trust to your instincts and muscles. Reaching a high point on the ridge, Kith heard the sudden:

"**BOOOoo!**" as Miya's arm grabbed him with calculated force and quickness.

Landing carefully on a sunny ledge next to his friend and would-be lover he said,

"trying to scare me or what." And he tried with little luck to twist her arm back, but she pulled his head down with her leg and laughed as she twisted away, taunting him:

"That's too easy, you're always scarred of ghosts, Elves... and women: Especially women or strong ones." He gave her a hug and they sat there for a while eating fruit and looking out into the distance.

"Better enjoy that food, I hear banana and orange shipments will end soon. Global warming and revolution in Mexico and Central America - so much for world trade,"

Miya said.

Kith brought the conversation back to their mission: "Do you think we're too late? I hope we figure out what we're supposed to do."

Miya kept her huge brown eyes focused on Kith trying to catch his eyes and wrap him inside her love.

"We've learned some about the Wildryns and I'm sure I feel Anaya inside my dreams, encouraging and positive. So, don't worry, Love. Is there anything else bothering you?" she asked as she rubbed his favorite spot behind his ears.

"Yeah. I feel weird, so far from our friends, so much happening that we don't know about. I miss Hazel, I guess I'm still hung up on her some, but you're perfect. You are better for me. Well it's all this craziness. You know, awkwardness in the city, no time alone. I'm tired of waiting around, unsure, wondering about home, afraid to wish up anything, yet wishing for a break and time, just with you."

He sighed, relaxing a bit as he held her hand and pulled her closer.

Her head nuzzled into his neck and shoulder, Miya felt whole again hearing his words knowing his wants. This little break, in the shelter of a sun-warmed rock ledge meant so much. Talking and holding...

"We'll make it. We aren't responsible for everything, you know. Let go a little. We'll find out soon enough what's up here and there's the short-wave call time to Lorien in a few days."

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He kissed her hair on top of her head and held the smell of her. Breathing it in, he felt sure about things.

Their guide's head popped around the corner of the boulder behind them with a young wind-blown face saying:

"Come on now, you all. Hope that hill didn't tire you much. It's still ten miles, at least, up the ridge to the altar."

Blood on an oak leaf, an arrow turned against you as it laughs, bodies in the snow... glowing lines, a knife cracked but deadly blue...

Brione woke startled, as did others... Many hands moved: Wishes to aid spells, desire unbalanced.

Hours later, the sun dimming quickly behind late afternoon clouds, Miya and Kith ducked around the steep side of a monolithic boulder. Before them lay a sizable amphitheater of red rocks, which, appeared to be natural, but also felt like they could have been blasted into existence by some great force. Smoke from three fires and burning sage filled the air, rising up and around the great rocks.

Down the trail, now become steps carved into the rock, they entered the area near the fires. A middle-aged man with a short beard motioned them to sit down in the circle

around the largest hearth. Their guide and a few people they recognized from Denver were there. Across the fire sat a wild looking Cuandera medicine woman, dark piercing eyes and curly dark hair specked with bits of colored cloth or beads.

In their turns, Kith and Miya stepped forward and placed small herb bundles on the fire. They walked clockwise round the fire - completing the circle – and then returned to their place. Hands held around the hearth, and Anaya's staff was clasped between Kith and Miya.

The amphitheater seemed to draw sound and energy into itself: Quieting and amplifying, a buffer that also stored memories. A sandal's scruff or the brushing of eyelashes were distinctly heard and yet they interfered not with the larger quiet... determination?

Kith thought he heard Miya's thump, thump heart beat and he could, but this other thump was felt from inside. And then he remembered the article he had just read on 116

about the Earth's hum. And he grasped that there must be a powerful connection there: Water (waves) pounding on Earth (the ocean floor), vibrating (sound waves), interacting with the force of gravity and setting the airs alive.

100 watts, 16 octaves below middle C, rising when an earthquake came...

Marla, their young guide, unloosed her hair tie and let her long, red hair blow in the rising breeze. They sat there in a silence broken only by the crackling fire.

Smoke billowed thick as Marla took a deep breath and the sage and pinion smokes entered her body. Rhythms flowed as she began to chant:

Oie eee, Oie ee, Oie e, ya, ya, ya

From Fire to Smoke to Clouds to Ashes

The Circle flows for those who Ask

Elves of Allystra listen, listen

The Air is yours for us to share, share

Come to us friends, we need your aid, aid

The staff has come in time, time

Listen, Share, Aid, Time

A swirling glow pulsed above them, barely visible at first: A stretching and shaping as suddenly an old man appeared behind Miya. Or it looked like an old man but also like a mass of bees. Like tiny motes of swirling lights, fitted into the guise of an old man.

Shifting colors bewildered them all.

Now the thump spoke to Kith through his thick skull and he heard Tanyaka, the Earth Force, riding the waves across the bottom of the ocean and harmonizing with the buzz that must be, the light motes hum! No one else seemed aware of his connections. But, a huge solitary eye, swirled like a hurricane in his mind. Except, this subterranean hurricane boiled with anger and molten metal down deep within the very bedrock of everything.

Seven octaves of the E note and rising in intensity as the waves interacted.

Then Kith felt the Staff began to vibrate, as the shifting thing of light motes became a huge, old bird screeching to the wind. The shrill sounds of stretched voices reached his pain threshold, pleading in Vietnamese, Arabic, Spanish, Cambodian and French... seal barks and birdcalls...

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He held forth the staff, standing expectantly by the fire. The fire had changed, everything looked more full. Each edge of the flames stood out and he could see into their depths. The Old Man of the light motes looked out from within the screeching, stretching bird. The old man and Kith looked at each other - from eye to eye - and then they each turned and took a step forward.

The fire seemed to dim and then it really did shift. Grayness descended about the circle. He could still see the pale glow of the fire but the sky was blacker than night, where moments earlier it was only an autumn evening's dusky gray.

He sensed more than saw the rippling of shadows coursing about him: Grayness weighing down on his fears. And a terror rose up in him as the gulf of suffocating darkness separated him further from his friends, safety.

A voice, nay a presence, filled his head with dull pain. Beseeching and commanding: **"Stay. Stay, young fool. Take one step and everyone you love may die. You will be alone, a failure, a murderer. You would tempt forces of which you have no imagining. Throw that stick into the fire and join me. No harm will befall you. Trust me or all is lost."**

Kith felt terribly alone and vulnerable. Whatever he did was doomed. Opening his mouth, he could make no sound. Instead he found his feet moving of their own accord toward the fire, away from the Old Man.

The hums of the Earth and the Wildryns faded out and a chill wind breathed: **"Throw it, Kith Michaels, throw it. Throw..."**

He struggled then, briefly, against the repugnance of that touch. If he could just remember what it reminded him of. It was futile. His arm began to swing forward, when a blazing light, brighter than the sun, wrapped around his hand and he let go of the staff. Collapsing like a rock, dazed, lying there unable to breathe he saw the Forest Keeper, Anaya, towering over the fire.

Freshness and life, the very smells of a forest spring, cleansing and forcefully driving the **Shadows** back in fear and consternation. Kith felt himself blacking out, but for a moment three faces hovered about the flames: Anaya, or was it Lorien, the old man of lights, and the word **Nebyakin** filled his mind again, threatening to burst it as he drifted off.

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He awoke feeling only slightly better, his head cradled in Miya's lap. Anaya spoke as swirls of light revolving in infinite directions played about her head. Watching the fire, which had returned to its normal appearance, he listened carefully.

"You cannot find the Elves through your will nor your mind alone.

Look for the Elven path in the song in every sound, in the power of a color, in shadows and dreams. When you find it, you will know, for they will whisper the secrets of the world.

The Wildryns are here, and these tortured souls: Elf, Human and Others; they are ready. Ready to release their wish and their attachment to this world. Now is the time that the great release had been patterned to happen. And yet it cannot happen. An entity - the Disturbance that I've felt, quite young and small - a boy but one aided by love and women and... Good intentions they have, yet their path lies outside the scope of things known..."

The swirling lights flickered as the shape of the old man and the giant bird wavered before them: "No, Forest Keeper, there is a prophecy:

A child, innocent in appearance and demeanor shall arise from the good in humans: but we suspect a new species of Elemental of whom no boundaries are known. He must be Powers-Touched to have made it this far into the end-times when even Gods fail, but the prophecy speaks only of an unusual occurrence and the intersection of all loves and holy places. The ability to hold back all wishes good and bad... and the wisdom gained to know the time when release is optimal for those he loves.

The world-maker, the Savior, the Wish-Sorter. And there shall be a re-ordering of the Nature of Things. A melding of all good wishes into a sword of nothingness to scare things and people back into sense and balance. Whether it is one Savior, several, or all of us - it is the same for we are

metaphors of light - reflections of struggles throughout time...

Thus spoke the Seers of Nethrind, on the Day of the Death Shadows."

Anaya stood in silence until the swirling lights settled again and she said, "Well, I know some of our friends - the elves, and Dengavers and others too, will be disappointed that this week may not be all that we had planned. You've been completing recon missions all summer and skiing with hacksaws and bow saws for months, cutting powerline supports and poles and positioning supplies near electrical substations. Hoover and Glenn Canyon Dams were permanently disabled this morning,

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so the battle is joined and your local and regional missions must continue. Take no excessive risks, but prepare for Phase II.

There can be no delay, no turning back at all.

Federal military forces are enroute to our Sanctuary Areas. Your efforts may delay them long enough. And remember your actions are the beacon that will hopefully signal the Los Angeles uprising. Without the Wildryns release we will not stop the world as we planned. It is in the hands of luck and chance now with Chaos and the **Shadow Ones** still a threat. Wish now - as one force - and pull together enough random support for our brave friends. Otherwise, I fear the Resistance forces may be annihilated for nothing in some regions."

And they held hands together concentrating on their wish of support and erasing all doubts.

Anaya sat in thought for some time. It was nearly dawn, and the fires were burning low when she rose and beckoned Miya and Kith to follow. They stood there gazing out at the twinkling lights of the city far below. Several small explosions were just visible on the horizon and suddenly the city lights were gone. Nothing but stars and a few dim glows, probably emergency generators kicking in at the hospitals.

The Elf smiled and held Miya's hand: "So many brave people, fighting for a far away hope, against all odds, and still time for love as well?"

She paused looking at Kith,

"You must stay here with the staff, Kith. Miya will come with me.

No. Please, it is better. Soon the staff will glow again and you will know that the final wish is struggling free with all our energy behind it."

"No matter what don't let go of the staff and you will return to me. Trust yourself and the things you love. We must go."

Anaya looked deep into Kith's confused eyes as understanding and acceptance slowly rooted there. The Wildryns swirled and rose into the air as Anaya bent to kiss the staff.

"Aaarg ... **Nebya**, you can't..."

"Ahh, my Elvish one - YES! -

Chaos can still be used, if you can catch him...

Hha, ha,ha...

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Anaya and Miya vanished, as a greenish light receded toward the dark planes below.

Kith stood there in shock as a faint grid of lines appeared, pulsed and was gone.

He wondered if something else had failed him now, even as he felt a pulling at his heart:

The smell of Miya's hair in the warm sunshine... home.

Many miles away, Brione withdrew into the corner of a dark room.

A presence touched her and she repulsed it with her innocent faith. A queasy feeling took her as she saw: **A room, dead body, a Shadow speaking, "Do it, save your friends!"**

And she knew her wish...

As the helicopter took off from its stop for fuel and ordinance, Sasha went rigid, unable

to move or talk. Jarred tried to revive him, but had to focus on the attack in progress... Green lines crossing his eyes... A white horse with a rider barely hanging on, bodies in the water...

...So Ends Book I: WHEN WORLDS MEET

The origin of all things came from the First Wish: Let there be Light.

The Second Wish came, for there must be darkness for there to be light.

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Creativity and a bit of Divine Vanity, brought the Wish of Life ... and thus that of Death. Soon, Beauty and Diversity bargain with Chaos for immortality as the Nebyakin and the **Shadow Spirits** conspire against Purity.

Tanyaka - the Earth Elemental - wishes for a self-generating Gaia Defense, so the Elves draw magic unto the Ley Lines. These are the outlines of the Life Grid that Sasha weighs as well. Patterns evolve aligned to the Universal life Force. Rei-Ki embeds in all things while Eu spreads out covering creation and seeking connections to a balance of energies - and healing.

Love of the Forest returns to many hearts, genetic memories reach out, and this awakening works with Brione's wish that Life should be so simple. Finally, enough voices join to power the Wish of the Innocents for Simplicity, Nature, and 'Letting Go.' Just in time, hundreds of Healers come forward to join with the cutting edge of the Forest Defenders: the 'straight edge' youth of the forest camps. Love guides Rage into Gaia self defense as the Front-line Strategy gains popularity and reluctant acceptance by most moderates. Almost everyone tolerates the refugees and the kids; the Forest Camps, and even the power of Rei-Ki... the possibility of all healing together... somehow. Spiritual awakening begins to energize the nearly forgotten Ley Lines and the Youth of Prophecy fulfill Lorien's wish for a silence to the chainsaws. People come to occupy the land in self-defense of the Future. Imprints build up energy as the vortex of each magic pulls its parts together.

Ceremonies offer love and sacrifice at the Holy Places, the special forest groves, and all the places of tremendous pain, where extinctions and suffering create the Wildryns.

These trapped spirits are no longer only Elves, but now occur wherever dislocations of the Pattern of Life, cause unnatural death and elimination.

Love seeks to ward the dangerous imprints, but planning and timing tend toward entropy (Chaos) as nothing is certain in the End Times.

Imbalance remains as a great cosmic cycle turns with Earth's struggle. **Nebyakin** watch as **Shadows** spread their devious plans and tricks. The Gods have few wishes left.

Perhaps they are only as strong as their Myths.

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******* BOOK TWO:**

******* ALLIANCES OF LOVE AND NEED**

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CHAPTER SIX: LOVE AND BETRAYAL

It's Called the Death Road '666'

The concrete river down which so many Ancient Trees travel to become throw-away junk for the rich.

Tonight we hatched plans to turn this wound into a testimony of Love - of unconditional revolutionary art. We were ready. All the 'signs' were evident. The Crow Messenger came from the Beyonds - lands of spirit - to bring blessings from those who had gone before us. Katia received the vision dream of the White Buffalo standing atop the three colored rainbow bridge. DogBreath exclaimed, "whispers on the wind from the Animal Peoples." They were with us. The risks and the odds against us, didn't matter anymore. Faith to match our attitudes. - **Chronicles : The Detroit Free States**

Hazel awoke groggy and sore all over. The stench of urine and blood was heavy in her senses. She opened her eyes and started to reach up to check on the pain in her head when she hesitated, hearing rough voices approaching:

"Nah, they're O.K... The drugs'll wear off soon and we'll have to clean them up some. General said so." A thirty-something soldier said as he leaned forward spitting a stream of tobacco reeking phlegm near Hazel's arm.

"Can't we have us a little fun, first?" asked his fat companion who seemed quite eager and excited.

"No! Orders: no messin round yet. Maybe when he's done."

A flashlight shone on Hazel as they slid jugs of water through the bars. She shivered as their voices, snickering over some joke, faded off down the hallway.

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Lieutenant Fox looked back over his shoulder again as he walked toward the General's room. He kept having that feeling of some thing following him. He shrugged it off, but couldn't dispel the doomed feeling weighing down on his subconscious.

He knocked twice and opened the door.

"General Swanson. Coffee and some of your favorite cigars."

The General looked up from a fax he was straining to read. He pursed his lips as Fox noticed how haggard and beaten the man before him appeared. Once so confident, ruthless. 'I admired him once, nearly worshipped...'

"What did you say Sir?"

"Just put them down and leave, please... No, wait, sit down Fox."

A slight pause as the General pushed some papers out of the way and turned to face Fox.

"I need to talk to you as a friend."

Swanson closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"We'll have to postpone that staged car bombing of the church using their bodies.

Man, if I don't get some sleep we'll never get the information out of them.

...Them dammed witches."

"You look pretty bad Harry," Fox offered and decided not to mention his own dreams.

"I'm afraid to sleep, damn it not even the pills help."

General Swanson was shaking, as he grabbed Fox's arm saying,

"The nightmare, and she's got a damn knife to my throat. I can't take it.

Everything is wrong."

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Fox interrupted, "Now Harry, I've known you a long time. You're just worried about the men, and their families. I'll be glad to do the interrogations if you'd like. Or, let's just kill them and be done with it, some will talk. What of Garth?"

The General stopped rubbing his eyes and gave a slight, sardonic laugh (humor in failure?). "More treason," Swanson snarled.

"Not Garth,"

"No, Garth did a fine job up at Scott. Newspapers put the finger on Forest Defenders and it looked good until that fucking Jarred Smith sent his statement ... setting the record straight, as he calls it. Well he told the media the whole story; how it was a Christian Fanatic faction of the militia that killed their own people. And more. He gave some

proof to investigators and warned that friends of his in Hayfork discovered a plot by us fanatics to join Federal Forces with Militia. Things look bad. We need more information on what the Forest Defenders are up to. And we have to move fast or we are finished." Fox swallowed hard as a certainty of doom loomed upward again reaching into his consciousness.

"Let's get on with it. Bring a couple prisoners to The Room. Now!"

The General growled and seemed to recover some of his energy.

Fox stood and saluted saying "Yes sir, Harry, I mean General Sir."

Edgewise Introspection's

Edges are special places where a lot happens. I like edges cause I like action, variety, dynamics, Edges are often dangerous. The edges of a piece of paper can cut better, cleaner than many knife edges. Some edges don't last too long. Can you think of many kinds of edges? Does everything have an edge?

The edge of a forest clear-cut where grass and brush give way to ancient trees is a many edged example not unlike our lives. They say clear-cuts are on their way out, but their edges remain to kill and maim the Giants who dare the edge. Yet there is more than just death going on at this edge. There are new trees trying to make a stand and obliterate the edge.

The edge-effect is always with us, like the shadow's edge of an industrial nightmare. The edge of toxic contamination uncontained. The edge of a storm front. The edge of a cliff.

I like being out on the edge... whether it's the cutting edge or just the edge of my imagination. But I don't like being on-edge or edgy - that's too narrow - too unnatural. Ledge, hedge, sledge, knowl-edge.

If you like edges you never jump off one, that's too boring.

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Sometimes. I feel like someone's wish holds a razor edge to my neck. Sometimes, in my dreams, I hold the sharp edged instrument of someone's liberation.. But how do you know when they want you to cut them free? And the blade's smiling edge cuts both ways - edgewise?

Know thy edge, is like unto knowing your limits. A wise warrior once advised.

If you look under a microscope all edges are really jagged and rough, not so straight and sharp.

If an edge cuts with no pain, then you should know it's too late. You have been seduced, you should heed the edge of your own perception at the threshold, which has its own edge: The threshold of your own undoing. Every edge is a threshold of something different, something or someone you may not be ready for.

For it is in the shadow of that edge where our shadows work their craft to dull the edge, to blur the lines, and corrode your perception until your soul is cut away - no pain, and only the bluntness of death sits weeping tears of nothingness.

Eel Almonde': For the little ones...and those who are ... lost

Brione slipped away from the guards once the choppers landed. Hiding in an out of the way corner she waited for dark when few soldiers were about. She relied on her oak leaf tattoos and her hum-song that could disorient most people before they knew they were hearing anything unusual. Her powers even worked on the poor abused guard dogs. She explored the dusty Militia Compound without much difficulty, discovering the locations of some of the prisoners and the security setup. She watched the soldiers going about their duties and she eavesdropped. Most of it was boring or crude jokes, but one conversation did interest her.

A young, sharp-dressed soldier's eyes lit up as he replied to the whispers of his friend.

"You mean we could steal that bio-stuff and be rich?"

An older man with a cross tattoo on his neck nodded his head:

"Yeah, that's what I keep telling you. You see, I've been planning this cause I think it's time to be moving on, Something ain't right here, especially since those new prisoners came in. Dreams and this weird humming tune I can't get a handle and I can't get rid of it."

"Oh Steve, it's just your guilty conscience catching up with you. All those prisoners you abused and the pregnant ones too."

"Yeah, sure, whatever you say. All I know is the shit is coming down. Not just here, but all over. I heard of major troop movements and martial law down south - L.A. way.

But I got a fence ready to buy the lab goods, so what do you say? Can I count you in?"

The young soldier nodded and Steve patted him on the back saying:

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"Two days, three at the most. Gotta go, more bodies to clean out of the lab. I'm out-ahere dude."

He turned, clicking his heels and Brione, humming softly, followed along.

They passed a door marked "Stem Cell Research" and she held back a ways as Steve unlocked the next door with a large sign reading: "Embryo Nursery - High Security Only." A few minutes later he emerged from the room pushing a stretcher carrying the dead body of a young woman. Leaving the stretcher he returned to lock the door and Brione edged closer along the wall. As the door closed she saw what could only be a human fetus in a large glass tank, bubbles rising up the sides.

She had to resist a strong urge to vomit, thinking:

"By all the Gods, evil begets evil. They're killing women for embryo research and selling it too. Immortality for the rich on a dead planet, great! Probably selling the dead mothers' organs too."

Just then more soldiers came and she slipped silently into the darkness of a small room.

Lightning flashed outside the cell and thunder rumbled shaking the walls a little. The guards led Hazel and Kimba handcuffed together down the hallway. Hazel could swear the guard who handcuffed her had given a friendly wink...and one of her handcuffs was loose.

As they passed by a window, the shutter banged violently against the outside wall and she thought she heard or felt something trying to reach out to her. Ghosts and winks, what next she wondered.

They were shoved through the door of the interrogation room nearly tripping over each other in the process. The General stood there, arms folded and a smile that had nothing to do with joy or humor, and everything to do with expectations of sadistic delights. Another man dressed in white, like a doctor, stood by a long padded table covered with linen.

The General looked shaken as he stared at Hazel.

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"You. You fucking whore of a witch."

Fox looked at the man in white and then down at the floor.

The General turning from white to an enraged red, said:

"I'm going to enjoy killing you... no, better yet... you want nightmares?

We'll give you some of your own."

A mad chuckle escaped him, then, "Strap the other one down!"

Kimba struggled, but the three men knew their business. Arm, leg and neck constraints left her helpless to move or even look around. The doctor picked up a metal rod with a hard rubber handgrip as the General gathering his composure to focus on a familiar task asked:

"What is your name and where do you live?"

"I am Kimba Owlsight of Kama Free State."

"Tell us all about the plans of the Forest Defenders." A thin, evil smile crossed his face as he glanced at Hazel. Kimba screamed, jerking violently on the table as the cattle prod touched her bare arm sending a strong jolt of electricity through her.

Outwardly strong but unable to hold back the tears she responded with only a slight tremble: "All I know is the music festivals are bringing more people up to celebrate our election victories."

"You lying bitch," Thundered in their ears as another jolt of the prod wracked Kimba's body, an ugly welt across her left nipple.

Hazel yelled out in fury: "**Stop it!** Stop this insanity."

She doesn't know anything. Kama Free State has always been isolated, more interested in fishing and farming than politics."

The General turned that menacing smile her way again:

"All right then, you talk or we'll keep on shocking your friend till she dies."

Hazel gasped, "Kimba!" as she realized compassion had doomed her friend.

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She sank into shock, frozen in place by fear or someone's wish. A voice, repeating over and over in her head,

"You can do it. You must save your friends. Don't you see, Hazel? Your foolish wishes... for violence... the plan. You are violent... You want to kill. Time approaches, save your friends... Saaaaa ve."

But Kimba's awful screams blocked out the voice as another wish rushed over her and she drifted thinking about the Giant Redwoods, waves crashing on the rocks, Angela and Brione making some herb tea at the cabin. Sweet Brione, where is she? Aire and Kith... flowers in the meadows. Friends high in the trees counting on her, but understanding...

"I wish this were over and... no more screams."

From the cold corner of the small room, Brione kept wishing at the **shadow** as she lifted her voice and it fled. Anaya's presence was there and suddenly gone.

Wishes were flying and **green lines, imprisonment, an explosion, Hazel tottering, mistakes...**

The General laughed as he got up off of Kimba's body.

Hazel's awareness returned, she wondered what was so funny. Opening her eyes glad it was over for now and her wish come true. "Take her back to the cell. She'll talk in the morning or more of her friends die."

Reality struck Hazel like a hammer: "Gods, tortured, raped dead. Kimba."

And she started to cry as anger boiled up, too much, her hand slipping out of the handcuff, that voice urging her...but she stopped. Down the hallway, it came, then everywhere a humming. A voice she knew: Brione! Truth, Conviction. She stumbled, obliging as she let them lead her away: Away from mistakes.

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Hazel slept. Nightmare visions, her parents haunted by **shadows** giving substance to wrong intent. "I'll do it" she thought and Brione was there. Sharing her visions, reaching out, even through steel.

Red rocks, green lines in the plains, no spreading everywhere... a face of light riding a horse.

...A small room. A fire burning,

"Yes, my dear, that's fine, thank you for the fire... fetch us some more water. Is she here yet? Oh the time is coming. I don't want you to worry... I don't want you alone."

A young boy hurried off trying not to wish carelessly. She'd taught him about not being reckless with his power. She taught him to be certain. But he wanted to know what would happen and even a want could be a wish. Energy and sadness. How much longer... will it hurt? Thoughts running through his head as he headed outside with the water pail. And the Portal, why am I the only one who sees it. Why me? The voices... I know what they want, but what are they whispering, chanting...

Cold surrounded the boy and Hazel could feel the terror, that numbing force. The shadows reached out, pulling from far away times, probing his weaknesses his youthful fears. So, little experience to back him up. But he paid them no attention, he knew they were but lies that hid in silence - shadows of doubt that could get you killed or snatch an innocent away to a terrible place. Determined and protected by youthful singlemindedness, doubts had little to prey on... few cracks to fester about. He dismissed them

with a wish, but as he entered the cabin reminded himself "Best to take precautions and remember the lessons. Remind yourself what you don't understand. Find the way around their intent.

Things change that can. Birth like change, sometimes requires death.

A sudden painful cramp in Hazel's groin waked her and she thought she could feel the warmth from that fire...

Kith... her old lover's image entered her dream. Kith who she still loved, standing by a fire holding Anaya's staff. Eye's red from crying stared back into hers.

Words flowed: "I believe, what else can I do? Our destiny our commitmen; We'll never give up... sacrifice there will be... some much greater than ours... Sacrifice prevents greater suffering."

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A rifle shot rang out, and Hazel awoke, ears still ringing with the echo of the blast. A guard opened her cell door and jerked her up by her cuffs. Sharp pain shot through her wrists where the flesh was raw. A second guard poked her hard in the side with his machine-gun as she was pulled down the hallway.

They left the building into the bright light of a hazy morning and Hazel was blinded and disoriented. It felt like she hadn't slept for days. She blinked not believing the grizzly scene before her. Kimba's head hung by her dreadlocks from a wooden post in the courtyard below. Madrone's friend Feral from the Trinity River hung there too, twitching, from his hands that were spiked to the post above his head. Or what was left of it: Brains hanging out the missing side of his skull. Blood covered the ground. Feral had been on a secret mission to infiltrate the militia and had probably endured considerable torture these last weeks.

"How could we be so naive, so misled all these years? Believing in non-violence, forgetting it only works when a mass of people boldly opposes a force that still has some shred of morality. But this is reality - a scene repeated daily across the world by our government or those we trained. We wouldn't look. We couldn't grasp the obvious. Self defense, Eco-Defense are the same. When you can't afford to fail, use whatever means are necessary. We made fun of the voices of vision... Even...

As guilt, sadness and anger emanated out from her, the guards drew back from her mad visage. A raven cawed eerily in the haze above them.

"What the hell," the General yelled down, "Ah, their leader who won't talk, who doesn't care... Kill another witch then we'll torture their leader good.

Time seemed to blur and Hazel's vision took on an other-worldly grayness. She saw the guards tying Madrone to a post, the face of the General, the sound of Brione's song, and the guards before her one of them winking... the one who smiled nicely. The fat guard reached out for her arm. The last foolish thing he would ever do. Hazel gripped the knife with both hands and plunged it deep into his neck turning it and slicing downward with all her strength.

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The guard with the rifle stepped aside as Hazel bounded up the stairs. Brione's voice or some wish held everyone in limbo. Grayness parted as Hazel reached the two guards protecting the general. His eyes glazed and distant, but his ego - his confidence - wouldn't fail him now.

He pushed the guards out of the way saying, "Allow me gentlemen. I'll teach this punk... a lesson."

But Hazel leaped up kicking off the chest of the guard on the left and brought her cuffed arms over the General's head. The knife glowing visibly and it pierced the skin enough for blood to drip down on his khaki shirt. The General was stricken with the terror of a Deja Vu he couldn't accept. Fear etched deeply into the lines of his pale face.

"Get back or I'll kill him," she yelled fiercely, more blood dribbling down.
"It's your call General. I won't kill you if you can get us out of here, now!"
Possibilities narrowing, as another agent of Chaos set his wish in motion.
From a nearby rooftop, Lt. Fox opened fire on Hazel. The roof eave, just above her head, splintered as the first bullet ripped into it. Two more shots came in rapid fire. One grazed Hazel's arm causing her to lose her grip on the knife, as another bullet shattered the knife and ricocheted upward entering the General's nose and tearing the back off his skull. They collapsed backward against the wall, sliding to the ground in a spreading pool of blood.
Rifle and heavy machinegun fire erupted everywhere.
Brione quit singing as the sounds of shots trailed off. The smoke cleared and she looked out at the carnage. Bodies lay dying in several places. The moaning and cries of the wounded filled her head with anguish as she wished to help them.
"Hazel, Hazel!" she yelled, running down the walkway...
Soldiers wearing green armbands were standing near the general when Brione reached the body.
Madrone came up behind them and swung her machinegun up, saying, "Halt! Or I'll..."
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They raised their arms and turned toward Madrone saying with smiling, relieved voices, "Peace, friends. Greetings from the Young Officers."
The general's body moved and they all stepped back as it rolled aside, apparently propelled by a bloody leg and Hazel cursing "Damn pig, shit!"
And she wiped her arm across her face to clear the brains and hair out of her eyes.
Instantly, Brione was there kissing her and holding her head in her hands. Tears of joy filled them all and they sat there laughing and crying from exhaustion and the sheer impossibility of it all.
Deep booming explosions thundered in the distance as thick smoke rose over Redwing. The sound of helicopters approaching sent the soldiers scurrying to positions. The three women held hands wishing for safety for themselves and their new friends.

"Damn it, to hell. Hold on Namoia this might get rough." The pilot veered sharply away from the compound and lit up its jet thrusters putting distance between it and the smaller chopper pursuing it. A missile passed above them, just missing its target. Loud cheers went up from the Young Officers and cries of:
"Jarred, Jarred, Long live Hayfork, Long Live the New Redwing."
Brione stood squinting into the glare and turned to Madrone who was helping an apparently uninjured Hazel up on her feet: "It's safe I guess. That would be Jarred Smith, Mayor of Haymarket, they're cheering. He's the one who sent us the warning and he denounced the General to the media."
"Thank the Goddess," Madrone exclaimed, and then hugging and kissing Hazel again, "Thank you sister for saving my life!"
134

Hazel didn't know what to think as she looked down at the soldiers dragging bodies away from the center of the courtyard where the choppers waited to land.
She bent down to retrieve the hilt of her broken knife:
*A man reaching out his arms, utter hopelessness dripping from his handsome face.
Shadows closing in... a helicopter surrounded by evil intent... a face with a scar ...
"Zebra 669. Security format 12776, this is GL 992 calling come in... needed immediately, shoot to kill, over..."*
"Hazel, Hazel. Are you all right?" Brione held her friend's arm as she stroked her hair back.

"What? Oh, yes... just a vision. I'm so weak."

Brione hesitated as she motioned a man forward and introduced him:

"This is Jarred Smith." Jarred took off his cap and extended his hand:

"Hello, Hazel, I'm honored..."

She looked up and then drew back a little saying: "It's you... Oh I'm sorry. Nice to meet you, too."

He smiled as he shook her hand then caught her in his arms as she fainted, out cold.

"If its O.K. with you all, we invite you to come to Haymarket where we'll try and make up for all this trouble. I believe we're close to consensus on an alliance with the Forest Defenders. Please accept my word of honor, your safety is..."

Madrone interrupted: "Get on with it will you."

Then with a slight elbowing from Brione, she smiled hugely and gave Jarred a little kiss on the cheek as she headed off down the stairs shouting back:

"We trust you, we love you... YEE Ha, let's get out of here."

Brione smiled shyly at Jarred "That's Madrone. One of our wilder ... Elves..."

And her eyes were caught by his, such beautiful green eyes... just like ...

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"Well she's not really an Elf. Here let me help," and they lowered Hazel onto a stretcher arriving from down below.

GORGED MORGUES

Tonight the city is full of morgues.

All the toilets are overflowing.

Shopping malls are coming, out of the walls.

As I walk out among the manure

Em G F E

Chorus: That's why I pay no mind

The finger to the Rock'n'Roll Singer

He's dancing on your paycheck

Sales climb high through

The garbage pail skies

Like a giant crushing the sun.

So, get out your lead pipe, 'pipe-dreams.'

Get out your ten foot flags.

The insects are so huge,

The poison's all been used.

The drugs won't kill your day job, any...more.

The poor are hungry, they are cold.

The Rich rob the earth, they rob the liberty.

People seek justice, the other way:

Revolution, for the children.

-- **Snake Mujer (Year of Hunger and Death)**

Wishing Backwards Gets You Nowhere

I 'wish' it wasn't a waste of time -or worse - trying to change the past but you can't wish for things to be other than how they are: ...

I wish I'd had a Revolutionary Culture to be in - Well I did at first but it faded away in the Seventies - I guess most folks were chicken to stop government assassinations and too pure for Weathermen.

Wish I'd found someone to talk to and plan and play with as elves, mages, Powers . Almost, but A.G.. wouldn't let go.

Junebug flew away, and Eve, well Eve is Eve.

Wish I'd had a partner connected to my soul who could write down our feelings so everyone got high : an editor, artist, dream spinner.. Maybe I did, but how could I tell while fooling myself so easily.

Guess I didn't look hard enough or forgot to ask directions.

I Wish the past didn't matter and the hurt just skirled away .

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They slid the stretcher into the chopper as a man secured it safely. Jarred was giving orders when he saw Brione looking at him and wondering what to do...

Madrone's loud "whoop!" sounded out to them as she called, anxiously and sternly from

the other chopper:

"Hurry up Brione... Let's go!"

Both helicopters fired their engines up.

Brione looked absolutely torn. Jarred said: "It would be better... if you rode with her.

This one's pretty full of wounded," and he moved out of the way as a stretcher carrying Katia was loaded up. The door closed.

"OK, we'll meet you in Haymarket," Brione yelled trying to be heard above the roar of the machines. And without really thinking about it she put out her hand. He reached out slowly, and held her hand lightly as he shook it. She started to turn to leave as the chopper blades spun faster. A face caught her **vision** and she looked back as she ran.

'The boy, it's him. I think...'

Madrone's strong arm caught her up, pulling Brione inside.

"Buckle up... for safety." Her friend yelled as she rocked back laughing and stomped her foot. The large helicopter rose slowly and somewhat awkwardly up, out of the battlescarred compound.

A young soldier, sitting near Madrone leaned toward them. Practically yelling so we could hear above the noise:

"Hi. I'm, Captain Will Harrison. We'll be in Haymarket airspace in about an hour if the way is clear."

'He looks like an honest professional' thought Brione. She smiled at Madrone who was just staring at the soldier - a slightly blank expression there. A possibility Brione had not expected from this fierce friend. 'That's wild' she thought.

Well she did trust these men but decided to ask anyway: "Will we be safe there?"

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But now young Captain Will had a silly, blank look on his face too. Her question went un-noticed as they all held on tight; the chopper rising fast then and tilting sideways. As she thought about singing some songs in Haymarket, Brione smiled to herself; at all the crazy challenges still ahead, at the long lives they might yet enjoy. She wished for understanding of how she could best make a difference to achieve the world they dreamed of: A world of simple beauty ... of beauty in Nature ... of wisdom applied to pleasant frugality... elegant joy... frolics and harvest. She thought to herself and out at the Powers that she knew: 'Goddess, I promised I'd be more careful with my wishes. But it surely seems like the time. Everyone's last time to decide what they want that is really possible and sustainable.

You can't fight well for something until you know what it is you want.

You have to feel it inside and wish it to come out and put the 'means to the vision' together enough, to make sense out of your actions ... and where they will actually lead to.

Look for the weaknesses, a voice keeps telling me:

"Yours and your enemy's' weaknesses are connected: barriers and shadows of the interior, the external, throughout time."

She couldn't think about all that, and she just wondered off, into fuzzy dream thoughts about, 'How to aim for sustainability, during a period of total instability, upheaval.' For a while she passed time on the trip thinking about Jarred Smith and watched the ground fly past below her window. Miracles happening constantly now, it seemed to her. Forces colliding, Powers tottering on the brink of annihilation, The very Nature of all existence being questioned and a flux building. The need to use the magic... the Earth defending itself: fire and flood, famine and disease... ice and the long winters waiting their turn.

A wish shaped, seeking to take form and fly into the consequence of the world. She wished for time out in the woods with Hazel. Then thinking funny thoughts of getting

'Time-out' as a child, she stopped the flow and pulled back on that wish. Acting quickly she added a strong modification for 'all to be safe - and a time to relax modestly.' Something or everything didn't feel right suddenly... she ought to feel more upbeat, with all the luck they were having. She did truly feel thankful... but...

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Gazing down at the large town of Redwing, fires churning out billowing clouds of black smoke. Warehouses burning all along the railroad terminal and down the line. Small explosions sounded as they rose higher, picking up a little speed.

She thought about asking the Captain if all that fire spreading below them was really necessary... and what if there were deadly toxins or worse ... But he and Madrone were busy, enraptured in their own little world, talking about weapons and tactics that fit best in different training curriculums.

Wrongness creeping up on all their designs and wishes. She felt it coming on hard, grabbing her body from inside. And she didn't want to be apart from Hazel. Memories... That face. A boy, older now, the name Sasha. Clear to her finally. His hair messed up like it was teased or... A strong power of certainty vibrating the air and space around him.

Hazel ramming her broken knife into a Shadow... blood turning dark

A Cycle of the 'great calamity' Turns Over.

Shadows grow as humans abuse the magic for greed unto eco-cide. Even so, the final assault of their Shadows dawns, and the pure shadows of the innocents release their fury and perhaps the sacred balance is restored. . Many and grievous will be the loss as many of the 'Powers,' Chosen perish too. To stand in the way of or too close to the fury of the innocent , knowing the consequences of either choice, may be a 'fool's path,' - but such is the human drama. All we know for sure is that blood will flow and a new generation may yet learn the example of sacrifice - then a wise, new vigor shall sweep the land and the 'time of learning Love' will overwhelm us, never to be lost again. ...Lorien

Prophecies

Flashes of dreams came as Hazel rested lightly, weakness still lingering: Strain and desperation slowly subsiding. But she wanted to stay a while longer there in the Dream of ancient places, places Holy with shrines. People praying together knowing the way... the sorting and mixing of what was good balanced against the risks required. Then just when she felt warm and comfortable in that place: **Shadows**.

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Drawn like maggots to flesh only these 'soul-maggots' gathered thick with supreme purpose. Drawing in their certainties and releasing their Chosen. Forcing human 'time' to compress, trying in crafty meddlings to ruin the Quickening... to steal the potential - the belief in sacrifice... Other shadows too... Different shadows there, barely discernible. Negatives of the other. Murrlet and Salmon souls enraged at Nothingness... at the sheer arrogance....

'Seek... seek' she seemed to sense more than hear... 'Power... the source... To undo the tricks of the **Nebyakin**.' Great imprints... The green lines... Anaya sleeping...

She heard voices and realized she was no longer dreaming.

"Let's bear west by northwest a few more points Dave. Stay pretty close up against the mountains. Bring it in from the North over Tri-Star ridge."

'I recognize that voice... or did I dream it. Firm, but friendly.

Well it was a nice sounding voice' she thought.

Another voice, the pilot's asked: "Looks awful down there... are we ...winning, I wonder?"

Jarred replied:

"We neutralized a lot of their ammunition and probably recovered many weapons...

There better be some heavy cannon to make up for... The..."

And then a strong urge for caution was with him and he said:

"There'll be a few factions we'll have to be dealing with yet. And surprises I'm sure! Watch out, and spread the word. The next few days, especially, are max alert."
'Yes. I wish I could trust him... she thought as she tried to sit up.
Then out loud she said to herself: "I mean I wish him to be worthy of my trust."
She looked over at Katia still laying still on the stretcher. Hazel remembered Tim, Katia's partner, killed brutally at the ambush, a rifle crushing his sweet face.
She felt that queasy feeling of someone's wish overpowering hers. A wish to be somewhere safer....

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The pilot yelled, "Jarred!" as he saw the jet coming in on the horizon.
Jarred adjusted his headset saying, "Zebra-Wolf 99er, come in. Bear south down threequarters. Charlie at ten o'clock. Out."
"Rodger, code four, Squad Leader."
Sasha, suddenly sat 'bolt-upright' and said in a strange voice:
"Head up Redwood Creek, Jarred."
The pilot looked at Jarred who nodded saying,
"Yes, up there and take us down low. 'Shit on my mother,' I hope there's only one and he follows us not... Brione."
Then he shook his head to clear it, wondering why her face popped into his head as he scanned the horizon looking for more danger.
"Hayfork Air Command, do you read me? This is Jarred 4207, Squad leader Zebra-Wolf. Requesting support: Code Max 668, Air and Ground? Are you 1039 er?"
Nothing but static there...
A loud crackling sound blasted their ears as something struck the chopper... A missile poked through the side of the cabin - unexploded...
Sasha sat dazed as he glanced back and forth from Hazel to the warhead that appeared a few feet away.
Eye to eye. She saw him concentrate... Suddenly he looked much younger... slightly lost. But time held momentarily. Hydraulic fluid sprayed over Katia's legs.
Nobody panicked as they lost altitude, and banked down over a side ridge.
Jarred saw the flare of rockets igniting across the canyon. Missiles headed right at them, screaming overhead followed by a blasting detonation. The chopper shuddered and was pushed sideways.
"The tail stabilizer is out," the pilot exclaimed as they began to spin wildly, out of control... wishes whipping about them, from them and from elsewhere...

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The wounded machine slammed into the side of a large tree. Noisily, but almost in slow motion it slid down the side of the tall fir, snapping off branches until it crumpled into the ground.
A blinding light rent the fabric of the Patterns for miles about.
A cheer went up from that nearby ridge top. Aire braced himself as Sage jumped high at him. He caught her, barely able to hold his balance and hugged her long and hard.
"We did it," they both said loudly, together laughing at their luck.
"I wonder why the government is attacking the militia?" Aire said, as he rubbed his fingertips over his lips, thinking hard.
"That poor helicopter... I wish we had been able to get to the jet sooner," said Sage, as they watched the strange fireball flash up from behind the smaller ridge.
Aire shook his head, not sure what to think.
"I hope Dr. Dee felt that hit wherever he is. I don't know... reports out of Redwing say there's heavy fighting, but no confirmation of who's involved ... or why."

He put the missile launcher back on the flatbed under the cammo netting.

Sage strode over to the radio station transmitter and said:

"Try and reach the eco-commando base at 97.3 on A band, I think."

Aire came over nodding.

Sage looked at him and said:

"Yeah, the crash is closer to Whoopatki. Maybe a search party could reach the site from there."

"Might be a good idea to see who was on board that downed chopper and worth the loss of a twenty million dollar fighter bomber. Give it a try." Aire said as the radio operator tried again to raise their friends across the valley.

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The helicopter exploded in a great fireball. Sasha managed to bring the two symbols of death and fire together in time to transfer the force of the blast over to the burning jet fighter plane. But too late for some of the injured on board and the little hand that reached out to touch his palm.

A green-violet glow flared away the smoke so that they could breathe.

... And Sasha saw that the Chosen held the Sacred Fire there within their hearts, as did he. They were strong. They could be trusted... he wanted...

"No... You need no one. It's the Elf puts these silly thoughts in the stir to confuse us, so she can control everything. No, I say young fool."

He didn't like that and pleaded with Lorena:

"Mother, I'm not so special... There are others... Jarrel is too..."

Tell her to stop wishing at me. I have to do this myself... If you doubt me, how can I do it?"

And he felt panic trying to find a crack and he was angry. The raven sought him out.

"Stop! Jarrel, can't you see, you create threats that endlessly multiply - trying ever too hard to keep things going your way. Your opinions aren't the only ones here. 'Wish no harm' you said, but there is harm everywhere now and you knew the consequences of such grand wishes... you knew and have tried to keep it from me with your simple reminders.

It's not the Elf we have to fear... It's each other. 'Watch the details' that's what the Elf tells them... I've been in their thoughts."

He thought of the resolve they held... their balance of the Powers of the Woods with their Human Will. Risking death or worse holding on to that Fire and they had knowledge and protections he could use and share... friends even.

Just because you know what you want... well you still have to watch out for changes creeping into your plans... stay aware and ride that wish all the way... right on top of it...

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And he pushed away from her lost wishes, barely holding back at all. He had never even thought of doing that... She wished harm in 'not-doing', but Sasha cast another strong spell outward determined to see his own way now... to accept consequences to learn how the other wishes she kept from him might be the answer.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: DEATH'S OWN SHADOW

At a Speech two years earlier... commemorating the attacks on the Pentagon and the brave demolition of the Statue of Liberty... a mock-scale version of the once great,

symbol of refugees, stood behind the speaker's stage. The Statue of Hypocrisy towered above their thoughts, waiting its turn to burn.

"I want to thank the FBI and the rest of the Lunatic Right for trying to frame our friends. Now we can all see the truth a bit for the better... or the worse... depending on your expectations and what not. Yes, the Government is but a **Shadow** Regime of the 'polluted Rich'... a Regime of Terror reared for this eventuality.

Brave soldiers turned on their corrupt superiors and so now we know their naked brutality. They killed twenty innocent people, so they could blame us, so they could stop us from thinking and they hoped we would capitulate - give up. But as I look out at this mass of aroused people, as I look into the eyes of the nearly one hundred thousand defenders before me, I see that evil rebounds upon itself once more. For we now stand united behind the Youth Campaign of 'Sabotage till Peace.' Our blessings follow them and we, here today, send our Love and Rage out to theirs. May they see the smoke rising from every gathering of Free People.

Across the land people seize control of the powerlines, the bridges, and their lives. There is only one thing to believe in now. Defend your watersheds.

Total reorientation of our lives to bare survival until the Time of Renewal.

Light the fires... To the Capital... all of us.

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...Make them kill you if that is what they must do.

Brione remembered the words from that fiery speech and she remembered all the dead that day, but the Movement grew and now with the Healers helping there is a new lightness and ease about many of the camps... 'But the Secret Plan... I can't figure how the response to it will shape up.'

...Dreamy thoughts lost their place, as the chopper dropped, veering sharply to the south... along with her stomach.

She heard the pilot's panicked thoughts: "Come on baby, just hold on there... keep a going."

And Brione wished as hard as she ever had:

Safety for Hazel and her companions... a way out of danger...

The loud roar of a jet shook them as it passed close overhead.

The roof timbers groaned as if tired of the burden grown terrible. Winds carrying not just the cold of a mountain storm pressed down on the small cabin, one side already buried in drifts. The wind blasts scratching the tree branches across the shingles, like sharpened claws out to get him.

Kith finally quit pacing and flopped down nervously by the fire. Resting his forehead on one hand, he took a few deep breaths. Anger and blame all mixed up showed themselves, but Marla had discovered in their three days alone that his worries easily overwhelmed his patience when it came to his partner, Miya. Those two, their bonds of love and companionship were strong, almost too strong.

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The disappearance of Miya along with the Elf had nearly sundered the thin thread of sanity that Kith clung to. It was bad enough having to fight a war of zero odds when he really wanted to be on the farm or anywhere away with his love... 'Enough of all this... I've done my share...' he thought feeling terrible and alone. Miya zapped away and the cold that he usually loved... starkly hinted at death.

He tried to reject the calling, his responsibilities, his friends... everything, but just like at the altar site where Miya had vanished, he ultimately gave in; righteous vengeance winning over self pity. He had seen a nearly unshakable Marla, losing her patience and making ready to abandon him there when the snow had started to fall. He could tell she

was impressed, struggling six long miles against the blizzard and its arctic winds. A night that lasted almost forever.

The early winter's shadow seeking across the barren rocks with cold tendrils seeking deeper than chilled flesh. Wishes for survival against an ancient Power – Tauone de Fleur, the Ice Goddess. A minor power, but one seemingly now allied with the **shadows** - or so it had all ended up twisting about him as he cursed his luck and then himself for cursing... for being rash and stubborn at the wrong times. In the end, his anger and Marla's skills saw them through. He wondered if Marla still felt as if she were out there... frozen yet resisting beyond the end of possibilities. And what she really thought of him now... cooped up here with a half crazed stranger.

He followed the draft of warm air up from the woodstove to Marla's caring eyes. She tried a slight smile on him, but that hollow look wouldn't budge.

Marla poured some Echinacea and Passionflower tea, offering it to Kith with a kind and hopefully not too concerned of a look:

"It will help calm you down. You need to rest."

Kith's only response was: "err...aargh," but he accepted the mug and sipped at the brew patiently enough. Then, he turned his head to the side and looked straight at her saying calmly:

"I'm really sorry, Marla. You've been helpful and a friend. I've been dreadful, it can't of been easy for you."

Marla reached up and rubbed his neck... saying:

"I know what it must be like for you..." Gentle tensions as their expressions met and fenced... mildly.

She held her ground and said:

"My partner is in prison... two years now.

I gave him up for dead last year, though a little spot still wants to believe."

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She closed her eyes pushing back memories she had not dealt with in some time. Kith's neck felt a last gentle squeeze as she withdrew her hand saying,

"The Feds took my daughter away too when they... raided the Boulder safe-house."

"Oh, Gods" Kith said shocked out of his own pointless stupor.

"... I... I didn't know."

He looked helpless and unable to say anything useful.

"I'm OK now..." she said with resignation overshadowed only slightly with half healed grief.

"It was last year... I doubt they'd hurt her.

Stephan says we're close to tracking her down. I know its so weird going on, having to act like nothing is a big deal... when you'd rather be dead than feel the pain another second."

She took a moment to collect her wits knowing her next words were crucial:

"Remember your dreams... all of them. Wish all the good ones to grow and weave... to spin and dance. Remember what you are fighting for and why, and always remember, how much your lost friends really cared.

Resolve to do your best and take care of yourself. Believe that every sacrifice we make will reap a big difference... down the road... in ways we can't even see. Draw on the anger - like you've done when the big trees fall... but don't let it eat you up."

"Yeah... absolutely you are right. When I'm with my friends it's so easy.

We click. You can feel the magic about us and one can trust in its vitality for a ways anyway. Now I'm far away, alone..." her eyes reaching his and a little funny look trying to tease him... just a bit

He continued: "Every **shadow** seems a threat... but that's what they want me to be

thinking. I thank you for listening, for not letting me ... drift too far. Thanks."
She shrugged as if it were nothing... She would do it for any forest defender, after all that's what made the Resistance so powerful... compassion and the closeness that comes from being a despised and hunted group... fiercely defiant against a fearless enemy, yet totally and openly loving to those in similar straits.

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She opened the door to the stove and poked around in the coals before adding more wood. Then her eyes lit up as she looked at Kith and said:

"Hey, let's tell stories - something positive until the short-wave call comes in. What'dya say dude - You old grump..."

And she nudged his crossed legs enough that he almost tipped over.

He laughed hard, thinking for a moment that he'd jump on her and get her back. But he did enjoy their talks and said, keeping an eye on her should she pull another quick one on him:

"Sure. That sounds great, I've had this same dream or overlapping parts of it lately. It seems spooky, but there's also a real feeling of love... The same feeling I have with the Chosen... everything right and tight. Intentions out in the open everything simplified so our motives and wishes are close - in sync.

It's a weird dream. I don't know what it is about or... whom.

Nothing is familiar, yet it's real. It will affect us.

Seven tall candles burn in a dark room.

Brilliant blues, pulsating at a steady throb: The candle-glow barely piercing the grayness, illuminating a woman on the bed. ... Thought - currents swirling, maintaining the illusion become reality.

Blue flames...green lines intersecting across her body.

A sensation of choking strangulation... and the scene alters:

A long stone slab stands amid seven blue orbs. Anaya lies there ... chained in iron. She looks asleep or near death... her usually vibrantly healthy, greenish skin... now sallow and aged.

Then I am Owl, perched high up in an old tree. The wind blows gusty and strong the way I like it. I see with Elf-sight the magic heavy around the stone cabin below me:

A solemn desperate feeling there and I am not welcome.

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A middle-aged woman, aristocratic in bearing approaches from a fold in the grayness. Her song fills the air, echoing against the gray mist following the candle flames' pulse. Feelings of melancholy and a joking acceptance penetrates my senses.

The simple faces of young children chanting appear everywhere.

Chanting:

"Ot (**From**) nepe~cneph (**Out of Death**), yepea (**Through**) Bopota~Cneph (**Death's Gate**), >knehb (**Life**) boeodhobiatl (**Returns to**) beche (**Balance**) if we let it.

You love a wish to make it grow - Hooray for all to dance like us...

Simple the way to life-love-long, simple to live as flowers playing colors...

Trusting free to share... how deep Love's roots shall surely be..."

Their song overlays hers creating song. The meaning of the words wrapping about me in all languages, but maybe Slavic mostly.

She opens her silken gown and arcane symbols glow like blue smoke through the grayness.

One green line passing through her body and passing on through the doorway.

She looks up at me - a puny owl, of no consequence before her majesty.

I feel her thoughts as she enters me - shiny dark eyes inside of mine - and shining back

infinite burning intent - too pure, too much to control.

Strange words, of universal expression, like the children's chant:

Shinning for our Npabya (Truth) to be. We wield this Oakeh (Beacon) valiantly... till Death's release.

Making me think: 'No, Elves, they must go... made of sin... Weaving faults - fancy facades that can't stand the light of change. They offer themselves... so be it.

Let the price of selfish aloofness be dear and final.'

Vivid, stirring pictures of thatched roofs and muddy roads, oxen and carrion at the roadside. A vast dimension of awareness and connections to the land stretching forever, and beyond. A people steeped in the darker side of humanity - desecration of their holy Pagan sites, serfdom and war... clinging resolutely to aid through ancient spirits of
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forest, stream and meadow. Equanimity as a shield, sloughing off endless suffering with Love and Sacrifice. Deep silent loneliness, a ghastly calm-like deep - sleep amid the famines and purges. A people living aware of the vast, overwhelming, immensity of a striving world... and all the promise and terror it avails...

From hence she - a sorceress supreme - came drawing the madness of despair across her wide - faring path, growing stronger and more mad... tortured by a hint of failure...

Then I feel as if I am in a trance when a boy comes gliding down a forest path. Down between the twin trees above the waterfall of the little brook... no tracks left to soil the moss. His presence drifts closer. Hair nearly white and sticking out straight almost. He carries a candle in one hand. The other swarms with tiny light-motes. God-like but innocent and truthful. He waves to me in my mind, and then the sorceress leaves me with an intolerant taste puckering my mouth, dry and disagreeable.

Inside the stone cabin they say prayers to unknown gods.

She feels old as she looks at her swollen belly - ripe yet never to be. Ripples slithering under the flesh. The woman in the gown dances around her as she chants.

The boy is there, his hands on either side of her child wanting it to come now. His sister or his death...

And the Earth trembles and groans with thunder rattling the very stones.

Concentration grows from one to the next. They all join in the chant and the boy's face contorts sharply. His mother gasps a shuddering cry ... and grips the bed, his concentration falters, but she smiles and takes the pain - her duty manifest.

Seven blue shapes rotate, spinning as motion fills the room. The dancing woman becomes a blur of many... concentric circles reforming endlessly, caressing and being. Her dancing images dissolve into the place around the boy and his mother -- all light, all life, channeling to them - collapsing inward in aid.

A circle of three is joined as all else removes.

White light pouring through the stone walls, a sense of water gushing... her belly radiating as she opens her mouth wider than possible. The sound of tears - she feels the infinite pain - the consuming terror of a billion doomed souls. Trapped and yet awaiting... Ready to endure... even more.

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Captured then as a blinding light consumes everything... the boy standing there alone atop a pile of stone and rubble.

A single teardrop traces down his scorched cheek, gathers itself and drops, falling slowly to the ground. Light pulses course down his body fading except for a slight glow about his feet.

And at the point of intersection of two faint green lines a single flower - a white tulip - opens, pushing through the rubble where his teardrop still glistens - nourishing.

The boy circles around the flower and it turns its stem following him. A spirit shape -

something - rises up from the flower.

He stops to let it merge with him and hears a voice:

"Beyond all doubts... drawing all love... a billion joys to lend...

Seek the Portal... Release all wishes."

Then I am soaring as the owl. The vision of the boy and the dancing lights recedes.

I soar higher and fare wider towards always... I see the whole planet from space - a grid of green lines suddenly flaring bright against a darkening background of eternity.

Kith came back to the room and this world, a sudden tingling around his neck where the Staff of the Wildryns rested on his skin. Marla gave him a worried look as he clutched the Staff, tears pooling in his eyes.

"Kith..." She waited holding her breath and watched her friend until he exhaled. His eyes opened from a catonic stare and then he proceeded to roll down onto the floor into her lap... stone dead.

Until he squeezed her knee at the tickle spot and pulled her over in a gentle wrestle.

Small laughs and catching his breath he said: "Did you feel it..."

She gave him a 'kind of' move of her head and he continued,

"Was it sad? It's not sad to me, scary maybe, but there's a blissful rush. A sense of things in motion and no use fretting - approvechar - make the best use of."

"The part about the Elf doesn't seem to fit." Marla said before she realized that might bring up Miya's absence in the dream.

Kith sat up careful not to lean on Marla who was practically wrapped around him.

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And he said with certainty:

"I think it means the Elf is alive. She probably sent the dream. But the boy is so strange, surreal and somehow commanding or without any fear, only one tear of sadness at the deaths of his mother or sister or..."

I wish Bri or Hazel were here, they know more about the prophesies and such."

Marla was going over the dream again and said thinking out loud:

"Let's see: Birth and death... infinite powers... definitely more than one.

Does the boy control the Wildryns?

'Life returns to balance through Death's Gate'..."

A pause and no response, Kith has tired of dreams...

"Hey tell me your story - wrestle girl - we've still got lots of time,"

Kith said and then he yanked his leg out of reach from her quick swipe.

She squeezed his hand for a minute. Seeing his relaxed, happy face the storm felt suddenly unimportant... the 'Infrastructure Wars' far away... no friends at risk tonight across the region... Just her and an old friend by a cozy fire.

"Well my only experience with the magic until you showed up was several years ago up north of Denver. We were out gathering herb off of Neder Canyon beyond the old bridge. My partner and his sister took me out to learn more of gathering and spreading native seeds. Smoke rose from farther up the canyon we were in, so off went us curious adventurers.

In the higher meadow we saw the tops of teepees and a few tended fields through the screen of young fruit and nut trees.

A voice behind us demanded politely:

"Can I help you all?"

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A young woman stood a dozen yards behind us. Her long hair tied back, she couldn't have been more than fifteen, but she held the cocked crossbow steady, a walkie-talkie and a pistol on either hip.

We explained that we were only gathering herbs and meant no harm coming to

investigate the smoke. She spoke into the walkie-talkie giving us a close 'look-over', but smiling shyly from under long lashes... seeming to enjoy visitors and her job.

"Come and visit our Burg if you would like to."

The young woman offered and went past us down the trail.

At the village we joined a circle where children were telling a story of their clan: the Dengavers. A teenage boy with dark dreadlocks and tattoos running the underside of his arms spoke clearly to a circle of mostly ten and twelve year olds:

"Follow your wishes through to their unfoldings - before and after you cast them. Seek the simplest of things and a way to live your life where being simple is what matters most. Find a universe in every moment... a world in every sight. Hold the struggles of all time in an instant and a path will open to you."

A tall woman stood up, smiling proudly and said:

"Well spoken Jenna.

Now who will tell of our application of The Way?"

Many hands went up, some waving hard. The facilitator chose a gangly girl with large dark eyes shinning back our doubts and fears erased. We looked at each other and the circle of children wondering each of us at the strength of these people, their casual confident wholeness that could not be denied. It pulled on us wanting us to know, to feel how to be at ease in all ways.

The girl rose walked forward to the center of the circle and tossed some dirt onto the rocks there as she repeated words to herself. She returned to the circle and looked around sharing eyes with everyone.

The girl seemed a little reluctant to start but finally cleared her throat as she twisted her toes in the dirt and began:

"There is magic in a simple wish, the story of the Dengavers.

In the 1990s a group of traveling artists, gypsies and forest defenders came together to live in the mountains for a summer hoping that together - all their talents and insights
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combined - they could create a plan for people to better survive and sustain themselves and the environment in the likely event of social collapse. Some say the elves were engaging our presence at this time... drawing those who could understand what had to be done to avert worse calamities. The Zine: Wishing Your Way Through Revolution was followed as we began putting together pieces of our future.

We wished for a future together living in nearby communes and surrounded by thousands of like minded folk; To live in a beautiful place of abundant water for drink and crops; plentiful game and wild foods; A place we could stay forever and be joyous to sacrifice our lives for. We wished for the wisdom and stamina to work hard enough and smart enough to have a surplus to share with those in need. We wished for patience and toleration from neighbors who did not know or understand us. And we wished ourselves luck in devising a plan to accomplish our dreams.

Many people believed it would all be quite easy if we went to one of the already established and growing sanctuaries in the Northwest. But in the spirit of helping others, we agreed to stay here around Neder Valley. This region needed a sanctuary and we were it.

Success followed us. People saved their money and tabled all over spreading the word about Green Survival and Eco-Sanctuary Defense. Large donations started arriving and we built the first three villages for a hundred people each. Each village had two large community structures; Thirty small cabins, various sheds and bathhouses; And huge gardens, some greenhouses and acres of grains for us and for all of the animals.

We barely made it the second year when the money ran low. Providing everything for that many people, well, we learned a lot. Now it is much easier even though there are

more people to share with.

Once people arrived there was real magic happening. We knew - somehow - why other groups had failed why it is so hard to find your group sometimes. It takes a lot of openness to make any relationship work and it takes even more openness, trusting, belonging to make a large group feel safe, comfortable and free. Without openness to feel safe enough to express your problems, criticisms and needs, it won't last. The 'cult syndrome' will raise up its threat and people will drift off, get frustrated or fight each other. Dengavers encourage independence within the framework of what we are doing. People chose which areas to work in and they take off and spend time in nature when they can.

Private cabins provide personal and couple space while the community buildings are always bustling with every activity: cooking, canning, music, arts and crafts, woodworking... and anything else. None of us use cars except for farm or work projects. The area is full of beauty and places to explore. Nearly three hundred Dengavers live near
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here and hundreds more will soon arrive. Sustainability is key. We try to limit children so we will have time for them and not be overtaxed. No one wants to starve.

Growing up Dengaver, children learn how to solve problems quick. They know the complexities of how garden soils work, where the deer graze... what herbs are good for. We learn to value skill and artistry, things we our selves grow and make with our hands. When a machine is used it takes away humanness. We believe that almost all technology based on metals, petroleum or plastics is suicidal and sadly misguided. We live our world. We spend hours out in the wild listening to the creatures and the plants living. We rarely wish anymore... though we may have to when the war gets worse. We discovered a great irony in the magic: people are supposed to create magic... not use it up. The wiser your wishes and the smarter you work the less magic you should need down the road.

Eventually we hope to give magic back, back to the land and to the magic of the future. It is so sad that people with money didn't help set up Survival Communities much sooner. They should of come: to congregate in the woods and meadows. So much more magic would of been free."

She nodded lowering her dark eyes and sat down in the circle.

My friends and I were totally blown away. I can still remember it vividly, like it just happened.

And it's the Dengavers leading all over the Rockies now. They have hundreds of villages and outposts. They're the major eco-commando contingent regionally. If any kind of sense comes out of this mess around here, they will probably be there helping and lending expertise."

Kith smiled thinking over the story. "That's so beautiful... it always amazes me whenever I hear a new story like that; What people have done. Recovering wisdom and skills lost for hundreds, even thousands of years... and making it all work! Ssheeeesh! Young people learning fast and often leading the way.

Up in the Free States there are many like the Dengavers, employing wishes directly, consciously as magic. Kama Free State is so magical, I swear time does not exist there.

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It's unnerving to newcomers at first - kind of an eerie connection between the ancient and the almost future.

Then there are other camps: wild, open, anarchist confederations - the triumph of the glorious Riff-Raff. You gotta love them."

And he cracked a huge smile as Marla did a little mock-Irish jig and said quite dramatically: "Hooray... for the Riff-Raff!"

"Who knows what they wish," Kith continued as he stood up.

"They were so free they affected us all, helped us let go of some of our well-off, educated, white boy stuff...

Shit, quick turn on the radio."

Marla plugged in the connector to the battery pack and when the light lit up she flipped the switch on the large short-wave radio. Kith gave her an anxious, 'come on' look as she finally got the frequency right on.

"... Reporting on rumors from Utah... sqrrrrzzchh...

Seceded... Armed roadblocks blanket the area south of Ogden. Tune to Code 799 at eight Central Time.

... In the central Rockies all we can say is a big giant THANK YOU!

You crazy kids have shut most of the country down on land, in the air, and electrical distribution no longer exists.... rrrrchhrrr

... tilwiiing... more static then ... to Kitdeer, Miyana and Marble: Greetings!

Dragonfly says hi, and you better vote next week.

Unconfirmed reports have Hazel and others rescued from near Redwing during a major battle there. Parts of the militia are fighting the government and others...

Who's that Dingo?

"Damm it! No..."

And then loud, continuous noise, maybe machine gun fire, broadcast over the speaker.

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Then just silence... with a normal fuzz... filling space.

The radio let out a medium crackle, as the wind blew hard for the first time in awhile... visions striking...

A VW van burning shot full of holes... two bloody bodies leaning contorted, half against the wall... wires smoldering... a face with a scar... and... That one familiar, twisted now it was, fearful of its own depravity.

Spirit, Magic, Love Will Save the World or Save those who Believe.

It's never worked that way - it can't. Faith can make your suffering less severe, but that's a selfish pursuit that leads nowhere but temporary deluded escape, from an inevitable reality.

Spirit and other forms of energy are meant to be used in conjunction with hard work to achieve a clear objective:

"The Goddess helps those who help themselves." The more clear and defined your plan and your intent the more powerful will be the spirit you bring to it. - Myth 1 of Five Myths to Kill a World

Jarred saw the blinding light flash through him and on forever...

Sound and heat striving to suck him to oblivion. His head felt huge and heavy as he turned it... a stream of molten metal about him - thick, consuming... a tiny black dot glowing back at the flame.

...For a second, he thought he heard his mother's voice... again.

Something being carried... a blur of time distorted by the magic and carried by the heat.

The feeling of another presence... The black spot and a lonely scream.

Then nothing just the darkness and thoughts stripped pure, layer by layer, till only intent remained. He clung there on the edge... the edge of an easy darkness... but he could not let go and nearly fell the other way into some thing, insidious... offering

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promises unlimited. - but too little substance. He didn't need that either. Good he had done and little bad, yet he had more to give... more to understand, questions covered up.

Drawing back from that place of no-edge, ghosts drawing life from him, he wished for someone to love - someone who loved him enough.

He backed up and bumped into something that made him jump. Swinging his arm around instinctively to defend against...

'A woman,' he thought as two startled faces reflected each other's surprise. The gray haze there pressing in as they revolved around each and seeing a glimpse of the world and needs from the other's eyes, hearts close, beating about the same... attraction reserved.

She felt like no one he'd known... as a cold shiver went slipping through him, a ghost... he could tell and an angry mocking turning...

'Are you a ghost too?' he tried to say, but didn't have to.

She was real.

She smiled and he knew she felt him to be kind, if rough and preoccupied. And she enlarged some, her confident presence swelling, letting him know, in no uncertain terms,

'No body gives me shit.'

He felt wishes: one seeking control, but the other healing and canceling the other... barely, strong but not sure of its power. From the woman before him came only a willingness to try anything to help...

He felt uncomfortable, a feeling he thought he had lost. Opening his eyes, he sighed realizing that he was still dreaming. A ghost crouched down over him, choking his neck... chanting. He started to struggle, but he being so very tired or it wouldn't let him - and more ... a fleeting dawning of other discoveries - dark magic or sorcery, so hidden he couldn't see it if it wanted him to.

He was almost more shocked to realize it was only Sasha.

A very frazzled Sasha it was. Soot marks on his arms and one side of his face.

But for an instant he saw the burn on his friend's right palm... four streaks, exactly like, the outlines of slender fingers, and Sasha wrapping his hand... something odd.

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And Jarred had a **vision** of a young girl who looked like Sasha crying amid the hot flames.

Sasha looked up from his hand at Jarred and said:

"I'm all right... a few burns... We were lucky.

Please, stay still Jarred. You're hurt pretty bad."

Jarred thought there was a distant melancholy in his young friend's tone... but a rush of weakness swept over him and he winced briefly, as Sasha carefully removed the jacket off from his friend's injured shoulder.

A strong wish flowed visibly from Sasha and an intense pain gripped Jarred for a second and then left. Numbness and a little strength returned.

"Your arm fractured in the crash... I've done all I can... I have to rest soon."

Jarred nodded thinking of resting a spell himself, when a snapshot of the dream, if it was a dream, flitted and stuck in memory. Too jumbled to make sense now from the scraps he held.

Just the woman.

Hazel handed the herb over to Sasha saying,

"These are good. I couldn't find any fresh skullcap... Is he... "

And she stopped, seeing Jarred's eyes open and looking quite puzzled at hers.

Recognition dawning...

He looked away at Sasha busy working and mashing the herb in a clean handkerchief.

Jarred watched Sasha and tried to think straight.

"Too many new faces and weeks of crazy dream things," kept going through his head.

Sasha wiped Jarred's face again with a damp rag and then secured the herb bundle over the bruised part of Jarred's shoulder that hadn't healed quite right.

"Wrap this around with the webbing and I think he'll be OK, if he doesn't move much," Sasha said exhausted, eyes getting heavier.

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Jarred looked into Hazel's eyes for a second as she started splinting his arm and fixing the sling. She looked back to her work, but he felt blindly certain that she knew the dream or read his thoughts.

"My mother... Jarred knew herb and..."

But he couldn't go on.

Sasha walked away toward a flatter spot just down the hill.

A sudden feeling of being confused about something.

Hazel finished the adjustment on Jarred's splint and looked down back at him:

"What did you say?"

Even at this distance Jarred saw Sasha's hands clenching as he heard himself say:

"**Fool!**" It was like he was repeating what Sasha mumbled, but he also felt like his thoughts kept going around in circles making it impossible to think. Except he thought he knew some of Sasha's worries, it had been almost a year since their mothers had perished and neither of them had really tried to talk about it... or even what had happened.

"Umm... are you talking to me?" she asked seeming tired and a bit edgy too.

His thoughts kept wandering... something about his mother... but all he could recall was **a day in the woods... tears, sadness...the house, the pile of rubble.**

Abruptly something lifted the pressure from him as a hawk cried high overhead. He knew what he wanted to tell Hazel and he tried to get up but he couldn't. She plopped down beside him and leaned back exhausted on the log next to where Jarred lay. He saw her looking down the hill at the smoke rising where Sasha now tended a small fire.

Turning, with a question on her lips, the sound of a helicopter woke them up from their weariness. Hazel jumped up and reached her hand down to Jarred saying:

"We've got to get out of here! Come try and lean on me down to the fire.

Jarred, listen to me..."

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He heard her, but so much bewilderment about just what to do and whom could he trust?

"I'm sorry, yes I can move... pull me up ... yeah."

Before they got very close to the fire, she felt around her with all her senses. Conflict and strong wills circled... Sasha sat cross-legged by the fire adding herb bundles quickly.

Jarred might make it if she could just support him a little further.

She saw Sasha breathing in the smoke as the flames turned dark billowing, and it seemed like he was further away. Smoke exhaling and gray smoke turning, fog now and a density to time, sound. Stumbling along half dragging each other, the two reached the fire sitting down clumsily. They crouched there fearing attack but wishing for rescue. Hazel looked around expectantly. Turning her head she barely believed it was leaving... the sound of the helicopter muffled and faded away. Smoke and the oddly chill fog fading some to, still mingling, and concealing. Clouds came lower now, to investigate, and a light drizzle dampened the three survivors.

Hazel felt the presence of a woman, wise indeed, but blinding her decisions with needless anger. Reflexively, she rushed over to Sasha just as his body went rigid, eyes closed. She caught his shoulders letting him tip over gently by the fire, thinking 'Jarred, Goddess!'

...And she rushed back to Jarred's side. He struggled to gain a more comfortable position, than the branch poking his sore arm where Hazel had dumped him.

He managed to sit up as she arrived.

Staring, he smiled at her, but also at himself. Humor must be the antidote he thought as he kept smiling, despite the frequent winces, unaware he looked rather silly to her just

sitting there smiling and staring.

Hazel, weary but kind of in that 'second wind,' sleep deprivation mode common to Alphas and other workaholics, thought 'maybe a sense of humor is indeed our only hope, at this point. Besides Jarred's so easy to get along with.

Almost too easy... It had been so long.

She waved her hand in front of his face and gave him a teasing, slightly screwed up smile she knew he'd like and said:

"Come on Dopey, let's try and all get together by Sasha, while I'm still moving."

He nodded as she pulled him up and he said:

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"I'm not really used to being in this situation, helpless, dependent on a woman... thanks for being my friend... I owe you 'one' at least."

He didn't hear her respond, but he thought maybe that squeeze was a hug. Urging... them around a fallen log and down next to Sasha without too much pain. Rest, at last... be better in the morning.

Sasha covered with one blanket, she added the rest of the wood and fit herself in between the two men, pulling the last blanket over her and Jarred. Hours passed in the quiet, huddling together there, hoping it would not rain before morning. Hazel tried not to think much about their difficulties, but something menacing and dangerous lurked on the edges of their protection... and it was not just the chill of the gray fog that gnawed the deepest. Fear and forced wishes gathered. She pretended not to pay much attention, focusing instead on the rise and fall of Jarred's chest, deep noisy breaths.

And she reached out to stroke Sasha's arm hoping he would stir or make some sign of change. 'Peace he needs' she thought as she started to drift off wondering what all troubled him... memory flashes of the battle, the crash, that missile right in his face almost... lost. His friend and commander injured... strength failing.... the dead he had failed to save...

'*The Earth... a way to trust... he needs soon.*,' her last thought, that didn't seem to be her own... and ... a voice ... *He needs the Earth*'... kept echoing from far away, and lost as sleep claimed her for now.

The chopper landed noisily in the cleared off space by the outpost's perimeter. Soldiers hopped out and Brione pushed past them trying to reach the pilot's door. Madrone followed close behind and reached to grab her agitated friend.

"Let me go! We have to go back... for Hazel, Jarred, please..."

She said as she started to wish things right, but Madrone grabbed her arm forcefully this time.

"Brione, listen to me I know you and that feeling is who I am, but..."

We have bigger responsibilities... and an audience... here."

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Brione spun around pulling her arm hard but resigning herself to her friends care.

And she held on to Madrone's muscled shoulder too bitter for tears and wishing, no vowing, to die to teach - 'them all' - a lesson.

She wiped the back of her hand across her damp eyes as Captain Harrison approached slowly towing a young lad.

"Put on a face girl," Madrone whispered as she released Brione.

Harrison barked an order to a soldier by the chopper and turned to Brione. He looked hesitant and took a deep breath as he took his hat off and the twelve year-old at his side pulled him down to whisper something.

Brione felt certain the child read her thoughts and knew about questions she held. The Captain straightened up and looked at Brione with kind eyes as he brushed his hair back

with a swipe of his hand: "Hi... Brione and Madrone."

He tried to smile but with only modest success said:

"I'm sorry, but there's no word yet. Somebody shot down the fighter-bomber that chased them. It looks bad... reports of at least one explosion... maybe it was the jet. I've got one chopper out searching and one's down for major repairs.

I'm taking off to relieve the other chopper... But I have to go while there's still light ... Stay here.

Please, I beg you. Jarred would never forgive me if something happened... again."

Brione kept wanting to interrupt and she truly felt she was the only one who stood a chance, but she didn't want to fight, create a scene or undermine legitimate authority - customs vary... She shook off pieces of her grief, recovering her composure - 'damned diplomacy!' - and she stood there expecting more... something to make sense or grant relief, when he said:

"A forest defender contacted us with appropriate codes. She says her name is 'Sage' and we're picking her up and a few of Jarred's best friends too. They'll find them if there's a way."

Brione just nodded thinking, Sage, she's one of the Chosen... She might make it...

Harrison introduced Damon, the bright young friend of Sasha's, to Madrone.

Brione still stood there thinking and wishing...

Wishing her friends to be just as she remembered them...

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She turned, feeling a small hand take hold of hers, and she looked down barely surprised as the faint twin flares of Eald shone calmly in young eyes.

A cold, damp morning greeted them, the dawn receding as dark clouds sank lower.

Hazel tried to get the fire going, but it seemed hopeless, raindrops splattered mostly from wind gusts shaking the branches. 'A wet, miserable day by the feel of it' thought Hazel standing there looking around one last time for some drier wood.

Jarred stayed in his blanket feinting sleep a while longer.

'She looks kind of nice like that: hair wet, curling from the dampness...

absolutely and that slightly flustered look.' He thought of her while stealing quick glances through half shut eyes. Something he wanted to ask....

He watched her tuck long braids up in her wool hat and begin sorting through their meager supplies. Bread, crackers, a few first aid items, herb, and her broken knife, which she put back in its sheath. She used a small pocketknife to cut some salami off - not her usual fare, but they all needed some energy. She handed it and some bread to Jarred.

Said Hazel: "Here eat some, I've known you're awake... Come on we should get moving. How do you feel?"

He shrugged not wanting to know yet. He chewed on some meat slowly, waking up, a little damp on one side. Stretching his legs he found them not too sore, but both of his arms ached seriously '... Rough day it had been,' he remembered. But as he pushed himself up to sit, he did marvel at how strong his 'broken' arm felt.

"I'm definitely better, we'll see how long I last though," he replied.

As soon as she turned away, his thoughts grew darker. The wind rose now and more rain started to fall, a slow patter working down through the canopy. It seemed like they were far from everything... and his insecurities looked back at him from the wet mossy

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branches and the fog lifting a ways across the ravine letting the day's glare reflect shiny wet rocks, cliffs towering fifty or a hundred feet.

'What am I doing?' he thought and the feeling grew of being 'out of it' inside.

'Thirty-three going on fifty, or what? I start a war, get us shot down... somehow I know

the other chopper is OK. Gods! People died in the crash... I didn't think... no one said anything. And the wreckage where was it. The bodies? The pilot?

...We're lost... Sasha's dying or something.'

"No, Jarred, I'm awake. Don't worry so much ..."

Jarred's head snapped up, surprised to hear his friend's voice...

A voice that always reassured him.

Sasha said:

"...Things are on the right track though it has been a bit bumpy. Your arm's OK I see."

Sasha came over to him walking stiff, but he looked ready to go, so Jarred stretched a little and watched Hazel trying to fit everything in the two small packs.

They set a course north by northwest, hoping to get down the canyon and up on a lower ridge where they could see the ocean or get their bearings better established. No one felt a need for talk. The going was rough, in the light rain. A faint trail opened to them through blackberry vines that grabbed persistently. Slippery rotting trees made each step difficult and tiring.

'It felt good to be doing something, going somewhere,' thought Hazel as she tried to pick the easy way around a jumble of dead trees and thorny brambles.

The forest hummed with life. The sound of running water, small rivulets and rushing creeks, infused them. Beauty shone there as most of the areas they passed through had never been entered or logged in fifty years or more. A few giant stumps hid among circles of suckers, duff, and vines. Every type of mushroom poked their colorful and varied heads up through the Sorrel and Yerba Buena. She inhaled deeply of the fragrant smells that linger around in undisturbed woods. She remembered holding on to Kith's hand as they tramped down forest paths, not so long ago...really.

The three of them seemed isolated and distant, caught up in their own worlds of problems and events unfolding rapidly beyond their control or comprehension. Their

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spirits lightened as the clouds thinned, the rain tapering off. There was hope.... but events were just happening too fast.

Jarred caught up to Hazel where the trail crossed a little stream. Leaves, fallen from the hardwoods ringed the clearing with yellows and reds. Hazel sat on a small boulder watching the water flowing, clear and healthy. A water spider preyed above the edges of a small eddy.

She saw him coming and thought he didn't seem to be hurting. A little rest... take it slow seemed like a good idea. She retrieved the bread and salami and started slicing some snacks.

Jarred accepted the food with a nod, saying: "Thanks, and thanks for going slow and waiting up."

She only nodded and took another bite of bread.

A small mouse or a chipmunk darted about beneath the brush sharing her excitement over crumbs...

Jarred wanted to talk with this woman, this Forest Defender who seemed so like him or like what he'd never dared dreamt of finding. He wanted to know her better... and to express the gnawing apprehension that grew steadily in his gut. But he didn't want to say the wrong things... make the usual mistakes...

He said, matter-of-factly, not to over do it:

"Hey, we are making progress. There ought to be a road sooner or later.

What do you think?"

And he looked back down the trail, searching by habit more than worry, for Sasha. He did worry too. Sasha seemed way too serious, especially since that meeting with the General. 'He's barely sixteen.' Then he remembered his birthday was less than a week

away.

Hazel's fingers touched his arm and she indicated the hillside above them. Sasha squatted by the gnarled root of an ancient fir snag. The top blasted off, a dark lightning strike evident, but the gnarled root where Sasha sat, still did its duty, as good as alive almost, wrapped around a large boulder, still holding back the steep hillside.

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Two tattered Ravens, dark and peculiar, hovered and cawed coarsely, like two complaining old women, as they came to rest on a branch of the old snag, high above Sasha.

The time was right... 'Talk you fool. Say something,' a little voice whispered to him again.

"Was it difficult in the beginning for you?" He asked speaking part way through his thoughts.

Hazel responded after a slight pause,

"I'm sorry, did I miss something? ...The beginning of what?"

"Oh, yeah... when you started as a Forest Defender, was it hard or what was it like?" He said trying to force his thoughts and questions into some sense.

Hazel handed him some more bread and said: "Actually the very first couple years we had a blast. All kinds of people, I was young with no limits. I'd work hard a few months and then hook up with someone cool and take off. When the Forest Wars heated up a few years ago, I had a lot more responsibilities and hardly a free moment. But I still had a part of me attached to my old life... not too much," she said as a grin appeared on Jarred's face.

"Oh don't laugh..." she said acting offended, but enjoying their easy banter, as she was certain he did equally.

"I still related to being comfortable and normal. I wasn't some material girl.

I loved camping and taking risks. Got arrested many times. I believed in the world I thought we were fighting for, but, well... I still looked for and wanted an easy, long break now and then... the cool dude, kind buds and a clean, private house that we could take off to."

I didn't expect to get it all, but the idea, the fantasy, lingered there.

Then I met Kith. We fell in love and it was a good partnership too for awhile... through some intense, hard times. Kith, he's the opposite of material. Cool in his own 'not of this stinking civilization' attitude. Ultra-Rad. He co-authored the book about the Ecocommandos. I met him just as a number of revolutionary cells formed. Crazy shit came down on some of us."

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Jarred looked her over, hearing the truth in the way she spoke, but giving her a look of 'That's amazing.'

She shook her head a little to the side and started to chew her lip, then said:

"I was the loyal skeptic. I found his sweet side sometimes and he found needed distraction. Together we learned new ways of looking at the struggle, combining our separate views... and we found... I guess a kind of joy, caught up in the rush of things, but a solid team. We had no possessions, an uncertain future at best, but we just dug on little things. Bird watching, moments alone and sneaking away ... well I do still like that. Shall we talk while we walk, I see Sasha up ahead?"

Jarred stood up, handing the pocketknife back to Hazel.

He said: "Sure, I'm feeling good."

Then as a shadow crossed overhead, his easy smile turned frightening. He pulled Hazel close to him, as one of the Ravens swept down low nearly snatching the bread out of Hazel's hand. A crazy edged: "Ca...aw, caw," trailed away from them. Jarred thought the

sunlight shone through the bird, like sparkles in ... And he lost the thought as he tripped over a rock and nearly lost his balance.

He took a step and stopped.

Feelings of an angry Sasha came and went.

Hazel caught up the rucksack and reached him as he cleared his head saying:

"Weird, spooky... did you feel it..."

Hazel nodded and said as she pulled him along the trail, gently:

"I know. Come on let's catch up to Sasha."

After a few steps she turned and said looking him straight in the eye:

"Jarred, there's really a lot we need to talk about... but, um..." and she took his hand and glanced at it before she looked back at him and said lightly but serious too: "I'd like to just talk about ourselves... get to know each other some before you hear how crazy I am."

She started to turn away, but he held her hand a moment and as she looked back he said:

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"No, arguments from me. I like hearing about you... Believe me, I'm not going to think you're crazy... I could tell you a few stories..." and he thought about the dreams.

She pulled him on again as they started down the trail across a small mudslide remnant. The day was pleasant, so far. Light clouds most of the time and the sun lit up the colors nicely, she thought.

Jarred followed along and when they came on an easy stretch he asked her:

"Tell me more... you were with this ultra-rad terrorists, I mean freedom fighter..."

She looked back with a twisted grimace not sure if he were joking:

"Forest defender or Eco-commandos... the government's the terrorist... They proved that." Jarred did get confused at so many words Americans used.

"OK, OK. You are right. It's all kind of the same depending on your perspective.

So, when did you stop being the skeptic?"

"I always will be in some ways, but I have moved more in support of ESD and the Ranger Defense. I always wanted to believe another path was possible. Kith helped me accept the inevitability of violence. Julia Butterfly - that symbol of a strong, loving woman braving two winters atop a giant tree inspired me as it reached into the hearts of our doubters and wanna-be enemies... opening the possibility of dialog... the seeds of potential cooperation. No. The **Ego-cult**, those old farts, they're really the ones responsible for turning me into an Elf, in more ways than one.

I remember it real clear. We had a big meeting to decide how the moderates would respond to media about Ranger Defense. The usual suspects set up the discussion and tried to control the circle. When that failed they, brought up fabricated personal attacks against a couple dear friends of mine. Screwed up nonsense, that only made people see how desperate egomaniacs could stoop. Consensus failed, but they managed to release a statement that the 'Greens neither condemn nor condone the actions of every fringe group that issues some wild proclamation.'

Late that night Kith and I gazed out into new moon darkness, glad not to see any car lights or choppers. The radio clicked on, twice and we waited for the third click to follow. A few seconds later we left our position heading across the open stretch before the fence. I handed my satchel through the hole in the fence and watched Kith pass through on his way to the substation. A few soft thuds sounded and my friends returned. A fast pace we set then. I was nervous, almost tweaking out, but it felt good, powerful, right on.

Kith stopped as we got to the ridge where the mountain bikes waited for us.

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"For everything that ought to be, and probably never will..." he punched the transmitter button and a super brilliant, white light flashed from where we had been. The glow dimmed turning more orange and then several explosions rumbled and peace settled on the land. You could feel it, just like when the power goes out in a storm and suddenly everything seems more wild, less confined, fresher... The towns to the south were cloaked in silent night now, not a light to be seen.

Coasting down the trail on the bike it clicked. The wind in my hair, the bad taste from the meeting earlier in the day forgotten, my life... it all made sense. The power of a few dedicated individuals to pull the plug and... I don't know what felt the best: knowing life would be quieter and simpler in a few places for a few days or knowing how floored the ego-cult would be.

'Two turds with one stone' became a private joke for weeks.

Kith's words were mine now:

"We're myth killers – It's not violent to mess up someone's fatal fantasies about technology. We'll start a fad and turn it off forever: electricity, communications, all that Babylonia set to dazzle and bewitch us."

My words too, because I knew we had to do it. Not so much to stop the government and prove our defense capabilities. Even warning the masses about the perils we all faced or bringing down the system sooner didn't really matter that much it seemed to me. We had to kill the myth of technology that hid in our own hearts, stop ourselves from clinging to the fragments of the old ways: A trap luring some in with visions of incorporating high tech stuff into a new value system. Fragments with edges of deception... And we would never know, never learn..."

She stopped at the top of a little rise and crouched down motioning him to come and be quiet. He saw the deer too and then the yearling. The young one stepping jerkily, yet coordinating itself to spring away, if it found the danger and did as the deer turned their heads toward the two, ears twitching and then they were off, bounding away, almost like four legged kangaroos... boing...boing, crash, and they fled.

Jarred and Hazel smiled at each other, the deer welcomed visitors. It felt like a week since they had seen anyone else.

Hazel stood and pulled Jarred up without much effort.

Said Hazel: "Well... do you think I'm crazy yet? Eh?"

He put on a silly - sad face and nodded in his best corny- kid style:

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"Umm... Yes and no. You'd have to be a little crazy to care so much and trying to save a place and maybe a whole region during social collapse, the likely end of the world. But your ideas aren't so crazy. You're aware that militia units took part in the Ranger demonstration?"

Many of us had the same worries... that we needed to start all over from scratch. Use wisdom not machines and avoid technology or anything that required too many 'experts' or was hard to fix locally. Technology and the arguments around it always seemed to take up time and energy that should go to understanding exactly what we really needed for safety and happiness'.

Most of the Young Officers and folks around Haymarket have slowly come around to embracing the CSP - the Community Self-reliance Plan. It aims for a structure, a way of being and consuming that requires few inputs and little technology. It's quite similar to many of the Greens and the Diggers platform."

She looked back at him, happy, he thought.

He said: "So it's kind of weird that our lives lately had the same kind of doubts like with totally committing to poverty. And big challenges with friends and strong opinions."

And then he just said without thinking:

"I dreamed of an Elf... I don't know why I said that..."

"An Elf ...Anaya?" Hazel responded feeling love, but alarmed...

Wishes coming between her thoughts and... luckily, she slid down a bank on the trail, using her rear end as a stabilizer, and jumped up out of the ditch onto an old logging road.

Jarred jumped up next to a Hazel who still struggled to catch her breath.

He thought her eyes would pop out of her head as she frantically grabbed his hand saying: "What of the dream, the elf... tell me quick... too many coincidences." And she gulped air, her heart beating and she really looked frightened.

Jarred squeezed her hand and said: "An elf or a tree, a root...? I don't exactly..."

A voice that sounds like bells telling me I have to do the right thing, protect those in need, stand up for what I believe in.

I know it sounds crazy..."

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Hazel pulled him down to the ground. Kneeling before a clearly confused Jarred, she said:

"Listen... I've been trying to explain, but we're being lead around in circles."

The shadow of a large bird crossed swiftly over them. Hazel came even more alert, pausing a moment.

"Jarred, I know that Elf, she taught me magic. There's got to be a reason we're together. Goddess..."

And she pushed that thought aside.

"Wish with me."

He said "What? What do you want me to do?"

"Just believe... hold my hands tight. Think about being young and wanting something so much... you would give anything..."

Now trust my words...

Give me your heart."

He gave her a slightly worried look, not sure at all what was going on... but a good feeling came over him and he relaxed smiling, thinking only how ...she was a nice person and how he'd like to see her more...

Her words penetrated, interrupted his deep thoughts only slightly. But their echo grew like an immense sheet of ice swinging out:

"We want no one and nothing to affect our choices of what we think about."

And he looked deep into her green eyes, wanting to agree and he felt his heart was there. Many simple wishes flowed.

Hazel gasped.

...Visions of Anaya trapped turning into a stone...

Sasha super-imposed over the scene... A shadow around a woman.

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It felt like they were linked... their thoughts jumbling out:

A new magic shall arise... Jarrel's Book... Jarrel wrapped about Sasha...

The Volkentrough... Our collective wish... our existence.

Brione, Aire, Madrone... the Chosen...All wishes are one, for all...

... Beware the elves... *Jarrel's face... Brione waving from the bridge, frantically, waving away... Jarred holding back...*

Brione's song filling the world...

Power in the Forest...a dead forest, ghosts... hands shaping... wishes clashing...

Spells flying... apart... Miya in pain... fading... The plan...that **Shadow**... laughing...

Blood dripping from dirty faces...Doubt only the truth, but fear it not...

The **shadowed** cavern of a gaping mouth... two figures traveling deep into its maw...

Amnesia, poor poor Amnesia.

Brione's words came to her among the cacophony of images...

'All of my heart, all existence through me.

Separate the vibrations, hold their natures...Touch the Life-Grid.'

A cold shiver passed through her and she stepped out of the maelstrom she had mistakenly created, and said: "Ghost of my friend... Amnesia."

And it squirmed in and out of here and not here...

"Amnesia, Amnesia... It's you?"

"I am here Hazel... Come hurry."

The ghost said, without moving its face, just hanging there.

Hazel squeezed Jarred's hands wishing him to wake up, to come with her.

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She bit her lip and rubbed her hand over her face thinking, 'Gods I wished... that nothing interfere with our choice of thought... I've probably trapped Jarred in reruns of old War movies or... thoughts of the two of us...'

Laughter... terrifying, but actually, sincerely hilarious, startled Hazel, who was starting to wear out. She turned around to see Dingo... the ghost of Dingo... and Amnesia laughing, the harder yet since they couldn't cry... and their words coming on as the strong feeling of extreme danger gripped her...

"We are no one and nothing... and our wishes are barely dreams, but we can reach your friend... put the thought of an icy cold finger right up his..."

"Mother!" yelled Jarred as he jumped up holding his backside, trying to figure out what that sensation was.

She grabbed him pulling hard and they rushed almost running down a path...

Hazel's elf-vision flared and she could see the way...

... And children skipping along past them teasing fondly...

"We have found the Elf, we have found the Elf... Anaya, Anaya."

And they giggled and sashayed as they moved farther ahead of them.

Two faint ghosts followed, flitting above and then next to Hazel before vanishing again.

"I'm trying to protect everyone... all wishes."

"You are an unbalanced power that seeks good."

"They understand me... magic draws its pieces together."

"Do you really think they can sacrifice, themselves...their friend?"

"Don't doubt them, please Mother... help me now or I fear ..."

"I can't stop her, but... I can help with the sending..."

"Thank you, Mother... will I see you... again?"

"I have to go... you will be unprotected..."

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"I'll have the Elf, or her friends at least."

"I know you will make me proud, dear."

"You gave up so much, I wish no mistakes."

"Hurry now, prepare... she comes."

"I'm sorry to have to do this..."

"Shhh..."

The forest grew strangely here... sometimes alive though old and crowded in... At other times, well, she thought it looked not there... or partly in the Elf-vision... but a gray, cold forest, colors flat, lacking something... and everything. They felt the danger gnawing at every fear... every harm they had ever endured. Each step now grew thick with chill, a cold no fire could chase.

Hazel had an eye and a hand on Jarred. Lacking the vision he stumbled more than once. As they circled the clearing, a very uncomfortable look hung continuously from Jarred's

face and he couldn't think with any coherence... thoughts still tumbling... the visions he shared with Hazel... and she flashed now and then into his stream of thoughts.

He knew she didn't care that he held back things... that he didn't want to know some things... about the world... about himself. But without even looking at her he knew she supported him, failings and all. And he her. 'Not a friendly place... no place for a simple man.' But he'd do anything... go anywhere for Hazel, for Sasha.

The silence struck them and the feeling that **a vacuum closed in about them... the nothingness of star space and they could see a small camp among giant dead Chestnut trees.** Dead branches hanging ready to... and Hazel squeezed his hand to bring him and those thoughts to a halt.

They stood in a huge cavern. Hazel felt it more than saw it and the vision of the maw tried to affect her thoughts but she dealt with each, wishing all confusion away... wanting only to know this place and the way out.

A small fire burned a foul orange laced with flares of purple flames... a deep red glow ... radiated from the ground itself around the fire. Desperation urged... wishes of harm sought realization.

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The little camp had some life to it... the feeling of being sunken down, heavy. But in her normal vision it looked closer, at eye level.

"Lorena!" Jarred gasped as a woman, no a very substantial ghost appeared out of nowhere a few feet from where they stood. Other ghosts gathered with them, and the children. Together they formed a semi-circle about that lonely fire...

Jarred tried to speak again but felt both Hazel and Lorena holding him firmly... picking through his thoughts. He could not believe that he was facing Lorena, Sasha's dead mother.

"What are you doing here? Sasha shouldn't be in this place..."

'No... Jarred, you should not be here. Trust your young friend and wait for my sign.'

Hazel heard the thoughts and knew that strong magic brewed about to climax... She remained on guard... keeping her mind clear... keeping to certainty. She wanted to look around... She felt that all the souls there, the living and the dead were being caught... drawn away from the real threat.

Tears flowed down Jarred's face as a new voice spoke:

"Foolish mistakes will make evil of great sacrifice." Said Jarrel, Jarred's mother.

Slivers of hate bristled and strained for release.

Sasha rose holding a burning stick in each hand and purple flares licked up his arms seeking his young neck. For some reason Hazel was sure she was the only one who knew the dangers... the real source.

Sasha said slowly and calmly: "My advice exactly Jarrel, my old teacher. I'm following your lessons: 'turn carefully from those who see only their own light, for they are **shadow-blind.**'"

Hazel tried to hold her concentration as she separated the patterns, but Jarred's pain as he strained furiously to link with his Mother, nearly undid her. She started to spin. Cold fingers of the dead took her other hand and she held on as Amnesia activated her deepest defense.

Jarrel, the Witch of Scarlet Glenn, the wizard turned sorceress born hundreds of years past in Novogorod. Dead now for a year since the fateful night of the summoning – Sasha's last birthday. A half-raven, wraith woman: Her human face adapted to the body

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and the huge eyes of the ancient beast. Eyes of malice eaten away from the inside, clutching power too closely - wanting more than you could have.

She scowled at the young man and the whole world seemed inclined to shift:

"Trust an Elf, whose fair minded Goddess put all creation in this mess...wanting her precious Elves to live forever, bargaining with Chaos, who now brings the Four Horsemen and the Prince of Terror through the Portal for his pleasure, to test an unbalanced Power that would know all wishes... one soon to be unprotected if I guess your plan."

Sasha looked out away from her then, and began to dance with the burning brands flaming strange colors:

"I know what I want and it is what I am meant to do..."

Don't tell me of sacrifice Jarrel - I lost my Mother, my baby sister, my desires.

And I've lived with you inside me - shared your tormented jealousies... control eating you up and pulling me into your disease.

Be gone, oh Raven of the Wind Power - take my mother and guard the Portal until my anointed time."

Hazel thought she saw a terrible realization contort Jarrel's expression...

'She sees it.' And indeed the witch knew the danger that Chaos and Shadow like to strike just before or after you do.

Sasha reached back with both arms and cold flames roared up out of the fire with a word: "Yanesh!"

Hazel heard the silver- flared Raven's cry but she was already moving.

He brought his arms over his head and hurled the flaming brands and all at Jarrel.

He thought he heard a devious **chuckle** just as Jarred yelled: "Mother... help."

Jarrel, pulling back inside her Raven nature flowed with the force, offering no resistance.

A great sucking followed as a second smaller Raven, the ghosts, and even the children - small angers raging in unison - whisked away through the gateway of the burning brands off into the distance. The wild feeling of a trap seized Hazel as she struggled to
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move forward toward Sasha. The hollow sound of giant jaws gnashing shut answered her and she knew that only the three of them remained to face...

Sasha felt a momentary flush of satisfaction, something accomplished and they needed that. 'Oh, if things could be simple,' and he remembered: small hands juggling the balance lessons. An irresolute face of light - knowing - enough to dare the Powers...

Keeping up the rhythm, with no hesitation now... not since she had made him show himself to his awareness.

Memories of soaring across space... touching the flow of time. Being young forever in a moment, his light blonde hair blowing out electric - almost 'not-believing' her final truth.

Jarrel, his teacher, his other mother. She who held his fate. She wore her sacrifice well for him to love. The Sacred Fire gave him the means... until he could reach across a canyon... enter the holy places.

He found the Portal and knew then that failure was possible, but absolutely not all right! Centuries flying by... a thousand struggles... deadly, necessary Imprints... weaving their own spells of time and place, and the others, Ancients... always holding back... the truth, and the **Shadows**, eager in their frenzy for souls."

Hazel wished Sasha to move. She doubted she would reach him before... She had one wish left. 'A way out,' and she tried to track the route the others had left by.

'**Shadows** are lies of fear... They use the soft, gray darkness to convince you to escape the truth.'

She saw the Pattern just long enough to see its nature: "all that preserves our chances and allows gentle wishes to progress, is its immense, arrogant ego... overconfidence in assuming us beyond pity or notice. Impetuous mockery to excess."

She felt the tearing between protecting Sasha and safety in flight and the voice filled her,

threatening to undo the wish upon her lips... the voice of **The Nebyakin**.

"I enjoyed the fear, that you might present a challenge young mage.

Alas, I am disappointed. Entertain me, why don't you... call the dogs of Hell...

Sing for me... Sing!"

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And it laughed vilely, as Sasha's mouth stretched wide, bones snapping as a furious crescendo of babble - the Song of Tongues - issued like froth from his swollen mouth. Sasha tried to anchor to something... the crash, saving Jarred and Hazel from the fire... his sister's sacrifice... green lines ... and Hazel knew then and there that the life-grid followed that route and she made her wish as oblivion swallowed them:

"I want us to be in a place outside of The **Shadow's** influence."

She closed her eyes hoping that didn't send them to a cold void behind a cold dark moon. But she felt Sasha's presence briefly and a long slender thread connecting her to a stone slab...

She opened her eyes as she bumped into something large. Hand grabbing instinctively for her knife sheath as another body crashed into her from behind.

Jarred moaned as he rolled off her. Hazel saw they were in the elfish wilds - the Eald - and a powerful wish brought her hand up as the demon flew through the air at them, slavering jaws sprung ready. She braced herself for a terrible blow. Waves of nauseating decay passed down through her body... draining her inner strength. Brione, Anaya, Lorien. All her sisters woven into her vibrating... a shimmering pattern cloaked them... A gust and wind hammered dust flinging a last insult their way... and then the silence of hard breathing, a leaf falling...

Jarred wrapped his arms around Hazel, cautious of her reaction as she continued to stab a dog like thing, lacking bones and now lacking much dark ochre liquid. Blood like oil, spilling across the living soil.

Sasha awoke from thoughts of his childhood, knowing he had failed and made mistakes. Colors flared against a surreal landscape: a forest, its past and future shimmering and merging. A 'knowing' from the place healing his sadness and bringing him back .

"Jarred! Gods...I forgot.." Sasha looked down with normal vision now.

Jarred huddled over something near a black stain in the dirt.

Hazel couldn't hardly think. A part of her identity or something felt torn and only wishes allowed her to rise with Jarred's aid.

As they got to Sasha she said quietly,

"I have to talk to you Sasha: its the Life Grid, the Wish, the Earth you lack."

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"I know," he said.

She reached out her arm and rested her hand on his young shoulder, squeezing his neck and smiling as best she could.

"We have to get out of here... this Imprint is so powerful its distorting the Pattern of Life..."

"I hope no more of those beasts come," she said as she took a few tentative steps down the trail. Sasha caught up to her and held her hand as they walked.

Destiny and youthful, if reckless, disregard for limits pulsed in their fingertips. She could almost feel his giggle spreading contagiously as she chided:

"Yes, I hear you thinking we've figured it all out, but don't forget the stakes are too serious..."

"We have to trust each other," he said looking aside at her confident if dirty face and then back for a glimpse of Jarred following behind.

They came to a split in the trail. One path led down a steep way toward the river another seemed to follow the ridge farther to the West or so Hazel figured though the

low clouds kept the ocean view from them.

Wisdom

*Well it's about grasping the big picture and then letting go of your assumptions about things until you think things through far enough to be sure of the outcome. **THOUGH YOU CAN NEVER BE SURE**, really.*

You have to balance the need for your actions with the potential that your understanding may be limited. Listen to advice, but doubt it mostly. If not too extremely. Become the fears of those who fear you...Accept their pain but don't flinch.

Truth is a weapon... Trust is priceless.

I say be wary and careful, but if ye be a true adventurer... the thrill in your blood, well you have to have a wee bit of fun as well. It feels good to bellow your war cry now and then - and if it gets you killed, oh well, we certainly need more legends, heroes and martyrs. !

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"I tell you Dave, we've already been this way twice now," said a very tall and lanky guy with curly hair.

Sage cocked her head certain that she had felt more than just a change in the slight breeze stirring the branches above them. She held her pose, alert and tense. Something had changed and for the better she hoped. She pulled her bushy dreadlocks to one side listening with her whole being and all of her considerable intuitive power.

Not one to spend much time planning a wish, Sage lived for action and putting herself up against whatever challenge crossed her way. She said to the both of them:

"This is where we heard something screaming, right?"

Dave nodded, saying:

"Yeah, from above a ways. Probably several hundred feet higher up where the slope levels off. I'd say."

Near to the spot where Dave pointed, they saw angry roiling clouds billowing but yielding as a faint glow of colors emerged. Two glowing spots and then the makings of three ordinary figures standing together. Sensations swarmed from that place: feelings of strength and power, and weariness and awe.

"God damm it, Dave..." Will exclaimed. "I just heard Sasha saying 'come on up.' It was in my head, I guess. I swear I heard it or his voice was there."

"Let's go and see," said Sage as she strode briskly up and around the cliffs, short-cutting toward the ridge top.

A strange, but welcomed, 'Kuhu...kuwaku' howl was answered by a shorter Wouk...wuouk' and Hazel stood there smiling peacefully.

She waited on that ridge top for her friend. Relief held her and flooded over the constant worries of the last days' terrors.

'Days... it seemed like weeks,' and strength and familiar connections to her old life... her friends, wrapped around her as Sage's arms held her and she said:

"Sage, oh God, I'm so happy to see you... somebody."

And she held her back a bit looking at her and tears of joy dripping lightly.

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Sage grabbed her again and lifted up some, nearly jumping up and down with excitement. Relief whisking her fears away too.

Said Sage as she leaned her head pushing it against Hazel's:

"Damn. It's like one hell of a rollercoaster, Girl!

What's sup?"

Hazel just shook her head and said: "Later."

They both rocked back and forth smiles wanting to laugh and Hazel added:

"We're OK, and everything might just be all right. Well... there is work to do."

Seeing the men done shaking hands and welcoming hugs, Hazel called over: "Come, y'all. We really need to be going. Let's sit down over here and talk for a minute."

They circled around in a flat space and passed some food to share with starving friends.

‘Search and rescue rations, or actually some righteous goodies, Honey-0-Nut cookies to be precise.

Hazel asked: "Does anyone know where we are? Do you have communications Sage?"

"Not really. I've been hiking for three hard days now with Will," and her eyebrows rose a bit as Hazel smiled.

Will said:

"The Kama River Road must start downhill not too far away. I bet we find it if we go on down... Kind of off to the left."

"The cell phone's been dead since... well, Will was there. It was the second time we got lost or whatever kept us so confused.

We tried following some shabby Ravens, but that only made things worse... I was trying to reach Haymarket again, and Will's hair suddenly went crazy electric... Dave felt it too. Our minds were like swept blank and we just stood there dazed.

And **there** was like, Not! where we thought we were. Anyway the batteries are dead.

Oh yeah... ‘GPS’ is no longer available," said Sage as she tried a different battery in the useless phone, one more time.

Sasha rose up from the circle, looking impatient or distant and said to them:

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"The Towers, Hazel..." and in her thoughts she knew that healing begged, and revelations beckoned. A dangerous new alliance with the Chosen opened from here on out... and it was up to her again somehow. ‘Down to business’ she vowed and with great determination she seized the call of leadership - hoping for clarity.

"There's a place... a place of healing and power. It's down the ridge this way, we think. It's the right way, more or less."

Everyone seemed to accept her and Sasha's plan.

As they rose she said - more to herself than anyone else: ‘I wish we had horses.’

Sasha said: "I wished some... yesterday I think."

And they both heard Will's jarring thoughts:

‘Me and Sage seen horses... running wild and scared. A day or two was it?’

Will looked over at Sage and then at Hazel. That ‘knowing’-happy - look kind of bothered him, but Hazel rose up now too, so the rest followed.

They circled up and held hands there - a mixed lot of different folks - and they gave thanks for safety and the luck of being together here. Well-wishes for friends far away and luck on the morrow. A new circle... a new group, and plenty to do.

Hazel said: "We need to go... we're losing the sun. Let's try and stretch these bones a few more miles. Let the forest guide you with good thoughts and sure steps."

They headed down ancient pathways, ways of power, leaving imprints... and seeking hope for a troubled homeland. Peace followed them even as their reunion joy lifted their spirits higher. The light breezes alternated warm to cool and they wound their way down the trail from the highlands. Switchbacks and a few eroded cuts, back and forth they went, dropping steadily. Once, Sage and Hazel thought they saw the ocean when the clouds thinned momentarily to the west. The sun lingering but fast becoming a fading glow, dimming along with the day.

A **vision** struck Hazel then: *The Earth has Its wish too... And, lo unto those who would cross the Nature of her wish.*

Then Anaya's face - pained and drew sparse - yet confidence and reassurance were still there unwavering it seemed...

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You can't know my ultimate subterfuge, Elf-lass...

A soft chuckle and a stirring of a great but silent vacuum poised to grasp it all...

“Laced with Shadow lies... Heed your Heart of Hearts - the one you share with your true

loves..."

...And Hazel shook her head wishing them on their way, and the empty feeling abandoned her as she kept up her pace.

The sky darkened noticeably and a stronger wind rose up. Uncertainties wavered and a rustle in the bushes startled some of them... perceptions slipping back and forth - out there on the edge of one world's ending.

No one said much as they trudged along, hoping they were going somewhere that made sense. The weather held and a few stars shone feebly, whitish glows behind the thin overcast.

In the dark and silence they all got a little strung-out along the trail. Hazel and Sage ended up in the rear with Will. They came out of the thinning forest into a wide, open area on a broad saddle. The land, spotted with rounded boulders, sloped up and away from them for a few hundred yards to a pair of towering rock pinnacles.

Rising starkly before the blue-black sky, the new moon's crescent framed delicately between the silhouettes of their dark forms.

"Where's Sasha?" Hazel asked to Jarred who waited wearily by an oak tree.

He pointed to a place between the two towers where they could see a lone figure passing.

"Dave went after him, but once he found the herb Sasha just took off.

I couldn't keep up so I waited for you all." Said Jarred, his shoulder obviously bothering him some after days of rough hiking, and sleeping in the damp.

Sage started jogging up the hill and the rest of them followed on.

Jarred touched Hazel's arm as he slowed down.

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"Here drink some of this. Its water I got from Will. It tastes great."

There were a lot of things he wanted to say to her. One voice said 'keep it simple' another just, 'say something!'

"I really enjoyed hearing your stories about the early days... doing hardcore actions. I wish we could..."

She interrupted saying: "I know, me too... Things are supposed to be simple aren't they?"

She squinted, screwing up her face in a creative thought and said holding his arm as he stood closer: "I've been with a lot of different people in all kinds of scenes, they are all unique, but this is a wild serious one and I'm happy you are here with me.

I think the young officers and the eco-commandos will make a whole new history or herstory - whatever we call it now."

She new he wanted other answers or a hint and other things he didn't really expect... and she knew any reassurance would do quite fine. She pulled him to her and gave him a rushed peck on the lips, then spun away quickly reaching her hand back behind her as she turned up the trail.

Turning, he hurried after her. The chilling breeze couldn't stem the fine warm feeling that spread throughout him. He did hope they got the fire roaring in time to dry his clothes out some. The dirt caking his legs and socks found humor in that wish, hoping to show off their patterns with Jarred half naked by the flames.

Coming around the side of one of the great rock formations a small glow flickered and they found their friends as flames licked quickly up the sides of a small pile of brush and twigs.

They fed branches to the fire and dried off while snacking on the last of their food. Sasha kept to himself occupied with a small shelter he fashioned of some recently fallen fir boughs. He tied small bundles of herb at the entrance to his hovel and occasionally could be heard mumbling or whistling while he worked.

Hazel looked around wanting to get the talking over with and seeking a useful wish.

She wished everyone to be themselves, but what does that mean, she wondered. A simple wish seemed more and more impossible to sort out of the tangles they had fallen into... 'Maybe all of us together can figure it out' she mused as she pulled off her two sodden boots.

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Everything holding back: Intentions turning toward **shadow** guile and timing rendered meaningless amid the confusion and the clashing interference of a million desperate wishes... Searching planet-wide for a shred of Salvation's whim... desperate and foolishly late for much of a chance to coalesce... yet finding 'like-wishes' and some inherent intelligent groupings began.

Moments drawing from before and ever-after and the Nature of Time flexing, as for some, the sequence of the forthcoming battles lined up neatly... no avoidance now only the grand ascension.. the building up of the chorus of the Chosen as they bring the entirety of their species development to bear down upon the final moment of their truth... or their folly.

"Don't you know: When vanity ends, so will Civilization - All Gods thank!

Behind many Bandannas, there are 'Happy Faces,' behind many happy faces are masked trouble. Behind some mask that really isn't there - 'unlies' a truth that must bring happiness if we could only believe we were once wild and 'more-knowing.'"

Will read the sayings forward and then backwards with his Eastern-Hillbilly twang and they all chuckled feeling fairly well rested, though well aware tomorrow would likely prove grueling and difficult - And that's if they were lucky. Comrades in arms and Hazel wondered about other groupings like theirs sitting around campfires or stoves in their meeting halls, discussing the elections that were only thirty hours away.

She opened her eyes not even aware she had closed them while resting by the fire.

Everyone was looking at her, apparently waiting to start the meeting. Sage nodded and said:

"I'll be happy to facilitate, are there any announcements or let's go around and say how we feel. Then we can do updates. OK?"

Everyone nodded and Sage went first: "I'm feeling good. I'm glad we are all together, a lot of positive things are happening and I think we will soon know much of what lies ahead."

Jarred sat next in the circle. He looked over at Sasha and then to Hazel and said:

"A week of nightmares, yet it wasn't so bad. I had Sasha and Hazel taking turns saving my life. I want to welcome Dave and Will and of course Sage, of whom I have heard a little. Hazel, as I'm sure Sage can vouch, Dave and Will are my most trusted old friends... tell them anything you would tell me. Let us all be honest, open, and fill-in the

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blanks for each other as best we can. Thank you all for the hard work you have been doing and you three - the lost finding the lost in a tempest of spell-craft no less!"

Hazel said: "Be yourselves, remember your happiest dreams and your favorite view.

Hold these wrapped about your heart and tucked inside the heart of your Chosen. Love the ones you're with - La ti da!"

Dave cleared his throat and took a puff on his pipe. He blew a couple decent smoke rings and then said: "I can tell some strange things are happening... I remember your mother Jarred and she putting thoughts in young Sasha's head... but I can't deny you all look like you got a handle on things, so I'm with whatever we decide here."

He settled back to smoke some more, but then he raised his hand and blew out a puff saying: "Oh, one more thought came to mind. My Uncle used to gamble a lot and tell tall tales. He used to say 'you don't need to be no gambler to be a success or to survive, but it comes in handy if you can handle the temptations...Lord Almighty. Just remember I

said this: hold your trump card as long as you can - trust the group or your spies anyway, but always be ready to act if you are sure.

Timing is a lot of the game and you can make it your own self and call it like you please. Know how you will strike in any scene and then when it happens well there you are: free to act decisively, lightning quick... Maybe even quick enough if you weren't paying attention.

Well anyway seek out good advice. But never pay it much heed until you stew it over. Don't be afraid to bet it all - if you believe then you'll know the damn timing because you have been paying attention.

Go on get out of here, now - the lot of you young'ns 'That's how he was... quite a talker and a gentleman's con artist. That's how he died."

Sage gave him the eye and tapped her wrist, Dave settled back again to smoke.

Memories of a time far removed stayed with him as he listened to Sasha.

"We are all here for a reason: to create certain possibilities to counter other possibilities.

Every feeling and insight has significance now.

Hazel is our best leader here. She surely saved us all in the last **shadow** attack. I failed my first big test, but I have learned by accepting friendship and grounding reverently with the Earth. I am sorry Jarred for how I had to deal with your mother's ghost and there is so much I would like to explain, but tomorrow, it may be too dangerous ... to be near me. And, I don't want to risk any of you any further, so..."

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Sage raised her hand at Sasha, and said:

"Whoa, please Sasha, I know that what you have to say, whatever it is you have to do is very important, but we try to follow a process and let meetings flow steady and forward at a pace, so please... can we let Will say hello and go to updates?"

Sasha nodded his head as Hazel's thoughts assailed him:

'Sasha you do need us and you couldn't stop most of us from helping you - even with your most powerful wish, because you would be going against the nature of things - and you can't do that - or not yet.

You know the sacred fire as well as any that ever were - hold the pain we will cause, the accidental sufferings - I know there will be many - among our friends and our others - the ones we are made to fight with.'

'Help us to help you.'

Sasha squirmed and thought for a second that Hazel was his new Mom or something.

But not like Jarrel, no the Elf and her Chosen can accept me, but can I manage... what can't I see?

Sage said: "Will, will you say something?"

Will looked back and forth and around and then he said:

"Can I talk about Haymarket now?"

Sage nodded and smiled to herself announcing: "Updates, go Will."

"Well, we last heard from Haymarket two days ago. Skipper said 'everything's cool.'

People are worried about you Jarred. But, hey, come to think of it, since there hasn't been no big crisis... we haven't really needed you. And your being gone kind of keeps people focused on that... on worrying about you and all, instead of worrying too much about the future... the savior..."

"The Savior?" asked Hazel.

Will tapped his boot with a small stick he used to stir the fire.

He said: "I don't know how to describe it or what to make of it, but there's this rumor, maybe we started it or the churches? They're sayin how, if anything bad comes this month: from the elections, the 'Evil Sam-suckers' (latest slang for the Feds or any selfproclaimed 'Higher Government'), or the great flood - whatever - the Savior will save

the humble and lead them to a promised land.

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Maybe they think you are the Savior Jarred, you're definitely the hero or you will be, if you ever get back!"

Will looked at Dave who raised his hand and got the nod from Sage.

"They also say that this year is in fact the true year of the second millennium since the birth of Christ! There are reports of millions of people leaving SoCal. The Resistance is fighting tough and so the Feds are driving as many people out as possible - to clear a killing zone around the liberated areas.

The refugees are like a bomb wherever they go: looting, fires, trees chopped down, waters polluted. The Young Officers haven't commented publicly yet, preferring to wait until after the elections, until they figure out what to do...

Or you get back...

Oh, yeah... there was a coded message from Sasha's network just as I was dropped off from the helicopter. Here Sasha."

And he passed a folded piece of paper over to Sasha who opened it and looked at it, but didn't say anything.

Sage said:

"If that's all for Haymarket, I'll give the update on the coast."

No one said anything though Jarred looked at Sasha like he wanted to know about the note. Thoughts clashed and wills crossed ... Sasha didn't notice Jarred's questioning expression. Most of his attention shifted to Hazel who hooked up to his mind so they could silently discuss plans and secrets - without explaining it all to everyone - and without **shadow** interest. Or so they hoped.

'Sasha, I feel like we're cheating, but don't talk about that message yet.

It's the same as our secret plan and I think it needs to be expanded... So I don't know how but get the word out. I could try sending a dream but it might go haywire and end up in the wrong head... Wow, the militia could use the helicopters, for...'

Sage spoke: "Everything seems almost too perfect on the coast and elsewhere in Lorien and the other Free States too. The weather is holding and thousands of people are already camping at the festival sites. There's traffic jams at some of the bridges where road repairs are underway for the rainy season, but all in all it's a good groove...

Except...

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You know about Amnesia... Well three days ago Dingo and Reaper died in a hit on the radio station... Dragonfly barely made it out the back. The old VW got all shot up too and now D-fly has five women bodyguards, and he even went dancing in a red wig - like some doll in disguise. Cause it was a band he just couldn't miss. But seriously, some think it's a militia hit team picking us off on the coast. Willow is missing too. I think we have a security breach on the inside - a 'mole' - to do obvious disservice to a fine burrowing creature."

Hazel said, looking sad and knocked down a bit - the impossibility of countering so many possibilities... so many dark wishes:

"I didn't know about Willow and Reaper... We saw Amnesia and Dingo's ghosts yesterday."

'The **Ego-Cult**, Namoia's lying smiles' stuck in her mind for a moment and she cursed bitterly, half out- loud... 'Demons!'

Sage's eyes went pretty wide and she wanted to hear more of that story, but she was the facilitator so she just added to her update:

"We need a plan for various contingencies. El Norte Command sent word that an attack from Federal forces is imminent, probably from sea and land a day or two after they

declare the elections void. So, I hope you have some ideas Hazel and you probably better work on a couple different speeches since we still don't know what to expect from all this."

Jarred raised his hand and said: "I just want to add that it's possible that a member of General Swanson's Officer Core: Garth Smith is involved in the killings on the coast. He's very professional, very dangerous. I had hoped he headed down South, that his self-preservation instinct would overcome his obsession for revenge. God, I hope I'm wrong.

He could do anything."

Sage looked around and announced: "OK, First Agenda Item?

I'd say we mostly just need to discuss coastal strategies and...?"

She paused and looked around waiting for more suggestions.

Finally, Hazel spoke as she looked at Sasha:

"Actually, that won't take long, but we must also talk about the Magic.

We must make some tonight."

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Sage could hear Sasha taking in a deep breath as she said:

"You go girl."

Hazel and Will tossed some more sticks on the fire and Jarred moved his socks a bit further back on the stick they were drying on, steam rising with the smell. They all got more comfortable and passed the water around as Hazel began:

"The priority is the Music Festival at Kama Bridge. With all the dignitaries there - like us - it's a prime target for more assassinations or worse. I'm sure Aire and Angela have a good security set up as do other groups, so we can just slide in... I'll get clearance badges for Will and Dave.

Oh, and Jarred and you can try and spot any ex-militia types. When Brione sings keep a sharp eye out, as her song can make evil come forth and reveal itself. We can get updates from Brione and Madrone on the Hayfork scene and Jarred, you'll be able to contact Haymarket if the lines are still secure.

"Sounds good so far," Jarred said and everyone seemed accepting.

"A big attack in two or three days, humm... Jarred I'm not expecting a formal commitment, but since Haymarket seems pretty quiet and pretty well defended... well what kind of resources could you lend on short notice?"

"We can probably help. There's a few hundred reserve troops, mostly young men and a whole MASH unit, they're green but well disciplined. Some could go by chopper, if all four are working and there's enough trucks to get everyone else there in a few days. I'm afraid I can't spare many large cannon, well we don't have any hardly. There's some in Redwing that we still haven't retrieved. If that's already on the way then we could send more."

Jarred roamed over the outline of their plan, the way he did his thinking at times like this... letting things flow until a problem or an omission popped up.

Sage waved her hand as she said: "What about Daniel-Man and the Non-violence groups? Even if there isn't a mole in our core they do have spies and connections outside too. They'll know what's up better than us probably and troops from Haymarket - I don't know... it depends on the election outcomes I guess."

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Hazel nodded and said: "We should try and 'ship' a few of the non-violence leaders off somewhere that day if we can. Non-violence might work and I'm certainly willing to give it a try, but I worry... you know as clever as some of the **Ego-Cult** is... they might turn it into a non-violent surrender and hand our hard won power over to some Fed cronies of theirs. But as for the troops, the Sheriff's candidate is an old eco-commando

friend of mine. Johnson used to sign sabotage communiqués: ‘Mr. Fuck the System.’ Nobody knows about it and he’s a for-sure winner tomorrow. So, we’ll get full cooperation from him.

Bring in some of the troops in civilian clothes - cammo is OK, but just dress them down a little and keep the weapons hidden. We could keep some Haymarket forces at the airports where we have high-security cordons... And we’ve got all those green T-shirts and old marching band gear... Maybe...

Anyway we’ll have to play some of it by ear. Don’t worry about refugees, Sasha and I have it all figured out.” And she wished that suffering would be no greater due to their efforts. A dangerous wish, but she wanted not to wish harm if at all possible. She also wished as did others that night, that their hard work infiltrating and appealing for inside information from sympathetic, morally minded folks would pay off... that the right news would reach their ears, while disinformation kept the Feds in a funky haze.

Using the helicopter from Haymarket for security at the festival, a secret mission for Sage, and a flurry of other half-formed ideas flew through her head, when it rolled over them. A thump without sound pulsed through their bodies, like a concussion bomb covered with lots of blankets. They all reacted similarly to the sudden shifting: a stunned awakening. Knowing that things much greater than puny humans and their arrogant constructs, stalked the land and sowed fields of nightmares where fertile decadence festered and oozed.

Hazel stood up and reached down to grab Sasha’s hand. She pulled him up and they all stood there, hesitant as if expecting an earthquake or another non-sonic boom.

‘Tell them what you will Sasha - picture the Earth and the roots that pull truth from the stars to recycle our dreams, tell them the truth as is its nature to be revealed.’

Sasha spoke and it sounded like his voice projected out from a cave:

“The human soul is immature and so our egos are ever hungry.

There are **Shadows** that feed on our egos... They drain power from us and our specie. If enough people had listened to their hearts - the heart of their ancient spirits - they would of found a place to love and restore. They would of wanted less now and for themselves,

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and thus, the **Shadows** would be weaker. We followed the wrong ways and we forgot the gifts that define who we are: the Magic and the Sacred Fire.

What you just felt - that hollow thump - sounding like the very Earth contracting, was a disturbance in the Patterns of Life: Anaya, the Elven Forest Keeper, no longer maintains the Patterns for she is trapped by the **Great Shadow** and may perish before we reach her. That may have its purpose too. Forces are acting and reacting - one impulse creates its own response, etceteras.

... And so the Time of the Saviors is upon us:

Shadows against Saviors. For eons, this pattern of Life’s Struggle has repeated its cycle, spiraling to this ultimate climax. The Nature of things has shaped the Patterns and helped guide the Elves in their maintenance and healing rituals. Balance was a wish, but now the Nature of Things is changing... all spells and stray wishes; lost souls and Wildryns; prayers and curses, fly together in a ‘final solution’ that none, not even the Powers and Gods, may know afore hand.

We have to hope we know what to do... in fact we have to entirely believe we are right; that we stand for the Earth and damn the consequences. The odds are so great, every step of the way, that doubts will undo all our sacrifices. The Magic senses the null void, which Chaos and the **Shadows** plan for it and it seeks out those who are ready to wield it humbly and in clear conscience.

The very existence of the Magic, brings things, events, people together. It seeks to preserve itself and thus its nature demands either harmony (wise use) or a great

calamity to clear the table, - la Tabla Rasa - to cancel wishes, and restore a path toward balance. These periodic calamities are cosmic imprints. Not always violent, but always powerful and Earth shaking. They clear away accumulated wishes that conflict and confuse. Imprints shape us.

Great Imprints alter the Nature of Things. For better or for worse they are necessary.

Humans are drawn to create these phenomenon: Stonehenge (300 B.C., A.D 1986); Masada (A.D. 73); Tikal (870, 1954); Akko/Acre (1291); Agincourt (1415); Patay (1429); Ireland (1650); Tsaritsyn (1670, 1774, 1942); Ayacucho (1824. 2005); Gettysburg (1863); Wounded Knee (1890, 1973); Dunkirk (1940); Oswiecim (1944); Hiroshima (1945); Vietnam (1940-1978); Paris (1968, 2000, 2005); Woodstock (1969); East-Timor (1975-2000); Waco (1993); New York (2001, 2005), Scott River (2006); our battle yesterday, and our wish tonight.

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The magic is like Chaos in that it chooses no side and has no opinions; only requirements and needs like instinctual feeding. That is its Nature. And we are the ones who must create an imprint or see ourselves and all that we love consumed.

Ancient people wove ritual, dance and song around Chaos to co-exist with it neither embracing nor rejecting it. And they used the magic almost exclusively to heal the land, to ease the pain of dying elders, and to teach the Shamans and Chieftains how to hold the Sacred Fire.

But for two millennia, structures of living, and culture have been created with the magic of an ill-conscienced science and social manipulation (advertising). With **Shadow's** aid the hierarchs and oligarchs have warded off Chaos - unto utter denial! A grand lie encompassing all things they sought to impose and terrible mistakes resulted.

Now bills come due. Destinies are as slippery as the **Shadows** think they are. In their arrogance they never considered, that the ancient magic of the Elves would flow through young humans and align with the magic of the Wildryn's Prophecy.

Do you know the power of a song? When we raise our voices together, we harmonize and vibrations build atop each other and wishes multiply, guided inherently toward power and self-realization. When Brione lifts up her song she can create an Imprint all by herself. I have seen her power in my dreams. She makes the truth cry out from tortured hearts. I believe we can too.

We stand at a place of Ancient Imprints and like most of them things of beauty and things of evil transpired here. Battles, treachery, and massacre befell these rocks as did celebrations, friendly trading, and alliances of peace.”

Hazel felt Dave's doubts arising and she started to wish at him to be strong when a giant brown owl landed on the tree branch high above Dave's head. For a second she felt herself looking through Owl's eyes and then she relaxed and felt Dave's will focused on the job at hand.

Sasha smiled at Owl and with a glance at Hazel he walked over to the fire and reached deep into the coals.

When he removed his hand, the fire was stone cold and he stood there with a small pellet of intense brilliance. Sparks or tiny flickers streaked from random parts of his body and he turned to face the ridge that ran to the South. His friends formed a semicircle behind him as he began to sing. Each word became a vision that built up pieces of reality - a pattern to the cosmic puzzle:

“Rising out from this Earth. Touching sky in violent birth,

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Wind and rain and ice and snow, Moss and Lichen, lightning blow,

Bugs and molds, heat and time, Hawk and Sparrow, mouse and Lyme.

Bird songs, Cricket sounds, babies cry... People come to shine and die. Love and sorrow

they shall make, struggling with their call to hate. We are here to sacrifice: all Gods' glory as the price."

They couldn't say whether they were all singing with Sasha at first but they each knew that some of the magic flowing now had a piece of them added to it. A piece of their life and soul borrowed against their willingness to lend it all. Borrowed by Sasha's Spell and protected by whatever God or Goddess dared answer his call despite the risks to Chaos and Oblivion. Tension filled the very airs as they sang the final verse:

The Summoning of the Life Grid.

This planet: Earth born of Fire; Blessed with Airs; Yielding Water, we wrap you in all Love as it was in the beginning, now and ever after; **Yanesh!**

They saw a hand holding a glowing ember and they wished it to grow and protect itself and draw on humans, on all their relations, to renew its existence. And it grew as did the hand that cradled it. A star ember become the Earth stretching out before and beneath them and life flickered, hesitant, but wanting expression. And it was.

Their song and every vibration these rocks had ever witnessed grew as a chorus. Bit by bit energy was loosed, protection accumulated and they felt the pain of loss as the image before them tore loose from their vision- sight and spread across the land below them.

Green lines lighting up and connecting to other lines spreading across the planet... and far in the distance a pain grew less... as they shared it. For one interminable instant they were there at the stone slab... Anaya in her prison... And that vision burned vividly, forever in their memories: a place of gray rocks, gray dirt, grayness, devoid of life - all sucked dry and wasted. A large flat rock with a withered dead root across it.

The root moved of a sudden and a hint of color flared ever so weakly. Green lines seeking to cross each other at that rock slab, but ending just short of it in a thin mist of green, shot with gray, spider cracks. A hand grasping the root and a longing fading out like grains of sand through a tiny hole. You could taste and feel the desperation pulpatating.

... A Hole in the Heart of The Earth.

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The fire was burning again. Hazel busied herself covering up her sleeping companions with whatever she could find. Sasha lit a bundle of Herb and wafted the smoke onto his friends' faces, as they slept peacefully - surrounded by green auras and illuminated by the faint green lines still glowing in that place.

Hazel's eyes met his as they both cared for Sage who lay awkwardly on a pointed rock - pleasantly unconscious. Sasha worried at what he saw: A weariness was there that troubled him; a weariness he knew only too well. The 'draining' from tracking all your wishes and the automatic borrowing from your life - Dear Fate's Bargain to pay the Present excess.

He gave her a little smile and didn't have to say anything since they shared each other's understanding, without effort. He touched her shoulder and said softly, though she picked-up a spark of excitement there too, which she was way too tired to explore.

"One more thing to do - I hope - tonight: A summoning and now a visitation. I'll see you in the morning. Please don't touch me while I sleep tonight... Good-bye... I mean good night Hazel."

He left her wondering slightly... at his choice of words.

At the little hovel he had built that evening, he lit some resin and a small candle before crawling under the thick mat of branches and moss. Fashioned according to an ancient practice Jarrel had brought from the old country. Fashioned for warmth and for safety in dream travel...

... Soothing quivering expression - unbounded... A blessing from one god to another...

...like heaven ... the wish for a taste. And for growth... driven to seek deeper ... Choosing and

being Chosen.

They drew unto each, only innocence separating while it attracted too! And added greatly to the sweetener...

Brione's Brown eyes swallowed him up where he wanted to be.

She held him - an insubstantial fragment of fluff - without effort or intent - for he wished only on himself - not on her ... Then...

197

The flow of everything that mattered, diminished... but only slightly, as her lips moved and his concentration so intense, his lips moved - following hers in mimic.

She said "I remember you ... you are older, much older!

...Do you still do magic, like at Scott River?"

And he felt her feeling, 'Not at all sure about this meeting in this place.'

He said: "I don't have any expectations, I don't know what to expect."

He stood near her, hands on his hips, then down to his sides.

A jittery smile, but his eyes were steady and holding her from inside... gently asking permission...

She probed him sampling something 'stronger... more sincere... than was possible' It made her dizzy.

And the suddenness - so much on her mind. But she didn't need to sing to feel the trueness of this wish that poured out almost of its own accord - his only little fear that he clung to and their affinity and 'like- purposes' the main cause of this moment.

She parted herself and fit into his vibrations... Their thoughts touching with caressing messages and lips brushing and then slowly with tender playfulness... pulling harder. His lips on her neck, a sweet, fragile moment. And she knew then why, as she pulled him tighter in sync with his wanting. He thinking: 'how?' and she peeling back the layers of her heart - offering, at some peril, that piece of Earth in Eald where Elves keep the Essence of their secret feelings and true love. She opened to him wanting him to know she cared and understood the passion and everything.

She only said:

"I would have loved you anyway. We'll always remember you - especially me."

He said as sensations flowed swiftly... on the edge of ending... "I'll find it again... It had to be you first to show me..." and she kissed him where her mouth touched him...

She heard her name called, "Brione..."

And called again by a different voice as she waked to warmth, her pulse speeding as she drew in a deep breath seeing Madrone looking over at her: a dumb, 'sleepy - look' where Brione imagined embarrassment.

And then the concerned face poking out of the sleeping bag next to her said: "Go to sleep." And Brione smiled as Madrone rolled over away from her.

198

"Wow... wild dreams ... and more..." and then more to herself, 'Maybe ... I'll meet up with him...' and her senses were heightened and her thoughts spaced out as she looked out the window at the stars... The sun still hours away, but the clear cold sky seemed to lighten toward an azure blue, after-effects of his presence... their union.

'Wonders and miracles,' she thought. 'How long could it last?'

What's the price...?'

The last part came out kind of loud and Madrone rolled back over saying:

"Are you talking in your sleep?" ... as a knock on the door of their Haystack barracks room brought Madrone instantly quiet and alert.

Slipping cat-like from the bag, the safety off her nine-millimeter pistol and already to the side of the door motioning Brione to move farther to the side and to answer the way they had practiced.

She looked at the rifle nearby, but Madrone shook her head as a second knock came and Brione said:

“Who is it? Zebra?” and she ducked down behind the heavy bed in case bullets followed on her words.

“It’s only us, me and Damon, friends of Sasha and Jarred...”

Let’s see the code last week was ‘Dominoe Jerk.’

That’s the best I can do. Please open up... There is danger.”

Madrone nodded and Brione said as she caught up the rifle approaching the door: “Put your fingers at the bottom of the door.” And Madrone aimed her pistol there as Brione unlocked the door and stood back covering the doorway and said: “Come in.”

Two sheepish young boys... not more than fourteen, entered, hands raised, as Madrone removed their handguns, but left their knives.

A look from Madrone and Brione motioned them into the center of the room and said sternly:

“Sit down.”

199

Madrone peeked out carefully into the hallway her head down low. She pulled back and quietly shut the door. One of the boys raised his hand and pointed at his mouth. They both nodded, Brione a finger to her lips letting them know to whisper.

The boy said:

“Something killed one of your guards. The other one is missing and we scared someone away. We sent Taryn to bring Harrison.”

Madrone nodded to Brione who handed the rifle over to her more qualified friend. They prepared to wait, but the boy leaned forward and said:

“We need to talk to you now. Are you the Chosen? Really?”

Brione caught Madrone’s eye with a wink as Madrone looked at the ceiling and groaned just the tiniest bit.

“Yes, we are Chosen... go on.”

“Well here is a letter. Sasha gave it to me and said to give it to a Chosen if something ever happened to him.”

Brione took the offered parcel and tucked it into her vest.

She said: “Anything else?”

The boys looked at each other and the one nudged the other who hadn’t said a word yet.

“I’m Damon. Nice to meet you ladies.

I... I had a dream of Sasha.”

“Tonight?” Brione asked, and the boy nodded.

“I dreamed he was here - all shinny - and he told me to ‘tell Brione that the militia should expand the Secret Plan of the Chosen - expand it everywhere. For the ...’ and that’s all I remember or all he could say.”

Madrone’s eyes rolled to the ceiling again, but it was serious now... a breach of the highest level security, an innocent prank... or probably legitimate.

Madrone brought the rifle up, toward the door before the knock came.

“Hello, Madrone... Brione... It’s me Captain Harrison.

Are you all right?”

200

Madrone said: “We’re fine, we found a couple of Sasha’s friends.”

Brione opened the door and smiled a little sleepily at an obviously worried Captain whose hair needed combing. A few crusties bothering his eyelashes and a look towards Madrone that Brione could well imagine.

Another soldier led a young woman into the room and Harrison went over and checked on the bandage covering the woman's upper arm where her shirt was torn off. He looked back at Brione and said:

“I would of been here sooner, but I had to rescue Taryn here who nailed a hit-man just

outside the fence- line.

I don't know what to do with you young lady.

How about if... I assign you... let's see: guard duty - twenty four - seven," and he raised his eyebrows to match hers and said fondly:

"Guard duty here... with Madrone and Brione?"

And Taryn's mouth opened as she ran and hugged him excitedly, a wink over to Damon and Trevor, and a magically quick motion of her hand. Madrone barely caught it, not even sure.

They noticed the sun starting to crest the ridge top and shinning rays on their bleary eyes... Brione yawned wide and the boys stood up, passing quick, subtle hand signals.

'To Taryn,' Brione supposed.

Harrison looked around the room stopping at Madrone he said:

"Do you want to stay here a while yet, this morning? I've doubled the guard and..."

He stopped talking as Madrone nodded and said:

"Yes... I think we'll rest a while and then..."

Taryn interrupted saying:

"We'll ride horses up to the tower so you can see... umm... the view?"

"I don't know about it..." said Harrison, who stopped in mid-sentence, again, upon seeing Brione's face light up at the mere mention of horses and riding.

"I will check the stables..." and turning to Taryn... he said:

"Maybe..."

201

She smiled knowingly, almost certain and reached behind her back as a strange purring sound vibrated and Taryn handed Harrison back his cell phone that she had just swiped.

He just shook his head as he talked into the phone and ignored the boys who chuckled and made eyes at Taryn, enjoying the performance immeasurably.

Harrison waved as he left the room still talking on the phone.

The three young folk stood looking at each other when a soldier returned and took the boys by the arm saying: "I have orders to escort these two home, if that's OK with you."

Brione agreed and the boys left tossing a few more hand signs to their friend on the way out.

The three women made themselves comfortable on the sleeping bags behind the bed where the sun didn't shine too brightly yet. Madrone dozed off and Brione rested humming a favorite old campfire tune she loved and found herself turning to at these happy-sad, melancholic moments like she drifted in just then. Drifted, not sleeping... a quiet, attentive restfulness of 'not-thinking' and flowing along with her feelings and the little sounds off where activities commenced with the day.

Taryn rested against the wall determined to stay on guard as she slept, dreaming of being a real eco-commando with a posse of kids out pulling off action-hits and hopping the train for a get-away.

In a posh seaside mansion almost due west of Haymarket, a burly man wearing a large scar blazed across his cheek, hands a glass of rare wine across an ornate table of green leather and polished Mahogany.

A well preserved, yet wrinkled hand receives the glass and draws it to a woman's red lips. She tosses back her long, flowing white hair and smoothes a stray wisp to its proper place. Serene and quite relaxed, she sips the fine wine in her fine home and contemplates mass murder and 'friendly' assassinations.

202

"I'm not against the idea, I just still don't follow the plan..."

So... the crowd is leaving or trying to head south, but its all jammed up at the bridge with the refugees trying to go north and... This stuff could kill for a mile radius?

...That's amazing... God bless you Garth.

Let's toast to your endless resourcefulness and your passion for ... should I say... adventure?"

He tipped his head her direction, paying respect to an old love and his current financier.

Finishing the glass he said:

"Of course we'll blame the Forest Defenders and have the proof this time...

And we'll keep some of these god dammed hippie refugees out of the way for Saturday. Maybe the rumors of 'the silent death' (he said this with a spooky accent) will keep a lot of scum away and we can take the credit for that too."

"Maybe..." she said as she pushed her glass his way thinking quietly...

'I'm afraid dear fool that you won't be able to enjoy that far into our victory.

*Pity, you are so useful on cold winter nights... but the **Shadows** had to claim you for their own.*

Yes, absolutely a pity..."

She smiled as more of the blood-red liquid filled her pricey Crystal glass ... a sound like wolves howled outside the large picture windows and lightning struck a mile away sending its assent for wishes of death... the need building for something to be released... for powers to be satisfied.

"Clean with plenty of fresh straw. That's how Jarred keeps the stables," said Taryn in her official tour guide voice.

203

Trevor looked at Damon they both thinking 'Jarred don't keep the stables like that, it's us kids usually.'

Taryn hustled past the boys and opened the gate to the corral, holding it until everyone entered and then closing it carefully. She started in on her speech about proper equestrian care and grooming, but found herself abandoned as the others walked briskly over to where the wranglers cinched up the last of four saddles.

Taryn arrived as Trevor led a good-sized Pinto over to Madrone.

She patted his nose and let him sniff her hand looking for treats.

'Spirit and brains,' she thought to the horse. 'Just like me.'

Madrone mounted up and Trevor adjusted her stirrups a notch.

One of the wranglers, a tall woman with long braids, brought over a dappled Appaloosa for Brione to ride. "Her name's Shiloh and she tends a bit skittish with new riders, you could ride Missy, Taryn's horse, if you prefer."

Shiloh snorted loud and raked the dirt with one hoof. Brione reached up to stroke her neck and it nosed her side bringing one giant black eye to stare into Brione's.

She had never heard horse thoughts before and found the experience both daunting and funny. The horse agreed with the first and resumed her attention on the green grass and weeds just outside the fence.

Brione stood up in the stirrups stretching and testing. The gate opened and suddenly thoughts of sweet grasses shifted to the pleasure of muscles working, running fast and the wind streaking back her well-combed mane.

Brione thought of riding Amnesia's motorcycle when her hair was longer... free in the wind... and a frightened snort bellowed as Shiloh threw her head and pranced a little sideways.

A wish calmed the horse noticeably and they all headed out at a steady trot, then a fast gallop as they raced across the meadows heading for the highest peak. At the steeper trail leading up to the lookout tower, they slowed to a canter. That familiar rhythm held them and their pace ate up the distance rapidly.

Brione climbed the ladder up the tall wooden tower and memories renewed themselves: playing around hundreds of feet up in the giant Redwoods; hanging banners from a skyscraper and hooking into the banner lines with her hammock where she stayed all 204

night so they couldn't cut it down. The time her friend fell off the platform and died... the sadness at victories turned against them...

She climbed until she passed the highest Firs and only a few Ponderosas still blocked her view. She wanted to stop and look around, but the fall winds blew hard on this clear-blue day and she was glad to finally reach the trapdoor of the small observation room that nested atop the tower.

She pushed the door open saying: "Hello, we're here."

A hand reached down and a man's voice said: "Here, grab a-hold. That last step's right tricky."

She pulled up hard and wriggled her foot under her so she could stand up easier.

Looking down through the open door at Taryn and Madrone working their way up the ladder. She froze, something prickling her senses as she looked closer at the man before her. He stood there - her perusal eliciting not a shred of reaction until her jaw dropped and her whole face practically twitched with certainty.

"Mountain? Is it..." and she waited expecting to be wrong... Unable to believe...

"Call me Rod, please... no one knows.

I've been here a few years... ever since we all got framed for that bank robbery...

Anyway, just here doing my part. Steering the militia clear of... stupid..."

And he ended it there as Taryn pulled herself easily up through the opening and greeted Rod with a handshake and a familiar: "Howdy Rod-man."

He smiled at Brione and canceled a wink knowing Taryn wouldn't miss a lick. He said: "Taryn, Taryn. How is my favorite gossip today. Well wait, you're the talk of the town today, aren't you.

Did you really kill three Ninja assassins? Or was it only two?"

Never one to take jiving lightly, Taryn fidgeted and asked as Madrone and Trevor arrived:

"How's the optics? Let's have a look."

Rod adjusted his cap and said with a touch of forlornness:

205

"Oh, you can see fine and far this morning... but the sights... I'll tell ya, it ain't all pretty ... and I don't think it will improve much no matter what we do, though we better do something - like yesterday."

Taryn scanned the horizon to the southeast and fixed the focus on the large telescope.

She gasped and sighed almost silently and motioned for Brione to come and look.

Careful not to jiggle the device, she looked far into the distance. "Smoke rising black by a town or something."

"That be Redburg burning or the fuel oil storage tanks at least." Said Rod who offered some water to Madrone and Trevor.

Taryn looked in the eyepiece again and repositioned it a few degrees.

Brione looked again and said confused:

"I can kind of see the highway there... Stuff all over the road or next to it..."

Taryn said: "That's people and cars if you look real close."

"Yea, I believe it... Goddess, a river of despair. The last great relocation I hope and not another era of repeated trauma."

They each took turns and Trevor spotted a large group of refugees high up on a pass near the Yolla Bollas. They all wondered at the numbers and the dire consequences if all those poor people somehow made it to their already over taxed community, and just

before winter!

They all sat down on the floor of the tower room except Rod who leaned back in his easy chair and lit up a rollie cigarette. Madrone couldn't hold back her frustrations and yelled: "Shit! And pig shit! What are we supposed to do? We have to get down to the gathering, give a speech, try and get assurances of aid from Harrison or somebody, fly out of here by early morning for the music festival at Kama, and we don't really even know the situation on the coast, what's happened to Hazel or..."

Brione took out the letter from Sasha and said: "There's more too... besides that flood of hapless refugees... we've got..." and she hesitated at a look from Madrone who said: "I've checked out these two. Trevor's got clearance and Taryn pretty much runs Sasha's network even when he is around, but," and she motioned her head toward Rod.

Said Taryn: "Aw, he's cool, you could ask Jarred if he were here."

206

Brione felt for vibrations that didn't quite fit and finding none she gave the nod to Madrone who said:

"OK, read the damn letter."

"I'll just say that the letter, Damon's dream, and common sense point to a solution for the refugee problem - at least a solution that saves us and buys some time. There isn't any solution for them... the refugees... Maybe we can spare some food and medical treatment, if things go smoothly elsewhere.

It's our Secret Plan - Ranger III - that better be in place already on the coast. I'll talk to Harrison about that but Sasha's network should probably get involved too."

And she leaned forward whispering even here - a hundred and ninety feet in the air: "the bridges and soon the dams."

That subject divulged and partially digested Brione said:

"There's more in the letter too. It's about some character named Garth Linborn and how he's reportedly on the coast, seeking revenge and hooking up with Daniel-Man. Sasha says he sent his best undercover operative to investigate a house near Stat-Ford where Garth may be based.

Does anyone know more?"

"I do," Taryn said struggling to control herself. Glassy eyes shone, but refused to cry. She closed her eyes and from a deep breath blurted out: "It's not fair. I want to..."

And she rocked back and forth until it came out:

"My friend Steve... he was that operative.

He told his story to a woman named Maria who stopped when she saw him all bloody on the highway."

Taryn halted again and Brione felt for her... Knowing what... the feeling meant...

But Madrone said bluntly: "Come on now, we have to know."

An angry look crossed Taryn's features and passed as she said from beneath long lashes that should never have had to know such pain: "Just before he fled, knowing his cover was blown, he spoke with a captive at Scar-Face's compound...a person named Willow who said:

"Death at Eel River Festival... Warn the Chosen."

207

And Taryn couldn't hold back anymore. She sobbed repeating several times as Brione held her and stroked her hair over her ears: "Steve...Steve... they killed My Love."

Madrone looked at Brione and said rising up to leave:

"Great. I guess there's another change in plans... I'm for Stat-Ford to get Garth any takers?

We'll have Chosen strung out over the whole world soon. Come on we better go. I don't think I can stomach any more problems in one day or I'm sure to punch somebody out."

She started to crawl down the trap door and Brione said quietly to Taryn:

“You all go down. I’ll go last.”

When the others disappeared down the ladder she turned to Rod who rose and said:

“Tell Sasha if you get the chance that Rod-Man is totally proud of him, that I miss him and I love him like I loved his mother, Lorena.”

That was all he had planned to say, but for some reason he felt Brione deserved to hear it all.

“Lorena died in childbirth a year ago. I was the child’s father. I stayed away ever since, I don’t know...”

I guess I worried he would blame me or that it would be better to just leave him be with Jarred. Or maybe that’s just an excuse... I had my own pain to deal with...”

And Brione shook her head and touched his arm lightly. After a moment she said kindly:

“Don’t worry... I’ll tell him.” And with a hug and a long look she left quickly hurrying to catch her friends.

They traveled a leisurely pace down the mountain letting the horses pick their own gait. Brione listened to Madrone doing her best to cheer up Taryn and keep her talking. They shared stories of bravado and soon got around to guys.

Taryn seemed to lighten up then as she teased Madrone about Captain Harrison and how he looked so cute and flustered at times; “your ‘lost little-boy’ with the cowlick sprouting out his ear,” and she giggled adding: “If we don’t find Jarred soon, Harrison 208

may have to take over as Mayor of Hayfork.... imagine the gossip...” and she rolled her eyes up laughing and teasing as only a beautiful, cocky, fifteen year old Alpha , Scorpio could.

“Heavenly Father protect us...” she said with a kooky, pious tone.

“The Mayor is making out with one of those notoriously loose Forest Defenders...”

Madrone tried to swat at her with the reins, but Taryn anticipating just such a reaction, had already nudged her horse and moved ahead enough to avoid the playful blow.

She turned and mocked again:

“What will they say...oh my...oh my what will they say.”

She road on, passing by Brione and working her way swiftly down the last of the hill where horse and rider turned to the left and halted a short distance down this new trail.

To their questioning expression she said: “This way Y’all, to the Gathering.” Events and considerations swirling so fast, Brione asked:

“Already? I didn’t think it was that late yet. I wanted to change, put on something...”

“...Less grungy and hippie,” said Trevor joining in the fun of teasing they all seemed to be using as therapy - ‘comic belief.’

Taryn’s turn once again as she shot a barbed look Trevor’s way and declared:

“Don’t worry you’ll be fine - I promise. We can all wash up at the spring over there,” she indicated a grove of tall Madrone trees where the grass grew green and lush.

“We can all team up on Trevor, if he won’t bathe. I hear there’s a reward out for information on just how big his feet really are and how big that giant mole is on his...”

“Taryn, I’m gonna...” but whatever he intended as a response faded in the dust as all the horses took off after Taryn’s.

Water, and grass - play and rest. ‘Horses are lucky,’ pondered Shiloh as she reached the first chomp of fresh herb. Her tail swishing dramatically and her cargo wishing at her to stay put and not run off.

The tranquil relaxation of their soak in the water was broken only once. Five choppers passed by fast headed East and South.

209

Brione wondered for a moment if wishes could start before you cast them, but lost that train of thought, as Madrone jumped off a tree branch sending a mighty spray of water her way.