

Zoria

(10516.1 / Isabella Shockley)

You find yourself walking in a city that feels at once familiar and unfamiliar. Tall buildings of brick, stone, and wood rise around you, creating a sharp-cornered maze. Beneath your feet, the pavement is sometimes cobbled, sometimes made of intricate six-sided pieces of yellow and blackstone, sometimes nothing more than waterlogged mud spread with sodden straw.

There's nobody else here, but you can sense that there *used* to be other people in this city. Here and there you see signs they have left behind – a footprint filling with water, a discarded paper, a hat hung carelessly on a railing. Yet this evidence just makes you feel all the more alone in this silent city.

Above, between the roofs, you can see stars. Thousands of them, more stars than you have ever seen in the night sky before. They're brighter than you've ever seen them, a spray of different colours that sparkle and twinkle like precious jewels scattered carelessly across a sable cloth. You fancy that each one is connected to one or more of its neighbours by a barely visible line of metallic colour – copper, bronze, gold, silver. Like gazing up at a vast net.

A silent city? Perhaps not. Somewhere in the distance you can hear the sound of a piper. A lilting up-and-down, repetitive tune that seems strange and known at the same time. As you walk, it draws no closer, but neither do you get farther away from it. Perhaps there is someone else here after all? Perhaps you should try and find them? Perhaps not.

As you stand at a junction where two streets cross, deciding which way to go, there is a fluttering of wings and suddenly the air is alive with birds. Hundreds of little white birds, wings flapping frenziedly, pour along the road to your right. As they pass, their little wings buffet you, their claws scratch at you, they get tangled in your hair and your clothes. Their high-pitched shrieking song is panicked, and it's hard not to feel that panic yourself as you cover your eyes and crouch, and pray for them to pass quickly.

When they're gone they've taken the city with them. You are on a manicured lawn surrounding a tower of red and yellow stone. Set in a ring around the tower are many beautifully sculpted statues of dog-headed figures, each holding an oval mirror of polished mithril, also carved of soft red and yellow stone.

Waiting for you at the door of the tower is an old Freeborn woman clad in robes of crimson and ochre. She waves, greets you pleasantly, but does not invite you inside the tower. Instead she comes down the steps from her front door, closing it carefully behind her, and offers you her harm.

She asks if you have come far, and how far you are going. She seems particularly interested in any traveling you have done, and shares stories of her own adventures – how she once captained a ship and travelled to ports across the known world. Now she is retired – and this is her abode.

It seems she knows she is in dreams, and that you are a visitor from the waking world. She seems singularly uninterested in news of current affairs though. Rather she wants to show you her statues, explaining that she sculpted each one of them herself when she was awake. As you pass each one, you can see a different scene trapped in the depths of the mithril mirrors. A bustling market somewhere far from Imperial shores; a ship at sea; a snowy forest scape; a road through dusty grasslands; a glass menagerie. The images move and change but you cannot tell if you are actually looking at something that *is* happening, or a memory of something that *has* happened trapped in a repeating loop in the depths of the mirror.

The Freeborn magician talks about how the mind, as well as the body, can travel through the world. That in the end the final understanding is that you can experience these places without needing to leave the safety and comfort of your home. Yet there is something almost wistful about the way she speaks. You are left with the impression she no longer entirely believes what she is saying, if she ever did.

She offers to sculpt you, next time you visit. Would you like that?

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals “Eyes of the Sun and Moon (Day/14) and Eye of the High Places (Day/14) as if you have mastered them; if you have already mastered these rituals, you may perform them as if you have one additional rank of Day magic. This is an enchantment. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying effect: As long as the enchantment persists, you experience a roleplaying effect: you have an urge to go to places you have never been before, and experience new things. You feel especially driven to speak to new people about the places they have seen.

Yevgeni Katzev

(62.1/ Timothy Goundry)

In your dream, you are in a dark forest, on a narrow winding dirt path. Little stones, alternately yellow and red, mark the edges of the path. Each one is carved with a face that seems oddly inhuman although you could not put your finger on why their knowing smile is so unsettling. Perhaps they are orc faces? Or some twisted goblin-things of the deep woods. Or the face of someone once familiar, now forgotten.

You can hear piping ahead. It is not the dancing, enchanting pipes of the forest dwellers, but a harsher sound that cuts through you like a knife. It becomes louder as you walk, your long crimson skirts whispering against your legs and against the dirt path. A drum starts up, alongside the piping. Then another, in counterpoint. You have the sudden feeling that you are not alone, and quicken your pace even more. You are not running, but only just.

The trees give way to a rolling moor, beneath the night sky. Above, the sky is wild with stars. Thousands of them, more stars than you have ever seen in the night sky before. They're brighter than you've ever seen them, a spray of different colours that sparkle and twinkle like precious jewels scattered carelessly across a sable cloth. You fancy that each one is connected to one or more of its neighbours by a barely visible line of metallic colour – copper, bronze, gold, silver. Like gazing up at a vast net.

Ahead of you, on the edge of the wood where it abruptly becomes moorland, is a military camp. Yellow tents and red ropes flutter in the night breeze. There are many banners hanging above the tents, and while you do not (necessarily) recognise any one of them, each of them uses iconography that is at least slightly familiar from the waking world. Marcher boars and hounds rub shoulders with Dawnish suns and dragons. A white Navarr tree on a green flag whips and coils in the breeze beside a three-ringed banner of the Winterfolk. And everywhere between them are the dour sigils of Varushka. Eagles, axes, iron fists. You can tell without knowing that while there are the banners of other nations here, this is a Varushan camp.

The only figure in the camp is a man seemingly of Marcher stock. Atop his head is a shapeless, sodden felt hat. Perhaps it has been raining, although there is no sign of puddles, and the tents and banners are quite dry. He wears an unlaced gambeson, with strange wicker greavers and bracers on shins and forearms. There is no elegance to it but you reckon it is rude Marcher mage armour.

He is playing a pipe, playing a sad and sorrowful song of a home he knows he will never see again. He plays with more enthusiasm than skill however. There is no sign of the drummers, but you realise you can still hear them beating out a slow rhythm alongside his song. Perhaps they are inside one of the tents? Perhaps they are inside your head.

For a moment you are profoundly convinced there is something behind you, although you dare not look.

The Marcher stands between you and a low cherry-red campfire. There is a spit across it, and the remains of a suckling pig. He has his back to you.

He stops playing and greets you, warmly, by a name not your own – Will or Jack or Bill or Bob – inviting you to share the fire and a jar of small beer, and a little pig-meat.

This is an old, tired warrior-mage. He thinks you are one of his company. He has little heart for the battle that will come when the sun rises. He will face his cousins, his brothers, and people who were once upon a time his friends. Not for the first time either. He is filled with sadness, and speaks of politics that mean little to you – the petty arguments of Marcher households that lead to civil war, and shameful defeat, and of fleeing north to rally to the banner of the Boyar who says he will make all better again.

Your host does not know if he believes the boyar's promise, but he will follow his steward wherever she leads him because of the bonds of loyalty. Tears run down his face when he speaks of love and loyalty, and the home he has left behind, and the certainty that he will die tomorrow and be buried in alien soil, unless he breaks his bonds, and breaks his heart, and walks away.

The fire dies down as he speaks, and then there is silence for a few moments, and then... he gazes behind you in horror, eyes wide as millstones. You feel movement, and then agonizing pain. Something tears into your back. Your host is screaming or shouting, mouth wide open, but you can't hear it over the sudden frenzy of drums and the roar a big cat and you are sent sprawling forward.

White sand surrounds you – fine white sand – a desert that stretches as far as the eye can see and there is no sign of moor, or forest, or camp, or Marcher.

There is a white tower – a lighthouse? - to the left of you but you can't really focus on it because of the pain. The sky slips and twists, seems to be spinning lazily anticlockwise, the thousands of twinkling interconnected stars turning around a point somewhere above the lighthouse.

There is blood on the sand – fresh red blood spattered stark against the white sand – and you are pitched forward onto your belly as some massive weight crashes down on your back and ...

... and then you wake up

Effect: You have suffered several jagged wounds to your back, as if a fistful of knives have been dragged across your shoulders. You have only one hit remaining, and are will be in a great deal of pain until you restore at least one hit. The wounds will heal cleanly, leaving no scars.

Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the ritual Clarion Call of Ivory and Dust (Winter/20) as if you had mastered it; if you have already mastered this ritual, you may perform it as if you have one additional rank of Winter magic. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying effect: For an hour after waking, you cannot shake the feeling you are being stalked by something. Something hiding in the bushes, on the other side of a tent, behind a door. Waiting to pounce. The longer you are along the more intense this feeling gets until it is almost unbearable.

As long as the enchantment remains, you feel keenly aware of the bonds of loyalty you feel for others. You are also keenly aware of the people for whom you feel no loyalty, but who expect you to feel obligated or answerable to them regardless.

Lechovitch-Roza

(13366.1 / Oliver Rose)

You find yourself walking in a city that feels at once familiar and unfamiliar. Tall buildings of brick, stone, and wood rise around you, creating a sharp-cornered maze. Beneath your feet, the pavement is sometimes cobbled, sometimes made of intricate six-sided pieces of yellow and blackstone, sometimes nothing more than waterlogged mud spread with sodden straw.

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The city is silent, but not perhaps as empty as you thought. Ahead you catch a glimpse of a horned figure in a red coat, moving quickly along a side street, leaning on a staff and clearly about some important errand. You call out – the loneliness has perhaps begun to get to you – and hurry to try and catch up with them. You reach the intersection only to see them open one of the interchangeable doors, and disappear into a building. Rather than be left by yourself again, you follow.

As soon as you pass through the door you find yourself in the open. The sky is dark, moonless, almost empty of stars, and the Northern Lights coil sinuously like a line of flame above the horizon. You are in a marsh that stretches as far as you can see. Behind you, a door frame and threshold stand incongruously, door open, showing the street you have just left. The yellow wood door is slowly closing, and you feel no urge to stop it. No urge to return to the city. After all, the fellow in the red coat is here somewhere. Surely? You were just a few moments behind them, and they cannot have gone far.

It is frigidly cold – chips of ice girdle the edges of the standing water. Stunted trees hunch here and there, clawing at the ground with naked branches. From the corner of your eye they look almost like human figures bent double contorted in pain.

Suddenly you have a companion. A scarecrow-thin young man in a cloak of black feathers with strings of bones hanging from his belt. His face is hidden behind a mask of woven

wicker – a featureless mask that covers the entire front of his head, with a hood of black feathers.

He seems to think you are one of his companions. He speaks of his previous hunts; each of the bones hanging from his belt comes from a creature he has hunted and killed. Some of them are beasts he slew in the waking world – he knows he is dreaming – and some are creatures he has hunted in the world of dreams. Soon, he says, there will be no threats left to the Kallavesi people. No predators feasting on those who dream too deeply, no more dangers in the marshes nor in the forests of the mind.

He has never heard of the Empire, knows nothing of the lands beyond his own hunting grounds, and has no idea how long he has been in the dreaming place. He firmly believes he is doing a service for his people by tracking down a dream version of each type of animal that they see as a threat to their existence and refuses to be drawn into conversation, insisting that he must maintain focus for his hunt.

Often he leads you into dead ends from which you must backtrack, though he is sure-footed enough that you never fall through the ice. He often hears something in the distance and ducks behind a tree stump or breaks into a trot.

The beast he hunts now – with short flint spear and wand alike - he claims to be the most dangerous at all. He has only rarely seen glimpses of it, relying instead on tracking it by spoor, stool and other evidence of its passage. In turn, he believes that it has begun to hunt him but he is too wily to be trapped. And thus they circle each other, neither gaining the upper hand.

Shortly before you awaken, you realise he has begun to look at you oddly when he thinks you are distracted, fingering the shaft of his spear. Slim and wiry as he is, he takes on an aura of slight menace, and speaks less and less. When you struggle awake, you are left with the certain suspicion that towards the end, for some reason, he had begun to consider you another beast to hunt.

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals Embrace the Living Flame (Night/7) and Still Waters, Running Deep (Night/29) as if you had mastered them; if you have already mastered one of these rituals, you may perform them as if you have one additional rank of Night magic. This is an enchantment. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying Effect: For at least an hour after waking, you seem to still be in the dream marsh; you can still see Anvil, but the sky is scattered with stars and the northern lights are visible on the horizon. Pools of half-frozen water and sinister trees are scattered among the tents, and occasionally out of the corner of your eye you catch a glimpse of a queer marsh creature that is not altogether wholesome.

In addition, as long as you are under the effect of this enchantment, you feel an urge to track down anyone or anything you consider to be a threat to you or your people – especially a symbolic threat - and defeat it.

Marzanna Verchernyaya Zorya

(Rachel Ambrose/5097.2)

The pair of you – Aleksandr and yourself - trudge across an endless plain of cracked, parched, baked solid, orange mud. Above the night sky is a riot of stars. Thousands of them, more stars than you have ever seen in the night sky before. They're brighter than you've ever seen them, a spray of different colours that sparkle and twinkle like precious jewels scattered carelessly across a sable cloth. You fancy that each one is connected to one or more of its neighbours by a barely visible line of metallic colour – copper, bronze, gold, silver. Like gazing up at a vast net.

While the sky is glitters gloriously, the endless plain is all but featureless. It isn't a desert, not as suche. This is not sand but mud, meaning there was water here once. Perhaps a lot of water.

Something large passes overhead. You glance up, and see the shadow of something immense, something that suggests not the dry plains but the depths of the ocean, lazy and distant, drifting across the night sky. Visible only by the occlusion of the stars as it passes. It is profoundly unaware of you, unconcerned about you. When you look back down at the plains around you, you are alone, and after a handful of heartbeats you've forgotten there was ever anyone else with you.

You don't know how long you have been walking. It is very warm. You ought to be thirsty, but you aren't. You're just alone. Alone with yourself. Yet after a while, perhaps inevitably, there is a sign of life ahead. Perhaps you are relieved. Perhaps you are a little disappointed to have your solitude disturbed.

The bones of a great beast – a huge fish or a whale on a scale that your mind shies away from accepting – jut from the cracked clay. A fire burns, despite the heat. Perhaps the fire is for company rather than warmth. The fire casts dancing shadows that don't quite fit – sometimes human sometimes something quite different. You are a Varushkan, so you know how to deal with a situation where someone casts two shadows. You approach openly, adopt as friendly a mien as you can muster.

There is a man here, seated cross legged next to the fire, staring into its depths. He wears very little, only a kilt of old leather around his hips. Its impossible to say how old he is, and probably doesn't matter. He does not look up as you approach, but gestures for you to take a seat across from him. The flames leap as you sit down, then recede slightly, withdrawing into the broken timbers, becoming embers.

He doesn't speak for a while, then looks up, studies you. His eyes are not human eyes but those of a beast, brown and gold, and liquid, but with a terrible awareness and... sadness? In their depths, a terrible sadness that tugs at something within you, perhaps something you have forgotten.

When he speaks it is as if he no longer quite remembers how to form words, as if he's unsure of how language works. He comments on your appearance, on the stars, on the warmth of the air, but he does not ask questions. As he speaks, though, his voice becomes more confident. You are painfully aware that the more animated he becomes, the more the shadows cast by the fire, draped across the bleached bones, become more unsettling. Larger. More predatory, more hungry. They flicker and move of their own accord – possibly an optical illusion from the fire – and make you imagine a hunting beast. Something part cat, part bird, part something else entirely.

The conversation turns, inevitably, to magic. The pair of you discuss how magic can sustain, can preserve life, can ward against death. He touches vaguely on the horror that is persistence, as he calls it. The way that magic does not care whether its victim *wishes* to continue to be, or not. Magic is heartless and soulless and sometimes, sometimes continuance is the worst kind of torment. That perhaps on some level the thing that makes life endurable is the knowledge that it will *end*, and something new will begin. That there is a kind of horror in permanence, and the terrible aching pain of being unable to change. Of the danger of unwisely leaping into space with no certainty that you will hit the water, and that you might fall forever.

You awaken with the final words of the strange magician echoing in your mind. “*Forever is a very long time,*” he said. “*Be sure you know where you will land before you leap.*”

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the ritual Last Breath Echoes (Winter/20) as if you had mastered it; if you have already mastered this ritual, you may perform them as if you have one additional rank of Winter magic. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying: You are filled with a melancholic sense that things are somehow becoming static and unchanging. This ennui, and the nagging sense of *deja vu*, that comes with it, lasts for at least an hour.

While the enchantment lasts you experience a roleplaying effect: you feel the urge to seek out new experiences, finding it frustrating to realise you are doing something you have done before.

Aleksandr Zoravich Novosad

(Mikah Gerster/ 12200.1)

The pair of you – Marzanna and yourself - trudge across an endless plain of cracked, parched, baked solid, orange mud. Above the night sky is a riot of stars. Thousands of them, more stars than you have ever seen in the night sky before. They're brighter than you've ever seen them, a spray of different colours that sparkle and twinkle like precious jewels scattered carelessly across a sable cloth. You fancy that each one is connected to one or more of its neighbours by a barely visible line of metallic colour – copper, bronze, gold, silver. Like gazing up at a vast net.

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