

Zastyt, the Feeder

Jason Belam (CID 704.3)

You all dream of a crystalline desert. The sand beneath your feet is fine, white, cool. It runs through your fingers like water. Columns of translucent crystal jut from the desert around you, seemingly at random. They are angular, smooth sided, and vary between half a dozen feet tall to looming three-storey towers. There is a quiet buzz of conversation as you and your companions examine these pillars, discuss your thoughts on them.

The night sky is dusted with stars, Their arrangement is unfamiliar because rather than a random scattering they seem to be laid out with geometric precision, in line with some obvious pattern or intention that you cannot quite grasp. When you look round to ask your companions what you make of these peculiar heavens, you are alone. Within a handful of heartbeats you forget anyone else was every here with you.

You make your way across the desert . It is dry, but not especially warm. You are not thirsty, even though you seem to travel for several subjective hours. It is heavy going, the sand shifting beneath your feet under the unnaturally organised stars. Sometimes the dunes seem to shift under their own power, as if something is moving around underneath the desert.

The wind picks up a little, bringing the faint noise of pipes, rising and falling. The distant sound of drums, martial drums. It seems to be coming closer, even when you stand still. There is a sensation of movement, of something rapidly approaching and then between moments you are in camp. A military camp, pitched on the edge of a square pool of clear blue water.

White tents and guy ropes flutter in the mournful wind. There are flags and streamers hanging above the tents, both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. 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, out in the middle of this endless desert of white, white sand.

The only other person here is a man of obvious Marcher stock. He sits on a bench, his back to you. Piled next to him on the bench is a suit of mage armour woven of wicker which he is carefully cleaning, one piece at a time. There is also a pipe here, resting on his right-hand side. Perhaps the piping you heard earlier carried on the wind although you might have sworn that was the produce of many little instruments rather than one.

He half turns, suddenly aware of your presence, tense as a startled rabbit, then relaxing slightly. He mops his face with a shapeless felt hat, greets you by a name not your own, and goes back to cleaning his wicker armour. His gambeson is unlaced, and he is sheened with sweat despite the fact the night is not that warm. He invites you to pull up a bench and keep him company, if you like, in his soft Marcher drawl.

He is a warrior-mage, a battle-wizard of the Marches, and he thinks you are one of his company. He is worried about the battle tomorrow. He has little heart for it. Tomorrow he will face his cousins, his brothers, his people. Folk who once upon a better time were his friends.

Occasionally he diverts to talk of events that mean nothing to you – the arguments of Marcher households, some of their names familiar and some strange. Civil war – a timely topic – people who are united by nation but divided by politics. Shameful defeat, underhand tactics, bitterness, anger, flight. The decision of his steward to rally to the banner of the northern Boyar, who says he will make all better again.

This Marcher magician does not believe that anything will make it all better again. You can't keep milk in a broken pitcher, apparently. But he will follow his steward wherever she leads him because of the bonds of love, and loyalty. He mops his face with his hat when he speaks of duty, hiding sentimental tears. He misses his home. He knows he will die tomorrow, buried in alien soil, no tree to mark his grave. Forgotten, lost, unable to find his way back to the fields of his family.

Unless he breaks the bonds of duty, and shatters his heart, and slinks away like a rat in the night, refusing everything he thinks he knows about himself, and condemning himself as surely as any magistrate.

He bows his head, and his shoulders shake, but he does not cry. He wants someone to offer a third choice, another path winding between certain death and certain sorrow. Someone to touch him on the shoulder, tell him it will be alright, tell him he is not alone, tell him... something to make it make sense.

And then you wake up.

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the ritual Shroud of Mist and Shadows (Night/10) 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 Night magic. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying effect: While the enchantment lasts you experience a roleplaying effect: You are 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.

Yevegeni

Tim Goundry (CID 62.1)

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Simoorgl, the Empty One

Steve Cooke (CID 269.1)

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Zoria

Isabella Shockley (CID 10516.1)

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Lechovitch-Roza

Oliver Rose (CID 13366.1)

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