

Sovica (5196.1)

You dream that the night sky is dusted with stars. Their arrangement is unfamiliar. Rather than a random scattering from which patterns emerge the longer you look at them, these stars are laid out with geometric precision. The pattern is immediately obvious but its meaning is beyond you.

You are in a desert of white sand. It is fine, white, cool. It runs through your fingers like water. Columns of translucent crystal jut from the desert, apparently at random but with the suggestion of intention. They are angular, smooth sided, and vary between half a dozen feet tall to looming three-storey towers.

There are bats flying overhead. A small handful at first, then increasing numbers. They bicker and flutter, zipping across the night sky on some urgent errand. One slaps against the side of a nearby column of clear stone, clinging with its clawed wings, and glares balefully at you from eyes the colour of the sun just before it drops below the horizon. It chitters, agitated, then launches itself into the air again.

You make your way across the desert. It is parched, but neither particularly warm nor cold. You do not feel not thirsty, even though you seem to travel for several hours. It is heavy going, the sand shifting beneath your feet, occasionally having to detour around a cluster of crystal pillars. Sometimes a nearby dune shifts and settles, as if something is moving around underneath the desert.

When the sand moves, it hisses like a snake.

The wind picks up a little, bringing the faint noise of laughter, whispering, voices talking on the edge of hearing. You smell woodsmoke, and there is a sudden sensation of movement as if the landscape around you is moving while you remain in place.

A three-storey tower of deep blue marble shot through with veins of gold is here, now. Perhaps it was always here and you simply failed to look in its direction. It is octagonal, studded with stained glass windows, and topped with a dome that reminds you very much of a fat-bottomed onion.

Without really thinking, you approach. A cloud of bats has formed, swirling around the tower in a swift-turning ragged spiral. The door at the base of the blue-stone structure is closed. You knock, politely. There is no response for a moment, two moments, and then the door opens.

A matronly orc woman smiles at you from the doorway. She is old, her skin lined. She wears a loose sleeveless tunic of cerulean cotton that reaches the floor, the hems embroidered with rich purple geometric designs that immediately put you in mind of waves. Her black hair is piled atop her head in coils that immediately put you in mind of a nest of serpents. She looks you up and down and the slightest suggestion of a frown creases her features. Then she is all smiles, welcoming you to her home.

Across the threshold, the tower is much warmer than the desert. Through one of the

windows – set with chips of blue-and-yellow cut-glass held in a wild, asymmetrical frame. It makes the scene beyond look a little unreal, but you note without much surprise that rather than pale desert sands there seems to be a beach beyond, under the oddly-rational skies, and oddly-proportioned trees with wide, serrated leaves.

There's the slightest suggestion that you are not the only two people here. Occasionally out of the corner of your eye you fancy you catch sight of other figures. Oddly dressed orcs, you think. They are not there when you look directly at them.

Your host is solicitous – fascinated to meet you. She rarely interacts with humans. She bustles around fetching cups and a decanter. She so rarely has visitors, she is quite unprepared. She keeps up a steady stream of conversation, barely giving you time to answer any of her questions.

She has never heard of the Empire. She tells you she is a Pandellion of the Eleven Stars, and seems only mildly disappointed when you confess you have never heard of them. She is from an orc nation you have never heard of before, any more than she had heard of Varushka. She knows she is dreaming, and talks matter-of-factly about leaving the mortal world with the aid of her allies, to avoid the sharp knives of her political rivals who coveted her position and her power.

The certainty that there are other folk here grows a little, but the distracting stream of chatter makes it difficult to concentrate on them for long enough to make them out.

You begin to feel a little sleepy. Perhaps the long journey across the desert has been more tiring than you thought.

The conversation turns to music, as she pours you both a cup of some blue liquid which puts you in mind of milk but smells sweet as honey. She shares a few snatches of her peoples' songs, asks to hear some of yours. The tunes she sings are somnolent, lilted lullabies, and along with the warmth and the constant tide of talking from your host, your limbs and eyelids become heavy.

Behind your host's shoulder you can see an orc, or the shadow of an orc, gesticulating wildly. She is trying to warn you. You are in danger. You pause with the cup of blue liquid half-way to your lips, and a wave of absolute exhaustion runs through you. Your host has fallen silent, staring at you with voracious hunger in her eyes. She reaches slowly across the table toward you, one long finger extended, her other hand making a series of unsettling gestures. You can't move, but you know you do not under any circumstances want her to touch you.

Forcing your arm to move is like trying to shift a mountain with a stick. But you manage it, drawing on all your willpower, and fling the contents of your cup into the face of your host. The orc jerks back, startled, and her spell breaks. You run for the door, and it is like trying to run through water. Every step requires another effort of will, and yet the door seems to get no closer.

The orc woman stands up, snarling that you cannot escape, that your youth is wasted on you, that you will soon join her court and serve her forever. Your fingers brush the handle of the door, but there is no strength in them. You can hear her approaching behind you, not rushing, walking with the slow arrogant tread of a predator who knows their prey cannot escape...

... and then you wake up.

You have fallen out of bed, and lie tangled in your sheets on the floor as the sun begins to rise over Anvil.

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the ritual Coil of the Black Leech (Winter: 20) as if you had mastered them; if you have already mastered this ritual, you may perform them as if you have one additional rank of Winter magic, subject to the normal rules for additional ranks of lore. This is an enchantment. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying effect: When you awaken, you are under a roleplaying effect that persists for at least an hour: You feel as if there is someone or something pursuing you. While you are around other people the sensation is muted, but when you are alone the growing certainty that there is something that means you harm drawing near is difficult to ignore.

In addition, as long as you are under the effect of this enchantment, you feel a nagging, gnawing hunger for something. Exactly what you are hungry for changes – it may be actual food, or it may be something less corporeal such as power, knowledge, magical energy, or compliments.