

THE Farplane was said to be unusually crowded that day. They would be coming through Guadosalam again on the way back northward, but Braska had promised Jecht a glimpse and Jecht was already notorious for his complete lack of patience, so the three of them joined the queue that snaked down the incline leading to the Farplane's gate.

Keen to drown out the sound of Jecht and Auron bickering in front of him, Braska turned and nodded to the man behind, a green-haired Guado who appeared to have come alone. He seemed elderly, but one could never tell with the Guado. "Busy, isn't it?" said Braska.

The Guado nodded, speaking in a tremulous voice. "Indeed. I have not seen such bustle for many a year."

"This is the first time I've been able to come," Braska told him. "I'm sure you visit quite often."

"Every morning and every evening," he confirmed gravely.

Braska was a little surprised by that: the Guado race had the advantage of living close to the Farplane, but it was still some distance out of the city. Two visits a day would be a significant demand on even a Guado's time. Their culture was different from the human one, he supposed.

"Family you wish to honour?" he guessed.

The Guado nodded. "Not my own, however," he said. "I am Tromell, retainer to Lord Jyscal. I pay respects to his forefathers on his behalf as part of my duties."

"I see," said Braska. "An important task, I'm sure."

“Quite,” said Tromell.

“I should think,” said Braska, turning to look again at the length of the queue stretching ahead of him, “you would have the authority to bypass all this, wouldn’t you? Isn’t the Far-plane officially part of Lord Jyscal’s estate?”

“Yes, indeed so,” Tromell said. “But Lord Jyscal insists that I take my turn among the common people. Although on days such as this, I am less inclined to agree with him. Still ...” He cast his eyes towards the gate in the distance, and sighed.

“And what brings you here?” he added. “You are travelling, I take it?”

“I am a summoner on pilgrimage,” Braska explained, doing his best to ignore the small raise of the eyebrows with which Tromell responded – it was a reaction he had become accustomed to. “One of my guardians is – ah – foreign. I thought he might like to see; and my other guardian has family to visit.”

“And you yourself?” said Tromell.

Braska hesitated. “Yes,” he said softly. “Yes, there is someone.” And he turned away from Tromell, and faced forward again, and said nothing more.