

## Talvikaarne, The Winter Guest

### Somnolent Wanderer

It is cold here. Damp. Wet, even. Water drips from the trees, twisted into peculiar and mildly unsettling shapes. Willows and beggarwood and other less familiar plants. One of you sinks into the mud until it bubbles up over their boot to general amusement. There is quiet conversation; not everyone arrives at the same time, of course. People fall asleep more or less easily.

The clear sky over your heads is rich with stars, familiar constellations such as the Whale, and the Four-faced Drake, and the Shimmer of Moths, and low in the sky just above the mountains, the yellow eye of the Beast watches over all. It draws your gaze, will it or not.

(And you are distracted for a moment by the squeaking, shrieking of a cloud of angry bats that zip across the sky, all wings and teeth and mad-staring eyes, blocking your view of the sky for a moment, and then they are gone sweeping across the marsh toward the mountains).

The wind picks up, rattling the damp leaves. Perhaps you're expecting it, perhaps it takes you by surprise, but when you look down you're alone and the next heartbeat you forget there was ever anyone else here. There is a path, nearby, raised on a low dyke. You clamber up to it, and perhaps spend a moment futilely trying to clean a little of the mud off your clothes, your boots.

On the path there are only two ways to go; ahead or behind. You choose to go ahead. Walking through the marshes. There's a symphony of sound unfolding around you - the low creaking and the high piping of frogs. The fluttering of night-time insects, some small and dark darting hither and yon, some larger, iridescent, stately beasts moving lazily across the surface of the pools or alighting on wet-barked trees. With an audible plop, something larger drops into the muddy water and swims toward you with a kind of pointed intent. You pick up your pace a little, leaving it behind.

Ahead, under the golden-eyed watching star, there is a town. Or... no not a town, not a settlement. A wall. A high wall. As you get closer, it's true size

becomes apparent, as you realise you are still some distance from it. A cyclopean structure that rises impossibly from the marsh into the sky.

(And around you lantern-flies dance, and stately red-feathered nocturnal cranes pick through the shallow water, and an eight-legged four-eyed water lizard observes you with cool indifference, and the spread-wide hand-like leaves of a floating water-wedded quiver and yearn toward you as you pass).

It is a castle. A keep, in the old Varushkan style. Slabs of seamless stone shaped into a wall to divide the world cleanly into those within and those without. An immense edifice a testament to the will and ambition of those who built it, and to months of hard labour. Especially here, in the teeming marshes. This dyke is nowhere near wide enough to accommodate the number of ox-wagons that would have been needed to drag this much stone into this unwelcoming swamp.

Closer, there is a gate. Four storeys tall, thirty feet or more wide. An open portal that breaches this immense barrier. It is, a little ironically, wide open. Doors of dark weirwood, studded with tarnished mithril bands. A portal to hold back an army, no less a barrier than the wall around it. Open wide.

As you push forward, something brushes your face. A strand of gossamer, a massive web of delicate strands covering the opening. No impediment, but perhaps they make you start, or swear, or jerk back when you feel them around you. Strands on your clothes, in your hair. But just normal webs - just normal threads.

Then you are in the courtyard before the tower that reaches up towards the sky. A great open space, a killing ground, scattered with stone barricades and lit, dismally, by low green flames.

You don't really remember crossing the outer defences, or entering the keep. It closes around you like a mailed glove, and then you are in a large room with leaping emerald-green torches. Two rows of long black-stone-topped tables. Benches of dark wood. Shadows. Tapestries depicting battles, but it is not easy to see which side is which - just a woven chaos of people slaughtering each other with all the inventiveness of thousands of

years of war and murder.

At the far end from the door, an immense seat, cunningly carved into the shape of three great lizards or perhaps a three-headed lizard. Seated upon it, a squat figure lounges on it, watching you approach with the slit-pupiled eyes of the naga, Night-touched green-and-yellow scales dusted across their cheeks and brow. They eye you suspiciously, and as you approach you are struck by the way this room has been created to separate those in it into two groups - the person on the throne and everyone else.

They welcome you grudgingly, offer you the sanctuary of their bastion raised from the swamps. They are a ruler of some kind, a monarch of a demesne they describe as "mighty" and "vast", claiming all lands that are touched by the sun between rising and falling (but the sun never rises here, does it?), a populace of prosperous, wealthy, loyal folk who look to their lord and master for guidance in all things. Yet their eyes are haunted, their finery just a little threadbare, and the silence between his stories of how much their people love them just a little telling. They ask you of your own lands, ask if you are a ruler of your own domain, a cousin-monarch come to visit them in their halls, or a diplomat bringing tribute, or a mighty magician here to offer service at their court.

A magician like themselves, a master of the arts of Mystery and Conspiracy, of Dreams and Binding, of Shadows and Torches. The leader of a coven who grant their power willingly to the one who sits upon the throne, for them to wield as they wish. Loyal, trustworthy wizards who love their naga-touched master and fear their displeasure (and again their eyes dart, and their bluster seems as much for their own benefit as for yours).

They are alone, in this great castle, and desperate for company. Their hollow brags begin to grate after a while, however, and they barely seem to hear your words when you are able to wedge them sideways into the fow of self-aggrandizing claims and sweeping generalities and those awkward silent moments when their fear, their terror, rises to the surface and they cannot hide it from you.

You awaken suddenly between in the midst of one of those silent minutes, the details already fading slightly. It is still dark outside.

Perhaps you struggle to keep some of the specifics, perhaps you let them fade away into a memory of a night spent talking with a foolish stranger on a barren throne.

But as you sit up, you are struck with the profound awareness that you are not alone. There is something nearby, something large, yellow-eyed, massive, and an almost overpowering scent of something musky and sweet like incense but not. You feel the warmth of its breath against your face, overpowering. You almost swoon. And then it is gone, and in spite of yourself, you find sleep claiming you again and spend the rest of what night remains wandering the broken worlds of natural dreaming.

**Effect:** All your personal mana has been depleted, rather than replenished by a night's sleep. You can recover personal mana as normal - via a potion or a Chamber of Secrets or similar - but it is as if you had spent all your mana in your sleep rather than resting fully.

Provided you have at least one rank of the appropriate lore, until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals Dripping Echoes of the Fen (Night/100) and The Conspirators Cloak (Autumn/4) 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 the appropriate 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:** When you awaken, for at least the next hour, fragments of the dreaming marsh intrude into your perception; damp trees, deep mud, strange insects or lizards or amphibians. They are hallucinations, but anyone who shared this dream vision with you might experience the same elements (you're encourage to riff about this among yourself). They'll disappear as quickly as they come.

In addition, as long as you are under the effect of this enchantment, you feel a strong desire to ensure that other people are aware of your achievements, and to conceal any hint of weakness, vulnerability, or doubt (ideally in such a way that you inadvertantly reveal moments of weakness, vulnerability. or doubt you have experienced, without realising).

## Zastyt, the Feeder Somnolent Wanderer

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(And you are distracted for a moment by the squeaking, shrieking of a cloud of angry bats that zip across the sky, all wings and teeth and mad-staring eyes, blocking your view of the sky for a moment, and then they are gone sweeping across the marsh toward the mountains).

The wind picks up, rattling the damp leaves. Perhaps you're expecting it, perhaps it takes you by surprise, but when you look down you're alone and the next heartbeat you forget there was ever anyone else here. There is a path, nearby, raised on a low dyke. You clamber up to it, and perhaps spend a moment futilely trying to clean a little of the mud off your clothes, your boots.

On the path there are only two ways to go; ahead or behind. You choose to go ahead. Walking through the marshes. There's a symphony of sound unfolding around you - the low creaking and the high piping of frogs. The fluttering of night-time insects, some small and dark darting hither and yon, some larger, iridescent, stately beasts moving lazily across the surface of the pools or alighting on wet-barked trees. With an audible plop, something larger drops into the muddy water and swims toward you with a kind of pointed intent. You pick up your pace a little, leaving it behind.

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Yevgeni Katzev  
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## Zlata Ruznikova Perenel, *The Dread Auntie*

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## Simargl, the Empty One

### Somnolent Wanderer

It is cold here. Damp. Wet, even. Water drips from the trees, twisted into peculiar and mildly unsettling shapes. Willows and beggarwood and other less familiar plants. One of you sinks into the mud until it bubbles up over their boot to general amusement. There is quiet conversation; not everyone arrives at the same time, of course. People fall asleep more or less easily.

The clear sky over your heads is rich with stars, familiar constellations such as the Whale, and the Four-faced Drake, and the Shimmer of Moths, and low in the sky just above the mountains, the yellow eye of the Beast watches over all. It draws your gaze, will it or not.

(And you are distracted for a moment by the squeaking, shrieking of a cloud of angry bats that zip across the sky, all wings and teeth and mad-staring eyes, blocking your view of the sky for a moment, and then they are gone sweeping across the marsh toward the mountains).

The wind picks up, rattling the damp leaves. Perhaps you're expecting it, perhaps it takes you by surprise, but when you look down you're alone and the next heartbeat you forget there was ever anyone else here. There is a path, nearby, raised on a low dyke. You clamber up to it, and perhaps spend a moment futilely trying to clean a little of the mud off your clothes, your boots.

On the path there are only two ways to go; ahead or behind. You choose to go ahead. Walking through the marshes. There's a symphony of sound unfolding around you - the low creaking and the high piping of frogs. The fluttering of night-time insects, some small and dark darting hither and yon, some larger, iridescent, stately beasts moving lazily across the surface of the pools or alighting on wet-barked trees. With an audible plop, something larger drops into the muddy water and swims toward you with a kind of pointed intent. You pick up your pace a little, leaving it behind.

Ahead, under the golden-eyed watching star, there is a town. Or... no not a town, not a settlement. A wall. A high wall. As you get closer, it's true size

becomes apparent, as you realise you are still some distance from it. A cyclopean structure that rises impossibly from the marsh into the sky.

(And around you lantern-flies dance, and stately red-feathered nocturnal cranes pick through the shallow water, and an eight-legged four-eyed water lizard observes you with cool indifference, and the spread-wide hand-like leaves of a floating water-wedded quiver and yearn toward you as you pass).

It is a castle. A keep, in the old Varushkan style. Slabs of seamless stone shaped into a wall to divide the world cleanly into those within and those without. An immense edifice a testament to the will and ambition of those who built it, and to months of hard labour. Especially here, in the teeming marshes. This dyke is nowhere near wide enough to accommodate the number of ox-wagons that would have been needed to drag this much stone into this unwelcoming swamp.

Closer, there is a gate. Four storeys tall, thirty feet or more wide. An open portal that breaches this immense barrier. It is, a little ironically, wide open. Doors of dark weirwood, studded with tarnished mithril bands. A portal to hold back an army, no less a barrier than the wall around it. Open wide.

As you push forward, something brushes your face. A strand of gossamer, a massive web of delicate strands covering the opening. No impediment, but perhaps they make you start, or swear, or jerk back when you feel them around you. Strands on your clothes, in your hair. But just normal webs - just normal threads.

Then you are in the courtyard before the tower that reaches up towards the sky. A great open space, a killing ground, scattered with stone barricades and lit, dismally, by low green flames.

You don't really remember crossing the outer defences, or entering the keep. It closes around you like a mailed glove, and then you are in a large room with leaping emerald-green torches. Two rows of long black-stone-topped tables. Benches of dark wood. Shadows. Tapestries depicting battles, but it is not easy to see which side is which - just a woven chaos of people slaughtering each other with all the inventiveness of thousands of

years of war and murder.

At the far end from the door, an immense seat, cunningly carved into the shape of three great lizards or perhaps a three-headed lizard. Seated upon it, a squat figure lounges on it, watching you approach with the slit-pupiled eyes of the naga, Night-touched green-and-yellow scales dusted across their cheeks and brow. They eye you suspiciously, and as you approach you are struck by the way this room has been created to separate those in it into two groups - the person on the throne and everyone else.

They welcome you grudgingly, offer you the sanctuary of their bastion raised from the swamps. They are a ruler of some kind, a monarch of a demesne they describe as "mighty" and "vast", claiming all lands that are touched by the sun between rising and falling (but the sun never rises here, does it?), a populace of prosperous, wealthy, loyal folk who look to their lord and master for guidance in all things. Yet their eyes are haunted, their finery just a little threadbare, and the silence between his stories of how much their people love them just a little telling. They ask you of your own lands, ask if you are a ruler of your own domain, a cousin-monarch come to visit them in their halls, or a diplomat bringing tribute, or a mighty magician here to offer service at their court.

A magician like themselves, a master of the arts of Mystery and Conspiracy, of Dreams and Binding, of Shadows and Torches. The leader of a coven who grant their power willingly to the one who sits upon the throne, for them to wield as they wish. Loyal, trustworthy wizards who love their naga-touched master and fear their displeasure (and again their eyes dart, and their bluster seems as much for their own benefit as for yours).

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You awaken suddenly between in the midst of one of those silent minutes, the details already fading slightly. It is still dark outside.

Perhaps you struggle to keep some of the specifics, perhaps you let them fade away into a memory of a night spent talking with a foolish stranger on a barren throne.

But as you sit up, you are struck with the profound awareness that you are not alone. There is something nearby, something large, yellow-eyed, massive, and an almost overpowering scent of something musky and sweet like incense but not. You feel the warmth of its breath against your face, overpowering. You almost swoon. And then it is gone, and in spite of yourself, you find sleep claiming you again and spend the rest of what night remains wandering the broken worlds of natural dreaming.

**Effect:** Provided you have at least one rank of the appropriate lore, until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals Dripping Echoes of the Fen (Night/100) and The Conspirators Cloak (Autumn/4) 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 the appropriate 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.

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In addition, as long as you are under the effect of this enchantment, you feel a strong desire to ensure that other people are aware of your achievements, and to conceal any hint of weakness, vulnerability, or doubt (ideally in such a way that you inadvertantly reveal moments of weakness, vulnerability. or doubt you have experienced, without realising).

## Lutobor (Lut) Branislavovich Glinka

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## Vaclav Mladenovich Kosti

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## Aleksandr Zoravich Novosad

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## Zoria

### Somnolent Wanderer

It is cold here. Damp. Wet, even. Water drips from the trees, twisted into peculiar and mildly unsettling shapes. Willows and beggarwood and other less familiar plants. One of you sinks into the mud until it bubbles up over their boot to general amusement. There is quiet conversation; not everyone arrives at the same time, of course. People fall asleep more or less easily.

The clear sky over your heads is rich with stars, familiar constellations such as the Whale, and the Four-faced Drake, and the Shimmer of Moths, and low in the sky just above the mountains, the yellow eye of the Beast watches over all. It draws your gaze, will it or not.

(And you are distracted for a moment by the squeaking, shrieking of a cloud of angry bats that zip across the sky, all wings and teeth and mad-staring eyes, blocking your view of the sky for a moment, and then they are gone sweeping across the marsh toward the mountains).

The wind picks up, rattling the damp leaves. Perhaps you're expecting it, perhaps it takes you by surprise, but when you look down you're alone and the next heartbeat you forget there was ever anyone else here. There is a path, nearby, raised on a low dyke. You clamber up to it, and perhaps spend a moment futilely trying to clean a little of the mud off your clothes, your boots.

On the path there are only two ways to go; ahead or behind. You choose to go ahead. Walking through the marshes. There's a symphony of sound unfolding around you - the low creaking and the high piping of frogs. The fluttering of night-time insects, some small and dark darting hither and yon, some larger, iridescent, stately beasts moving lazily across the surface of the pools or alighting on wet-barked trees. With an audible plop, something larger drops into the muddy water and swims toward you with a kind of pointed intent. You pick up your pace a little, leaving it behind.

Ahead, under the golden-eyed watching star, there is a town. Or... no not a town, not a settlement. A wall. A high wall. As you get closer, it's true size becomes apparent, as you realise you are still some distance from it. A

cyclopean structure that rises impossibly from the marsh into the sky.

(And around you lantern-flies dance, and stately red-feathered nocturnal cranes pick through the shallow water, and an eight-legged four-eyed water lizard observes you with cool indifference, and the spread-wide hand-like leaves of a floating water-wedded quiver and yearn toward you as you pass).

It is a castle. A keep, in the old Varushkan style. Slabs of seamless stone shaped into a wall to divide the world cleanly into those within and those without. An immense edifice a testament to the will and ambition of those who built it, and to months of hard labour. Especially here, in the teeming marshes. This dyke is nowhere near wide enough to accommodate the number of ox-wagons that would have been needed to drag this much stone into this unwelcoming swamp.

Closer, there is a gate. Four storeys tall, thirty feet or more wide. An open portal that breaches this immense barrier. It is, a little ironically, wide open. Doors of dark weirwood, studded with tarnished mithril bands. A portal to hold back an army, no less a barrier than the wall around it. Open wide.

As you push forward, something brushes your face. A strand of gossamer, a massive web of delicate strands covering the opening. No impediment, but perhaps they make you start, or swear, or jerk back when you feel them around you. Strands on your clothes, in your hair. But just normal webs - just normal threads.

Then you are in the courtyard before the tower that reaches up towards the sky. A great open space, a killing ground, scattered with stone barricades and lit, dismally, by low green flames.

You don't really remember crossing the outer defences, or entering the keep. It closes around you like a mailed glove, and then you are in a large room with leaping emerald-green torches. Two rows of long black-stone-topped tables. Benches of dark wood. Shadows. Tapestries depicting battles, but it is not easy to see which side is which - just a woven chaos of people slaughtering each other with all the inventiveness of thousands of years of war and murder.

At the far end from the door, an immense seat, cunningly carved into the shape of three great lizards or perhaps a three-headed lizard. Seated upon it, a squat figure lounges on it, watching you approach with the slit-pupiled eyes of the naga, Night-touched green-and-yellow scales dusted across their cheeks and brow. They eye you suspiciously, and as you approach you are struck by the way this room has been created to separate those in it into two groups - the person on the throne and everyone else.

They welcome you grudgingly, offer you the sanctuary of their bastion raised from the swamps. They are a ruler of some kind, a monarch of a demesne they describe as "mighty" and "vast", claiming all lands that are touched by the sun between rising and falling (but the sun never rises here, does it?), a populace of prosperous, wealthy, loyal folk who look to their lord and master for guidance in all things. Yet their eyes are haunted, their finery just a little threadbare, and the silence between his stories of how much their people love them just a little telling. They ask you of your own lands, ask if you are a ruler of your own domain, a cousin-monarch come to visit them in their halls, or a diplomat bringing tribute, or a mighty magician here to offer service at their court.

A magician like themselves, a master of the arts of Mystery and Conspiracy, of Dreams and Binding, of Shadows and Torches. The leader of a coven who grant their power willingly to the one who sits upon the throne, for them to wield as they wish. Loyal, trustworthy wizards who love their naga-touched master and fear their displeasure (and again their eyes dart, and their bluster seems as much for their own benefit as for yours).

They are alone, in this great castle, and desperate for company. Their hollow brags begin to grate after a while, however, and they barely seem to hear your words when you are able to wedge them sideways into the fow of self-aggrandizing claims and sweeping generalities and those awkward silent moments when their fear, their terror, rises to the surface and they cannot hide it from you.

You awaken suddenly between in the midst of one of those silent minutes, the details already fading slightly. It is still dark outside.

Perhaps you struggle to keep some of the specifics, perhaps you let them fade away into a memory of a night spent talking with a foolish stranger on a barren throne.

But as you sit up, you are struck with the profound awareness that you are not alone. There is something nearby, something large, yellow-eyed, massive, and an almost overpowering scent of something musky and sweet like incense but not. You feel the warmth of its breath against your face, overpowering. You almost swoon. And then it is gone, and in spite of yourself, you find sleep claiming you again and spend the rest of what night remains wandering the broken worlds of natural dreaming.

**Effect:** All your personal mana has been depleted, rather than replenished by a night's sleep. You can recover personal mana as normal - via a potion or a Chamber of Secrets or similar - but it is as if you had spent all your mana in your sleep rather than resting fully.

Provided you have at least one rank of the appropriate lore, until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals Dripping Echoes of the Fen (Night/100) and The Conspirators Cloak (Autumn/4) 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 the appropriate 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:** When you awaken, for at least the next hour, fragments of the dreaming marsh intrude into your perception; damp trees, deep mud, strange insects or lizards or amphibians. They are hallucinations, but anyone who shared this dream vision with you might experience the same elements (you're encourage to riff about this among yourself). They'll disappear as quickly as they come.

In addition, as long as you are under the effect of this enchantment, you feel a strong desire to ensure that other people are aware of your achievements, and to conceal any hint of weakness, vulnerability, or doubt (ideally in such a way that you inadvertantly reveal moments of weakness, vulnerability. or doubt you have experienced, without realising).