

Job Description of a Vestal Virgin

Deborah Flanagan

The choosing ceremony is referred to as the Capture. Be perfect. Selection is freedom from physical and mental defects. Terms of service: 30 years of celibacy. Violators will be buried alive in Evil Field. Control things by surrender. Duties include Keeper of the Hearth and Surrogate Housekeeper. Cultivate the sacred fire; under no circumstances let it go out. Store the wills of Caesar and Mark Antony in a safe place. You will be assigned a salary from the public library. Do not let your hair down or take off your glasses. Your body is sacrosanct. Free condemned prisoners with a touch if you must, but wash your hands after. Perks include: always being right, and you can vote. You'll never have to take an oath—your word trusted without question. I don't always tell the truth, so I do have to swear: I'm not a virgin, but I do love the library. My fire has gone out, and I must stoke it.

The Flying Saint

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St. Joseph of Cupertino is the levitating saint. Flying delivers him from unpleasant scenes. Uniquely disqualified from earthly duties, he isn't allowed to serve meals in the monastery. The sight of a holy statue exalts him to vertical flight—two saints, one of stone, one of flesh, circle the air. *Don't try to catch God so soon*, the Minister General of the Order warns. Joseph's nickname is "The Gaper," for his habit of staring blankly into space. The other monks find him wandering in a daze in various parts of the friary. Joseph gives off a sweet smell. It's his purity: he can smell the bad odor of a sinful person. He tells the sinner he stinks and to wash himself, to go to confession, but there are misunderstandings. Soon he experiences a certain spiritual dryness, and his flights come to a halt. In early September, Joseph senses the end is near and is heard mumbling, *The jackass has begun to climb the mountain*.