

The Star-Seer's Story

A Short Prequel to The Star-Seer's Prophecy Trilogy

By Rahima Warren

*How can a young apprentice free her people from
the Soul-Drinker's reign of horror?*

Lyriana has spent her life in hiding with her mother and her mother's brother. But now the two of them have been sacrificed to the formidable sorcerer-king called the Soul-Drinker, who enslaved her people and banished their Goddess. Whisked away to safety by the Star-Seer, the grandmother Lyriana barely knows, she must learn how to search the stars for the Liberator, the only one who can end the Soul-Drinker's horrific reign.



The Star Seer's Story is a short prequel to *The Star Seer's Prophecy Trilogy*, an epic mystical fantasy of sacrifice, self-discovery, and redemption. Lyriana's story is set four generations before the trilogy begins. Her Prophecy sets the Liberator's dire fate in motion.

For more info about the trilogy and where to buy the books, visit

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Note from the Author

I loved writing *The Star Seer's Story*, which sets the stage for those who have yet to read *The Star-Seer's Prophecy* trilogy, and clarifies some mysteries for those who have already read it. I had a few ideas about this prequel, but, as usual, when I started writing, the characters jumped to life on the page and took over. It is so much fun to see them develop in their own ways and tell me their stories.

That's exactly what happened years ago, when I wrote a little story in my journal for a character that kept showing up in my dreams and fantasies. But that time, Kyr (the hero of *The Star-Seer's Prophecy* trilogy) took over my life and turned me into a writer! I have always loved to read fantasy novels, but I never imagined writing one, much less an entire trilogy.

Kyr has taken me on an amazing and transformative adventure. I hope you find the journey with Lyriana, and Kyr—and all the other fascinating characters who await you—just as meaningful and inspiring!

Rahima Warren

Chapter One ~ Flight

“Quiet as a hunting owl,” Granmere Kyrana whispered.

Lyriana choked back a sob as she followed her grandmother’s faint blue mage-light through the dark, musty tunnel. She clutched her boots to her chest, her bare feet making no sound on the icy stone floor. The cold crept up from her feet to her heart, adding to the horror chilling her to the bone. She wanted to cry or scream but that would mean a ghastly fate for both of them. The thrice-cursed Soul-Drinker had already taken Mamma and Mabro Bri. Dwelling on what had just happened, she didn’t notice that her grandmother had stopped, and bumped into her.

“Pay attention, dear,” Granmere whispered, giving her a gentle hug. “Wait here while I check ahead. And put on your boots.” She snuffed out her mage light and slipped away without the slightest rustle of her dark, heavy robes. Lyriana pulled on her wool-lined boots, grateful for a little warmth. Alone in the darkness, she silently repeated *Zhovanya ganaralo, Zhovanya dagantalo*, praying to the Banished Goddess for guidance and protection. But rage shattered her attempt at mental discipline. *Gods curse the Soul-Drinker and all his Watchers and Scavengers!*

She had long been furious over the invasion and desecration of her land by the Soul-Drinker, even though it had happened in her Granmere’s time. Now, she seethed with fresh fury and grief. Ready to explode, she stood rigidly still, and pressed her lips tightly together to keep silent, knowing she mustn’t attract the Soul-Drinker’s attention. Nevertheless, tears leaked down her cheeks as her mind returned to what had just happened.

“Come quickly!” Granmere had whispered, jerking her out of bed. She had stumbled after her grandmother into the shielded closet that was hidden at the back of the closed chapel where she and her family had been living in hiding for the last year.

“What’s wrong?” Lyriana had demanded in a loud whisper. “Where are Mamma and Mabro Bri?”

Granmere clapped her hand over Lyriana’s mouth. “Be silent, dear,” she said in the barest whisper. “The Scavengers have found us. Remember, this closet is shielded from magical detection but not from the ordinary senses.” She sighed. “Oh, my dear, I’m so sorry to tell you this, but your Mamma and Mabro are taken.”

Lyriana fought to get loose, choking as she tried to scream, but Granmere clasped her tightly to her soft bosom. “Shhhh, shhhh, shhhh,” she soothed, and went on whispering in Lyriana’s ear. The girl felt a dull calm take her over. She sighed to herself, realizing that Granmere was murmuring a calming spellchant. She knew that her grandmother wouldn’t use her magic unless it was truly necessary. That had been her first and oft-repeated lesson. Lyriana closed her eyes and sagged into Kyrana’s embrace.

At long last, Granmere had loosened her grip, and stopped repeating the spellchant. Lyriana roused and tried to speak, but Granmere placed a finger on Lyriana’s lips to silence her, then set her hands on the closet door, and whispered “Kaa’atali.” Lyriana knew that she was opening her inner senses to search for any

hint of danger, and wished that she had learned that skill herself. After a moment, Kyrana opened the closet door and they crept out of their hiding place.

“Mamma! Mabro Bri! We have to go get them!” Lyriana whispered, desperately fighting back tears. Her mother and her mother’s brother, Bri, would be sacrificed to the Soul-Drinker’s insatiable greed if they weren’t rescued.

Granmere put her arm on Lyriana’s shoulders. “I’m so sorry, dear girl. We cannot. Once someone is taken, no one can free them. The cursed Soul-Drinker’s sorcerous powers are too great, and neither of us is a mind-masker. He would read our minds as soon as we approached his lair. No, granddaughter. I am the Star-Seer and you are my apprentice. We must escape and search the stars for the one who can destroy our terrible enemy.” She turned Lyriana around to face her, and said in a sterner tone, “Now, will you chase after your Mamma, screaming like a little girl, and condemn yourself and all our people to endless suffering? Or will you be quiet and come with me?”

Cold fury filled Lyriana’s soul at that moment—fury at her grandmother, at the Soul-Drinker, and at herself for being thoughtless and selfish. She nodded abruptly, and wiped her tears on her sleeve. “Let’s go.”

“Quickly, then. Get all the cloaks.” While Granmere grabbed their emergency packs from the secret closet, Lyriana snatched four wool cloaks off the hooks by the side door. With burning eyes, she jammed Mamma’s and Bri’s cloaks into his big leather satchel. She refused to let her grandmother take it, even though it was too big for her. It was all she had left of her Mamma and her Mabro, the two she loved the most in the world, the two who had always made her feel safe and loved no matter how often the family had been forced to move to avoid the Soul-Drinker’s clutches.

The only one left to her, now, was her grandmother Kyrana, who was almost a stranger, arriving only four moons ago to claim Lyriana as her apprentice. Lyriana had been excited to discover that she had a great deal of magical talent, and would learn to be the next Star-Seer. She had loved her lessons and admired her Granmere. But she’d gladly give all that up if it meant having her Mamma and Mabro home safe.

Now, standing in the dark tunnel awaiting Granmere’s return, Lyriana knew she had to rein in her rage and quiet her mind. Silently, she repeated the mind-shielding spellchant, *Da’agantlori*, to keep from heaping a litany of curses on the souls of the Soul-Drinker and all his Slaves, servants, soldiers, and sycophants.

At last, Kyrana beckoned from the shadows. “Come.”

They shouldered their packs, and hurried down the back stairs to the secret exit. Again Granmere whispered, “Kaa’atali” and stood with her hand on the door, her eyes closed. After a few moments, she whispered, “Kaa’atay,” and the hidden door slid silently upward. Quickly, they stepped out into a dark alley. Lyriana nearly gagged as the odor of rotten garbage flooded her nose. “Kaa’atak,” Granmere murmured. Behind them, the door slid down and melded into the wall.

“Now, remember, Lyriana, keep to the chant or the Soul-Drinker may notice. It isn’t as good as mind-masking, but as long as we keep our minds on this chant, we won’t disturb the Soul-Drinker’s psychic web. You’ve done well in your mind-training, but this is the real test. One slip-up....”

“I know, Granmere,” Lyriana whispered. She cleared her mind, and began again to silently repeat *Da’agantlori, Da’agantlori, Da’agantlori*.

Slipping through shadows of night, they headed north. The Crescent Moon provided little light, but still they crept through back alleys and edged along night-darkened walls. Whenever Granmere sensed one of the Soul-Drinker’s sentries ahead, they crouched down and froze until the sentry moved on.

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After an eternity of fear and stealth, they finally left the City behind. Granmere led the way, following a faint trail along clifftops above the ocean. After the narrow, filthy alleyways of the City, Lyriana gratefully took deep breaths of the clean, salty breeze, and stared wide-eyed at the vast expanses of empty sky and restless water. The ocean sent foaming white waves crashing against the land as if to devour it, and she clung more tightly to Bri’s satchel as if he could somehow protect her. After a life in hiding in the City, the wide world made her feel small and vulnerable.

Soon, her legs and back ached and her pack and satchel seemed to get heavier with each step, but she trudged along behind Granmere, doggedly repeating the mind-shielding chant. She watched the thin sliver of the Crescent Moon slide down the sky and sink into the depths of the sea, wishing she could go with Him to be with her mother and Bri in the other world. Only the stars shone now, the stars that Lyriana, as the Star-Seer’s new apprentice, must somehow learn to interpret.

Finally, Granmere called a halt at the top of a small hill in a shadowy grove of palm trees rustling in the cool sea breeze. “We don’t need the mind-shield chant now. We are far enough away. Let’s stop here for a rest and some food.” Lyriana slipped off her heavy pack, and slumped down on the sandy ground, her legs and back burning with fatigue, but her heart’s ache eclipsed her physical pain.

Granmere stood looking at the City in the distance. “Oh, Lyriana, seeing the City like this makes me so sad. Coming back here after all these years has stirred up so many memories.” She sighed and sat down beside Lyriana. “I think you should know a little about what it was like before the Soul-Drinker and his horde of red-eyed demons invaded Khailaz. That way, you will know more about what we are fighting for.” She took a swig from her waterskin, and began.

“The City was full of bustling markets, colonnaded academies, graceful fountains, and colorful homes, with Goddess chapels in every quarter. Neighborhoods vied to create beauty and harmony with mosaics, music, sculptures, and flowers. The City’s crowning glory was Zhovanya’s Temple, at the top of the bluff overlooking the Blue Sea. The Temple’s white columns and golden roof gleamed in the sunshine. The Goddess’s Presence Lamp glowed brightly, filling the Temple with light all night. Oh, my dear girl, it was so magnificent! The Temple was a beacon of joy for everyone! People came from all over for the ceremonies of the Sun-Moon Cycle; or for individual prayer, meditation, or worship; or to sing, play music, and dance. Zhovanya and Her Temple were the sacred heart of the City and of our land, Khailaz. On

the Holy Nights, She would dance in Her Temple for all to see." Granmere was quiet for a moment, then added wistfully, "I got to see Her once, when I was a little girl."

Lyriana looked up at the bluff, trying to imagine the sacred and beautiful Temple. But all she could see was a dark hulk. Now what squatted on the bluff was the Soul-Drinker's Labyrinth, sealed off from light and air by crude walls, its white columns darkened by the soot of its long-ago burning. Where the Goddess had once danced, the Soul-Drinker now crouched, spinning his filthy web to trap more victims for sacrifice or slavery, using his vast and unholy sorcerous powers to locate and crush any thought of resistance.

"Why did the Soul-Drinker come and destroy everything beautiful, Granmere Kyrana?"

Looking stricken, Kyrana muttered, "It was our fault."

"What?" Lyriana stared at her in shock. "Whose fault, Granmere?"

"Um, we Priestesses, I mean." Kyrana. "His name was Dauthaz and he was born here a dozen years before me. The problem was that his mother was High Priestess and spent most of her time at the Temple. On top of that, she didn't have a brother, so Dauthaz had no Mabro to guide him. My mother was also a Priestess, so we both lived in the Temple complex. He ranted at me, blaming his mother, the Priestesses, and the Goddess for many things. I was too young to understand him, and he scared me, so I hid from him whenever I could. Then he ran off with some traders from across the Sand Sea. We never let them in our City because they hated our Goddess and subjugated their women."

Kyrana sighed and shook her head. "I guess we should have paid more attention to Dauthaz, tried to help him. But I was glad he was gone, and soon started my training as a Star-Seer. We forgot about him until he returned with his army of demons, overwhelmed our Warrior-Mages with his blood sorcery, and banished our Goddess Zhovanya and Her Consort Jeyal. You know the rest."

"Gods above and below! That means the Soul-Drinker is from here, from our land of Khailaz?"

"Yes, sadly. I'm one of the few surviving Priestesses and the only Star-Seer. That's why I *must* find the one who can stop him, and save Khailaz. It's my responsibility. I'm sorry, but this burden may fall on you, dear child, if I don't succeed."

They both fell silent. Lyriana felt weighed down with this new knowledge, almost sorry for that neglected boy. But then her rage flared up, hotter than ever. "Well, I don't care! He's hurting Mamma and Mabro! I hate him! I hate him!" And she broke into deep, wrenching sobs. When Kyrana reached out to hold her, she pushed her grandmother away, and buried her face in her hands.

After a while, her storm of grief blew itself out. This time, when Granmere wrapped her in a cloak and gathered her into her embrace, Lyriana did not resist. She let Kyrana rock her like a little girl and sing the calming chant, soothing her grief and pain. But her anger burned steadily now, feeding her determination to help end the Soul-Drinker's vicious rule. "Alright, Granmere. I'm better now." She sat up and wiped her face with a corner of the cloak.

"It's good that you let yourself grieve, my dear, but we do need to move on soon. We'd better eat something now." She dug into her pack and pulled out nutberry bars for them both. When Lyriana bit into hers, the salty-sweet taste made her mouth water, and she ate another

bite, then choked to a stop. "How can I eat when Momma and Bri are...?" She grabbed her waterskin, and gulped down the cool liquid.

"Dear one, we must be strong now. For their pain and deaths to mean anything, we must fulfill our mission. And that means we must keep up our strength."

"Are we the only ones who can find the Liberator, the one who can end this horror?" She gestured toward the Soul-Drinker's distant lair lurking on its promontory over the sea.

"Yes, dear child. I am the only Star-Seer, trained by my Granmere and mother in secret. And you are the only one who has the magical talent to learn from me. I searched for an apprentice for many seasons before I risked the journey to the City to find you."

Granmere took a bite of her nutberry bar. Lyriana watched her chew and swallow, wanting to hate her, wanting to rebel, but unable to resist her remorseless logic. She bowed her head and sent up a silent plea for quick deaths for her loved ones. Then she made herself take another bite.

As they ate and sipped water from their waterskins, Granmere stared pensively at the night-dark sea. "Oh, I do miss the fish. They were so delicious! The Blue Sea used to be brimming with fish, brought to market by the fisherfolk with their fleet of wooden boats. Each family had its own color of sail: white, red, turquoise, gold, green, or purple. I loved watching them sail out in the dawn, all the colored sails bright against the dark blue water and white clouds. But now the sea is called the Blue Desert. Even the fish hate the Soul-Drinker and they have almost all gone away. What few are caught now are for that cursed sorcerer and his chosen Slaves." Granmere sighed, and fell silent.

"I've never tasted fish," Lyriana snapped. "How can you talk about the wonderful past when Mamma and Mabro are suffering so!" She jumped up, shrugged on her pack and grabbed the satchel of cloaks.

"I'm sorry, Lyriana. You're right. Let's get going." Granmere packed up, and started off down the hill, still heading north.

Lyriana stood looking back at the Soul-Drinker's lair glowering over the dark City and the barren ocean. She shivered, cold with icy rage, and heavy with grief for her mother and Bri, who were now lost in that hellish place. Under the stars of that darkest night, she clenched her fists and spoke with quiet ferocity. "Zhovanya be my witness, I will devote my life to ensuring the Soul-Drinker's destruction, no matter what it takes."

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## *Chapter Two - Journey*

A quarter-moon had passed as they trudged along dusty forest trails and tramped across brown meadows. Granmere had said, "The forests and meadows all used to be lush and green, full of birdsong and wildlife. Now everything is drying up, thanks to the cursed Soul-Drinker." This night, the half-moon shed just enough light to see by as they skirted a bramble patch at the edge of a wood.

As she often had, Granmere stopped, and muttered, "Kaa'atali." She stood with her eyes closed for a few moments, then nodded and set off more to the west. Shortly, they came to a little green dell with a tiny spring bubbling at its center. "We'll camp here. This is a little bit of what the land used to be like. This spring's kailitha must be strong."

"Kailitha?"

"It means one's life essence, or soul. We share our kailitha with our soulkin. That's what makes what the Soul-Drinker does so terrible. He steals our kailitha from the web of life, weakening our soulkin."

"I know, Granmere," she sighed. Looking around the dell with its little spring, she added, "This place...it's lovely. It's so sad what the Soul-Drinker is doing to the land."

Their camp was simple, and quick to pack up if they had to flee. They spread out the four cloaks for their bed, and ate more nutberry bars. Lyriana was getting sick of them, but they couldn't risk a fire. The Soul-Drinker's Scavengers still roamed the land here, looking for slaves and sacrifices.

After they had finished eating, filled their waterskins, and carefully used a little spring water to wash their dusty hands and faces, Granmere said, "We must help this little spring now, in return for the blessings of water and beauty it has given us. We'll sing a chant for it. 'Zhovanya dagantaleya' means that we ask the Goddess to protect this place. 'Vaa'a lanteya' means 'May this place be whole.' Are you ready?" Lyriana took a sip of water from her waterskin, sat up straight, and nodded.

In a soft, kindly voice, Granmere began to sing. "Zhovanya dagantaleya, Vaa'a lanteya. Zhovanya dagantaleya, Vaa'a lanteya." Lyriana joined in hesitantly. But then the spell of the chant intertwined with the magic of moon and water, stars and darkness, and her voice flowed with quiet ease. Strangely musical clicking and croaking joined their chant. Surprised, Lyriana glanced at her grandmother, but she was not alarmed, so Lyriana kept on chanting. "Zhovanya dagantaleya, Vaa'a lanteya. Zhovanya dagantaleya, Vaa'a lanteya."

The light of the Half-Moon and stars glimmered in the spring's little pool. After a time, Lyriana sensed a faint, mysterious Presence, and subtle light spread out to fill the entire dell. Granmere smiled but kept chanting. "Zhovanya dagantaleya. Vaa'a lanteya. Zhovanya dagantaleya. Vaa'a lanteya."

When the chant flowed into quietness, Lyriana too smiled, grateful for this moment of peace. Then they crawled into their bedding, such as it was: just two cloaks underneath them



and two on top. Lyriana did not fall immediately into exhausted slumber as she had on previous nights, and lay looking up at the stars. "What are those sounds, Granmere?"

"Ah, those are the crickets and little frogs who live here." Granmere cupped her hands, murmured "A'vero," and then blew gently into her hands.

"Oh!" Lyriana gasped. Little images of light floated above her grandmother's hands.

Granmere laughed. "This one is a cricket, and the other is a frog. It makes my heart glad to hear them! Life is still fighting the evil of the Soul-Drinker."

Though she still mourned for her Mamma and Mabro, Lyriana's shock and numbness were wearing off, and now it occurred to her to ask, "Where are we going, Granmere? What is it like?"

"Oh, it is so lovely! You can't imagine, poor girl. You've never seen anything but the City. I'll be so glad to get home. It's one of the few places in Khailaz that the Soul-Drinker hasn't poisoned. This little dell gives you a taste of what it will be like there."

"But where is it? How long till we get there? And *how* is it protected from the Soul-Drinker?"

"I'm sorry, dear one. I can't tell you anything about that. Its location is a secret that's been kept since I was a little girl," she explained. "If, Goddess forbid, you got taken, and revealed anything about our journey or destination, many people would be endangered."

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After two more months of secretive travel, the weather was growing cooler, and the terrain mountainous. As they climbed a rocky trail beside a rushing cascade, Granmere said, "We're getting there." She laughed, and refused to explain further. A little while later, she led them around a tall shoulder of graystone into a narrow valley.

"We're almost home!" Kyrana grinned exultantly.

"What are you talking about? There's nowhere to go from here, Granmere!" Lyriana pointed toward the white waterfall crashing and foaming all the way down the tall, dark cliff that blocked their way.

"Oh, yes, there is! Come along." Granmere laughed again, and started up the slope toward the cliff, adeptly leading the way along a path that was disguised with many twists and turns, strategic rockpiles, and scraggly borders of thorny brush. They soon reached the base of the cliff, far enough to the right of the waterfall that only a few sprinkles fell on them.

Granmere raised her head and sent out a strange, loud croaking noise, over and over. It echoed weirdly and even penetrated the roar of the waterfall. Lyriana stared at her, sure her Granmere had gone mad, thinking, *What am I supposed to do now, out here in the middle of nowhere?*

"Kra! Kra!" The biggest, blackest bird Lyriana had ever seen swooped over their heads, cawing and eyeing them with dark, shining eyes. Granmere wrapped her cloak around her arm and held it out. The bird swooped around again and thumped down on this proffered perch.

"Kra'a, good to see you!" Granmere smiled and stroked the glossy feathers of the dark bird's back. It bumped Granmere's arm with its large beak, and Granmere scratched gently between its wings.

“Kra’a, this is my fledgling, Lyriana.” The bird turned its dark gaze on her, and Lyriana gave it a nervous smile. The bird examined Lyriana first with one eye, then with the other. The she bobbed her head, apparently satisfied.

“Lyriana, this is Kra’a, matriarch of the Ravens of Ravenvale, your new home.” Lyriana glanced at her grandmother, who looked at her expectantly. Feeling like she was in a mad dream, Lyriana said, “I am pleased to meet you.”

Granmere smiled, and then spoke to Kra’a. “Please go tell the guards that I am home.” She tossed the Raven into the air.

“Kronk,” she said, and flapped away, soaring up and up the cliff face until she became a black dot, and then disappeared.

Granmere perched on a nearby boulder, smiling and gazing around at the lush grasses and colorful flowers that filled the narrow valley, and the dark green forest climbing its steep sides.

Lyriana found a seat on a smaller boulder, and chewed her lip, trying to be patient. Then the land shuddered under her feet, and she jumped up in alarm. “What’s happening?” she shouted.

Her grandmother merely grinned, and pointed toward the waterfall. The top of the waterfall was sliding to the left. Soon the rest of the fall followed, and then it was all falling straight down a narrow channel. Now Lyriana could see a path leading up to a dark opening, previously covered by the waterfall.

“We’ll need our raincapes.” Granmere dug two oilcloth capes out of her pack, and handed one to Lyriana. Thus attired, they trudged carefully up the wet path, sprayed by the waterfall’s roiling mists. Half way up the cliff, they reached the dark portal. Lyriana turned to look back toward the City, so far away now, her heart breaking with the finality of leaving her Mamma and Mabro behind forever. Biting her lip to keep from crying, she followed her grandmother into the darkness.

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Chapter Three ~ The Star-Seer

Fourteen Sun-Cycles later, Lyriana sighed, and rearranged the pillows behind her back to be more comfortable. Tired and lonely, she rested on the divan in the ground floor room of the Star-Seer's Tower, staring into the turquoise flames of the mage-fire in the hearth. "I miss you, Granmere," she whispered, remembering the day she had followed her grandmother into that dark tunnel, and entered Ravenvale for the first time. Since then, she had never left, and she never would. With the Soul-Drinker savaging the people, the soulkin, and the land, it was too dangerous to leave this secret haven, and her work was essential to ending his torture of Khailaz.

For the first ten years here in Ravenvale, she had undergone intensive training with Granmere to become a Star-Seer, able to cast the spells that caused the Okula—an enchanted sheet of pure, clear crystal set in a golden ring on a round darkwood table—to perform its magic. Granmere had worked all day teaching her, and then spent most of the night with the Okula, casting star chart sequences, one after another. Once Lyriana's training was complete, she and Granmere had cast hundreds more starcharts, and followed each one's potential futures forward. *She worked herself to death*, Lyriana thought, and roughly scrubbed her tears away. Now, with Granmere gone, the burden of finding the Liberator—the one who would end the Soul-Drinker's reign of murderous madness—fell to her. She couldn't afford any emotional indulgence.

To steel herself to begin again, Lyriana thought of the fates of her Mother, and Bri, her Mabro. Like so many sacrificed over the past three generations, Bri had been tortured to death and drained of his kailitha, his life essence, to keep the Soul-Drinker alive. At best, her mother had been made a drudge to clean and cook and serve the Slaves. Or she too had been a sacrifice, tortured and drained like Bri. Worse, she could have been made a breeder: raped by the Slaves, and forced to bear child after child to provide the Soul-Drinker with potential new Slaves. Besides the demonic Watchers, the only ones allowed near the monstrous sorcerer-king were males born to captive breeders, raised and tortured into becoming mindlessly obedient and worshipful Slaves. Only the gods knew how, but one of these Slaves would have to be their Liberator.

In the year since Granmere had died, Lyriana had cast hundreds more star charts on her own, and she was deathly tired herself. But nothing mattered except her work. A determined frown hardened her face. She *had to* find the right sequence of star charts that would lead to the one who could somehow get past the Soul-Drinker's psychic defenses and his Watchers, put an end to the vicious sorcerer's dreadful reign, and restore the Banished Goddess to Her rightful place.

Now Lyriana sensed the stars moving toward midnight. With somber purpose, she rose and once again donned the midnight-blue robe of the Star-Seer. Light sparked from small crystals dotting the velvet gown. As she climbed the dark stairs to the top of her isolated tower, she traced the slight groove worn into the stone wall of the Tower by generations of Star-Seers before her. At the top of the stairs, she opened a darkwood door and went in.

As she crossed the threshold, four torches flared to life with aqua fire, revealing a large round room. Embedded in its stone walls at head height was a wide silver band inscribed with copper runes of protection. In the center, beneath the crystal dome of the Tower, stood the Okula, its crystal surface a shimmering silver. To one side, a padded chair sat by a small hearth where aqua flames danced. Nearby stood a worktable littered with stacks of starcharts, clean parchment, quills, and ink.

Lyriana crossed over to the table, opened a small casket, took out a heavy silver chain with a circular pendant, and draped it around her neck. The silver-and-diamond Wheel of the Heavens rested above her heart. She grasped it and stood still for a few moments, attuning to the Stars, opening to the deep well of her magic.

Then the Star-Seer raised one hand above her head, and held the other over the Okula. “Kaa’a-tay! Open!” Above, the stars of midnight shone down, their light concentrated by the crystal dome of the Tower into narrow rays of starlight. Below, the silvery surface of the Okula swirled and darkened to match the black sky above the Tower. Then the Star-Seer commanded, “Vaa’a lan! Unite!”

From the now-luminous black surface of the Okula, rays of silver light shot upwards, meeting the rays shining down from the stars. The power shivering through the room caused every hair on Lyriana’s skin to rise. Quickly, she held up the Silver Wheel, pointing it toward the copper runes on the silver band, and began chanting, “Dagantaleya! Protect this place!” As she turned, a narrow beam shot from the Wheel, touching each rune. They began to glow with a warm, ruddy light. When the final rune lit up, the ruddy light expanded into a sphere encompassing the entire room. The stellar forces calmed, now safely contained.

Breathing a sigh of relief, the Star-Seer dropped her arms and turned toward the Okula. One thing had become clear to Granmere: it was *their own family line* that would lead to the Liberator they sought, if Lyriana could find the right mate for herself. Accordingly, she tapped out the pattern of her own star chart. The surface of the Okula swirled, and settled into the familiar pattern of lights—white for the stars of the Constellations, and colored ones for the seven Wanderers—on a black sea slowly heaving with possible futures. Resting her hands on the edges of the table, she began a new chant, praying for guidance.

“Zhovanya ganarali, Zhovanya ganarali, Zhovanya ganarali, Zhovanya ganarali.” After a time, she felt her power deepening more than ever and her awareness becoming sharply focused.

“Reveal the required spirits, the lineage of the Liberator.” she commanded. “A’averoy zanto nebara!” The surface of the Okula swirled with myriad stars and slowly settled into a pattern of Constellations and Wanderers. Lyriana bent over the worktable and sketched the pattern on a piece of parchment, using symbols that represented the Wanderers, and the Constellations. Then she faced the Okula and commanded, “Ra’anaya. Continue.” A second and then a third pattern appeared, and she sketched these also. The Okula swirled again and the rays of light disappeared, leaving only a quiescent silvery surface.

Taking the star charts she had sketched, she perched on the padded chair by the hearth to study them. “Gods and demons! If this is the right sequence, it will take three more generations.” She sighed in dismay.

Looking at the third chart, she gasped. “The Dire Cross under the Firebird’s Wings!” The more she studied this chart, the faster her heart beat. Finally, she looked up, her face radiant. “Oh, Granmere! I finally found the Liberator!” She returned to the Okula and touched the

silvery surface in the pattern of this third chart. "A'vero." The surface swirled and darkened, and the pattern appeared again. She examined it with the silent intensity of a hunting Owl.

"By the gods, I've never seen a stronger soul!" she exclaimed in awe. Eagerly, she commanded, "Ra'anaya." But as the stars and Wanderers of this man's chart moved forward through his lifetime, she watched with growing horror. "He must go through three hells?" She shook her head. "Goddess, no! Surely there is quicker way, and one that does not entail so much suffering!"

By now, dawnlight shone golden-rose through the crystal dome. There would be no more work with the Okula until darkness returned. "Kaa'a tak," she said wearily, closing the star spell. The stellar forces in the tower room subsided, the coppery symbols on the silver band went dark, and the Okula returned to its quiescent silver. She replaced the Wheel of the Heavens in its golden casket and descended to her sleeping room to rest, though she was sure her excitement and horror at what she had discovered would prevent her from sleeping.

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## Chapter Four ~ Sacrifices

The next night and the next, she tried again, but the results were the same. Only that third star-pattern culminated in all three of their long-sought goals: the end of the Soul-Drinker's reign; the return of the Goddess; and the renewal of the Sacred Balance. At last, Lyriana closed the Okula and sank down in her chair by the hearth, clutching the star charts of those who would produce the Liberator whom Khailaz needed so desperately.

"Oh, Zhovanya, why? Why must this take so long—three more generations!—and cause so many more to suffer the Soul-Drinker's brutality?" She looked at the last chart, the chart of the Liberator. "Why must his path be so harsh, so hard?" Overcome with grief for her descendants-to-be and all of Khailaz, she bowed her head and sobbed, her tears dripping onto the parchments she held. At last, exhausted by her continual use of the magic of the Okula, her sobs waned away and were replaced by soft snores, then by silence as she began to dream.

*"Granmere Kyrana, how...? What are you doing here?" Lyriana stared at her grandmother in awe. She seemed taller and more regal than ever. Her eyes glowed golden. With a sweep of her hand, she unveiled a scene.*

*Lyriana saw the City laid out before her, a crumbling, stinking ruin. Skeletal people stumbled about pawing through garbage heaps for food, fighting rats over scraps, drinking muddy water from puddles. The view shifted as if Lyriana were a bird rising into the sky. Below her, Khailaz spread out, farmlands parched and gray, forests dry and brown, wildfires sending dark billows of smoke to obscure the Sun, the Sand Sea encroaching deep into the once-fertile valleys. No farms or villages, no rivers or streams, no wildlife, no birds, not even a horse or cow, dog or chicken.*

*"Oh, Granmere! The soulkin are all gone!"*

*"Yes, the Soul-Drinker has absorbed the kailitha of the people he has taken as sacrifices, so none of their kailitha has been returned to renew the web of life. And he has drained hope and courage from the people who remain. Soon even the Soul-Drinker will not be able to survive here, and will move on to conquer another realm, leaving Khailaz an empty wasteland."*

"NO!" Lyriana shouted, jumping up as if to fight an enemy, looking around wildly. Seeing her familiar workroom, she blew out a breath and stood still for a moment, getting her bearings. Then she gently smoothed out the crumpled, tear-spotted star charts, set them on her side table in a row, and stood looking at them. Sadly, she touched the first chart. "Oh, my beloved Harzha, why couldn't it be *you* who will be my mate?" She thought her heart would shatter, but she straightened her spine and her face hardened. "So it must be."

Without a backward glance, she left the room where she and her grandmother had labored so long, her eyes fierce with her desire to end the Soul-Drinker's horrendous reign of torture

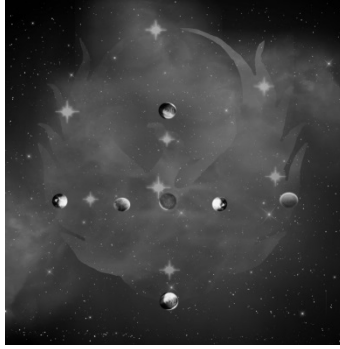
and murder. Descending the spiral staircase inside the tower, she passed by her sleeping room and continued down to the ground floor. She crossed the circular room, knelt before a small altar set in a niche, and whispered, "Shai!" Flames bloomed on a white and a black candle, revealing a golden statue of a dancing Goddess.

"Zhovanya dagantali, Zhovanya ganarali." Lyriana chanted, praying for guidance and protection. Slowly, her heart calmed and she settled into inner quietness. The Goddess statue's topaz eyes began to glow with a golden light of their own, and Zhovanya's ethereal Presence filled the room.

Lyriana bowed her head. "Dear Goddess, I thank You for being with me tonight." Hands clasped before her heart, she spoke in a formal, somber manner. "Zhovanya, I vow that I will ensure that the Liberator is brought into being and enabled to fulfill his destiny, no matter the cost." She held her hands out as if cupping something. "I offer you my heart. In return, I pray for the courage, strength, and discipline I will need."

The golden eyes of the Goddess blazed forth, and Lyriana cried out as her heart and bones filled with the hot red blood of mountains, which instantly cooled to dark stone. The Star-Seer nodded once, and rose to begin her long battle against the Soul-Drinker.





## *THE STAR-SEER'S PROPHECY*

When the Wanderers  
form the Dire Cross  
under the Firebird's wings,  
sorcery and murder  
must give him life.

He must be abandoned.  
May we be forgiven!

Star-cursed, twin-souled,  
knowing only evil, pain and ice,  
the dark innocent  
is our salvation.

He must be betrayed.  
May we be forgiven!

Through three hells,  
through blissful heaven  
and its loss,  
he surrenders all  
yet never yields.

He must be forsaken.  
May we be forgiven!

Hollowed by suffering and evil,  
Hallowed by expiation and submission,  
the Vessel of the Goddess is created.

We must ensure his Fate.  
May we be forgiven!



## GLOSSARY

### Pronouns

*Lo* = us all, me, you, us, them – exact meaning depends on intention of speaker

*Li* = I, me

*Lai* = we

*Le* = it, this

### Other words

*Kailitha* (Kai-LI-tha): spiritual energy or soul of all aspects of Nature; divine healing energy

*Mabro*: (Mah-bro) Mother's brother (i.e., maternal uncle): In the matriarchal culture that existed before the Soul-Drinker came, there was no marriage, and the mother's brother took the role of father to his sister's children.

*Soulkin*: One's spiritual relative; the animal in harmony with one's soul

### Chants

*Zhovanya naralo(li)* - The Goddess forgives us all/ Goddess, forgive us or them (me).

*Zhovanya dagantalo(li)* - Goddess protect us (me).

*Zhovanya ganaralo(li)* - Goddess guide us (me).

### Magical Commands

*A'avero*: Show, reveal

*A'avero ya zhanto nebara* - Reveal the required spirits.

*Dagantaley* - Protect this place

*Da'agantalori* - Shield my mind

*Kaa'atay* - Open

*Kaa'a tak* - Close

*Kaa'a talak* - Break

*Kaa'atali* - I open (my inner senses)

*Ra'anaya... Continue*

*Shai* - (Let there be) Light

*Shaili* - (May) I shine

*Shai'ya* - Burn

*Vaa'a lan* - Unite

*Vaa'a lanti* - Be whole

*Vaa'a lanteya* - (May this place) Be whole.

*Thank you for reading The Star Seer's Story.  
I hope you enjoyed it!*

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*How this story has helped readers heal*

**About reading *Dark Innocence*, Tetja Ann Barbee writes:**

“I found I could safely start to heal old wounds, and question things about my own beliefs. And it all happened *through* the story. ... As a result, I have been able to forgive someone with whom I was very angry for a long time.... (And) I have committed myself to deepen my recovery process.”

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*About the Author*

**I’m Rahima Warren**, author of *The Star-Seer’s Prophecy*, a deep, rich fantasy trilogy of the transformational and healing journey of the soul. With Master’s degrees in Clinical and Transpersonal Psychology, I worked as a licensed psychotherapist for over 20 years, retiring in 2006 to focus on my expressive painting, creative writing, and spiritual studies.

In my work with clients recovering from abuse, I was awed by the human capacity to heal, and to reach new levels of forgiveness, wholeness and happiness. My experience with my clients and on my own healing journey unexpectedly coalesced with my love of fantasy fiction into the writing of this mystical and redemptive trilogy adventure—and in the process, transformed me into an author, much to my surprise!

**For more about how my hero turned me into an author:**

<http://starseersprophecy.com/about/>

*I love to hear from my readers!*

**If you have any questions or comments,**

**feel free to contact me at**

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