

The Cranes take Michael on a journey to the unspoiled lands that lie beyond the perilous Blasted Plain. Their goal: to exchange a *Sidhe* horse called an *epon* for a young *Sidhe* male, Biri, who will be trained by the Cranes in preparation for his initiation into the *Sidhe* priesthood known as the *Maln*. All are dusted with *sani* powder to protect them during the crossing, with Michael riding the *epon* for added protection. They emerge unmolested from the Blasted Plain, and amid the rich splendor Spart demonstrates for Michael how the insubstantial foundations that underlie *Sidhedark* make it possible to alter another's perceptions using illusion. She deceives Michael again and again by changing the color of a flower at will. The exchange for Biri fulfilled (topped off by an unexpected encounter with Alyons) they must now return across the Blasted Plain under the protection of Biri's full-blood *Sidhe* magic.