

Zoria

You dream of a plain, stretching out to the horizon in every direction, beneath a star-splashed night sky. The constellations are unfamiliar, but the longer you look at the sky the more patterns you see. A crab. A unicorn. A mysterious sphinx. A sword and a shield. An unfolding lotus flower. A sheaf of wheat.

The plain is dry; there is no water here. The grass is yellowed and scrubby, as if withered by an unseen summer sun. Every step you make throws up a little dust. Nothing will grow here, not on this barren, baked soil. Still, you cannot stay here or you will simply die of thirst. So you pick a direction, and set off, leaning on a stick for support.

After a few hours of walking, you spot someone ahead. Drawing closer you can see they are a brown-skinned woman wrapped in a sarong of yellow cotton, wearing sandals, and their face shaded by a broad-brimmed hat in an unfamiliar style. They sit in the shadow of a crumbling red rock, and beside them a spring of fresh-looking water bubbles out of the stony ground.

They stand, leaning on a staff of bleached white wood, and wave as you approach. They greet you warmly, and invite you into the shade, encouraging you to quench your thirst at the bubbling spring. There is nothing threatening in their manner; they seem genuinely pleased to see you.

The water is sweet, and delicious, and you are surprised to find how thirsty you are.

Your host laughs, warning you not to drink too much too quickly. They are a traveller from an antique land, and you are the first visitor they have had in many days. They are unfamiliar with the Empire, with Varushka; you realise you are not speaking Imperial but some other tongue that feels strange in your mouth.

The woman has been crossing this stony desert for some time, and all they will say is that they are not going *to* anywhere, they are walking *away* from somewhere they could no longer remain in good conscience. They ask if you know the place, but its name slips away from your memory as soon as they speak it and you can only shake your head. When she speaks of this place, her face darkens a little, and you get the impression she does not have fond memories of the place.

Conversation turns to the importance of making preparations, of arranging contingencies, of planning before you act. They talk about the Sphere of Pattern, which governs the magic of thought and reason and helps protect from the sun; and the Sphere of Life, which heals and harms and grants strength to keep the jackals that hunt the desert at bay; and the Sphere of Fire which governs thought and intuition and leads her across the trackless wasteland. They are adept in these magics, and that is how they learned to raise a spring which is invaluable when one travels across a stony desert.

As you converse, the woman's gentle voice and lilting, lyrical words lull you a little. You feel safe, secure, sheltered. You lean against the red rock, your thirst quenched, and fall asleep.

You awaken in your own bed, your mouth dry, and a few pinches of sandy soil caught between your toes.

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can cast Ascetic Star of Atun, Blessing of New Spring, and Signs and Portents as if you had mastered them, If you have if you have already mastered one of these rituals, you may perform it as if you have one additional rank of lore, subject to the normal rules about additional ranks. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying Effect: You experience a roleplaying effect: you feel an urge to call out things you consider unjust that persists for several hours. Anything you feel is unfair causes a surge of anger to rise within you. Speaking your mind, and judging between things that are right and wrong, feels natural and empowering.