

DE'NITHE

by Scott Walker

The fields called to De'nithe, as they had done for as long as memory served. Fields required constant care, especially of late, but De'nithe took great pride in the quality of the crops. While others complained of poor harvests over the mountain, De'nithe's fields produced some of the most bountiful yields in the valley. Praise and thanks came to De'nithe daily and it was received gratefully. Farmers regularly came to De'nithe's home to offer gratitude, seek help with crops, and leave small gifts. The visits provided renewed strength and energy to meet the needs of the fields.

There was much to do before sundown: weeding, working the soil, inspecting the progress of the plants. It looked to be a good harvest, provided the fields received more water – it had been a relatively dry summer, and De'nithe would have to see about avoiding a drought. A good farmer always looked for ways to help his crops.

While working, De'nithe thought back to the early days, when the fields were newly seeded and the weather seemed to cooperate perfectly. Over time, the weather had worsened, become unpredictable. More than a few crops rotted on the vine, dried to a parched death, or drowned in standing water. Those were hard years and many suffered. Even De'nithe found it difficult to focus on the fields, but eventually the climate tempered itself. After that, De'nithe had found it very easy to coax crops from the ground and became quite well known and regarded. Summons from other farms brought De'nithe to help with stubborn crops, frustrating pests, and tired earth. Every time, the farmers were amazed at how their crops improved, further enhancing De'nithe's reputation.

The sun was well into afternoon by now and work would soon cease for the day. De'nithe spent the nights resting, reflecting on the next day's tasks. Often, thoughts of how the world had changed would intrude on De'nithe's evening respite. Rumors of wars, the collapse of the Empire, and the coming end of civilization abounded all over the valley. De'nithe felt – knew – the reality was something different but was unable to communicate this effectively. Still, one had to admit that the world was not as it once was, and not all things were as they seemed.

De'nithe turned to the corn stalks, seeing how careful placement encouraged their early growth this season. A good farmer always learned from the world and applied those lessons to his crops. De'nithe preferred crops that used good spacing, even rows, and were planted at the proper time of year. Those turned out better, regardless of how much attention De'nithe gave

them.

This crop had been planted properly, De'nithe could see the evidence. The soil effortlessly surrendered the corn stalks, supporting and nourishing their growth. Already, this harvest might prove to be the best in many years. The stalks were firm, green, and tall. The soil smelled rich in nutrients. De'nithe was so skilled that even the slightest difference in the way the dirt changed over the year did not escape notice. Farming was harder than most knew; it was an art, and a lonely one at that. De'nithe had always tendered fields without help and always done well, but it could still be lonely work.

De'nithe noted that the sun was well below the mountain range to the east and prepared to put a halt to work for the day. It was wise to work with the way of the world rather than against it (Gallidon himself had told De'nithe this many, many years ago). Besides, De'nithe sensed the approach of some local farmers. De'nithe arrived home just as the sun was falling behind the ridge line.

Shadows appeared, stretched across the valley, reaching for the East range. As twilight fell, the farmers left baked cakes, seeds, and a small wooden carving on De'nithe's home. They smelled the autumn harvest in the breeze and knew De'nithe had heard their prayers.



Illustration *Altar for Spirits* by Andy Underwood.

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