

ASTRONOMY

When the young squire takes Thorn under his wing for the few days she shelters in the outskirts of town, the two of them entertain one another with songs and parodies drawn from their own cultural experience. The squire is most familiar with local gossip and affairs of the court, Thorn with astronomy, what can be seen in what she calls 'the Emperor's Court' – the night sky.

As with the Sailors' Stone, these observations carry their own stories and imagery. Pale Mistress, and the squire's far more amusing parody, teaches the phases of the Moon. The bright planet Venus takes on the role of 'Sun's Herald', the Master of Ceremonies who appears variously as the Morning and Evening Star. He has a baby brother who is very shy and rarely seen above the morning or evening horizon – the planet Mercury.

The role of the outer planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn as guardians is an ancient one which precedes the beginning of the Kingdom. The great swath of stars of the Milky way which span the Emperor's Court was once viewed as smoke emanating from the Sacred Brazier, offerings of incense to the heavenly bodies. But times have changed, now the finery of court life is expressed in the billowed opulence of the Silken Veil. In the same line of thinking a comet with its long tail, often seen in the night sky for weeks at a time, can be compared to the stately caravan of a foreign king, trailing his royal banner.