

Simargl

You dream of the forests of Varushka at night - they look like the trees of Miekarova. Between the trees 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.

As you walk through the trees you are suddenly aware you are not alone. A shape slinks near you, just out of arms reach. It is both a slim youth with yellow eyes and a great tiger with yellow eyes and at the same time something else with yellow eyes, something older than you can imagine. It walks beside you, matching your step for step, occasionally glancing in your direction. There is no feeling of threat, just a sense of anticipation.

Ahead of you among the trees yawns a great pit, a jagged hole in the soil that opens into a coiling passage - you don't need a lantern. Your golden eyes see as easily in the pitch blackness as they might see in an open field at midday.

The tunnel cuts deep into dark rock, scattered with red and white hand-prints - they grow slowly in size as you descend - starting as the small, delicate hands of a child and then growing in size to those of an adult. A man's hands, you suspect. The same hands, repeated time and again on the walls of the downward coiling passages. There are no branches.

After four turns of the passage - the spiral widens outwards – you come to a patch of wall where there are no handprints. Without thinking, you reach out and rest your palm gently against the wall, fingers spread. When you pull your hand away, it leaves behind a pale impression on the wall. Your hand-print, fixed in the stone forever. Ahead of you...

Ahead of you... What is it ahead of you? Consider for a moment, what brought you here, what it is that has set you walking this path of dreams, all you have seen and all you have learned, and then...

Ahead of you, there is a crouched humanoid shape wrapped in dirty black cloth. It hunches over, turned sideways on. It appears unaware of your presence. It lifts a stone bowl to its lips and places one hand - a hand covered in delicate iridescent scales - on the wall of the cave.

It tenses for a moment, then forcibly spits the red pigment in its mouth over its hand leaving a spattered empty silhouette on the wall. It stares at it for a moment then shuffles half-a-foot down the corridor, placing its hand on the wall again and lifting another little stone bowl to its lips. Then it tenses. It turns. Its face is obscured by a thick black veil that falls in a waterfall concealing its features.

You are closer than you thought - and you cannot stop your hand - unbidden - reaching forward toward the veil and almost touching the rough cloth ...

And you know, without a doubt, who this is.

Simargl. In the dreamscape, unfettered by the need ever to wake again. And the Gate of Silence stands open but... you could reach out and close it. If that is what you wish...

CHOOSE

CHOICE ONE

You reach out toward the cloth but before you touch it, you awaken.

Yet you are left with a calm insight.

From now on, you are in no danger from the Tiger. You may walk the paths of the Dreamscape safely in future, and nothing will harm you.

Furthermore, at any time you are touching the Dreamscape, by whatever magical means, you may choose to leave the mortal world behind and be here, free, forever.

But you will never see the waking world again. You will leave no ghost behind – the Black Gate will be barred to you – but you will come to this place and from here... anywhere in this wondrous, terrible, tempting, deceptive world of madness and hope.

Effect:

Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals A Shadow in the Glass (Night /10), Curse of Absent Friends (Night /8), Dream Quest of the Empty One (Night/30), Dripping Echoes of the Fen (Night/100), Sleep shall not divide us long (Night/24), Soft Light Charms the Mind (Night/15), Summoning the Loquacious Birds (Night/18), Tale of Grey Feathered Anya (Night/12), The Gate of Silence (Night/20), The Painted Cave (Night/6), The Somnolent Wanderer (Night/8), The Sunken Library (Night/20), Verdant Bounty of the Twilight Bayou (Night/6), Voice of Smoke and Memory (Night/16), Wisdom of the Balanced Blade (Winter/6), Words of Ending (Winter/4), as if you had mastered them; if you have already mastered this ritual, you may perform it as if you have one additional rank of the appropriate lore subject to the usual rules about additional ranks. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Ask a ref to radio the Matt cave and tell them “THE TIGER IS IN THE DARK WOODS”

CHOICE TWO

You reach out toward the figure and take the bowl from their hands. Your perspective shifts. You fill your mouth with pigment and place your hand on the wall, spraying paint, moving your hand away to see the ochre, the red, the white empty handprint on the wall. And then again. And then again.

And then... you put the bowl down. It'll be here waiting for you if you wish to return. And from that place, from your place, you go... out.

You will be in the Dreamscape forever, or at least until you tire of it and go elsewhere. Unlike most you have met here, you will have walked out of the mortal world with your eyes open, through a gate of your own crafting. Like one of those handful of magicians you have met who have brought their own self here, you'll be

You will travel as you wish, in safety, free to meet and speak, to create, to seek.

But... you will never return. The Gate of Silence is one way only. You will leave no ghost, the Black Gate will be barred to you, and in time even memory of you will fade.

But you will be free to walk this place and see and create wonders until at last, centuries from now, you tire of its splendour and...

... well, there must be some mysteries surely?

Effect

Your character is retired, and becomes part of the Dreamscape. Ask a ref to radio the plot cave and tell them “THE TIGER HAS LEFT THE COOP”