

Axomber's Crypt

A Cugel-Level Scenario for DERPG

A sample adventure (and notes for an encompassing mini-campaign) for Jim Webster's *Scaum Valley Gazetteer* (Pelgrane Press, 2002)

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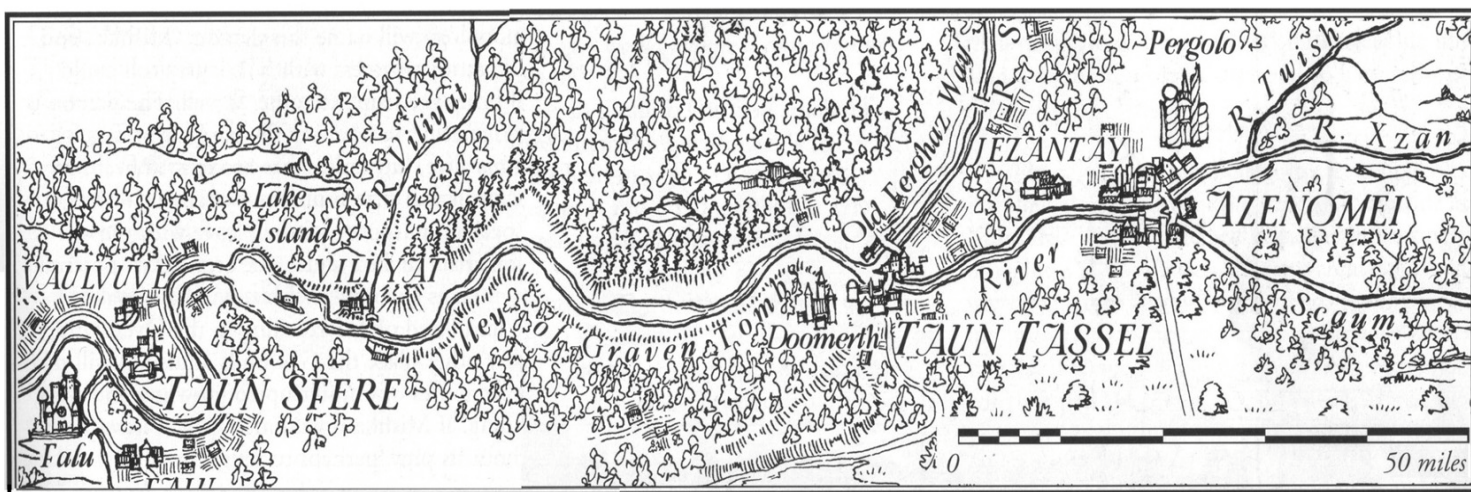
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Original Artwork: Sarah Wroot (Scaum Valley map), Commode Minstrels Collective (p19)

Graven Tombs picture (p9) from XPS Vol. 1, No. 3 – specific artist not indicated

www.pelgrane.com/violetcusps.htm

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Author's Introduction

Several of my submissions to the Violet Cusps page, plus my own campaign notes, have been expansions to the magnificent 'Kaiin Player's Guide'. However, no less equally worthy of attention is the wonderful 'Scaum Valley Gazetteer' (SVG), to which I turn my attentions this month. (As with the recent 'Guide to Azenomei'.)

In my early-teens I was exposed far too often to the first major fantasy RPG™, and though I quickly moved on have never fully recovered. (As followers of my work for Gloranthan gaming will no doubt confirm.) This trend resurfaced in 2004 with the extensive "Gomoshan's Tomb" (a Turjan-Level convention module for DERPG), and continues here with "Axomber's Crypt". After all, in a world where civilization is piled on top of civilization, the plundering of the wealthy dead seems far too great an opportunity to miss. And the opportunity to invent a wacky Cugel-Level tomb-robbing scenario for the Dying Earth milieu was ultimately irresistible.

Do you want to Play this Adventure? If so, stop reading here and pass this to your GM. If you were to proceed further, a great portion of the entertainment value would be lost - since this adventure thrives on surprise twists and general unfathomable oddities.

PRINTING NOTES: Pages 1-50 = Duplex (double-sided); Pages 51-57 – single sided.

As always, the primary purpose of this scenario is to provide another amusing Dying Earth interlude for my players and myself. Therefore this is no ordinary tomb - not even a regular tomb planted with fiendish traps and tricks. (Although such a scenario might in itself be very entertaining, I think such to be more suited to Turjan-Level frolics.) Rather this is a tomb created by a senile sage in his final raving years - a madman with still enough prestige, power and wealth from his former days of glory to set up a series of trials of character that tomb robbers must submit to if they wish to escape the tomb alive.

The scenario is likely to take three sessions to complete. It is my intent that preparation, travel, and encounters with difficult GMCs on the way will be a fundamental part of the entertainment – not something to be rushed through in order to more quickly reach the crypt section. (Such things provide a good counterpoint to the esoteric ‘judgement’ section of the tomb dangers.) Also, emphasize petty squabbles over who gives the orders, who goes on watch, who makes decisions etc. Also, improvise difficulties with buying or stealing necessary equipment from miserly merchants or vigilant owners. (This is not an RPG genre where orderly adventurers routinely run well-planned missions.)

What You Will Need to Use this Adventure: Ideally you will have a copy of the Scaum Valley Gazetteer, as this will allow various additional encounters/incidents/descriptions to be easily utilized. The SVG is widely referenced in the text of this piece. Also a handful of references are made within the text to spells from the SVG and these will need to be reinvented if you do not own that supplement. Nonetheless, any experienced GM of DERP will be able to use this scenario as it stands if merely familiar with the regular rules and no other supplements. We also reference several magical items from *Cugel’s Compendium* (Pelgrane Press, 2001). These are not essential to the plot, but nonetheless form a substantial segment of the loot – which in itself is an important part of the plot. (In that merely trying to retain some of the glorious spoils provides the final segment of the scenario.) If you do not own *Cugel’s Compendium*, you will need to invent a number of amusing and irritating magical treasures. Likewise we have included references to one or two things from *Turjan’s Tome* (Pelgrane Press, 2003).

1) Beginning the Adventure

GM Note: This scenario is not suitable for ‘absolute beginner’ PCs. They should be veterans of at least three other Cugel-level escapades of more standard design, and preferably half a dozen or more. It matters to the sense of the scenario that Xallops presumes them to be of at least middling competency. (Compared to other ruffians and ne’er-do-wells.)

The PCs are at a hostelry in Azenomei one evening. In my campaign it was the ‘River Inn’. Thus you can take advantage of the Azenomei Guide on the Violet Cusps page. Your PCs might already be in Kaiin or some other location along the Scaum River, and if so it is possible to alter this scenario to accommodate that. But the simplest way to start this scenario is to use a well tried DERP Cugel-Level technique. Regardless of where the PCs were at the end of the previous adventure (except hopefully somewhere in Ascolais or Almetry or their surrounding regions) begin the adventure by saying something like...

“Since your last adventure you have ranged the lands seeking wealth and ease. Occasionally you have found such but never retained it. Some weeks ago you ended up in Azenomei and took a small suite of rooms in a rundown and unoccupied manse. The folk in these parts are uncommonly civilized, and apart from the local Constables calling weekly to collect their ‘purely voluntary’ donation to their Benevolent Fund, none have bothered you for this residential situation. However, now your funds are running dangerously low, and the threat of honest labor looms uncomfortably large in your immediate futures. Understandably you are disconsolate, and desperately trying to come up with some scheme to gain the maximum reward for the minimum effort.”

This scenario is also written from the perspective of a group that begins in Azenomei and ends in Kaiin, and much of the text will be redundant of you send them anywhere else. The PCs will be approached Xallops the Archaeologist (*Turjan’s Tome*: p134). This personable and successful dealer in antiquities (tomb-robber) will soon reveal that he has information about a crypt in the Valley of Graven Tombs. However, he will tell the PCs that various reasons divert him from immediately exploring this option himself. Firstly, he says he has another enterprise to which he must immediately turn his attention first thing in the morning. Secondly he informs them that he is well known to (and hated by) the tedders of both Viliyat and Taun Tassel. These people make his life a misery whenever he travels their way, and he is sick of donning disguises and dodging their malefances. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly of all – though he won’t mention it to the PCs - he has suspicions that this particular mission might be rather hazardous. (He is so successful these days that the daring exploits of his youth are no longer a requirement of his trade, and that he tends to operate missions where the risks are reasonably calculated.)

This is where the PCs come in. Xallops spies our worthy rogues, down on their luck, perhaps sitting round a single mug of beer. He stops by their table on his way out of the door. Or, if you prefer, he comes in, purchases an ale, and comes straight to their table. In any event, the only game proviso here is that no other likely adventurer types are present in the establishment when he first approaches the PCs. Xallops claims to be motivated by sheer altruism, though he stays truer to Dying Earth type by requesting one highly valuable item. Although what he says is partially true, it is tempered by: (a) his belief that risk-taking is an important part of character development, (b) his wish for them to take any such risks rather than himself.

Though he expresses his conversation in a sympathetic manner – and indeed says that he will be delighted if they profit well from the expedition - behind his word is the belief that these scoundrels may well face a considerable challenge with this undertaking. He believes that that this is exactly what they need to propel them out of their lives of less-than-mediocrity. (However, this belief is somewhat of a panacea for his conscience, since he is using the PCs as pawns in his plan.)

Optional New Allies

GM – You know your players and PCs. Once you have read this scenario (especially the tomb section), if you decide that the PCs are routinely insufficiently able, cautious, or fortuitous to be able to survive all of the hazards, use this option.

Other RPGs of a less eloquent nature know such supporting characters as ‘canon fodder’. Indeed this is their purpose, as later in this scenario dangers and temptations of a potentially fatal nature occur, and it is thought best that someone other than the favored PCs take the brunt. Probably the GM will run these characters, although possibly one each might be given to any player who can run them convincingly - as secondary to their actual PC. If after reading this scenario you anticipate that a tragic loss of personnel will accrue to the cursed temptations, far better that the GMCs are one by one left behind rather than the favored PCs.

Introducing the Allies (1): These allies appear in the scenario as a group that were either nearby (perhaps in a booth behind a curtain) or who came in quietly just as Xallops started talking - and have been listening intently (having recognized Xallops) whilst pretending to be in a conversation of their own. They suddenly step up and announce their own worthiness to undertake the task, citing various marvelous exploits (denied by their state of apparent impoverishment). If there are at least 3 in the other group, Xallops for a few moments considers which group he will favor (giving the chance to role-play some attempts to curry his favor or convince him who is best). However, the point is that Xallops eventually decides that both groups should combine, and says:

“I have decided that you shall all go. However, I am aware that those yet short of success can engage in petty squabbles, and even fatal interactions. At the end of the mission I shall demand a full accounting for any missing members - and be aware that I have magic that can ascertain if I am being told the truth. Therefore, if you can agree to put aside any differences for a fair share of the profits and take a fair share of the dangers and tasks involved the expedition will go ahead.”

Introducing the Allies (2): These characters can disembark from a boat (or be seen approaching from the opposite direction) when the PCs first locate the correct avenue to cut their way up towards the tomb. They have with them an identical parchment (which they consult from time to time but attempt to hide from the PCs). This may be the most amusing way of introducing them to the adventure. When both groups realize they are heading for the same destination, a loose alliance must somehow be forged. (Plenty of opportunity for Cugelesque bickering.) The GMCs will initially decline to reveal where they got their parchment.

However, if some kind of agreement is reached, they may reveal that they bought it from a curio-seller in Val Ombrio. What happened was that the previous party (now dead in the undergrowth) took with them a copy, leaving this original in the hands of a ‘trusted associate’. When they did not return, the associate sold it to the highest bidder. One possibility is that the two groups initially operate as two loosely allied units, with the GMCs muttering amongst themselves, snickering at mistakes by the PCs, and generally acting as GMC reflections of the PC party. They would then stay as GMCs until the entire group is transported into the inner tomb.

Playtest Note: Since the introduction of Boris the yardboy as a GMC happened more or less spontaneously, I won’t need to introduce a whole group of new GMCs in the valley. What I am considering is having the PC group be found by two unfortunate wanderers who became separated from their own party last night during a half-man attack. This was in the forest some miles to the north, and the pair has struggled down to the river. Terrified and yet eager to improve their lot, they attach themselves to the PC group. One will be Ermana, thus a Resist Rakishness roll will be required from any male PC that wishes to turn down this request.

The Rivals: These may be further enhanced if necessary to provide more challenging adversaries.

Because players never know full details (at least not until after the adventure is over) - but primarily for reasons of the author's ease - we freely admit to having adapted here the same supporting characters as presented in the 'High Road to Kaiin' adventure.

Gilbrick Pasht

"My expertise is surpassed only by my experience. Stand aside and regard my prowess."

Gilbrick is a dandy in a yellow vest, and deep orange hat with a ridiculous blue feather. He also sports a rapier (as do many folk). His manner is quick and charming, and he seems like a fellow who holds a high opinion of himself.

Ratings: Persuasion (Charming) 11, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Attack (Finesse: Rapier) 12, Defense (Vexation) 14, Health 12, Athletics 5, Concealment 8, Gambling 7, Seamanship 1, Stealth 9, Stewardship 3.

Iffindil Choorn

"The viands here are a trifle tedious. This establishment is worth three and a half stars at best!"

A large gentleman in a blue jacket (with numerous gray patches) and smart black trousers. The strange over-garment might be fashionable somewhere, but you can't think where. Despite his size, Iffindil moves with a certain confidence, and carries a large knife with an easy familiarity. He often poses as a restaurant critic in order to obtain free meals.

Ratings: Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Cunning: Knife) 11, Defense (Misdirection) 10, Health 11, Athletics 3, Gambling 5, Imposture 5, Stewardship 4.

Borik Zent

"I can scarcely depart upon a mission of such merit without first fortifying myself with adequate beverages."

Zent dresses in the black robe of a Val Ombrian scholar; however, beneath the robe are bright red pantaloons, and he drinks a great deal for a man of the learning. He carries a rapier.

Ratings: Persuasion (Obfusatory) 11, Rebuff (Wary) 11, Attack (Speed) 10, Defense (Parry) 11, Health 13, Athletics 3, Gambling 2, Pedantry 3, Stewardship 1.

Ermana Makanliff

"I advise you to abandon all rakish thoughts, as I find you less appealing than a river eel."

Ermana is a handsome woman with short fair hair and wearing a red cloak. She also carries a rapier.

Ratings: Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 13, Attack (Finesse) 12, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 12, Health 10, Athletics 4, Gambling 4, Seduction 5, Stewardship 2. Resistance: Rakishness 6.

Tamol Hoosgrip

"By the cut of your jacket I wager you have never walked so much as one hour through the uncharted wilderness."

Tamol is a rugged-looking man in simple leather clothes made for durability rather than fashion. He claims to be a former hunter, but seems to have a far better grasp of etiquette than someone of that station might be expected to possess. He carries a staff and a longbow.

Ratings: Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Obtuse) 9, Attack (Strength: Staff) 9, Defense (Dodge) 10, Health 12, Athletics 7, Gambling 3, Living Rough 5, Stewardship 2, Tracking 4.

Playtest Note: One of the female PCs failed to Resist Rakishness against a strapping carter's yard-boy when they were trying to purchase a cart and mermelant in Azenomei. In good storytelling style, he became Boris, the son of the yard owner. And (since the PC in question rolled a PS with her Seduction in response - or was it her Athletics?) was not only willing to sell them the mermelant and cart at a substantial discount, but was also inveigled into accompanying them on the mission. (One of the other PCs was convinced that Xallops was using them all as patsies, and insisted that they have a patsy of their own. This is the PC of the same player - oh cunning fellow - who spontaneously thought of the idea of a false-bottomed cart.) Incidentally, for Boris I shall use Tamol's statistics, and hand his details to the player of the PC of which he has become enamoured. This not only saves me as GM from the tiresome necessity of running another GMC, but also pretty much guarantees that the player will risk Boris before her PC - and thus he can realistically fall foul of a horrible trap later in the scenario.

Xallops the Archaeologist

“Hello, good people. My name is Xallops, a trader in antiquities. You may have heard of me?”

Scuttlebutt or Pedantry:

DF: That wouldn’t be Xallops the IVth from the Nineteenth Aeon then?

QF: Xallops? Xallops? I may have heard of a Xallops. He is a travelling trader. Is that you?

EF: If I heard right, you are quite successful in your antiquities trade.

HBS: And make a living out of seeking out ancient artifacts from their forgotten resting-places.

PS: In fact, aren’t you the Xallops who recovered the fabled lost book of all-knowing from the tomb of the sorcerer Zinqzin?

IS: And who was originally a street urchin from Kaiin’s Threek district?

Xallops acknowledges their recognition and continues:

“I saw you sitting here, and there was something about your manner that reminded me of my colleagues and myself during the early years of our professional activities. Many were the times I sat and discussed plans and ambitions with my friends. A few weeks ago I bought a parchment describing the location of a lost crypt within the Valley of Graven Tombs. I am known in that region, and currently have greater concerns than this opportunity. However, for persons of limited means such as yourselves, this presents an extraordinary chance for those willing to grasp it. If you believe you are capable of preparing for and accomplishing such a task the parchment is yours, since otherwise I shall probably just lose it amongst my files. If it is genuine and the tomb found, I ask only for one item of note - for which I will pay you handsomely. The entirety of any further spoils is your own. So, what say you?”

What do we know? - Players might now be asking the GM what their PCs know about the Valley of GT or various other topics (such as Axomber himself). If so, consult the information in the next section. At some point they will want to know who is buried in the crypt. Xallops will only tell them when they have more or less already accepted the job. (He is treating the parchment like a trade secret.)

Xallops the Persuasive – We do not advise that Xallops try and convince them the old-fashioned way (Ψ PERSUASION), since he might lose. However, since his argument is so good, the GM who wishes to use this method might give him a bonus of 1 to his Forthright 11.

A FEW QUESTIONS FOR XALLOPS:

** = questions that the GM must assure get asked (or that Xallops simply supplies as information)*

*** What item do you want?** – *“An ornate sarcophagus lid of great historical merit and significant monetary worth.”*

*** What will you pay for the lid?** – *“I shall pay you a quarter of what it is worth in hard cash – this being a minimum of 300t per person.”* (Xallops may be bargained up to a third of its worth or a minimum of 400t per person.)

Why did you buy the parchment if you don’t intend to go? – *“Initially I did consider going, and in fact the parchment was part payment from a debtor with no other way to remunerate me. Being a reasonable fellow I accepted it.”*

*** What do you want in exchange for the parchment?** – *“Nothing. I was about to throw the parchment away. All I ask in return is that if it is present you exert your best efforts to bring me Axomber’s ornate sarcophagus lid that is famed for its intricacy and worth. Any further valuables you find are entirely yours.”*

*** Who was Axomber?** – *“Axomber the Erudite was a famous sage during the previous aeon. He wrote several great philosophical works and was a popular figure. He died at a great age and was buried in the Valley of Graven Tombs. I know of him from my other researches, and have always been intrigued by references I have come across that his sarcophagus lid was a magnificent gift from one of his wealthy admirers.”*

What’s the catch? – *“There is no catch. Certainly it will be an expedition requiring courage and ingenuity, but I know of no unusual risks.”*

Why aren’t you going yourself? – *“Apart from the sarcophagus lid, if it is present, this is small business for me. I am wealthy and successful, and in any case depart tomorrow morning on a much more thrilling expedition across the Songan Sea that will take several weeks. Even the sarcophagus lid is a small prize compared to the substantive relics I normally deal with.”*

Why are you giving it to us? – *“As I said, you remind me of my younger days. Also, to be totally honest, I suspect that the person I bought it from has made a copy and he may have secretly organized an expedition of his own. I would prefer to foil that attempt, and to leave it any longer might mean the tomb is already emptied.”*

So we might be wasting our time? – *“That is possible, although this man was not possessed of particular cunning or resourcefulness, so it is equally possible that he may have failed to get his enterprise off the ground, or that he may fail to even reach the crypt.”*

Who was the man from whom you got the scroll? – *“A certain Dahwordge of <insert name of most distant known large*

town/city from where they are: Cuirnif/Kaiin/Val Ombrio>. *He is a smuggler of middling ability, but without experience in tomb-robbery and land-based expeditions.*”

What can you tell us about the area we would be going to? – *“I will leave that for you to research. It is relatively well-known.”*

What traps and other dangers are we likely to face? – *“I cannot say, but Axomber was apparently a man of easy disposition. It would be odd indeed if he had caused his crypt to be filled with fiendish dangers.”*

*** How will we know this sarcophagus lid you want?** – *“It bears a likeness of the entombed sage, and according to legend is bejeweled and ornately carved. It will be obvious if it is there.”*

How do we know this isn’t a trick? – *“Ask others about me. I have no interest in tricks, except - in the old days - those required to separate the rich from their excess funds; and I assure you my offer has nothing to do with anything like that.”*

What are we likely to gain? – *“From my understanding, this sage was buried with his small library, certain magical relics, and a significant amount of gems and coins. Such was standard practice during his day in that culture. He was a famous and wealthy man, although far from being the richest in the land.”*

How do we find you again? – [GM devises Xallops response. Likely he will tell them that his new trip will take between 4-6 weeks, and give them the address of his office. Think about a suitable distance for the PCs to attempt to haul the sarcophagus lid, and how they might accomplish that. Kaiin is my choice, since the PCs begin the scenario at Azenomei.]

How do we know the crypt hasn’t already been plundered in history? – *“We can’t know for certain. However, I would definitely have heard if the sarcophagus lid had come onto the market in the last few centuries, and I would probably have heard if any other objects associated with this man were found. Common rumor even now falsely places his crypt in Kaiin’s Old Town – where it has of course never been found.”*

Where did the scroll come from? – *“The man I bought it from claimed that an old relative found the scroll amongst the recently rediscovered heirlooms of his great-grandfather, who apparently died suddenly in brawl whilst preparing to go on an expedition that he said would make his fortune. I suspect that the old man was no relative at all, and that the scroll was stolen when the old man in question tried to sell it.”*

What equipment should we take? – *“You must decide such things for yourself. I generally travel light, but take the basics such as a good pick, a lantern, and a sturdy pack for the spoils.”*

How do we defend ourselves against the half-men of the region? – *“What means do you usually use? Flaming brands, erb spears, a wall of thorns? I prefer Voynod’s Expansible Fence. The anthropophages in this region are no worse than in any other, though asms of course can leap quite some feet into the air.”*

Any other questions – *“Enough, enough. I have offered my gift. Are you the bold adventurers I took you for, or sheep dressed in yesterday’s finery destined forever to a life in the gutter?”*

(Any player who doesn’t agree to go on the expedition can be asked to roll ‘Resist Avarice’ for their character, due to the chance to be the first to plunder ancient wealth. And/or ‘Resist Arrogance’ – due to these final chides that Xallops throws their way.) Should they succeed at both of these, the GM needs to improvise, or perhaps merely have the others depart without them. Further resistances can be called for as time passes – as the PC considers the wealth and glory his friends will soon be accruing.

A parting comment: *“Likely the sarcophagus lid will be heavy and cumbersome. You will need to devise some means of transporting it. Also, do not dare to deface it in any way. It is the only object I insist on having and I want it pristine and intact.”*

The GM’s Low-Down on Xallops

Although he really is planning to leave town (though perhaps his reason for leaving is contrived) in the morning, he has had the parchment now for a few weeks and is keen to pass it on. He has just noticed a group of rogues (the PCs) who appear to have the potential to use it to good advantage. (IE are dumb enough to go on the mission on his behalf, and yet possibly capable of succeeding.) Xallops hopes they will succeed, but will not be devastated if they don’t.

If the PCs ask want to ask around about Xallops, they will find that he appears entirely genuine. If they request from him some time to consider his offer, he will only agree if they present a reasonable and considered case for doing so. If they are merely prevaricating, he will lose patience (as above), and the PCs will then - fearing that they will lose the chance - agree on the spot (presuming they fail to roll at least one of the two Resistances).

Although he is an independent - and somewhat pleased with his own success - Xallops is relatively honorable; and several people they ask even claim to genuinely like him. If you want to push this, then someone the PCs don’t like, claims to dislike Xallops for his arrogance and debonair manner. He does have a reputation for unorthodox behavior, but that reputation is amongst the wealthy and rigid. Amongst the underdog treasure-seekers he is something of a hero. Most importantly he is not known for being particularly ruthless or deceptive, and has never run confidence games on the poor –

only on the wealthy. He is known for having a certain integrity, and sticking to the agreements he makes.

In truth, his deceiving (for that is what is occurring to some extent) of the PCs is not out of character for him, but he has hidden such things so well, that they are not public knowledge. For instance, this is the second party he has sent out on this quest, using identical parchments that he has had magically duplicated. He wants others to go the first to the crypt, and only if they return and produce an adequate report would he then risk his own resources. The primary reason for this duplicity is that his researches turned up contemporary commentaries on Axomber claiming (truthfully) that Axomber became mentally unbalanced during his last years – and spent the remainder of his wealth on a ‘tomb fit for tomb robbers’.

Xallops is very keen to obtain the famous sarcophagus lid, which is why he is stooping so low as to dupe those from the underclass that idolizes him. During his travels around this region he has been on the lookout for likely adventurer groups (weak enough so that he can find them and recover the sarcophagus lid if they cross him, but with enough apparent gumption that they might succeed).

NB: *If the PCs have any means of finding Xallops out in those of his statements which are obfuscations or lies, he has a magical device that grants him greatly enhanced authenticity when he speaks less than the truth.*

The Vellum Scroll

This sheet of vellum is rolled in an ivory case, and crackles with age. Xallops advises them it is somewhat fragile, but far from being about to turn to dust. He estimates that it is somewhat less than a century old. The trader will hand them the parchment at the end of the question and answer session, wish them luck and then depart. If they have questions for him and can find out where he is staying they may (if they act respectfully and like professionals) be able to meet him as he heads out of town with his allies first thing in the morning. However, ideally the GM can arrange for this to be impossible.

This text itself is available at the end of this piece - as a printable appendix.

2) Potential Common Knowledge

Pedantry on Axomber

(Penalty of 1 unless the PC has a Pedantry specialty of a historical bent.)

DF: “Axomber? Isn’t that a type of harpsichord?”

QF: “I may have never heard the name before, but can’t recall where.”

EF: “Surely Axomber was a great philosopher sage of the previous aeon.”

HBS: “His works were wide-ranging and highly respected at the time of his life, and he was buried with great ceremony in Kaiin’s Old Town.”

PS: “He was respected as a man of honor and integrity, and gave much to charitable works.”

IS: “His great works included: ‘The Geology of the Scaum Basin’, ‘Weather Patterns of the Melantine Gulf’, ‘A Study of the Curious Beings of the Seven Overworlds’, ‘The Origins of the Hybrid Sentients’, and ‘A History of Humorous Performance.’”

If any PCs go so far as to research Axomber in any of Azenomei’s private collections,, provide some minimal supporting information. No reference will confirm his burial at the Valley of GT, but an IS during research will uncover a reference that vaguely hints that this might have been the case. General references presume that he was buried in the Old Town (which was Kaiin in the previous aeon), but none claim to know exactly where. Also, none have specific descriptions that confirm it was Kaiin where he was buried. Some statements will support the idea that he was buried with some notable wealth for a man of his time and station. Anyone with any experience of ancient artifacts will know that such a historical horde will be worth much more now than it was even then. Xallops has painstakingly collected much information on Axomber over the years – as part of his general collection. Therefore, Xallops knows more than is readily available. However, this is Cugel-Level play, not Turjan. Thus the PCs will not be able to find any detailed accounts of Axomber with the time and resources they have available. If they have unusual tenacity in performing research (coupled with PS or IS rolls) allow them to find a reference that indicates Axomber’s society was already plagued by tomb robbers in the years before his death, and that Axomber was therefore deliberately vague about his final resting place.

For all further entries, begin reading from the DF result, and cease at the highest level rolled. Address the player of the character who rolled the best, and alert that person’s fellows that their own characters were not so illuminated.

General Knowledge of the Valley

DF: There is a valley along the River Scaum, where ancient graven tombs are profligate...

QF: Tales talk of many treasures there - ripe for the plundering...

EF: And further note that the famous Viliyat wine and Bonefield ale also come from this region.

HBS: The wine tadders from Viliyat and Taun Tassel zestfully discourage treasure seekers - who tend to disrupt their working practices and damage profits. However, a fifteen-mile long section of the central valley area on the north bank is untended - as it is too far from either settlement, and deodand and asm are said to haunt the area.

PS: Distance means that one cannot safely return to any settlement before nightfall, so although the rewards are rumored to be high, many tomb-robbers that venture there do not return....

IS: ... and various tales speak of restless spirits that will swap their earthly riches for a new and proper burial, or in exchange for some last task they wish performed. And of some that attack with deadly intent.

The Local Wine Industry

DF: I have heard that the famous Viliyat Ordinaire comes from this region, ...

QF: ...along with Boneyard Ale and various Taun Tassel wines.

EF: Viliyat Ordinaire and Boneyard Ale are particularly noted for their excellence, and generate an excellent living for the regional growers.

HBS: The growers are based almost exclusively in Viliyat and in Taun Tassel, from where they work opposite ends of the Valley.

PS: Both groups strongly object to tomb-robbers exploring the valley, and have been known to turn these objections into physical abuse – or even to make play with their small, yet effective, crossbows

IS: Thus, those attempting to explore the ruined crypts are well advised to create some watertight subterfuge for their presence in the district, and to stay away from the tombs amidst the vineyards.

Dealing with Half-Men

Some players might begin to consider the dangers of a night spent in the wilds, and wonder on how to avoid being attacked by half-men. Either ‘Living Rough’ or a consulted pedant of the correct specialty might reveal the following basic advice. (Other than the DF, start at the lowest success level and read to the one that is actually rolled.)

DF – Coating oneself in offal confuses and repels the senses of all half-men.

QF – It is certainly sensible to come up with some plan to deal with or avoid the anthropophages...

EF – ...for apparently they can detect humans by scent and track. So, some way to conceal both of these would be sensible.

HBS – Sweeping away one’s footprints, and disguising one’s odor through smearing oneself with mermelant manure might conceivably work.

PS – It is also best to avoid visible flames if one has no defensive boundary, as the flickering light can attract predators.

IS – The best option is surely to barricade oneself into one of the more defensible crypts.

Specific Knowledge on Local Half-Men

Living Rough, Pedantry (-1 unless specialty is specifically ‘half-men’ related), Tracking (-1)

Again, read results from the worst success, and stop at the level indicated by the roll. (Of course don’t read anything for a QF or DF.)

The Asm

EF – The asm is a demon-insect cross, ...

HBS – ...large and powerful enough for an adult to feel confident in combat with an armed man.

PS – They are primarily black in color, humanoid with compound eyes, and with other insectoid features such as their grinding mandibles and bristling antennae.

IS – They also have large fangs and are capable of leaping several feet in the air.”

The Deodand

EF – A hybrid of man, demon, wolverine and basilisk; charcoal-black in color, up to seven feet tall.

HBS – Many deodands are characterized by well-defined musculature and regular human-like features rendered demonic by the presence of long fangs and narrow glinting eyes. Others are more bestial in appearance.

PS – All deodands exude a characteristic animal reek, which can announce their presence even before they come into view.

IS – Above anything else, all deodands fear magic. This may be because the magicians who originally created the species wanted to instill in them some permanent respectful dread.

GM Note: *Some of this information might also be gleaned along the way, or by asking around before setting off.*

3) Preparations

The PCs will have to decide how to travel, what sustenances and equipment to take, and think about how to transport a heavy sarcophagus lid back to wherever they expect Xallops to collect it from. All such plans can and should all be ad-libbed during play. Allow the players to devise as many details as they wish, and to buy, beg, borrow or steal any equipment they think they need (though only that which might realistically be available). If you like (and the PCs decide to explore this) this could even be a complex arrangement involving a financial backer and an advance on expected profits. When I run this part, I shall allow the players as much freedom as they need to sort things out. No doubt the usual difficulties with greedy shopkeepers and/or well-guarded supply sheds will also present themselves.

Becoming Tomb Robbers

Not all PCs will be experienced at such enterprises. Indeed those in my campaign are not. Thus they may race off into the unknown with the equivalent of only a small knife for peeling fruit. In that case some other contact they meet along the way might advise them on items they should take along. Although, such a reminder might not occur until they arrive at Taun Tassel or Taun Sfer. If they go along utterly half-cocked, another option presented within the text is the decomposing bodies of another expedition hidden amongst the brambles on the slopes before the crypt. Slain by half-men, these city-bred fools may have arrived laden with state of the art shovels and picks, but having neglected to hire assistants capable of wielding the rapier with any degree of ability. (Note that they will not have a block & tackle – this important item will only be here if the PCs/Players think of it when stocking up before departure.)

Of course, the players themselves might be experienced gamers and fully appreciate the value of such things as picks, shovels and crowbars, rope and metal spikes. If so, no problem. It may become part of the gaming fun as they choose and try to obtain all the most bizarre and foolhardy 'dungeoneering' items they can think of. In other RPGs the GM might feel restrained by game realism. However, in the Dying Earth hare-brained schemes are ten-a-penny, and so the PCs should be allowed anything they can reasonably obtain – regardless of how paranoid, misguided, or just plain stupid their motivations for obtaining such an item can be assumed to be.

It is best to make sure one thing is clear - either Xallops, a contact, or their own common sense will remind them that the tedders apparently loathe and despise tomb robbers, and can act against them with unrestrained violence. Thus not only must some solid cover story be invented, but also some way be found of concealing or disguising picks, shovels and the like. For the latter, at time of writing the author can think only of a false-bottomed cart. If such is done well, it will pass all inspections. As mentioned elsewhere, a cart will be necessary to carry out their spoils, so might either be brought with them or adapted when bought at Taun Tassel.

Obtaining Equipment

Goods bought for the noted price in Azenomei have only a 10% chance of being substandard. (Roll for each piece). [NB: If PCs look for a highly reputable business, no pieces will be substandard, but add 10% onto the price.] In this town, shopping around will uncover the same goods at one quarter less price (30% chance per piece of being substandard). Note that the reputable merchants of Taun Tassel will not sell grave-robbing goods to out of town vagabonds, but instead will call for the town guards. Less reputable merchants in Taun Tassel have some items available at 50% more expense (and 50% chance of being substandard). If any goods are dodgy, allow an Appraisal or Craftsmanship roll to detect this before purchase. For any item that is substandard, the GM needs to take a note, and test its endurance when in use. For any session it is used for sustained action, roll D6. On a '1' it breaks. After the first two sessions of use increase this chance to '1' or '2'. After the fourth session increase the chance to '1 – 3', where it remains.



Backpack (leather) 10t, Chest (small/lockable) 12t, Crowbar 8t, Erb Spear 70t, Grappling Hook 13t, Hammer 4t, Handcart/Barrow (sturdy) 20t, Lantern 4t, Lantern Oil (flask) 3t, Mermelant 200t (aging mermelant 120t; aging and recalcitrant/senile mermelant 70t, stolen mermelant 00t¹), Mermelant fodder (one day) 2t, Pick Axe 10t, Pulley Fitting (for block & tackle) 30t, Rock Chisel 15t, Rope (25ft) 2t, Sack (Sturdy) 1t, Sack (Cheap) 3g. Shovel 8t, Spike (iron) 1t for 3, Rations (1 person/1 day) 4t, Wagon (small) 35t, Wooden Beams (sturdy - for use w. block & tackle) 15t.

Playtest Note: One PC had a tweak that allowed him to convincingly point out flaws that didn't exist in objects. This gives a boon to Persuade when bargaining for goods, and helped with their price reduction hopes.

Problems on the Road

Standard problematic decisions (Ψ PERSUASION/REBUFF) should plague this expedition at every available opportunity. For instance, who gets the comfortable job of riding the wagon, who must be the one to demean themselves by any cooking that must take place along the trail, who must go and collect firewood? How friendly is the mermelant? How aged? How senile? If someone is sent to buy beer for the mermelant, make them roll to Resist Gourmandism, or else they drink some themselves. If someone who is hungry is left with the stores, make them roll Resist Gourmandism to prevent themselves from having a hearty meal.

Playtest Note: One of the PCs took pains to befriend the mermelant and supply it with beer. So far this has been within reason. However, Bobb the mermelant may become horribly drunk at some point. It was not too senile, since one of the PCs 'befriended' the yardboy who sold them a reasonable beast.

4) Travelling to the Valley

Travelling times are estimated for the sprightly rogue travelling hastily on their own loping shanks, or upon the back of some beast of only mediocre capacity. In the SVG it states that Azenomei is seven days march from Kaiin. The major difference between that and my observations is that if we look at a strenuous 27 miles a day² along the old road - anyone following the twists and turns of the river will clearly take six days to reach Kaiin from Taun Sferre, not three. I have based my own calculations on something close this average, even though they disagree with other distance/time calculations suggested elsewhere in the SVG. One can only assume that the mapmakers hired some roguish dilettantes to calculate travel times. This is supported by their suggested 'two days' to cover the less than 20 miles between Taun Tassel and Jezantay. I imagine that the survey party perhaps got roaring drunk in Jezantay and invented the extra travel time to account for their delay in reaching the next checkpoint.

Azenomei to Kaiin

Azenomei to Taun Tassel (1 day)

{Taun Tassel to Taun Sferre – by the safer south road (4 leisurely days)}

Taun Tassel to Viliyat – along the Valley of Graven Tombs (2 days)

Viliyat to Taun Sferre – by the riverside road (1 day)

Taun Sferre to Kaiin – by the riverside road (6 days)

Several Persons in a Boat

Hiring a Water Craft - This is not possible in Azenomei. The boat-owners will demand too high a fee – suspecting that they are being asked to go off on some wild hoon chase. More likely they will demand that the entire vessel is purchased. In Taun Tassel proper, the tedders and local boat-owners will assume (correctly) that the enterprise for which the boat is being hired is for some tomb-robbing expedition. (Illustrate these negative tendencies through bonuses on the Rebuff rolls of the GMCs in question.) Only in the 'Charnels' district might one find the owner of a leaky barge willing to transport characters to the midpoint of the Valley of Graven Tombs for a fee they can afford. However, such a person will not be prepared to then wait

¹ A stolen mermelant will require a higher allotment of beer in order for it to agree not to cry for help whenever they pass other travelers. Likely it will be tempted to over-consume!

² Three miles an hour for nine hours – say ten hours on the road per day including short breaks.

at that point, and will only agree to return the next day if given a substantial retainer. (Even if given the retainer, there is only a 50% chance he will return – having used the retainer to become excessively drunk.) Such a person is also at least 50% likely to rob them before the journey even gets out of sight of the town.

All in all, even in the Charnels, PCs should be struck by the high likelihood of disillusionment, should they choose to depend on river transport. The difficulty of transporting a cart might be the crux of the matter. Nonetheless, if the PCs are capable of taking the cart apart and putting it back together again, they might manage such a trip. If players suggest plans that involve henchmen or hirelings returning at a fixed time, feel free (nay ‘compelled’) to point out the unreliability of folk in the Dying Earth. Even pointing out that any scheme involving someone else turning up as planned at the very least stands a good chance of not working out, and a reasonable chance of being ‘doomed to failure from the start’.

Other reasons why they might simply not consider hiring a boat are: (1) they suffer a state of impecuniousness, (2) they also note that they will require a cart to transport the sarcophagus lid – and a cart will be difficult to transport on a boat, and (3) boat owners and sailors in the vicinity of the valley of Graven Tombs are notoriously likely to suspect a treasure hunt to be in the offing and to demand a cut of the loot (or to wait in ambush for the successful party so as to take an even larger cut – in fact the total amount). GM: If you do not favor the boat option, do not be reticent in allowing PCs to suspect the details of ‘3’ - due to their general experience of the inhabitants of the Dying Earth.

It also goes without saying that riverside folk guard their watercraft with excessive zeal. (As will become apparent if any attempts at theft of such are attempted.) Furthermore, whom amongst the players has chosen Seamanship as a priority skill? Such may have been the case in your campaign, but certainly is not in mine. However, it is never ideal in role-playing games to railroad the PCs into one-choice situations³. Therefore, the PCs may find a way to build a raft, steal a craft of some kind, or even have the funds to purchase a small vessel. (Though a ‘Resist Avarice’ roll must be achieved to make any major investment of this nature.)

Experienced river folk use oars, poles and specialist boating cantraps to guide the smaller vessels. (An oar and sail combination – assisted by actual spells - is common on larger craft, but these are unlikely in the extreme to be available for the PCs.) So, the rogues will be adrift on the mighty Scaum Major. Although the water itself travels at twice the speed of the land-based travel times noted, one needs to constantly direct the course, fend oneself away from the bank, and avoid rocks, fallen trees and other debris. This slows travel to (coincidentally) exactly the same rate as indicated for those travelling by road. For every half-hour the GM rolls a D6. On a roll of 1 some more hazardous obstacles is encountered. Roll another D6 to ascertain its nature:

River Hazards

1 – Swept too close to the shore, the raft is pushed up onto a gravel beach. It is very difficult to re-launch here, due to the current. Providing the PCs have poles, they may try and push themselves free. Two persons must achieve a PS, or three persons must achieve at least an HBS, or four persons at least an EF, to push them free. *The GM decides whether one or two attempts decide the final and ultimate success of this struggle. Each attempt takes 15 mins.*

2 – The raft becomes embedded in a mud bank (50/50 whether against the bank or some distance out into the river). Providing the PCs have poles, they may try and push themselves free. Their chance of success is not good. Two persons must achieve an Illustrious Success, or three persons must achieve at least a Prosaic Success, or four persons at least a Hair’s Breadth Success, to push them free. *The GM decides whether one, two or three attempts decide the final and ultimate success of this struggle. Each attempt takes 20 mins.*

3/4 – The raft is swept close to some kind of an obstacle relatively near to the bank – either a large tree fallen partially-submerged in the river, or a low protruding rock not seen until almost too late. Anyone on watch or specified as being alert may attempt Perception. Provided they get a PS or IS, there is just time enough to act. Two persons with poles must make Athletics successes of PS or IS, or else the craft will smash into the obstacle. If the Athletics attempts were insufficient (or nobody noticed the obstacle until too late) the raft crashes into the obstacle. The GM rolls a single D6. On an IS the raft somehow survives, but begins to disintegrate. It must quickly be polled to the bank. On any other result it is holed or else its bindings come lose within a few rounds. Everyone can scramble ashore. If a PC attempts to rescue anything substantial use rolls for Swimming and Drowning. (DERPG: pp 54/55)

5 – Due to their unfamiliarity with the river, the craft is too close to the bank and instead of bobbing down the calmer section of wider rapids bounces roughly over an uneven maelstrom. The PC with the best Seamanship has one chance to attempt an IS. On any other results the craft capsizes or falls apart. Being close to the bank only those who roll a DF with their Athletics

³ It is always better to at least present the illusion of opportunity.

drown. The rest crawl ashore, though anyone rolling a QF suffers and injury from battering, and on an EF they lose 1 Health point due to scraping against the rocks.

6 – A freshwater keak surfaces and decides to investigate their craft, and this blubbery being attempts to clamber on board. All and everything is tipped into the water. Fortunately they are not so far from the bank (or relatively close to a protruding sandbar a little further downstream) and everyone scrambles ashore whilst the beast chews upon their tasty vessel.

NB: Hazards are more to be applied if the river route is their first choice. If the PCs have already been beaten and robbed by tedders (or others) on their first try to get into the valley, then perhaps the river route will prove surprisingly easy?

GM Note: It is possible both in Taun Tassel or in the valley itself, that the PCs may be correctly identified as tomb-robbers, stripped of all their goods and wealth, beaten and thrown into the river. Do not undermine such possibilities if they are the result of thoughtlessness or amusingly bad luck with dice rolls. After all, the PCs can crawl away, spend another session stealing supplies and arranging disguises, and devise a new plan - such as entering the valley by river or simply from the opposite end to their aborted first attempt. Such a setback might even make them more determined. (Resist Arrogance not to be even more strongly motivated to succeed.)

Azenomei (SVG: pp50-56)

This large town is also covered in exquisite detail in the ‘Guide to Azenomei’ – which is available at the author’s Violet Cusps page. In fact, the scenario before you might well be used to extend a series of adventures set in and around Azenomei. (Despite indications to the contrary in some sources, it is only a day’s travel from Azenomei to Taun Tassel, and from there only around half a day to the central section of the Valley of Graven Tombs.)

Playtest Note: I started my PCs in Azenomei and allowed them (as usual) to keep 10% of the total funds they had at the end of the last adventure. This was sufficient (along with some hard bargaining and a bit of Seduction) to equip themselves with picks, a crowbar, sacks, packs, and a few other odds and ends – including a cart with a false bottom for hiding their equipment and hoped-for spoils. It was indeed most gratifying to see them spending this money themselves rather than having to swindle it off them. ‘One must speculate in order to accumulate’ I quipped, knowing full well that they might end the adventure with nothing – and knowing that they (being used to my style) knew that I knew this.

Taun Tassel (SVG: pp63-69; & XPS Vol.1/Iss.3: pp25-32)

This settlement is not as large in area as Azenomei, but has a larger population. It is a bustling place on the crossroads made by the Scaum Road and the Old Ferghaz Road where it joins one of the roads south to Val Ombrio. Whilst around half of those heading to Val Ombrio detour to Azenomei and take the more direct route from there, those in a hurry shave a half day from their trip by heading immediately south from here. Baron Baumevaunt rules this town, and his guards keep order in the town and sweep optimistic half-men from the surrounding woods. Consequently, although Taun Tassel is walled it would probably be safe enough without these ancient stone protections.

Taun Tassel stands on the juncture of the Scaum and Sune, with the bulk of the town being on the southern shore. Here are its most prosperous residences and businesses, including the haberdasheries for which the town is famed. The baron himself has a large manse (‘Doomerth’) outside of town. Two further sections exist: the smaller Citadel district on the east bank between the rivers (where the milliners and other trades-people have their businesses and homes), and the ruinous Charnels on the north bank (where the poorest folk reside). Many residents of the other two districts will not even acknowledge the Charnels as a true part of the town, although many of the base laborers who maintain the workings of the rest of the settlement live there. This district was long ago dedicated to the funeral arts, and many buildings still sport age-worn carved stone lintels proclaiming them to be funeral parlors, embalmers or stone masons.

Taun Tassel is the least hospitable of all settlements mentioned in this section. The inhabitants of both the Citadel and the Town Proper are arrogant and self-important in the extreme, and regard ensemble as everything. Even to cross the bridges one must wear the appropriately colored collar. Such intricacies once often lead to blows, and so in the interests of decorum, the baron now turns a blind eye to travelers that bribe the bridge guards in order to obtain shoddy temporary collars made of colored paper (which soon disintegrate).

Those arriving from Azenomei will be travelling along the north bank of the river, and so will enter the Citadel district first. The inns in both the Citadel and the town proper are highly overpriced, so PCs will likely find themselves residing in the Charnels. Several disreputable taverns exist away from the river, but these are clearly of a very rough nature and anyone going into one is likely to be ridiculed, robbed and kicked black and blue - though not necessarily in

that order. The Charnels are dangerous, and anyone venturing into the streets away from the river after dark will be robbed and beaten with cudgels, and possibly stabbed and thrown into the river for good measure.

Fortunately, on the riverfront near the bridge is the ‘Inn of the Malachite Sarcophagus’ (the only proper inn within the Charnels). Though rough and basic, it does have rooms with stout doors and serves half-decent beer and meals that do not obviously contain vermin as a principle ingredient. However, newcomers who look as though they might be easily intimidated will initially be charged ridiculous prices and fed yesterdays leftovers that have been hurriedly reheated into a foul gruel. If challenged on such behavior, both the innkeeper (Grefindule⁴) and the clientele, treat the incident as a great joke.

The roughly dressed clientele in the front bar are mostly workers in the Citadel, although a substantial number also work seasonally amongst the local vineyards, and many (of both groups) are also tomb-robbers by hobby. They are not overly threatened by foreign tomb-robbers, as 99% of those who come this way either find nothing or die in the attempt - after which their bodies can be looted. Nonetheless, they will be scathing in the extreme towards the ill-prepared, and tell many horrible tales about hideous death out amongst the tombs. The regulars in the second bar are a more civilized sort, and are the most successful of the Charnels’ residents (although this isn’t saying much). Dressed in sturdy work clothes, they have an air of surly confidence, and on tables before them one can see pruning knives and small crossbows. Most of these folk are the under-tedders who work for the vineyard owners who live in the Citadel or (more usually) in the Town Proper. These drinkers look extremely askance at probable tomb-robbers, and are highly suspicious of any travelers who do not have a good reason for heading down the Scaum.

Those PCs who thought to buy a cart and draft animal in Taun Tassel will be somewhat disappointed. Anything from the other districts will be insanely expensive, and the best they can get in the Charnels is a rickety contraption pulled by an elderly drogger. In any other district they will also face the suspicion of the vineyard owners – who will automatically assume that some manner of tomb-robbery is afoot (and will alert the guards – who will attempt to detain and question the PCs).

The SVG suggests that most who live in the Charnels make a living by tomb-robbing. More likely many who live in the Charnels have attempted tomb robbery at some time, but it is likely that very few actually make a living out of it. However, it is entirely possible that a significant proportion of residents of the Charnels are those who came here to set up a base specifically for a career in tomb robbery, and are now reduced to menial labor for the wealthier classes.

Adventure/Encounter ideas: (i) Moolar, Master of the Yellow Orb, (SVG: p67) recognizes dupes when he sees them. He will furtively approach the PCs and attempt to interest them (Ψ PERSUASION) in supporting his book. Hopefully the PCs will recognize a source of information and string him along. (ii) If the PCs are destitute and seeking to get hold of supplies, or a cart and beast, someone (presumably one of his trusted lackeys) will put them in contact with Promebaust (SVG: p65). Promebaust is looking for some rascals to perform an act of secret sabotage (SVG: p66) and will provide temporary torqus of the appropriate style (SVG: p68). In return for a job well done he will secretly aid them to gain all the supplies and transportation that they need. If they succeed spectacularly he may even help them further (at the GM’s discretion). NB: Though I did not do so in the playtest, I recommend taking full advantage of these adventure opportunities in Taun Tassel to expand this scenario even further.

Playtest Note: The ‘Footsteps of Fools’ PCs were almost out of money, so had their cart and mermelant lodged overnight in the secure yard of the ‘Inn of the Malachite Sarcophagus’. (Convincing the yardboy that they would pay upon departure.) Then one by one they left the bar (or snuck in over the wall) and all slept in the cart or hayloft overnight. In the morning the stableboy found them, and was about to kick up a fuss when a bribe was offered. In the end the stableboy was soundly beaten in the Persuasion contest, and so the IS-rolling PC paid no bribe, and only half of the agreed fee for lodging cart and mermelant overnight, and left with a parting: “Since we were never here, be glad you are getting even this!”

Doomerth (SVG: p74)

With Taun Tassel being such an irritating place, some PCs might consider travelling the extra few miles to what appears to be another settlement. Unfortunately, Doomerth is the manse of Taun Tassel’s baron, and not a small homely town. PCs who fail to make adequate inquiries might make the arduous trip along the steep cliff road only to be rudely turned away by the guards.

⁴ Grefindule is tall, hirsute and with disproportionately long arms. In short clearly containing plasms of half-man – most likely erb. It would be unwise in the extreme to mention such observations.

Avoiding the River Route

Careful perusers of the official Scaum Valley map might ponder on the wisdom of avoiding the river altogether and approaching the site from the north or south. North of the river lies the dangerous depths of the Old Ferghaz Forest, and so this is definitely not an option. (As anyone will advise them.) To the south of the Scaum at this point, according to the official map it seems as if perhaps only five or six miles of relatively light forest – or perhaps even grassland – blocks the way. (Although of course they would then need to cross the vigorous river.) In the reality of this adventure (and the observant might notice that the map accompanying this scenario has been adjusted to reflect this⁵), the distance is closer to ten miles – and through densely forested rocky terrain inhabited by asms, erbs and deodands. Such need not be stressed, but only revealed in a matter of fact fashion - in response to questioning. The exceptionally determined who nonetheless attempt this southern route should be further discouraged by half-men attacks and substantial rocky gullies that need to be traversed. In short, the valley route is the way the PCs will be going.

5) Passing Along the Valley of Graven Tombs

(XPS Vol.1/Iss.3: pp17-24; & SVG: p71)

Pay attention to the time at which the PCs leave their place of accommodation from the night before. Presume that locals arise about 7am, and indolent wanderers are more likely to stir around 8 or even 8.30. Then it is likely to take an hour for breakfasting and other preparations. Cunning and practical persons may get going far sooner, but a Resistance to Indolence must be attempted to even suggest such a thing – and certainly must be attempted in order to get out of bed at the same time as the common lumpen prepare for their day of tedious drudgery. In all likelihood 9am is the earliest the PCs will leave the inn, and the following text assumes this time. Alter the following itinerary as necessary, and note that within the lands of the Dying Earth time is told in such terms as ‘ten of the clock’ and ‘a quarter before eleven’ and ‘half after noon’ – not according to our modern parlance.

Outside Town (9am): Once the PCs leave town, they will immediately notice that the road along the north bank⁶ lacks the signs of constant heavy use. However, signs of civilization continue aplenty, as acres and acres of grapevines cover the hillsides. Any PC with a negative Sympathy Rating must attempt to ‘Resist Gourmandism’ in the standard fashion, as must any PC that has insufficiently dined the previous evening. (Or, if you prefer the opportunity for maximum mayhem, the tantalizing grapes simply impel everyone to Resist Gourmandism and those that are particularly hungry take a penalty.) Anyone who fails is motivated to climb over the low walls or through the bird nets and sample some of these succulent fruits. Be warned, any Perception success will reveal the grape tenders (or ‘tedders’) watching with suspicion from the vines. Although the nearest of these might be a good half a mile distant, a number from two to a half-dozen or more will quickly converge to discourage any thieves that they observe. (See ‘Angry Tedders’ below). Note that in order to test whether the PC/s is/are observed the players may attempt Stealth or Concealment. Then the GM rolls a single die per PC who failed their attempt. On a success of any kind, a tedder spots suspicious movement - and D6 fellows are present in his vicinity (and enthusiastically accompany him to chastise the thieves).

On the southern side of the wide and fast-flowing ‘Scaum Major’, travelers will also notice local farmers tending fields of barley and hops. These folk are the prosperous producers of the famous Bonefield Ale.

Angry Tedders

The initial tedder will do the ‘negotiations’ and the others will stand back fingering their crossbows. During playtest I decided that the tedders would demand a standard 100t fine for devouring grapes. (There were three tedders – one young, one middle-aged, and one elderly. The middle-aged one did the talking, whilst the others held back with crossbows cocked.)

Violence - If the tedders outnumber the PCs, only extreme flattery is likely to allow any thieves – and their associates – to escape a battering. The tedders will Rebuff at +1 if they are in strength, although if non-grape-eating PCs turn on their fellows and beat them soundly, that might be sufficient to nullify this advantage. Otherwise, bribery is often a good option. Of course, in the manner of Cugel-Level RPG, it is always possible that some obscure explanation might be offered, such as being ‘grape quality testers’, but without any back-up credentials or equipment. Or perhaps the others might pretend that the offending PC is holy or mad?

⁵ Though this should never be pointed out. Rather, whenever a player suggests referring to a map, merely offer the handout.

⁶ A road along the southern bank is also noted in some sources. Should you wish to remain more closely faithful to this, perhaps that road is now largely a ruin, used only by those tending the fields of barley and hops for the famous ‘Bonefield Ale’.

Threats – If the tedders are outnumbered or outclassed, they will not approach to close combat range, but will stand some yards away with crossbows unslung - demanding compensation. They claim that if this is not given immediately, they will run and alert more of their fellows, and that whilst this might take a little time, they will surely soon catch them on the road and administer fitting punishment. The tedders who are outclassed gain no bonus to their Rebuff of any reasonable Persuasions or Impostures offered by the PCs.

Playtest Note: *The PCs failed abysmally to convince the tedders of their right to sample grapes. When a PC tried to cast doubt in the tedders' own legitimacy, they pulled out a contract signed and sealed by Baron Baumevaunt. In the end, it seemed inevitable they would have to pay the fine, although one PC tried to sell the one that had eaten grapes as a slave. (The tedders decried this as a foul practice!) When all else failed, one PC evoked his cantrap 'Discommoding Dazzle', and whilst the three tedders were blinded, they were thumped into unconsciousness and robbed of their pistols, cash, special tedder hats, and contract document. This garnered several negative sympathy points, let me tell you – especially when the attack on the elderly tedder failed and I decided that in a stunning attempt this basically meant that they were beating him as he howled for mercy.*

The Tedder Crossbow Pistol

We can imagine that this device is similar to the Dart Pistol that is briefly described in XPS Vol. 1 No. 6 (p84). See more complete details on this device in the appropriate appendix at the end of this piece. (Page 50)

Into the Valley (10am): Within an hour or so, travelers will begin to notice that the gently-sloping valley wall on their own side of the river is evidencing half-buried ruins of a small ancient buildings. Surely many of these are too small to be houses? Knowledgeable PCs will of course recognize the battered remains of crypts and mausoleums – for they are now truly entering the Valley of Graven Tombs. As they continue, the north side of the river continues to rise in an imposing slope, and more and more ancient monuments of all sizes and shapes are seen to protrude from the ground. However, not only do any that can be seen clearly look to have been long ago hewn open, but also tedders glower from the hillsides, and the vinefields are still thick across the slopes. More of these structures are visible on the southern shore, where the rise of the land is not nearly so pronounced, but again, field laborers watch with suspicion if anyone attempts to cross the river.

Suspicious Tedders

Around half-way through the next section a group of tedders exactly equal in number to the PCs are seen working close to the road - loading grapes onto a dray to which a mermelant is harnessed. The tedders are immediately suspicious that the PCs are tomb robbers, and approach them with hostile demeanor: *"I note by your bearing and furtive manner that you are clearly tomb robbers; only permission to examine your belongings will convince us otherwise."* The PCs must either Persuade the tedder leader he is wrong, or allow their goods to be searched, or simply attack them in the hopes that no other tedders observe this action. If a search begins, the PCs must hope any hidden compartments stay that way. Make only two Perception attempts for the tedders, and apply penalties according to how well the goods were concealed. Any poor result for the PCs in this encounter is likely to lead to an armed confrontation. (Unless they can convince the tedder leader that their equipment has some other purpose. For any such attempt the tedder will Rebuff at +1.) If the PCs are beaten, they will be thrown into the riverside silt, deprived of any valuables - and any tomb-robbing equipment will be either taken away or thrown as far out into the river as possible.

Tedder: Fortright ~+3, Lawyerly ~+3, Strength ~, Dodge ~, Health ~, Athletics 4, Perception 4, Wherewithal 4

Playtest Note: *The PCs did much better here. Their spokesperson scored an Illustrious Success over the tedder spokesperson. So, not only was the cart not searched, but the tedders fell for the Imposture ploy – the PCs claimed to be tedders who had newly inherited a tract of vineyard and were off to tend it. (This was so preposterous that I deemed that only an IS would be sufficient – but that's what they got.)*

The Extent of the Vineyards (2pm): It takes almost four more hours before the vineyards even begin to thin. This is the furthest reasonable distance the tedders are prepared to travel, and although the poorest and most desperate have plots this far out and even a bit further, these continue to become scarcer and scarcer. After another hour or so, the last of these are left behind. It will take another hour beyond this (a total of around six hours) before the PCs reach the point of no return. After this they will be unable to go back to the settlement - from which they departed in the morning – before nightfall, unless the jog most of the way. (And this all presumes they departed in summer when the hours of daylight are longest.)

Lutashko

If you have possession of the ‘Scaum Valley Gazetteer’, Lutashko the Man-Island (SVG: p167) catches up with them (or drifts downstream past them – depending on which direction they are travelling). This strange being, and his avian associate, are enjoying the peace of the day, and will be open to communication. If both groups are travelling in the same direction and the PCs are sufficiently friendly, he may carry both them and their cart/barrow for a while. (This will save them half an hour.)

Playtest Note: *Lutashko took the PCs by surprise, and they had no idea what to make of him. Then one PC made an HBS (PS with my stated penalty of 1) on Pedantry and so I gave some basic information on him. A brief shouted conversation had Lutashko say that yes he had heard of Axomber the famous sage and philosopher, and reveal the knowledge that he believed this same Axomber went insane towards the end of his life. This created a nice edge to the scenario as the Players/PCs realized for the first time (yes, hard to believe in DERPG isn’t it) that perhaps they were somehow being duped to go on this mission. Lutashko also confirmed the presence of a great gray inselberg some miles ahead.*

Beyond the Point of No Return (4pm): From now on, the multitude of semi-buried tombs spread back up the slopes as far as the eye can see, and are obscured by scrub brush and stunted trees rather than by elegant vines. Small woodlands of straggling trees are also in evidence. Not all of the ancient mausoleums look as if they have been obviously looted; however, years of soil creep may well have simply covered up the entry points. You are now deep within the fifteen-mile long uncultivated section of the valley, where tedders fear to tread. In fact, you are utterly alone, and the ancient roadway is overgrown and in some places obscured by inches of soil, or has partially collapsed into a new meander of the river. The wide and fast-flowing Scaum is your only companion, and although river-traffic still occasionally passes you by, it stays far from the bank, and the majority of river travelers regard you with suspicion.

GM Note: During playtest of this section I began to call for occasional Driving rolls to illustrate the poor condition of the road. On DFs the cart became bogged and had to be freed by efforts of great strength. Fortunately Boris the yardboy was good at driving and saved them several times.

The Heart of the Valley (5pm): Soon they will see the ‘great gray inselberg’ in the distance across the river. After yet another hour of vigorous walking, the PCs draw abreast of it, and can assume that they are at approximately the mid-section of the Valley of Graven Tombs.

6) Finding Axomber’s Crypt

The parchment provides adequate instruction. Nonetheless, it would be way too easy for them to just waltz up to the door of the crypt. Thus, in the century or so since the parchment was written, things have changed.

Remember to keep track of time, as dusk begins at 8.30pm, and night has fallen by 10.00pm.

“The great gray inselberg.”

This large protrusion of volcanic rock stands around 10m tall and 15m across on the very edge of the south bank of the river. On the map the GM can be aware that it stands directly above the ‘a’ of Graven. Exactly how distant the waterlogged shrine is from this landmark is up to the GM, but it should certainly be within half a mile on either side of the inselberg.

“A small ruined shrine with two domes – waterlogged”

⊕ “Obviously this area has flooded sometime in the last few months. The banks of the river are partially collapsed, and many small buildings are now half-hidden in the murky waters.”

This shrine is one of those that have collapsed - half into itself and half into the river. The PCs actually have to walk along the river’s edge, examining the numerous ruined structures embedded in the bank, until they find the one with the collapsed dome. (And notice that half of the building has fallen into the river.) Presume for convenience that each stage of the search takes around half an hour. Describe their wandering and peering as they examine the various submerged and semi-submerged ruins. Especially note that great banks of brambles obscure the lower tombs on the other side of the path at the base of the hill.

Perception:

DF – Part of the bank collapses and you slip down the sodden muddy bank before plunging into the river.

QF – Part of the bank collapses and you are in danger of plunging into the river. (Make an IS or PS with Athletics, or else fall in.)

EF – You step into a muddy puddle somewhat deeper than you expected. Your trews are sodden and you look a sight.

HBS – You do not notice any ruin resembling a twin-domed shrine.

PS – You do not notice any ruin resembling a twin-domed shrine, but you do find something else. (See the ‘Found Something’ table below.)

IS – You have found the twin-domed shrine. Although one of the domed sections has utterly collapsed, and the other is barely visible, you are certain that this is the building.

Playtest Note: *Falling in and being covered with fetid river mud became an amusing pastime for PCs (amusing for Players and GM of course).*

Found Something!

1 – You have discovered a clawed footprint vaguely representing the shape of a human foot. (*Living Rough or Tracking PS or IS identifies this as a deodand footprint.*)

2 – You have discovered a clawed footprint vaguely looking more insectoid than human. (*Living Rough or Tracking PS or IS identifies this as a asm footprint.*)

3 – You have found a single terce protruding from the soft ground.

4 – You have found a small leather purse encrusted with mud, trodden underfoot. (Inside are 17 terces and a single gold centrum.)

5 – Here in the grass is a small metal stick, looking like nothing less than a mage’s wand. As you look more closely you can see tiny sigils scratched up and down its length. (Anyone with a Magic rating of 4 or more who picks up the wand will sense that it is waiting for something. If the person then attempts to attune themselves to the wand, this requires an IS – re-rolls allowed – with their first attempt. If successful, the wand is now theirs, and no-one else can use it – unless it is re-attuned after having been out of the owner’s possession for 24 hours or more. It bestows on the new owner – and alerts them of this fact by intuitive knowing – the ability to cast the cantrap ‘Codwill’s Minor Excavation’. [This cantrap is detailed in the article on ‘Cantraps’ also to be found on the Violet Cusps page.]

6 – In the grass against the foot of a tomb you have found a small mildewed leather packet. (Inside this packet are five inch-long strands of thick silver wire. These are actually several minims of explosive diambroid. This material is highly dangerous, being activated by any sharp blow that causes it to deform. It is ideal for assisting with the demolition of the crypt door, and presumably was just the kind of operation it was brought here for. The best way to use it would be to chip deep holes in the door’s edge at some crucial point such as the center of a side, wedge in the diambroid and then throw rocks at it from a safe distance.)

NB: Re-roll 1, 2 & 3 when rolled again after the first time.

Pedantry on the Silver Wire

DF: “Hmm, here are five strips of wire...”

QF: “...I wonder what they do?”

EF: “Perhaps they are Explosive Diambroid,...”

HBS: “...that material which can obliterate anything in a small area...”

PS: “...and is activated by a sharp blow.”

IS: “I’d better be careful I don’t drop it and destroy my own legs!”

Physical Labor

Note that only a PC who Resists Indolence will ever begin a physical activity such as bramble-clearing without first trying to Persuade someone else that they are better suited to the task. Each section of clearing required should be preceded by a group argument to see who actually does the work. During this time, the players should be notified as to the passing of time as the indolent PCs bicker amongst themselves. Keep this up only as long as it is amusing.

GM Note: If you are introducing the GMCs to the party, now is a good time to do so. With all this work to do, the more people to argue about who does it the better! In the playtest, since two PCs volunteered whilst the other two just looked at them as if they were mad - and settled down for a sleep in the wagon - I didn’t ask for Resistance rolls.

(Playtest Notes: *The PCs spent so long trying to find the collapsed twin-domed shrine that they ended up having to camp down here. One PC had already started to hack away the brambles – on the wrong avenue – and so they concealed the cart here by covering it in brambles. Then they found – due to an IS Perception – a great crypt to hide in, sealing up the entrance with rocks except for a small gap. Bobb the*

mermelant came inside with them, and no-one had considered that Bobb would need to perform his bodily functions throughout the night. Ab me, how we laughed. Since it was unsafe to go outside, they were stuck with it. I even called for Wherewithal rolls, and the PC who got a DF tried desperately to get out and had to be restrained. During the night both of the members of first watch failed to Resist Indolence and fell asleep. Fortunately one made a PS with Perception and woke up as the deodand started to remove rocks in order to squeeze in. This was quickly injured with a crossbow bolt and then backed apart as it tried its plaintive calls for flesh.

I had Sad Neric appear later (as the PCs were chatting after having been woken en masse by a particularly strong voiding from Bobb). I decided that only those who succeeded with Wherewithal (PS/IS) would realize he was an interloper – and had them roll periodically. Due to this, those conscious that he was a ghost and not a party-member kept varying. (The Players/PCs had assumed this was his crypt, so I decided that this made sense, and made it so.) During the conversation Neric was actually useful and told the PC who found the wand earlier how to attune to it. Eventually I decided that any who failed Wherewithal would fall asleep. All did bar one PC, and Neric stole a couple of things and faded away. This PC couldn't wake the others (because of Neric's charm-effect, and because it made good role-playing fun at the time) and so she was left on watch by herself. During a restless night she managed to slay one deodand and two asms with the crossbow pistols as they tried to squeeze in or as (in the deodand's case) they wheedled outside. Of course in the morning the rest of the PCs failed to give her credit for saving their lives, giving only cursory glances to the half-men corpses as they went off to make breakfast.

"Turn then up the wide row between the tombs, and travel past seven intersections."

- Being as the base of the hill is very overgrown, the PCs must hack a way through in order to see the row that they need to travel up. This requires Living Rough or Attack rolls from everyone involved, each one being presumed to be equivalent to 20 minutes of activity. The rolled result shows how much actual effective work was accomplished during that time. *The PCs must achieve a total of DF [5 mins] – With blathering incompetence you not only badly gash yourself (lose 1 Health), but also cause a branch to whip into the face of one of your colleagues (they lose 1 Health as well); QF [10 mins] – During your inept battle with the thorn bushes you gouge yourself badly on brambles (lose 1 Health point); EF [15 mins] – Whilst struggling aimlessly with the briars your clothing sustains a significant and noticeable tear; HBS [20 mins] – Whilst backing away madly, your clothing snags and is damaged, yet still you labor on; PS [25 mins] – You proceed with commendable aplomb and manage to avoid injury to yourself or your accoutrements; IS [30 mins] – You hack and slash with admirable gusto; these brambles are no match for you!* Once the PCs have achieved a group total of two hours, they have cleared away sufficient vegetation to see the base of the main pathway. (**Playtest Note:** *Bramble wounds also became a most amusing factor as the players imagined their inept PCs trying to master the wilderness with wild swings and muffled curses.*)
- It will be somewhere near the start of this ascent that the PCs will find the remains of the previous expedition. If the PCs are low on gear, then scattered amongst the weeds will be tarnished picks, shovels, and even a chest still attached to two sturdy wooden poles – indicating that porters carried it from both ends. The most distressing finds are the bones and scraps of clothing from the previous expedition members. Some were consumed on the spot, and others presumably carried away – although one can only hope that perhaps two or three escaped. On one corpse is a bone scroll case containing an identical parchment to the one they carry. (Presumably replicated by magic.) (**Playtest Note:** *The fact that the parchments were utterly identical, down to the last crease, also gave the PCs pause for thought, but nonetheless they continued with their mission. Had they thought to turn back I would have called for Resistances vs. Avarice to do so.*)
- Now the PCs also need to cut their way up the hill. Fortunately the brambles and bushes are less dense away from the base of the hill, and also animal tracks of varying sizes can be used. Each character must roll Living Rough or Tracking as they make their way up to the eighth intersection. GMs choose how many times this challenge must be met. *DF – You have suffered injuries to both clothing and flesh, and lose 1 Health point; QF/EF – Your clothes are now torn in numerous places; HBS – You pass through the vegetation with only a few cuts and tears; PS/IS – You make your way along with delicate skill suffering no indignities whatsoever.* This trip takes half an hour. (Plus any significant additional time due to the following encounters or any other PC actions.)
- Three encounters of note will occur during this careful trek. **(1)** Firstly, hidden in the underbrush one of the characters will see (Perception roll as they pass) a corpse. When examined, it is an uncomely rogue, three days dead, with his face locked in a grimace of terror. Also, something has torn open his belly and devoured his entrails, though any Physician or Perception success will reveal that this happened after death. If the corpse is searched, inside the belt are 23 terces in a secret compartment, and inside a small pack on his back are contents identical to those carried by one of the PCs (choose a sheet at random) except for any magical items. **(2)** Secondly, a carnivorous plant settled beside the path here only two days ago – waiting for a succulent half-man to pass. It has a 1-2 chance on D6 of attacking the first person to pass, increasing by 1 point for every further character. If the PCs

get passed without an attack, it has obviously eaten recently. Otherwise, the plant lashes out with rubbery vines, attempting to grapple a victim and haul that unfortunate back into its gaping toothed maw. (Behind which is the acid-filled digestion chamber in which food is gripped by muscular ribs whilst it slowly dissolves.) GM invents appropriate ratings.



(3) Finally, as they approach the point at which they hope to see the eighth sideways trail of tombs, a faint voice may (Ψ PERCEPTION) be heard issuing from a long crack that has split the side of a sarcophagus set into the ground. (This may once have been raised, and long since been partially buried by the gradual accumulation of dirt.) The voice appears to be muttering to itself. If anyone addresses the crack, or holds a conversation in the vicinity of the crack, the voice will call out to ask who is there. It will identify itself as Lord Pestramon, and beg them to cast of the sarcophagus lid and let the clean air cleanse his resting-place and set him free. Although he promises that several bejewelled items lie with his corpse he is lying. He is of course a hideous undead, and anyone opening the sarcophagus deserves the frightening apparition (Wherewithal) and other consequences (Attack, Defense, Athletics) they bring upon themselves.

"At the eighth (intersection), turn right and cut across towards the little mock temple with twin statues of Fate and Fortune on top."

Again these are hard to see now, as the trees are much bigger. So the PCs need to hack and slash their way in the general direction. Rather than rolling some more, simply say that this takes half an hour or so. (After all, the PCs are surely getting used to their exertions by now.) The mock temple itself has long since had its central sarcophagus smashed open and emptied, though its fine architectural remains to be admired. The two statues are

- 1) A proud and beautiful woman standing aloof, with her head partially turned to one side. She carries a set of scales in one hand, but holds them casually as if they hold little interest for her. Her garb is of a classical style long-since passed out of de-rigueur. (Fortune)
- 2) A woman both sly and attractive, with a third eye on her forehead. She too is dressed in classical garb, but on her left side it is of high quality and on her right it is so tattered as to be basically rags. (Fate)

Pedantry on Fate and/or Fortune

DF: "I know nothing of such things."

QF: "The gods are all rumors – beings invented by priests in order to gain power and prestige..."

EF: "...although perhaps long ago they were real."

HBS: "I maybe once have heard that Fate and Fortune were widely worshipped by merchants and adventurers."

PS: "Perhaps we too might benefit from such a practice, since it would cost us little to try..."

IS: "...although meddling in the fates may perhaps prove as risky as it might be rewarding."

What Time is it? – You should be keeping track, and alerting the PCs as to when dusk falls.

(Playtest Notes: After a very late start (they woke late due to their harrowing night before), the hours it took to clear a way up the slope, and the hours spent trying to open the crypt door, the PCs had to spend a second night in the wilds. This wasn't lengthy in terms of role-playing, as I simply alerted them to the fact that each of the several rolls for bramble-bashing signified more than an hour's work. The wand was very useful in clearing the debris before the tomb, but without the diambroid – which they didn't find – they couldn't get the tomb open. One of the PCs had the great idea of creating a lever from a tree-trunk and went off to get one, whilst someone else chiseled a gap at the edge of the crypt door. Before attempting this, the PCs decided to spend the night in the shrine to Fate and Fortune, which was a possibility I hadn't considered. Fortunately, the session ended shortly after this decision, so the following section on the shrine was added in before the next episode.) Incidentally, it is of course up to the GM if diambroid can blow open the crypt door. It makes sense that it could, if planted properly.

The Shrine to Fate and Fortune

This building is octagonal, some 40ft across and 10ft high, and is mostly obscured amongst the undergrowth. Again it requires Perception rolls to spot, until one is very close. The statues themselves are around 4ft high, and although dilapidated are in surprisingly good condition considering their age. Should the PCs explore this edifice, or decide to spend the night here, use the following ideas:

- It is defensible, having only one small door (Though cracks in the walls and ceiling are several inches across in a few places, all of these can be blocked with debris or grasses/moss etc)
- Inside are two rooms: the larger main chamber still containing several solid stone platforms (possibly benches) that could be useful for sleeping on (especially if moss and grasses are gathered in great heaps for padding). There is also a smaller antechamber housing an altar – long-since devoid of decoration but still featuring ancient carvings of dancers (male and female) dressed in classical garb.

- Hidden beneath a loose flag in the main chamber is a box containing a small silver statue of fate. Should this statue be taken a single mile beyond this place⁷ the thief will suffer a levy of 1 to all rolls of Rebuff, Concealment, Gambling, and Stealth for as long as the GM sees fit. The statue is hard to get rid of, as it always reappears - and may only be left at another shrine to Fate and Fortune (or returned to this one), or dispelled of its curse by a mage. If it is sold, left, or given away it vanishes within the hour and returns to the PC. At the GM’s discretion it may be stolen (rather than finally disappearing) or may be gambled away – but only if the PC thinks of this possibility after sufficient amusement has been had.

- Every night several dozen ghosts attend the shrine, petitioning for solace. Should the shrine be occupied, they will wait patiently outside (gathered in a sinister and terrifying silent crowd). Anyone who observes them must succeed in a Wherewithal roll to continue to function normally. (The GM is also welcome to use the rules on ‘Suffering Supernatural Terror’ available at the Violet Cusps page – or to adapt said rules to this situation – for maximum amusement.) In the playtest, the ghosts were spoken with, and talked with classy British accents. It turned out that they were unable to enter an occupied crypt without being invited, were here to petition their escape from this dull half-life, normally took it in turns to enter the crypt, could not enter Axomber’s crypt due to enchantments, and had been here so long that they could hardly remember who they were or even whatever tragic event it was that turned them into a ghost! One also revealed that the disembodied voice a PC had conversed with nearby – see above – was a lich-mage whose sole amusement is the devouring of travelers.

- Should the PCs have avoided sufficient amusement from half-men the night before, feel free to add such things here instead.

- Those who sleep here will dream of the lives they could be living. Each PC rolls a single die, with penalties possibly applied dependent on the spread of negative Sympathy points:

DF: “You are living the life of a beggar in Kaiin’s Fringe District. Life is dire, unfashionable, and uncomfortable in the extreme, and your best meals come from scraps gathered from the edges of the market place. Every day you live in fear that Prince Kandive’s vigils will arrest you for vagrancy and throw you into the deodand pits, and all persons of worth spurn you as if you were a mangy dog.” (On waking, the PC in question has slightly changed character. This is reflected by their having – in this order – either: lost a point of Etiquette, lost a point of Wherewithal, or lost a point of Resist Avarice. The optional list is given in case any PCs have no points in some abilities.)

QF: As DF, except the PC has also gained a point of Living Rough.

EF: You live the life of a poor working man/woman in Kaiin’s Canal Town. Life is drudgery and days are long. Canal Town stinks, and the glimpses you get of Kaiin’s wealthy folk fill you with seething resentment.”

HBS: “You are a crafter living and working in Kaiin’s Threek District. Life is hard, but you have sufficient money for a drink or two every week, several friends of reasonable quality, and the district festivals provide occasional relief to the boredom. Still, you cannot help but feel somewhat mistreated by fate, when you are often employed by those with more wealth than you can ever dream of.”

PS1: “You are a merchant of Kaiin, living and working in the Scholasticarium District. Life is good, both social and professional, and you have a small comfortable home and a fine family.” (On waking, the PC has an additional point in Appraisal or Stewardship.)

PS2: “You are a citizen of Kaiin, making your living from gambling and running confidence tricks at the Tracks and sometimes in other districts. You are good at what you do, and smart enough to avoid penury or legal ramifications. You have a number of trustworthy associates with whom you have formed a mutual support group to watch for vigils and assist each other when profits are lean.” (On waking, the PC has an additional point in Gambling or Scuttlebutt.)

PS3: “You are a student at Kaiin’s famous Scholasticarium, having won a Scholarship under some ancient and obscure tradition. You spend many hours studying knowledge and magic, and even more hours enjoying the student life in various drinking dens and places of luxuriant entertainment. However, you are smart enough not to carouse to excess, and never gamble away your living expenses. Life is good.” (On waking, the PC has an additional point in Pedantry or Magic – use the Magic option only if the rating is low compared to the other PCs.)

⁷ IE these Rebuffs will not kick in until the PCs have finished the crypt exploration and are leaving the area.

IS: “You are the member of a noble family living in a fine manse in Kaiin’s Odkin Prospect. Thanks to the wealth of your relatives you live a life of ease, culture and entertainment. Nothing is beyond your reach – clothes, food, drink, couching partners, works of art.” (Have any PC with this dream make a roll to Resist Indolence⁸. Should they succeed, they retained control over their appetites and wake up having gained a bonus point in both Etiquette and Seduction. Should they fail, they gain a bonus point only in Seduction, and also lose a Resistance point in either: Rakishness, Avarice, Gourmandism or Indolence.)

GM Notes: If more than one PC gets the same result, alter the description so that the PCs are together in the dream. Except PS – where three possible options are given. (If more than three are rolled, the GM will need to improvise another.) In the playtest, one PC got DF and another QF, so the slightly more fortunate one ended up stealing cabbage leaves from their scabrous and infirm associate. Likewise, two rolled IS, and one failed the Resistance whilst the other succeeded. Thus, they were brother and sister in a rich family – the brother a classy rake, the sister a wild debaucher. It is up to the GM whether further nights spent in the shrine have similar results – or if these dreams are a unique occurrence. If possible elaborate the descriptions further and allow the Players to improvise details for their PC. For instance PCs in the same dream might be rival squabbling beggars, or friendly fellow workers or students, or noble brothers. The optional bonus/penalty abilities are given in rough order of preference. The GM decides, based on which changes alter the character concept the least.

The purpose of this shrine was so that mourners could come here after a service and pray that they are as successful as (or learn from the mistakes of) the deceased. It was considered important to recognize the lessons inherent in the life of the dearly departed, so that their successes could be emulated and that their errors need not be repeated. Also, one could pray for general blessings, for the removal of curses etc. It was considered by the creators of the shrine – and by the many mourners who passed through – that this place of so many memories and possibilities was a perfect site of power.

Anyone praying at the shrine for good luck in their following enterprise rolls a single die. Give a bonus of 1 if their efforts are well role-played and sincere, and a penalty of 1 if they have a significant number of negative sympathy points. (This comparative assessment is up to the GM.) Give also a penalty of 1 if the PC has damaged the shrine whilst ransacking it for treasure. Result:

DF: 1 point lost from Athletics and Health pools (Don’t mess with the fates, buddy!)

QF: No result whatsoever.

EF: Athletics and Health rating pools gain 2 points

HBS: Athletics, Defense and Health ratings pools gain 2 points each

PS: Athletics, Attack, Defense, Health, and Perception ratings pools gain 2 points each

IS: Athletics, Attack, Defense, Health, Perception, Persuade and Wherewithal ratings pools gain 2 points

These points may increase a pool beyond maximum, but these new points are temporary only. Note also that the GM does not reveal these bonuses until the PCs have been transported into the Reception Room (9.1). This is so that no player knows to emulate the PC of another, and also because the PCs cannot return from the Reception Room to the shrine to boost their pools some more. Also mark that in the perceptions of the PCs these changes are so subtle that unless a PC strikes a remarkable run of good luck in the crypt, it is unlikely they will make a connection. Still, any PC who survives may well wish to thank Fate and Fortune and may pray here again. Since the PCs are unlikely to come back to the shrine very often (or ever) the GM may allow similar results a second time. As per the Law of Equipose, the GM may also arrange for the PCs to shortly come across some injustice – perhaps orphans being beaten in Taun Sfere, or a man on the road recently robbed and cudged and having lost everything, or both. Anyone who gained at the shrine and does not help here loses an equal number of points to those they gained. (As soon as the opportunity to assist is completely over.)

“Upslope - a short way back and to the right behind the little temple - is a gully. At the end of the gully is the entrance to Axomber’s crypt.”

The gully is easily visible from the vicinity of the shrine. Its walls at the entrance are only 7ft high, but rise to nearer 20ft at the end. It is about 60ft long, and along the edges one can just make out half-collapsed niches large enough to contain small statues. (These statues are all broken and cracked, and are of the ancestors of Axomber.) Getting along the gully takes another quarter-hour of vigorous bramble hacking (to clear a path wide enough to travel down without constant snagging of one’s clothes and skin). Presumably this was once a solemn walkway, though nowadays its proud flags are covered by inches of dirt, and if urns or beds of flowers once existed along the pathway they are but distant memories. The end of the gully has collapsed, and any doorway or other entrance has been buried under a large heap of soil. (If it is already dusk, the fact that the end of the gully has collapsed will not be noticed unless someone examines it at close range – IE from above or after hacking through the brambles to get to it.)

GM Note: Some PCs may wish to reach the crypt entrance from above, to save all that hacking through brambles. Whilst brambles are slightly less thick outside the gully, they nonetheless exist, and going any other way also involves climbing up a steep slope and then descending back into the gully. Still, it is possible and should be allowed, especially if the PCs are smart enough to think of posting a guard for deodands.

⁸ If they have no Indolence resistance, then kind GMs might allow Avarice, or possibly even Gourmandism.

7) A Night Under the Stars

As you may have surmised, we have purposefully arranged things so that at least one night must be spent under the stars before entering the tomb. If they spend more than one, this entry applies principally to the first night. Should the PCs be extremely well-organized and/or lucky, they may reach the entrance to this crypt with plenty of time to spare before darkness falls. In anticipation of just such an occurrence, the GM merely adjusts the time needed to clear the earth away from the tomb entrance. For any PCs that wish to keep digging long into the night, point out that dangers of coming under attack whilst exhausted. Should the PCs have obtained magic that can clear large amounts of debris in an instant, then good for them – and they avoid the dangers of a night in the open. Instead they may sleep in the entry passage to the crypt.

Although not specifically mentioned prior to this point, presumably the PCs have devised some plan for avoiding the predations of half-men? (If they have not, then such is typical of the casual aplomb of Dying Earth PCs, so don't feel guilty that you didn't remind the players to consider this.)

One relatively easy option (unless they have a magical protective device from a previous adventure) is to build a raft and somehow moor it a ways out into the river. Enough rocky outcrops exist in the river so that this is possible, but the actual skill rolling – especially as darkness falls – might make for amusing role-playing. Certainly if they leave this until well into dusk a deodand is likely to arrive and watch them with bemusement (sporadically whining for their flesh).

Other options include making a crawlway into a dense patch of brambles, making a clearing and building a fire. Living Rough successes will reveal that although half-men hunt by scent, this is not a long-range capability and unless the fire is hidden somehow it may attract predators that would otherwise miss them. The most likely option of all is that they search around (whilst it is still light) for a looted crypt with a small door, and barricade the door with heavy debris (that cannot be easily pulled aside). Then to ensconce themselves firmly inside, denying both fire and noise for the rest of the night. The quality of their efforts will affect the unfoldment of the following encounters.

The Beast of Burden

It is possible, even likely, that the PCs may have brought a cart with some creature to pull it. (Although it is also possible that they will instead have brought two or three hand-barrows.) If a beast of burden is present, it will also need to be secured with them. When predators threaten, it will become terrified and its sentient will whine and plead for safety. If unintelligent it will whinny and shuffle nervously, preventing anyone from sleeping properly. It seems appropriate to mention at this point that the PCs must also think what to do with the draft animal when they are in the crypt. At the time of writing I have run only the first session of the playtest. Although the players know that the Valley of GT is a place haunted by half-man predators they have not as yet given a moment's thought to the safety of the draft animal whilst they are inside the tomb.

Nocturnal Visitors

1) A deodand comes by. He is alone, and pleads for their flesh. If possible he will try and sneak up and attack one of the guards by surprise. If they are barricaded into somewhere, he will mutter to himself about the possibility of going to recruit several allies to pull down the barricade. His argument is over the problem of having to share the meats within. (Ideally the PCs will realize it is best to kill him – and even perhaps to bring his body inside to use as a scent distraction against other half-men.) If their cart (or barrow) is nearby, the deodand will be heard examining it, and perhaps trying to push it around.

If the party are on the water, there are three of these and they attempt to swim out using a log as support. Roll D6. On a 1-2 they fail abysmally and are swept downstream; on 3-4 they almost reach the PCs but then fight and argue amongst themselves, lose grip on the log and are swept away; on 5-6 they reach the PCs and must be repelled. (It is easier for the PCs to attack these stupid creatures from the boat, so apply bonuses.)

2) Asms pass near. Two asms are nearby. Their base chance of finding/noticing the PCs is a HBS or better. However, the GM adjusts this down by one level for every dumb thing the PCs have done, and up by one level for every smart thing. These creatures are smarter than deodands and might pretend to have found treasure and be counting it, in order to lure the PCs out of hiding. (Or other activities at the GM's discretion.) Note that they can never sound fully human, and will always have an insectoid squeak when they talk. Asms can use hand barrows and will steal away any that they find (only up to two – one each - they will leave any more over that number).

If the party are on the water, the asms, chitter in a frustrated fashion on the bank, perhaps occasionally springing into the air. They will not attempt to leap across to the PCs unless the PCs have moored only 20-30ft from the bank.

3) Sad Neric (SVG: p71). This ghost will imperceptibly join the party wherever they are, whether on a raft or in a crypt. Introduce him into the conversation, or have him converse with a guard, implying that his presence is totally normal. (Perhaps only on an IS or PS Perception will any PC abruptly realize that his presence is unusual?) Describe his pitiful and slightly scary appearance in atmospheric detail. Improvise his tedious monologue, and if/when each PC falls asleep he will rifle their belongings and take one random valuable from each of them. If a PC notices they are falling asleep (PS or IS with Perception) he/she might oppose this sleep effect - IS with Wherewithal; IS/PS with Magic rating; IS with Rebuff (Wary or Penetrating only). However, do not advise players on which abilities might help – let them suggest a response. One option is to have him latch on to the PC with the lowest negative Sympathy Point rating and loot only their belongings.

4) If you are considering adding two GMCs to the group around this time, they might come floundering through the underbrush in the early hours of the night. (Being the only two survivors of a half-man attack late last evening on their group some miles to the north.) This not only allows the GM to invent strange sounds as the GMCs blunder around, but also presents an immediate option why the GMCs must join with the PCs – they will surely die if they wander anymore tonight. Of course no PC might attempt to rescue the GMCs, so these new persons may well have to stumble on the recently hidden cart or hear the draft animal or a snoring PC etc etc.

Asm

Persuade (Forthright) ~, Rebuff (Wary) ~, Attack (Ferocity) ~+4, Defense (Dodge) ~+4, Health ~+3, Athletics ~+1, Concealment 3, Perception 4, Stealth 6, Tracking 3, Wherewithal ~-1.

(Note that due to their chitinous armor, asms roll their Health checks at a boon of 1 against damage from ordinary weapons.)

Deodand

Persuade (Glib) 0.75~, Rebuff (Penetrating) ~, Attack (Strength) ~+5, Defense (Intuition) ~+3, Health ~+4, Athletics ~, Concealment 4, Gambling 4, Perception ~, Stealth ~, Tracking 3, Wherewithal ~.

8) The Outer Crypt

GM Note: Some parts of this tomb are far less deadly than one might expect. In many cases this is because the passing of the centuries has caused the mechanisms and enchantments to weaken. GMs may wish to add in faint magical sparks to mark such feeble attempts as the PCs cross doorways etc. Or these might simply be ignored (as they largely are in the following text).

8.1 - Clearing the Door

As mentioned earlier, a substantial landslide has buried the entrance to the crypt. This will take a minimum of three person hours to clear away, and only three people can work side by side without getting in each other’s way. Note that this task is common labor, and only those who Resist Indolence will do the job without trying to find and excuse or Persuade someone else to do it. Athletics is the most likely ability to be used, but is at a levy of 1 without quality equipment, and at a penalty of 1 without any proper equipment at all. QFs result in taking a loss of a Health point due to a fall or a rock rolling onto one. DFs result in an injury sustained due to a more severe fall or being crushed under a mass of soil. (Again, the PCs must decide who does the work, and track of time should be kept. Quite likely they will try and loot the crypt quickly in order to return to a town before dark.) As soon as the topmost portion of the door is cleared, refer to the first paragraph of ‘The Door’ a little way below, and then the entirety of ‘The Curse’ immediately below.

8.2 - The Curse

The deodands are magically impelled, thus arrive as quickly as they can get here - which is roughly half an hour after the top of the door is first revealed. (IE likely some time before the excavation is finished.) See deodand ratings above. These beasts attack swiftly by leaping down from the top of the gully. Should the deodands overwhelm the PCs, all will end tragically. Therefore, the GM needs to make sure that this does not occur. Knowing your PC group, you will be able to decide the best way to do this. Either the PCs will have set guards and be forewarned, or they will be able to agilely avoid attack and regroup to best advantage, or they have missile weapons, or skills in the erb spear, or tweaks that forewarn them, or something else. Also, anyone who knows that deodands fear magic above all other things might be able to scare them away using Imposture or Persuasion.

If all else fails, and PCs are facing slaughter, the deodands will suddenly become confused and for several rounds act in an odd fashion – staring around in jerky movements, lunging for things that are not there, and ducking attacks that are simply not occurring. This happens because the madling responsible for the compulsion that brought them here has, over the long centuries, become bored. He knows that nobody is around that can cancel his indenture, and has finally given up – this time merely running through the motions of his obligations. PCs with good Perception will notice a pale-skinned wefkin sitting on the edge of the gully making passes in the air with his hands. When noticed he will yawn ostentatiously and begin to make one of the deodands dance. This, however, only seems to bore him, and he quickly stands up, scratches himself and vanishes. From this moment the deodands begin to recover (though hopefully slowly enough to be slain). Or, if the PCs are seriously injured, the deodands flee in fear. Mind you if severe injuries have been sustained, the PCs are pretty much reliant on crawling down to the river, and calling for aid from a craft headed into Taun Sferre. (After concocting a story about being attacked by half-men whilst innocently walking along the roadway.)

An alternate amusing option is that the madling instead controls everyone – making them all dance (preferably in human-deodand pairs) up and down the trail and around the crypts and tombs. Everyone will dance in perfect time to a soundless melody, and upon completion (after about an hour when everyone is exhausted) each partner will stop and bow (or curtsy) and then be released from the charm. At this point the PCs will collapse exhausted, and the deodands will run away as fast as they can. (Deodands greatly fear magic.)

Note that it is possible that some PCs may successfully gain cover whilst others fight and are injured (although difficult in such brambly terrain). The players of these PCs may need to be reminded that should their fellows die, then their PC will inevitably be next – thus encouraging the PC to sneak out and try to slay deodands by surprise, or with missiles.

The Draft Animal: Make a single Wherewithal roll for the draft animal. On a QF/DF it runs away at this time. If tied to the cart this may cause immense problems.

(Playtest Note: The PCs retired to the shrine shortly after clearing the door, so the deodands arrived too late to attack them. Since deodands can’t enter the shrine and in any case don’t like to hang around the crypts, this encounter was avoided.)

8.3 - The Outer Door

The door is a large and square block of stone set into a stone frame in the rock wall. Above the door is a single rune, which is not translatable - as it is the focus of the tomb’s curse. [For the GM’s knowledge only - the curse is worded thus: “Those who try to breach this tomb shall be beset by creatures that reflect their own greed.” Basically this draws quickly to the scene a number of half-men equal to the number of persons in the party. It is a coincidence that deodands are drawn both times.]

At the center of the door is a line of runic carvings from the same time period that Axomber lived in.

Identifying the period is about the best any PC Pedant is likely to be able to do, but if the runes are somehow translated they read: “Here lies Axomber the Wise, Caretaker of the Hierophant’s Library and Author of Several Auspicious Tomes, such as: ‘The Cure for the Seventeen Ailments’, ‘The Nature of Iconoclasy’ and ‘My Life: Such As It Is.’”

The clever way to open the door is through seeking out and finding a hidden catch in the tiny gap between the door and the lintel. (Special tools, or a very thin piece of metal, will be required.) Due to the passing of time, this has been greatly obscured by dirt and soil, and requires an IS to find. Likewise it also now requires a Quick Fingers IS/PS to activate. The fallback means to open the door is by brute force, attacking it with picks and crowbars (or cunningly planting applications of explosive diambroid). GM adjudicates as required, but the hard labor way will take considerable time and effort.

However the door falls, describe its movement in suitably dramatic terms. After all, it has remained unopened for a significant number of centuries. In visual terms it will likely fall in slow motion (whether assisted by explosives or just hard work), accompanied by clouds of dust and/or loose soil, and followed by a spray of loose soil onto those standing nearby. Once the dust has settled, a low dark passage is revealed beyond, and a low moaning noise will emanate from the depths of crypt. (This is Axomber’s first joke – see box immediately below.)

(Playtest Note: The PC that found the catch, also found themselves abruptly deserted as the others withdrew to a safe distance. The door did indeed fall as the catch was activated, and the PC managed to leap aside with an EF, thus taking damage only from a glancing blow. In my game the PCs have a few cantraps, including Assuage Injury, so this was soon rectified.)

GM’s Note: It seems timely to mention at this point a little bit about the noble Axomber. He had a well-evolved personality, being both a thinker and a wit, but was also a pragmatist. He was a student of history, and accepted that at some point in the future he too would be merely a historic figure. Therefore in his advancing age he devised a plan to create a crypt that tomb-robbers would find ‘especially memorable’. (A concept that appealed to his sense of humor and provided an opportunity for ingenuity.)

His real treasures he slowly sold or gave away to his children, grand-children or surviving wives. Since his health was good he took his time buying up flawed magic items and devising amusing traps with which to stock his crypt. He also sought the advice of cunning architects and gradually the crypt evolved – first on paper and then in actuality. Some friends and high-ranking personalities knew of his amusing plan, but generally it was secret. Axomber also spread around the rumor that he was to be buried in Kaiin (now the Old Town) – so that his crypt would not be found a plundered for some considerable time. These days only Xallops has managed to uncover the location of the crypt and Axomber’s crafty plan. (Which is why he doesn’t want to lead the first expedition into the tomb.)

Readers may be thinking that this is a shocking way of treating your PCs, even by the standards of Cugel-Level RPG. However, Axomber was not totally without heart, and has scattered several genuine treasures throughout his crypt. Additionally, and this was not a benefit that Axomber considered at the time, several of the false-treasures are exactly the kind of devious devices that Cugel-Level PCs would be able to use to their own selfish advantage. Thus, the crypt is indeed a storehouse of treasures – though not in the way the PCs originally hope.

GM’s Note 1: From now on the GM should roll Perception rolls secretly whenever PCs search the walls. This establishes a pattern that will become useful when the base of the chasm is searched. (Especially in the instance that PCs who are too clever by half climb down to look for secret passages **before** exploring the remainder of the upper corridor.)

GM’s Note 2: The draft animal will refuse to wait outside by itself. Only a Persuasion success will convince it that it will be safe out here by itself, and only an IS will leave it utterly confident. On any failure it will follow them inside, and if threatened will be much more likely to run away, hoping to return to the nearest settlement before nightfall. (Of course if the draft animal is not sentient this is less of a problem.)

GM’s Note 3: This is not *Bog-Standard RPG™*, and many actions that are not even considered in some other games need to be emphasized in the action that follows. For instance, crossing the fissure by ‘jumping’ is incredibly risky, climbing up or down a rope requires special training and/or prior notable experience, and volunteering to go first is more than a little out of character. Bear such details in mind as you GM the following in true DERPG style. For instance, Wherewithal rolls will definitely be required for anyone wishing to do anything heroic.

8.4 - The Entry Passage (first part)

⊕ “Beyond the door a passage heads away into the gloom. It is 6ft x 6ft corridor lined with stone blocks, and is comparatively free of dirt. No markings adorn the plain walls.”

This corridor proceeds for 60ft and is then intersected by a natural fissure 10ft across and 20ft wide (i.e. cuts sideways into the walls).

8.5 – Crossing The Fissure

⊕ “The fissure is slightly more than 10ft across in the middle and slightly less at the edges. It cuts back into the passage walls, allowing no purchase to either side. Tree roots criss-cross the ceiling above, but this is a further 10ft above the ceiling of the passage and thus an awkward climb at the very least.”

This obstacle is a natural rock fissure that Axomber had incorporated into the tomb. During construction it was bridged by a sturdy slab of stone – which was removed on completion of the work. Consequently, successful leapers can cross the fissure. If tested (since the full depth cannot be seen), the darkness below extends 80ft down to a narrow floor of jagged and broken rock. If anyone is dumb enough to leap across unaided, and unlucky enough to fail their roll, refer to the falling rules (DERPG: p 56). In such a case, demise is likely. Hopefully PCs will use safety ropes. In any event, whenever anyone leaps across, a projection of metal scythes up and outwards from beneath the ledge that marks the end of the first part of the passage. This, fortunately, is only a foot or so long (ending in an unclean fracture – as if at some point it was hewn apart), and threatens nobody except those who try to lower themselves by rope from this side.

(Playtest Note: The PCs crossed the fissure by taking a plank from their wagon and securing it via a rope tied through a hole at one end, and hammered spikes at the other – nearest them. [It was only just long enough.] After exploring the false tomb, the PCs descended the fissure, but didn’t have enough rope. Inventively they lowered a sturdy small tree trunk in until it wedged half-way down, but then also had the

bright idea to unbraid a third of each - three-stranded - rope they had, making a third rope to increase the depth it would reach. The inventiveness of these people!

8.6 - The Entry Passage (second part)

⊕ “Beyond the fissure, the passage continues on into the darkness, in exactly the same dimensions and décor – or lack thereof.”

This passage extends a further 70ft, although at 40ft there is a trap (8.7).

8.7 - The Corridor Trap

No quoted text exists for this trap, because it is not immediately obvious. The astute may (if using a good light-source and specifically examining the walls and/or ceiling at this point) may notice (Ψ PERCEPTION), faint scrape marks on the walls, or a thin line running across the ceiling (with a second faint line being parallel and 7ft ahead). This trap is activated by interfering with the door (see below). When someone tries the door, a stone block slams down from between these two faint lines (that mark its boundaries). This now stays in place for a full 24 hours, or until the de-activation lever is discovered in the false crypt.

Escape Clause: *If not all of the PCs are beyond the falling slab, or a valued PC stands directly beneath, the slab seems to fall slightly askew. Instead of slamming to the floor it grates to a halt one third of the way down, and then begins a jerky unstoppable descent. If the PCs don’t think to block it from reaching the floor of the passage, it jams solid further down, leaving a one-foot gap below. (Just enough for someone of average size to squeeze under.)*

8.8 - The Inner Door

NB: This is visible from the site of the trap if the party have a good light source.

⊕ “A heavy wooden door with iron hinges is placed incongruously in a stone block wall across the end of this passage. Several letters have been burned large across the center of the door. The door has a metal ring handle but no lock.”

The letters spell out ‘Axomber’ in the old script, and are still fairly easily recognizable (any Pedantry success). Turning the handle on the door activates the trap, as above. No other trap is on this door.

8.9 - The False Crypt

⊕ “The door opens onto a room about 50x50ft. At its center is a large lidless stone sarcophagus on a raised platform, and around the edges are a number of opened stone coffers and broken wooden chests. Large shards of pottery suggest that other receptacles – perhaps sizeable urns - also once existed. Scattered amidst this debris are a small number of copper and silver coins, and also five human skeletons.”

Magical Auras - All items in here register magic, but not to mere cantraps. A cantrap can only detect a background ambience of enchantment filling the whole room.

Coins – Anyone wishing to spend sufficient time can collect 83 bronze coins and 17 silver coins. All of these are magical, and exactly 20 days after being taken from the crypt will vanish and reappear back in the same spots they were taken from. Since the coins are historic, anyone selling them before this time might get 5-10 times their face value as the result of good bargaining.

Pottery – It is possible to take the shards of the least damaged urns and reassemble a few of them. (Providing one has some kind of repair magic.) These are not especially valuable examples of work and are bulky and difficult to carry if whole, but might fetch 50t each from a collector. (They too will vanish and reappear back here – in pieces – 20 days after removal.)

Skeletons – These unfortunates are dressed only in the very ragged remnants of whatever clothes they once wore. Nothing salvageable remains and they are not properly intact. Two are unmarked, but three show signs of contusion via cracked rib-cages and other fractures. When the first skeleton is touched (or when the sarcophagus is touched – whichever happens first) the bones will suddenly glow with magic, and begin to slide together across the room to form a central mass. The GM needs to describe this in suitably weird and scary fashion. Within a few moments they coalesce to form a bizarre composite multi-armed, multi-legged almost arachnid-like skeletal being, which attacks. *(When this horror first animates, ask each PC present for a Wberewithal roll. On a DF, the character is at a penalty of 1 for all actions except Defense in the following interaction with the skeletons. On a QF*

or EF this is a levy of 1. On an IS one instead operates at a boon of 1 – driven by righteous zeal to destroy these abominations.).

Note also that this composite undead is immune to various magics due to having no mind, but affected by others – because it is not living tissue. (This presumes your rogues have any substantive magic at all.)

Skeleton: Attack (Speed) 2~, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2~, Health 2~, Magic (resistance only) 10, Wherevithal Ω

Stone Coffers – Only dust remains in these. Several of them have niches cunningly carved into the front lips, from which metal spines are poised at the ends of springs. Presumably these were traps, perhaps poison-coated.

Wooden Chests – If the locks of these fragments are examined, some also evidence traps – either similar projecting spines or else tiny dart-guns.

Sarcophagus – This large, lidless stone box, stands on a solid stone plinth about a foot high. Inside it are only dust, a small section of ornamental iron chain, and several fragments of (human) bone. (Should such be required, an emergency lever to raise the stone block in the corridor outside is very well hidden in a secret panel in the plinth.)

The Manifestation – As the PCs are examining the sarcophagus, a dim glow appears hanging in the air between the sarcophagus and the back wall. This quickly expands until within moments the wraith-like form of a classically dressed scholar – with a stern expression - stands before them, floating in mid-air. But then its form wavers and shrinks to become a glowing 3ft tall repulsive homunculus – also hanging in the air. This creature seems slightly dazed, and looks around in puzzlement, then scowls. The GM most definitely **MUST** read the following whole section out in a speedy impish voice that is **totally unsuited** to a genuine scholarly ghost: "*You who have come to desecrate my tomb, have arrived too late. My remains and my earthly treasures are already looted. Bluub, blub blub, blub blub, blub blub. The end.*" The apparition then vanishes with a loud flatulent noise and leaving a sulphurous stench.

GM: This is intended to indicate a failing enchantment (and to suggest that this is a false crypt), but PCs can make of it what they wish. In the playtest this state of affairs was suspected but not assumed.

Secret Doors – None. There is no way on from here, and nothing secret to find. The way into the true tomb is via a secret door at the base of the fissure.

8.10 – Descending The Fissure

To descend the chasm in safety one merely requires 80ft or so of knotted rope securely anchored. Many games allow the descent of a rope without thought of danger; not so here. After all, ascending and descending rope is a skill requiring agility, strength, and confidence. Only if the rope is knotted at convenient 1ft intervals - something that takes around half an hour to do and reduces the overall length of the rope by a third – do we dispense with rolls. Otherwise climbing without rope is at the standard difficulty, and climbing with a rope tied around one so that much weight is supported from above is at a bonus of 1. (In the latter case if someone falls - on a QF - those above must test their Athletics as the GM deems appropriate.) Climbing down a rope that is unknotted and merely tied may (at the GM's discretion) provide a boon of 1.

Amongst the jagged rocks and stagnant pools at the base of the chasm are the broken (by the fall) skeletons of ten humans and an odd humanoid (half-human and half-deodand), plus corroded pieces of metal (presumably belt buckles, buttons, and other small sundries) and a few rotten scraps of clothing. The corroded hand-guards of three rapiers are also here. Most importantly of all, a secret door is concealed here – a small (irregular area roughly 3x3ft) section of the rock face four feet from the rough ground. This opens onto a crawlspace of similar dimensions that slopes forwards for 20ft, before reaching a solid end. However, this end can be pushed upwards away from the PC - like a mailbox flap. It opens halfway up the wall at the end of a passageway that leads away into the gloom. (If the crawler has very good light, they will see the door 50ft away.) Note that it is awkward to climb out through the heavy trap, and that after the PC has fallen to the floor it closes with almost air-tight precision – and is not possible to open from the inside by any normal means.

8.11 - The Lower Corridor

This section of the tomb is unadorned, and ends at a large bronze door decorated with runes. Only one trap is present in this corridor, being within the last ten feet before the door. Here, a very good Perception roll by someone actively brushing the thin layer of dust and dirt off the floor will notice two very thin lines running across from wall to wall less than one foot apart. When this part of the corridor floor is stood upon, or a heavy weight (at least the weight of a small man) placed upon it, a magical light-blue gas pours out of tiny hidden holes in the edges of the ceiling.

This gas is conjured from an Overworld dimension and quickly boils up the corridor and out into the base of the chasm. It is a potent soporific, and though some agile PCs may (Ψ ATHLETICS) outrun it for a few moments anyone caught within it quickly passes out. It is not possible to climb fast enough to outpace the gas (unless one had a spell), or to hold one's breath long enough to climb up. IE anyone who is in the area will succumb, although they may escape its effects for a few rounds. If the all of the PCs are here then GMs skip the next sections, and transfer the action immediately to the 'Reception Room' below. (If you have GMCs in the party, this presumes that at least 2 or 3 GMCs are also overcome and therefore accompany the PCs. In fact it is up to you as GM to make sure – without making it obvious that you are doing so – that sufficient GMCs are within range, or are dumb enough to climb down to 'see what has happened' and therefore reactivate the gas and follow along shortly afterwards.)

If the PCs do not activate the trap in this fashion, then they may examine the door. If anyone is able to view these runes up close, a single Pedantry roll is available to divulge their meaning. The roll is at a penalty of 1 unless the PC's specialty is something related to antiquities or history:

EF – "It seems to be a notification that something of importance lies beyond..."

HBS – "...Something to do with a man of importance being within..."

PS – "...Oh I see. A great sage is buried here, along with his wealth..."

IS – "Hmm. This is interesting. This line here mentions that apparently the unworthy are not permitted to enter."

Although there is no lock on the door, it is nonetheless somehow locked. Anyone examining the door may (Ψ CRAFTSMANSHIP -1, PERCEPTION) find a hidden locking mechanism. A Quick Fingers (-1 to the roll if without appropriate locksmithing equipment) IS/PS will deactivate this lock, whereas a HBS/EF will not succeed. Any other rolled failure will activate the gas trap (see above).

(Playtest Notes: The PCs avoided the trap in the floor but failed the Quick Fingers attempt on the door. In frighteningly apt Cugelesque behavior, for a while only one PC was down in the fissure – whilst the others enjoyed a picnic outside in the fresh air. Another PC has wanted to stay, but it seemed an appropriate time to ask for a resistance to Gourmandism – which he failed. However, he made his second Resistance and so the two of them explored the crawlway and were slowly but surely joined by the others – except for the last PC who had to be tempted by a Resistance against Avarice – on wondering what treasures the others might have found. All were in the corridor when the roll on the door failed, and had secured the entrance hatch by hammering in spikes. I asked for Wherewithal rolls to see who could hold their breath, and everyone did in the first round. So the pandemonium of trying to get back through the trap was hilarious. One PC actually rolled an IS with Athletics and dived in and started crawling. Fortunately the closest person to him was Boris the GMC - who promptly grabbed his legs and hauled him out again. They began tussling in the corridor whilst the others watched in disbelief – then the combatants forgot to hold their breath and collapsed into unconsciousness. In a virtually unique act of selflessness, the most nefarious of the PCs attempted to bodily throw his companion through the gap, but rolled a DF and succeeded only in smashing her head against the wall. When they all woke in the Reception Room, the one who had been pulled out by Boris the GMC asked what Boris had been playing at. Off the cuff I replied: "I am singularly embarrassed, but on account of extreme fear momentarily lost control of my otherwise impeccable standards of behavior." The Players unanimously voted this as a three-point tag-line.)

8.12 - The True Crypt

If the lock is picked, the door will swing open, revealing a room beyond.

⊕ "Your vantage-point is good, because you are at the top of fifteen steps descending to the floor of the room. It is a large columned room that is apparently empty, although you cannot see all the way to its end."

If the PCs carry lanterns and torches, they can easily make their way through the long room⁹ and will soon be able to make out the looming shape of a large sarcophagus on a raised stone platform. This is at the far end of the room, and around it are several closed chests of differing sizes and several small and large urns – some of which appear to be filled with gold and silver coins. (The smaller urns will be harder to spot in dim light, but several large ones are obvious.) Behind the sarcophagus, the lid of which is carved into the shape of a slumbering bearded man and decorated with gold and silver inlay and many set gems – against the wall, so it won't be seen until someone moves up close - is a large ornately-framed oval mirror. This is of no relevance to this part of the scenario, but should be mentioned if anyone moves in that direction with a good light source – after all the light will be reflected back.

⁹ The length/size of this mostly empty room is for three reasons: 1) so that it is more likely all the PCs will gather here and thus be soon conveniently subject to the soporific gas en masse; 2) To give the PCs the chance to trepidatiously cross its length; 3) For dramatic reasons that will be revealed at the end of the adventure.

GM Note: Once details of the room contents are passed back, or shortly after communication is lost, any persons having stayed behind must roll¹⁰ to Resist Avarice. (Explain in detail their imagination describing to them the riches their friends are pocketing even now.) If they fail, they will follow the forward party in order to make sure that they are not being deprived any spoils. This room is one big trap, for the purpose of having the PCs succumb to the blue gas, so that they can be unconsciously transported deep into the tomb. Should PCs hang back further – after resisting Avarice – the GM may soon also call for a resistance roll against Arrogance. (Explain their mental processing as they imagine later describing how they could have been part of the looting expedition, but their fear held them back- or paint a picture of their newly wealthy and well-dressed associates gloating.)

The GM decides on whichever activity triggers the gas to pour into this room and the corridor. Perhaps it is merely stepping off the steps onto the floor? Perhaps it is stepping onto the lower step of the dais supporting the sarcophagus? Perhaps it is merely a time delay after the first person steps off the entry stairs? Possibly it is someone touching the mirror. Your main criteria needs to be that all PCs and most GMCs are within the range of the gas. Should a PC have resisted Avarice and Arrogance and be remaining above the chasm, once people actually enter the treasure room and their awed whispers float back up, have this PC roll again. (How can he/she possibly trust the others to put aside their share?) If they resist again and a GMC is available for them to use instead, then perhaps they will not be transported - and will be left behind. The GM must solve such difficult questions on the spot.

9) The Inner Crypt

GM’s Intro: This next section is a list of hazards, designed for an entertaining gaming experience. These things are not designed to slaughter or permanently entrap your PCs (although they are designed to appear as if they are), and so we have included various ‘escape clauses’ to explain the solutions and/or soften the effects. Note that since progress is linear, and this adventure in any case took some considerable time to write, no map has been included. GMs will be required to fabricate an interesting map for the players based on the following descriptions. Such a map is in fact important, because the location of various objects is crucial¹¹ – and it is only fair to give the players a clear idea of what is going on. Thus, from now on the GM **will ideally** start mapping on the PCs’ behalf.

Since there has just been some kind of magical transportation/interlude, should it be necessary, the GM can simply state that all pools are now replenished. Another point worth mentioning is the ‘Rewards Option’. Various of the following rooms test Resistances. Should any PC conspicuously achieve the requisite resistance in a way crucial to solving that particular test, the GM can consider granting them a free point to that rating. (This symbolizes the mythic potency of Axomber’s cunning traps – and the amazing luck of resisting them.) Likewise, should points in Resistances be relatively common in your campaign it is advised that those who fail conspicuously lose a point in that Resistance. (This again illustrates the highly magical nature of the situation, and it is always good to present tangible penalties for failure in such esoteric-type scenarios. Otherwise the PCs/Players may feel they can pass through any experience and ultimately emerge unscathed.)

9.1 - The Reception Room

⊕ “Feeling unpleasantly like you have been extremely drunk, you slowly regain your senses. Fortunately you are lying upon softly padded divans. The smoke of incense from nearby braziers scents the room.”

Then, when they have regained equilibrium:

“This large oval room is decorated with tapestries, bookshelves, cupboards, wine cabinets, comfortable couches, and a small circular ornamental pond. A bright crystal embedded at the center of the rocky ceiling lights the room. Over at one end of the room is an ornamental pond that twinkles and sparkles most alluringly. A single small metal door without a handle stands at the center of one wall.”

This room has magically-replenishing cupboards that are well-stocked with food and drink and fascinating board-games, and the books are all more interesting – philosophy, magic, natural sciences, etc. Likewise the furniture is all wonderfully

¹⁰ I have included the statement ‘must roll to resist...’ several times in this document. On all occasions, this means a player ‘must roll to resist ... only if they wish their PC to do something other than what the GM is saying they are impelled to do’.

¹¹ IE the large tureen in the Feast of Fools section – though don’t make it too obvious!

styled, soft and welcoming. The two incense braziers are magically operated, and cannot be used to start fires, or indeed interfered with in any way. The water in the fountain is drinkable and beautifully refreshing. Hiding behind one of the sofas (Ψ PERCEPTION) is an elderly man dressed in rags.

GM Notes: (i) Play the elderly man for maximum gibbering and drooling, and minimum usefulness. Although he may well accompany them and could be used to fall foul of a temptation further along the way – oh harsh fate! Taking him along out of pity reduces negative Sympathy points for anyone who champions this decision. Sacrificing him deliberately accrues them! (ii) **Note that the PCs no longer have** any cash, gems, credit notes, food or drink upon them. (Tell the Players and make sure that such are erased from character sheets). All else remains as it was when they succumbed to the gas. Since rope is critical to their survival, try and make sure that they have some, or else that they find some amongst the various things hidden about the room (see below). (But don’t make it obvious that this is a crucial possession.)

When the door is approached, frosted writing immediately appears on its cold surface, in the modern language of the party:

“Welcome to my final resting place. Since you were not dissuaded by the fact that my crypt appeared to already have been plundered, you must indeed be professional robbers of great tenacity. I, Axomber, scourge of thieves and nemesis of despoilers, now invite you to retire from your despicable trade and spend your last days in comfort and fascination here in this cave so far beneath the ground. Alternatively, you may pass through this door and chance your abilities and resolve against the tests of my tomb. If by some freak chance you survive to reach the outside world once more, you must have far greater self-restraint and nobility than I can imagine. If so, perhaps your nefarious tendencies will have been somewhat tempered, and your respect for the dead enhanced. Once you have passed through this door there is no returning, so think well before you surrender the comfort of this room to an uncertain fate.”
(NB: This text is repeated on a hand-out at the end of this scenario, so that the GM can pass it round.)

Hidden around the room are the madman’s belongings. These certainly include a rapier, a leather pack, a broken knife, and a chisel. They may also include a few other things that the GM thinks will be useful for the PCs during the following sections (including perhaps rope). The madman may ‘coo’ with recognition as they find parts of his gear, but is otherwise of no help.

Resisting Indolence: PCs have to Resist Indolence in order to consider leaving here. (It is comfortable and warm and interesting, and the writing on the door is pretty much indicative that to go that way means death.) Should no-one succeed in the first round, each failed Resistance of Indolence for the entire group indicates three hours spent in this room. Eventually someone wonders about moving on and is going to succeed. Then, when they turn to gas and pass out through the door, the GM might suggest that the others roll to try and to Resist Avarice. IE their very greed (at the possibility that their companion has gone on towards the inevitable riches and magics available in the crypt) will be stronger than their Indolence. This should be made clear to the players - as the idea that one weakness overcomes another in order to save them from death by indolence is quite amusing. Incidentally, should use decide to use the rewards option, the first person to break this Indolence gains a free point to their Resist Indolence. (Providing they were trying in game to motivate themselves and act decisively.)

GM’s Notes: Unless the GM has any particular ideas of their own, the books are of no practical use to the PCs, and do not accompany them from the room. As you may have surmised, from now on this is the section of the adventure when it may be useful to have GMCs as party members. In my scenario I plan to have both Boris the yardboy (mentioned earlier in playtest notes) and the madman mentioned above. Both are destined to fall prey to temptations and be sacrificed along the way. Boris considers himself a full member of the expedition, and is therefore entitled to take a full share of the risks. The madman will cower behind the party if pressed to go forward, except when the GM deems it is time for him to make the sacrifice, in which case he will become fascinated by the temptation and go forward to his doom. Should the PCs do extremely well, he may even survive, though this is unlikely.

The Exit Portal

As mentioned above, the metal door has no handle. It is also very cold if one places one’s hand (or any other body part) near to its surface. To exit, one merely presses a hand (or indeed again any body part) against it. This extremity then becomes stuck to the painfully cold surface (irrespective of whether or not any clothing is between the skin and the

door). After a few moments the person starts to feel odd, and then all others in the room will observe them turning rapidly translucent and abruptly being hauled through the solid door. Do not continue play until the last person has decided to go on in this fashion.

Escape Clause: If anyone succeeds at their Resist Avarice and thus still chooses to stay behind (or merely refuses to roll), they must soon also Resist Arrogance, or else feel impelled to prove their worth by following the others. Run this as an internal argument, with the player taking the role of the Indolent self, and the GM taking the role of the Arrogant self. At the height of amusement, request a resistance roll. Should they still succeed, this then occurs at regular intervals until they eventually succumb. They then pass on and rejoin the rest of the group – who had conveniently been waiting in the alcove in the hopes that their companion would eventually follow. Any GMCs left behind will not ever reappear. If anyone tries to motivate reluctant GMCs to test against Indolence again, this requires a successful Persuasion contest.

9.2 - The Cavernous Chamber

The Alcove Beyond

⊕ “This small room is approximately 15ft by 15ft around the base and 8ft high. Three of its walls are bare stone, and the fourth opens midway up the wall of a cavernous chamber beyond. The wall opposite this opening has a large metal panel embedded into it. It is from this panel that the gaseous PCs coalesce.”

It is likely that the PCs that went through first will have waited here for their fellows, because the chamber before them will not probably not inspire individual confidence. There is absolutely no way to ever return through this portal, nor to communicate through it.

⊕ “Lit dimly by phosphorescent moss growing across the lower walls around its marshy floor 50ft below, the room is around 100ft across and quite long. It stretches another 40ft up. The most remarkable thing about it is the series of thick stalks that rise from the mossy floor, ending in large pads. These form a pathway at the same height as the alcove you are in, but separated by about 12ft between each. Nine¹² of these pads stretch across the cavern, to the end of a corridor also midway up the far wall.”

The only safe way across appears to be to leap from one pad to another. The stalks supporting these pads seem to belong to some vegetative structure, and appear quite strong and flexible. If tested (by throwing some object) they seem eminently capable of supporting the weight of a human - and the resultant swaying when someone lands on a pad looks more or less tolerable. The pad itself is like a thick spongy leaf, lacking handy knobs or protrusions.

GM Note 1: The exact number of stalks in this room depends on the GM's assessment of the capacity for Players to enjoy the opportunities to leap from one to the other in a progressive line. In the playtest there were 9 stalks, and this managed to remain enjoyable play, though began to drag towards the end. Although this problem was alleviated by the fact that all but one person fell into the mire before the end.

GM Note 2: The roiling motion of the quag is apropos of nothing. It will be helpful at some point, if someone down there finds the long skull of some kind of aquatic carnivore wedged underfoot at the base of one of the stalks. (The deadly denizens are long since extinct.)

GM Note 3: Just for your reference, this room was originally conceived as a place to test one's Wherewithal. (Since Wherewithal is on a par with the resistances in terms of PCs being able to control their own destinies.) However, since many campaigns have not established this ability as an important one, the idea was then discarded. We mention it here, just in case any GMs want to bring it back in – by requiring an IS with Wherewithal to be the first to leap onto a pad. (Or possible PS/IS if they are securely roped and the rope is held by sturdy folk that they trust.)

Leaping from Pad to Pad

To gain a pad, one must use Athletics to leap. (*For this and other actions in this section and the tomb from now on, we recommend using the 'Enhanced Action' ruling that is available at the Violet Cusps page.*) On any success one gains the pad and grips on. (Although on an HBS there is a moment where it seems that the PC will lose their grip and fall as the pad sways at the end of the stalk.) On an **EF**, the PC fails to get balance or grip, and slides from the pad. They must now attempt either Quick Fingers or a second Athletics roll to hang on and haul themselves back. (If this seems too easy, feel free to impose a Penalty of 1 on this recovery attempt.) On a **DF/QF** the person fails to grasp the pad, and falls towards the muck.

¹² See 'GM Note 1'

If someone falls when jumping towards a pad and is not roped, they impact with the muck and must roll Athletics (‘Action Enhancement’ ruling). [On an IS they are unharmed. On a PS/HBS they lose 1 Health point. On a EF/QF they take an injury. On a DF they take an injury and are stunned.] If they are roped, then those holding the rope (and braced) must try to hold them and Athletics must be rolled to attempt to avoid damage when impacting with the cliff.

Jumping Mechanics

- When jumping from the ledge with a run-up, give a bonus of 1 to the Athletics roll.
- When jumping from a stalk that you have set swaying in order to get closer to the next stalk a bonus of 1 is also applied to the Athletics roll.
- When jumping towards a stalk that is swaying a bonus of 1 also applies – indicating a sensible wait for the minimum distance to jump. However, due to the complexity of co-ordinating two swaying stalks, this never becomes a bonus of 2. (Exception: when jumping from the ledge to the first stalk which someone has left swaying after jumping to Stalk 2 – this alone is a +2 bonus situation.)

Crossing the Quag

Since the PCs presumably have rope (indeed it seems unlikely they have any chance of succeeding if they don’t) they might consider lowering themselves to the mossy floor and continuing on foot to ascend the wall on the far side. Reasonable visual examination shows that the floor of the cave is a quaggy mass or mire, and large serpentine shapes oil their way along just beneath the surface. The muck is actually too deep and watery to cross on foot. Only the root systems at the base of the stalks are high enough so that someone can stand with head and shoulders out of the ooze. Otherwise the PCs must swim (Ψ ATHLETICS) from the base of one stalk to the next. In the playtest several rescues were required- the most spectacular as someone rolled a DF with Athletics after falling. It is possible to climb the thick rubbery stalks using some implement to gouge a grip – perhaps a dagger in each hand? Perhaps even a rapier is sufficient to hack a rough hole for each hand. (Though it might first have to be recovered from the mire – one roll per round of searching – IS only to succeed.)

Optional Obstruction

Since one PC had the ‘With a Heroic Bound’ tweak, he passed safely across to the very end. However, on leaping to the opposite ledge he found an invisible door and impacted with it. Fortunately an IS with Athletics allowed him to grip on, and he found a hinge on one side of the door before failing an Athletics roll and falling down. Though the wall itself was too difficult to climb, the PCs had the smart idea of someone climbing a stalk (with daggers in hands and carving footholds) and making a notch at the top of the stalk to tie a rope. Once this was done, the others below hauled on the rope - bending the stalk towards the invisible door. In this position the PC was able to stand on the tilted pad, find the invisible catch and open the door. Another PC then climbed the stalk, and the two of them were able to secure a rope and begin pulling the others up.

9.3 - The Chamber of Demonic Avians

⊕ “This chamber is 200ft long, 100ft wide and 80ft high, and you have a reasonable view because dim light from no particular source illuminates the area. You are mid-way up the wall at the top of a set of stone steps. The floor is scattered with large carved blocks of stone, twisted into peculiar shapes – some rounded with holes, others angular. It looks like some kind of abstract art display. The only regular shapes are ten pillars in two rows of five – each topped with an odd statue - like some kind of clam shell standing on end.”

At the far end of the room a similar set of stone stairs leads to another door, but this might be difficult to see (Ψ PERCEPTION) because of the gloom. Once the one or more PCs passes more than a fifth of the way into the room:

⊕ “The shells begin to open, first one then another. Now two, now three have revealed that these are not shells at all – but in fact the curled-over leathery wings of some small demonic pelgrane-like creatures. These creatures do not seem to have eyes, but have substantive ribbed ears embedded in their long heads. They blink in befuddlement and are beginning to turn their heads this way and that, as if listening for something.”

Allow a moment for this to sink in – then:

⊕ “Several of the other shells are now also beginning to vibrate. What are you going to do?”

The PCs may wish to engage in swift and fearful action. By all means encourage this. However, the other five ‘shells’ do not open. The fourth one slowly topples and falls into the murk without ever opening, and a fifth falls into crumbling powdery fragments as they watch. The sixth (the only other one that is vibrating) continues to do so and will never open. The creatures take some moments to orientate themselves and then begin to flap lazily about the room. They are drawn to sudden movement, and lunge for what they presume is food. One or more of the PCs may notice (Ψ PERCEPTION) that the creatures seem to be using some kind of sound-location sense, and this should lead to their utilizing distractions, sudden leaps and various related tactics to ease their escape. Hopefully if someone is attacked, other PCs will throw things or shout in order to disorientate the creature. To some extent the GM must oversee/adjudicate this on the fly, since we can never know exactly what the desperate PCs will do.

Demonic Avian ratings: Finesse (___), Misdirection (___), Health (___), Athletics (___), Wherewithal (___).

Escape Clause: The fact that only three out of the eight creatures animates is in itself a type of Escape Clause. If necessary perhaps these three are also fragile and shatter whenever an IS Attack is scored upon them. (Although not if this happens too early and reduces the level of terror that this room is designed to evoke.)

9.4 - The Path of Avarice

A corridor slopes upwards from the doorway in the opposite wall of the cavernous chamber.

⊕ “After less than a hundred feet the corridor opens into a more regularly constructed room, one around 20ft high, 60ft wide and 200ft long. This room is illuminated by the light of several glowing objects set at irregular spaces in the ceiling. However, this in itself pales into insignificance compared to what they illuminate. A path of yellow bricks around three feet wide is set into the floor. It winds between large heaps of gems, gold and silver coins, exquisitely-fashioned jewelry, grossly over-ornamented weapons, exquisite bolts of cloth that appear to have been spun from silver or gold, and multi-various crafted items which glow dimly with their own enchantments.”

This is a room of temptation, although the PCs may falsely suspect that it is their goal. Ideally the presence of the yellow trail will clue the players in that something more than treasure collection is involved here. None of the items are within reach of the pathway, not even by someone leaning over – with support from others – and stretching to their fullest extent with a rapier. (This still leaves them a foot or so short of their goal.) Even throwing a rope with some kind of hook does not help, as this is magically diverted to fall short of flick aside. (NB: If PCs want to know about the crafted items, they are things like platters, jugs, goblets, candlesticks, mirrors etc.)

We do not call for a Resistance against Avarice immediately at this point, as if we did, the amusing tensions of trying to stay on the path might be overlooked. If players question why a resistance roll is not called for, simply say that the treasure has clearly been here for centuries and is not going anywhere, therefore there is no urgency. However, if someone is ingenious enough to construct a longer device (say by tying two rapiers together, or a rapier and a staff) and manages to hook some treasure, they will then suddenly have to attempt this resistance. If they fail, then they become enamoured of the treasure and walk off the path without a second thought – and begin to sift through and collect the spoils in a quietly crazed and obsessive manner. They also become aggressively jealous of anyone who tries to approach them, or talk to them – thinking that this person wants to deprive them of their treasure. Most importantly, they will not leave, nor even approach a non-enamoured person - unless very firmly convinced (Ψ PERSUASION).

GM Notes: If someone standing on the path and reaching for treasure resists Avarice as they touch it, then they may pull it back - perhaps an ornamental cup, a necklace, or something. Note that only treasure hooked by a person standing on the path who resists against Avarice will remain with the PCs when they leave this room. Everything else will vanish - so keep track of these pieces. Perhaps thoughtfully provide the players with a blank sheet of paper for listing their acquisitions, so that the character sheets don’t get too worn when the treasures are erased shortly. Note that each time a person touches a piece they must attempt to Resist Avarice again.

As soon as a person fails against Avarice, they can no longer take anything out of this room, and it will all turn to dust when they leave. (Exception – if someone succeeds their Resistance at least once, they may retain one thing.) Nonetheless, if a resistant PC retains any, back in the real world any treasure collected in this way turns out to be of temporary reality. Each piece will vanish - either at dawn after the first full day the PC spends back in the surface world, or whenever the PC passes a distance further than one mile from the item. (IE they can be sold but this may well create problems for the PC when the item vanishes – or may not, depending on how lucky or swift-moving they are.) If anyone is able to detect magic, then any

items taken from this room radiate magic.

Remember also that the person/s who make/s the most conspicuous resistance of Avarice in this room may gain a free point to that Resistance – if the GM so desires. A likely qualification would be that after they Resist they must then go on to assist in saving the party, rather than merely saving themselves.

Anyone who steps off the path must attempt to Resist Avarice. The PC experiences this as a massive wave of greed and possessiveness and jealousy pouring over them. If they fail to resist it, see the description in the GM Notes immediately above. If they succeed, describe the internal battle with their own greed in vivid detail. This is an epic battle of personal mythology, one that they somehow desperately resist. Such a strong-willed person now becomes aware of something they hadn’t seen before. Lying against, or partially buried in, the heaps of treasure are several human skeletons dressed in rags. From any single location, a person will likely be able to see 5 or 6 (though describe them not all at once – IE they see one, and if they look around can see another and another). Within the room itself are something in excess of fifty skeletons. Some of them still have corroded rapiers stuck in them as if slain. (Note that no regular gear is lying around though.) If a person who resists when stepping off the path then goes to collect treasure they must attempt to resist again, and again for each piece or small pile (if they choose coins). The idea is that this is a cumulative temptation. No-one who fails will ever leave under their own volition – get players to role-play this gluttonous avarice for maximum amusement.

Escape Clauses: PCs still on the path may try and convince (Ψ PERSUADE) their fellows of the folly of their ways. Arguments of the kind: “You just want my treasure.” “No I don’t, but you’re going to die if you don’t come with us!” are likely. Due to the fixated nature of the allured victims, they are only able to listen to one person at a time. However, levies only apply to further attempts by the same person. Bear in mind that a successful argument does not cause them to regain sanity, but may convince them that they can come back to the path and continue with the mission. IE ‘How can you spend the money here?’ ‘Just think what it will buy?’ ‘Of course I want treasure, but I don’t want yours – I can get my own.’

If everyone steps off the path, any GMCs will do so as well. But perhaps one of them will successfully resist. Or perhaps the madman is immune and will eventually lead one of the PCs back onto the path. Or, he tries desperately to drag the PC back onto the path and the PC kills him. After committing murder the PC then gets another chance to resist, perhaps even with a bonus. Either way, anyone who comes back onto the path snaps out of it, though they may still have some treasure clutched in their hands, and can now see the skeletons. Anyone successfully reaching the doorway at the far side also becomes aware of the skeletons.

PCs who make an IS when searching for a particular type of treasure, instead see one or more skeletons of former treasure-hunters with fingers locked around each other’s throats or arms held jealously about a heap of spoils. This sight allows another attempt to Resist Avarice and snap out of the hypnotic effect.

Lassoing people with rope, and dragging them out by their necks, is also possible - as is direct clubbing into unconsciousness. Bear in mind that anyone who wants to approach an allured person must either convince them that they don’t want their treasure (Ψ PERSUADE -1) or else take them by surprise (Ψ STEALTH).

Leaving a friend of the road behind without trying any and all methods to save them accrues substantial negative Sympathy points. (Leaving a GMC acquaintance behind still attracts these points, but not as many.)

9.5 - The Feast of Fools

Optional Idea: After reading all below, it is up to the GM whether in fact at the end of the tunnel from the Path of Avarice is a solid metal door with some kind of odd clock face on it, with a single hand inexorably counting down. After watching it for a few minutes they can estimate that it will reach the apex of its route in about three-and-a-half hours. During the wait, only an IS with Perception will pick up any vague noises (the gluttony) from beyond the door. Also during the wait, the GM will be forgiven for reminding the PCs how hungry and thirsty they are becoming.

The clock’s hand reaches its apex exactly six minutes after the diners are released from their hour’s break. During that six minutes they drag themselves senseless to the couches around the room. Thus, when the PCs enter the room, the magically replenished feast is there, and several men are lounging in states of deep relaxation. (After 50 minutes they all leap up and race back to the table.) During this 50 minutes they are way too exhausted to talk. You will need to slightly adapt the quoted text below of course.

You will need to decide which option you are going to use as soon as (or preferably before) the PCs leave the room containing the Path of Avarice. One option is to simply roll a 50/50 chance on a dice.

On leaving the path of avarice, the PCs enter a section of winding tunnel carved into the bedrock, and are forced to duck protrusions and climb over rocky obstacles for several hundred yards. (This section is unlit.) As they do so (presuming you are ignoring the timing device option), they gradually begin to hear up ahead the sound of voices. Perception successes may reveal these as the sounds of hearty and convivial company. Before too long they reach the end of this tunnel-corridor and can peer into the room beyond:

⊕ “Here is an ancient feasting hall in the classical style, lit by torches attached to the walls. The walls are wood-paneled, and an entire hog is turning on a spit over a roaring fire blazing in the stone hearth. On the walls are mounted the stuffed heads of stags, wolves and bears, and along the center of the room is a great table of polished oak, weighted down with numerous foodstuffs. These include full haunches of meat, heaped plates of vegetables, entire glazed river fish, a swan stuffed with oysters, and numerous carafes of sparkling wine.” *PAUSE for breath/response.* “Around the sides of the hall are several large sumptuous couches. Next to the table is a massive tureen, from which a man is swiftly ladling thick broth into a large wooden bowl. As well as this gentleman, seven others sit round the table - five men in total and three women. Although none are overweight, they all seem well-fed, and yet they are dining as if famished. They are so engrossed that only one or two of them even glance up for a moment as you peer into the room.”

“The sound of voices was their frantic calls for their fellows to hand food in their direction.” (If the noises were heard.)

(It takes a good Perception roll - by someone actively looking around - to spot one of the four skeletons dressed in rags, each one being hidden behind a sofa. If you are using the option of having the PCs enter the room during rest period, then perhaps delay these being spotted until necessary to try to deter the PCs from starting to dine. The reasons why they are so few is because these people managed to resist long enough to crawl away from the table and die. They were then stacked neatly to one side by the diners during the next rest period.)

The only concealed door in the paneling leads to a privy, that the diners queue to make use of during their break. This was invented spontaneously during the playtest and proved quite amusing when some of the PCs were amongst the diners – and fighting furiously for lavatory privileges!

The PCs are of course very hungry by now, since they have had no food since they arrived, and probably no drink either. However, you don’t need to call for rolls to Resist Gourmandism immediately. (If players ask why you don’t call for such rolls, say only that they are not yet sufficiently hungry – although they surely will be soon. For your own benefit, it is really because the PCs are undoubtedly wary that not all in this place is as it seems and would have an automatic mistrust. However, to say this to the players risks undermining the atmosphere at this point.)

The Diners

The diners are all former adventurers, who were tempted by the food here and are now cursed to be unable to leave the table without starving to death. They can’t talk much because they need to eat and drink all the time, and in any case are these days only marginally sane. Beneath the table are scatterings of their old equipment – rope, rapiers, picks, etc etc as the GM sees fit. Their responses will be things like ‘must eat’, ‘try some it’s delicious’, ‘pass the beef’, ‘can’t stop – too hungry’. Only with a good Persuasion success will a PC get anything out of them. This might be maudlin comments of a previous life now long gone, or whatever the GM wants.

If one is hauled away from the table, the others will look worried, and maybe even shake their heads or groan in fear, or even mutter ‘No! No!’ – but they will not under any circumstances stop eating. The one who is hauled away will commence kicking and screaming and will begin to starve to death right in front of their eyes. Only immediate return to the table will allow him to eat fast enough to save himself. Otherwise he will rot away to nothing before their eyes. Yuck! It is up to the GM’s discretion if they continue eating all of the time the PCs are here, or if the curse-allowed one hour’s break after every eleven hours spent eating arrives during this time. This meal is of course cursed, and after the first mouthful one is doomed to spend one’s remaining day here – in fact one is held in stasis for centuries before finally expiring. Sniffing close-up or licking the food is so tempting as to initiate a resistance vs. Gourmandism.

It is not possible to disrupt the table very much. Of course one can take food, but the more one does this the more one risks having to roll a Resistance to Gourmandism. If the food is watched, it imperceptibly replaces itself. Thus the diners have to keep moving around or asking the others to pass them food. (Since they can eat several portions in the time it takes for one to regenerate.) It is not possible to move any of the large plates or the large soup tureen – they are magically held in place.

Bonus Offer: It is possible for a determined PC to hack one of the torches off the wall. This is not easy, but possible, and will provide them with a permanent magical item – a torch that never goes out. (At least it remains permanent until a moment of

the GM’s choosing in some later adventure, at which point it abruptly goes out and cannot be re-lit except by being laboriously and expensively recharged in a magician’s laboratory). However, it does have drawbacks – in that it is still fire and cannot be easily stored.

It is likely that the PCs will first look to escaping this room. (In the playtest the room was systematically demolished, though it proved capable of slow regeneration.) There is no obvious door, and no secret door in the wood paneling. Note also that once the PCs are all inside, a wall materializes across the passage they came in through, and so this will no longer be an option either. (Ideally this will happen when none of them are looking.) Note that if a PC arrives here having left anyone in the previous room with the intention of seeking help and going back, then delay this materialization until the PCs are all here. The problem here is that they are trapped, and of course soon will be so hungry that regular Resistances to Gourmandism will be inevitable. (You can in fact mention this in an aside to the players, in order to motivate their efforts.)

PCs pulled away from the table after eating do suffer some small degree of malnutrition. In the playtest only one PC remained fully resistant, and had to club, bind and lower his associates one by one. The poor madman from the reception room was forgotten in all of this activity and left with the diners.

Escape Clauses: The PCs merely need to find the exit and leave. If they don’t think of it for ages, then the exit is by simply dousing the fire somehow, and climbing up the chimney. If they think of this pretty quickly, then instead the exit is in fact hidden in the huge soup tureen. The tureen needs to be emptied (which is possible even though it magically replenishes like everything else). At the bottom is a closely-fitting metal trapdoor. The biggest problem is that even touching the soup initiates a Resistance roll to Gourmandism. In playtest the PCs solved this by using the mallet and climbing spikes to pierce the tureen at the base and letting it drain – although one made a poor Athletics roll and was splashed, and joined the diners for a while.

Should the PCs go straight for the fireplace and the tureen, you may want to extend this encounter even further. Although fighting the poor diners might be sufficient. And remember that anyone who even splashes themselves with soup from the tureen during its emptying must roll to try and Resist Gourmandism (or else succumb to frenzied dining). Anyone only recently succumbing to this ‘perpetual feasting’ curse can be clubbed and pulled away, and will eventually recover. If all of the PCs succumb, the scenario risks being prematurely ended - so again one of your GMCs might be required to save the day.

It is possible that all PCs will succumb. An amusing escape clause is that they then eat and eat for many hours (describe in detail), until the next break. At the break, ask each to use their Magic rating to try and get an IS or an IS/PS. Anyone who resists the curse in this way can then attempt to Resist Gourmandism again. Should all fail again, then a further amusing option is to shortly – an hour or two after feasting restarts - have one of the original diners suddenly explode, showering all with goo. This horrific sight allows all new to the feast a chance to resist again.

Again remember that anyone who conspicuously resists Gourmandism may gain a free point in this Resistance – at the GM’s discretion and dependent on whether they then use this lucky break in an altruistic or selfish fashion.

9.6 - The Hall of Mirrors

The PCs either climb up the chimney or down the chute beneath the tureen. Either way they either climb into what appears to be a very large clothes cabinet or a small dressing room. It is dark in here. There is a simple wooden door to this closet – outlined by the light of the room beyond, which they may easily open and pass through. (Though quite possibly there will be a lot of cautious listening before they do.) The clothes inside the cabinet are of good quality and many different styles and sizes. They include: hats, leggings, trews, coats, tunics, shoes, boots, stockings, tabards, you name it. However, such things might not be initially considered important – or smart PCs may realize that they are about to have their vanity tested. (NB: Again the entryway will seal up when all are through, so no return is possible.)

⊕ “Beyond the door is a large sumptuously decorated room of comfortable rich couches, potted palms, and a deep rich carpet. Around the walls are four more doors, and a dozen large dressing mirrors. Standing in the middle of the room, draped liberally with cobwebs is a hulking man of partially-bestial appearance, yet wearing a very well-fitting servant’s uniform. The room is lit by a deep glow from no discernible source. It is not full light, but perhaps the kind of light that is kind to wrinkles and minor sartorial problems.”

This vat creature (for that is what he is) remains motionless until someone actually steps into the room (or strikes him with a thrown object), at which point he animates and begins talking:

“Ladies and Gentleman. Welcome to Axomber’s Tailoring Emporium. We have every possible accouterment for the modern man or woman about town. Simply ask for whatever you desire and it shall be brought to you.”

The problem here is not the vat-creature, it is the mirrors. Anyone who looks into a mirror must attempt to Resist Arrogance. Should they fail this as well, they now become obsessed with dressing themselves in the most glamorous finery. The vat-creature will follow them around, flattering and fawning to the maximum capabilities of the GM, and gesticulating at the mirrors, trying to cause them to look. He will do this anyway, even if the PCs refuse to look into the mirrors: "Sir has a physique to die for. Just imagine your wonderful frame draped in a lounge suit of the most exquisite Kauchique wools!" In fact if anyone shows the slightest sign of weakening, he will run and get some clothing to try and attempt to show it to them (and if it is amusing he will do this even if no-one is weakening). He will at this point engage in a regular Persuasion contest¹³ with them. And should the person fail, they will allow this vat-creature to hold it in front of them so that they can look in a mirror. (Note that anyone who looks into the mirror sees themselves looking exaggeratedly beautiful/handsome, and the GM needs to describe this. They basically fall in love with themselves and want to pamper and further beautify themselves.)

As they search the room, call for Wherewithal rolls to prevent people looking into the mirrors. Both DF and QF will result in a glance that calls for a Resistance roll. On EF/HBS allow some slight description of what they see and experience, but the glance is not sufficient to pull them into the effect of the curse.

Once under the spell of the clothing, the person will spend some time being dressed in the best clothes they can find (role-play this for maximum amusement). Then, when this is finished, they will become slavish followers of the vat-creature, and join him in trying to Persuade the other characters of the advantages of dressing well. The objective of the vat-creature is to get everyone properly dressed and then when this is finished the full curse kicks in and everyone stands staring at their own reflections. The vat-creature's reward is then to slay and devour them at his leisure, and once the last one is properly digested he goes back into stasis. The vat-creature will cajole and tempt people by saying how much better anyone who has succumbed looks to the others (those as yet still clinging to freewill).

Behind each and every other door is another closet full of clothes. Anyone who stops to examine any of these clothes with a view to their suitability to wear (rather than just rifling through pockets etc) must also attempt to Resist Arrogance, or become cursed with sartorial fascination. Oh yes, and stacked at the back of one of the closets (in fact taking up probably a full tenth of the space in there) are thirty-seven human skulls and the equivalent mass of human skeletal bones, all nicely piled. The larger bones have been cracked open, presumably to such the marrow out. At the back of another closet is a smaller heap of rapiers, knives, and other bits and pieces of adventuring equipment as the GM sees fit – enough to have been the possessions of 37. All magical gear has of course long since been transported away.

Escape Clauses: The vat-creature may not be the problem, but it is the solution. In his breast pocket is a large key. (Not that he will ever reveal – or even allude to – this.) It is not possible to search him, since he does not permit liberties. He is also immensely strong. He is not permitted to unprovokedly attack anyone (until all are enthralled), but can defend himself. Mind you, he will continue to be absolutely obsequious - whether trying to discourage attacks or when fighting back viciously to defend himself - and trying to hamstring and otherwise disable the PCs. Any fight should be role-played to the full - as the vat-creature leaps hither and thither, lashing out, pausing and panting etc. He clearly enjoys it even though he claims that he does not want to fight but only to do his job.

The PCs may think at first that it is not part of the story to attack him. Mind you, the biggest problem is not his strength (which is high but surmountable) but rather than anyone leaping about the room is in danger of catching sight of themselves in a mirror. (And players may require notification that this is the case.) On any attack or defense roll, a PC must make a Perception roll. On a DF they catch sight of themselves in the mirror and must use their Magic and then their Resistance to Arrogance – or else become enthralled. The exit door is behind one of the mirrors – which must be broken to see it. Once revealed, it can be unlocked and passed through. Those under the curse will remain enthralled and will need to be persuaded to leave. If it adds to the fun, the vat-creature is also authorized to fight to prevent anyone leaving the room. He also slowly regenerates after being slain – and can thus grip someone's ankle in an amusing/startling fashion even after he is assumed dead. (As happened in the playtest.)

Should the PCs cotton on to the vat-creature too early, then the key is in fact hidden in a suit pocket in one of the closets. Searching without looking could be quite a difficult process. Hung amongst the fine clothes, incidentally, is the gear of the 37 dead adventurers. (It has been freshly laundered.) Note that anyone who somehow gets out of here with fine clothes, can keep

¹³ PCs can also resist this Persuasion with their Wherewithal if they wish.

these and they remain fine and expensive clothes in the outside world. In fact they are so fine that they can be sold for quadruple the standard price, and when worn add a boon of 1 to Seduction attempts and to anyone who appreciates that good clothing indicates a person’s station and reliability¹⁴. However, choosing to don fine clothes when one is not magically impelled to do so requires a resistance roll for each item of clothing.

If all PCs are all enthralled in this curse, if there is a personality GMC (such as Boris who is enamoured of one of the PCs in my campaign) this person could try and Persuade his particular friend that what they are doing is deluded. (Role-play this well rather than make it a ‘standard default’ type event.) If they fail, then eventually they too will succumb. As soon as the vat-creature rips out the jugular of a GMC, everyone gets a chance to test their Magic rating. On an IS/PS they break free enough to try and Resist Arrogance. (NB: If no-one/few in your campaign has/have Magic ratings, adjust this option to a mere Resistance roll.) If no GMC is left, then the creature is less fatal in its first munchings – or perhaps the PC gains the chance to roll when he/she notices they are about to become dinner? Once it has first attacked, the creature is now free to ravage and will try and disable everyone just in case they break free of the curse before he has eaten them. This too allows Resistance attempts. (Or Magic resistance attempts as the GM sees fit.)

Again remember that anyone who conspicuously resists Arrogance here may gain – at the GM’s discretion – a free point to that Resistance rating.

9.7 – The Nympharium

⊕ “A passage leads beyond the dangerous dressing rooms, curving slowly upwards and around to the right for several hundred yards. As it does so, its structure changes from roughly hewn blocks to large ornate bricks, and from up ahead the scent of incense wafts through the air. At length you arrive at a small wooden door, decorated with curious carved patterns of birds and insects alighting on the curling branches of trees.”

Then, when they open the door:

⊕ “Beyond the door is a large courtyard lined with arched chambers, some hidden by curtains, others open to the air. The scene is lit by a deep golden glow, and scattered around are many large potted plants. Inside the chambers that are visible are large comfortable couches. At the center of the room is a wide oblong pool from which the pleasant scents arise. The waters are clearly warm, as faint wisps of steam arise from the surface here and there.”

Once they have taken this in:

⊕ “Although the room was apparently deserted, from various shadows and nooks and crannies lithe humanoid shapes are uncurling. Mostly female, but some male, clad only in gossamer gowns, these beings have subtly colored skins and are clearly not human, but yet human enough to arouse more than just the imagination.”

These beings are nymphs – Overworld creatures of lusty sensuality, that many mages make use of for their sensual sport. The author chooses to leave the exact details of this scene to the individual GM. Suffice it to say that the nymphs will offer sensual massages and other more intimate pursuits, and that each PC will need to Resist Rakishness at least three times. On succumbing the PC will satiate themselves, and then may attempt a further resistance roll. Should this fail, the process continues with the roll being at a penalty of 1 each further time. When there is no chance of success remaining, the PC has fallen totally into the thrall of these beings.

Note as per the other scenes, that anyone who resists significantly may gain a point in their Resist Rakishness. However, anyone who succumbs more than once may lose a point.

Escape Clauses: The nymphs are not violent, and flee from any threats. However, they are here to tempt and allure, and when you chase one away three more will appear. The best way to deal with tempted PCs is the standard ‘coshing and dragging’. However, once a PC has succumbed at least once, they no longer retain full vigor. The means of escape is via a grating beneath a couch in one of the curtained chambers. However, anyone attempting to search a chamber will be ‘pursued’ by at least half a dozen nymphs.

9.8 - The Room of Honor and Justice

Once the exit grate from the nympharium area is opened, the PCs may descend a set of finely cut stone stairs to a long passage. At the end of the passage is a bare waiting room with a solid wooden door. This door is immovable until all

¹⁴ IE anyone but the most uncultured buffoon.

surviving characters are in the room. At this point the corridor along which they have just traveled magically fills in with close-fitting stone blocks – and the wooden door in the other side of the room can now be opened.

⊕ “Beyond the door is a small courthouse, complete with two sections of wooden benches – one to the left and the other to the right. A stand for the accused is at the front of the railed section into which you must perforce step, and a raised platform is opposite you - on which is a judge’s seat and desk. Behind the judge’s seat is another wooden door, and on either side of that door are two large ornate frames around 8ft high and 6ft wide. Each frame resembles a mirror, but through the glass you can see not a reflection of the room you are in, but totally different scenes. The frame on the right shows a shadowy treasure room at the center of which is an ornate stone sarcophagus, the lid of which is encrusted with gems and precious metals. The frame on the left reveals an unpleasant rocky scene beneath a peculiar flickering red sky.” (If they have already investigated the true tomb, a Perception success recognizes it.)

The entry door opens directly into the plaintiff’s box, and a small swinging door (knee-high) connects this to the defendant’s box. Only one person at a time can leave this box and enter the defendant’s stand, though the PCs will not know this at first. (An ‘elastic’ energy barrier allows this to be the case.) The seated area to the left has a larger surrounding partition (4ft high) than the one on the right, and the seats on the right are padded - rather than bare wood. Other than that the two seating areas are very similar.

(GM Note: a map is definitely appropriate.)

As soon as all adventurers are in the box, the door behind them vanishes, and:

⊕ “The judge’s door opens, and an old man in classically-styled robes and a huge beard steps out, carrying a small set of metal scales. He is tall and appears to be not quite human. However, it is hard to place what is unusual about him, other than his silver-tinted skin. It takes him a moment to gain his bearings and he appears confused. But then he gathers his wits, and sits down at the desk, placing the scales untidily beside him and saying: ‘Will the first defendant please come forward?’”

This character is actually an aspect of a minor deity, enslaved for this purpose. It matters not what powers bring him here, for the PCs will never know, and the ‘judge’ is bound here only to do his job – and will utterly refuse to answer any esoteric questions –with any exceptions noted below. (“I am the one asking the questions in this court!”)

Judge: “State your name for the court.”

PC Response

Judge: “State your occupation for the court.”

PC Response

Judge: “Are you aware of the crimes for which you appear before us today?”

PC Response

Judge: “The crimes are arrogance, avarice, indolence, debauchery and sundry indulgences. What say you: Guilty or Not Guilty?”

PC Response (NB: PC must Resist Pettifoggery not to waffle on and annoy the judge. GM should make comments about the judge’s annoyance if the PC does waffle and argue.)

Judge: “You now have the opportunity to make a statement in your defense.”

PC Response (NB: PC must Resist Pettifoggery not to annoy the judge with self-aggrandizing statements. GM should make comments about the judge’s annoyance if the PC does brag overmuch.)

Judge: “Does anyone have anything to add before I make my judgement?”

Other PCs have the chance to respond. (GMCs will be too cowed/confused.)

If questioned about the penalties, the judge will say that these depend on his appraisal of their character. The judge may quote their crimes from previous adventures, or just talk generally about greed and ruthlessness and robbery if no details can be remembered. The PC will be expected to justify themselves. The judge’s Rebuff is normally Lawyerly, but changes to Eloquent when dealing with someone of Forthright or Obfuscatory style of Persuasion. His rating is: ~+5.

Winning the Argument: The PC basically must convince the judge that they are not a bad person compared to the values and mores of their time. PCs get bonus points in their Persuasion pool, or other benefits, for the following. NB two boons of 1 transmute to a bonus of 1, and vice versa for levies. Also, balanced boons/levies + bonus/penalties cancel each other out. For each failed Resistance to Pettifoggery – either subtract 3 pool points or nullify a boon of 1

Anyone pleading ‘Guilty’ – boon of 1
Anyone stating coherently that they are not bad people compared to the society they were raised in & live in – boon of 1
Anyone saying ‘Not Guilty’ – levy of 1
Anyone blaming others – levy of 1
Truthfully reciting any minor yet significant altruistic act from in the game – 1 extra pool point
Truthfully reciting any very significant altruistic act from in the game – 2 extra pool points
Talking rubbish without taking an intelligent comparative approach – judge gains a boon of 1 on his Rebuff
Talking oneself up in a cavalier fashion - judge gains a boon of 1 on his Rebuff (take care this isn’t just the same as the previous option)
Any significant spontaneous character support for those yet to go on trial – 1 extra pool point (to a max of three)
Offering to give 10% of their haul from this adventure to a charity – 1 pool point
A third – 2 pool points
Two thirds – 3 pool points
All of it – 4 pool points
Claiming contriteness and offering apologies – 1 pool point
Using Imposture to theatrically repent: IS +3; PS +2; HBS +1; EF -1; QF -2; DF -3.
Every bonus Resistance point gained so far: 1 extra pool point.

Surprise Escape Clause 1:

The first person who offers themselves for the punishment so long as the judge spares a friend will be congratulated on their altruism and automatically allowed to go free. (“Your nobility releases you from this court, but your ‘friend’ must still stand trial on their own behalf.”). The next person to try this will be instantly believed and the other person will go free. (“Your sacrifice is noble indeed. This is highly irregular, but I am tempted to believe you. Yes, your friend may go free, and you yourself are given the full burden of their guilt.”)

Surprise Escape Clause 2: It is possible that a PC might take the righteous approach - that nobody has the right to judge another, and claim that this court is a mockery of the ‘Law of Equipoise’ or some such stance. Although the judge will be offended and claim that he is an ‘avatar of divine justice’, he doesn’t seem entirely convinced of this, and is in fact open to being Persuaded that the whole thing is a travesty, and to let them all go. Remember, if this PC fails, then unless an entirely new tack is taken, further attempts to convince him of this accrue levies. If the PC succeeds too easily, the judge only lets through the person who actually convinces them – to go into the ‘freed’ box to wait. If anyone else tries this tack, the judge explains that “nobody may mount an identical defense”. However, if someone tries this approach after this room has already had good role-playing time, then by all means it may work to the full.

GM Notes: So you get the picture – humbleness and selflessness gain extra pool points. Although going over the top might also lose them. The GM should keep track of pools and bonuses secretly and let the player know if the PC is doing. The barometer is the judge who seems sympathetic or offended. Relay the judge’s manner: If the PC is doing OK, the judge is ‘neutral’, if the PC is doing good the judge appears ‘mildly interested’, if the PC is doing very well the judge seems ‘quite sympathetic’. However, if the PC is doing not so good, the judge seems ‘stern’. If the PC is doing very badly, the judge seems ‘offended’.

Note that one way to speed this up is to allow only five exchanges between the judge and the accused. The person with the highest pool at the end of this exchange wins. GMCs of course will have an extrapolated narrative spoken by the GM, rather than a series of dice rolls. One roll should be quite sufficient, with the GM deciding beforehand on the likelihood of their success.

The Verdict: Once a person fails against the judge, they will be pronounced guilty and sentenced to “life imprisonment”. They will then be asked to stand aside in the convicts’ box (the less-inviting seated area on the left). Should anyone get rough or argue, two hulking bailiffs (very similar to the ‘dresser’ encountered earlier, but in more workaday gear) will arrive through the judge’s door and sort them out. The judge will regard these ‘bailiffs’ with faint disdain. Since force-fields currently prevent willy-nilly leaping and racing around the courtroom - allowing access only to where individuals are meant to go – the bailiffs have little work to do in any case.

If someone succeeds against the judge – i.e. convincing him of the extenuating circumstances, apologizing etc, he will be given a warning: “You will be freed. First take a few minutes to think upon what I have said. If you are ever brought before me again, I will not be so lenient.” The force-fields will then permit them to enter the more comfortable seated area.

Escape Clauses: To some extent this must be adjudicated on the fly, since each trial will no doubt play in different ways in each campaign. Also, bear in mind that whilst escape is inevitable for the PCs, the GM must take pains not to alert them to this fact. Condoling comments to the convicted, and worried referrals to this scenario description will be entirely appropriate during the court-room proceedings. It is important to maintain an atmosphere that leads players/PCs to believe their immortal souls are in grave danger if they do not come up with the goods.

If all PCs manage to convince the judge that they are innocent (or at least deserving of another chance), then we can simply leave things as they are, and any GMCs are trapped forever. In this case, when all the trials are over, small demons will leap from the red-landscape portal, carrying tridents and whips, and will drive the wailing convicts back through their portal. The judge will then indicate the other portal to those who are free to go, he will sigh, shake his head despairingly, and pass back through the simple wooden door - which will vanish behind him.

In any other circumstances, when all the verdicts have been carried out, the judge will indicate the portal to the crypt and say to those he has let free: "I am now authorized to open the way back to your own world. No doubt more cruel dangers await you there." He seems somehow annoyed as he turns next to the others: "You whom I have been forced to judge, I leave to your own fates." Then he abruptly stands, spins on his heel, takes up the scales and strides through the wooden door - which closes behind him and vanishes. (Leaving a solid wall in its place.) All barrier force-fields in the room now vanish.

Again, the little demons come bounding in, but now presumably the PCs will put up a fight. Yes, this is the simple default option: since no-one has been disarmed, they may lay into the demons with cold, hard steel. If any GMCs remain, it is entirely appropriate for one or more of them to be hauled wailing through the subworld portal whilst the PCs fight a desperate but successful rearguard action to the portal that leads to the tomb. Possibly in fact it is the bravery of one of the GMCs in starting the battle that allows a distraction so that any convicted PCs may fight their escape. (Even though that GMC may be taken by the demons.) Feel free to have more demons pour in as soon as all the PCs are in a position to escape. Should dramatics allow/suggest such a thing, these little demons are just the underlings of a larger demonic creature that muscles its way in to see what the hold-up is. Again all the PCs should escape, but GMCs - particularly heroic ones - should succumb. However, if several GMCs survived to this point perhaps one will escape with the PCs.

Little Demons: Speed ~, Sure-Footedness ~-2, Health ~-3, Magic (Resistance only) 2, Athletics 3, Wherewithal ~-3.

NB: However you run this, the idea is for the PCs/Players to feel that they have subverted what probably used to be some kind of solemn judgement.

9.9 - The True Crypt

The PCs emerge through the mirror in the back wall of the true crypt. Possibly they were briefly here once before.

⊕ "This end of the large columned room is dimly lit by a glow from no apparent source. A large stone sarcophagus rests on a raised stone platform, its lid carved into the shape of a slumbering bearded man and decorated with gold and silver inlay and many set gems. Around it are several closed chests, and a number of large pottery urns, several of which are filled to overflowing with gold or silver coins. It appears that you have stepped out of an ornamental mirror, though this does not presently reveal any other scene than that which you would expect."

Anyone wishing to smash open chests should be advised (by the GM) that doing so may damage or destroy whatever is inside. Each chest is locked, and no keys are available. Although each item is numbered, roll randomly to see which of those as yet unopened is picked. Or the PCs might test gently by weight and the sounds of what is within.

Large Chest 1: This chest contains a dozen thick glass tubes sealed with corks. Inside each is a dark gray powder, and burnt upon the top of each cork is a small rune. These are all deodands freeze-dried by *Angwantibo's First Chilling Preservation* (SVG - p97). To activate the powder, simply add a drop of water. If more than 5% of the powder is ever dispersed, the enchantment fails and the deodand is gone forever. These tubes are utterly unlabelled. The rune, incidentally, is a marking for 'water'. (Pedantry PS/IS)

Large Chest 2: This chest is trapped with a poisoned needle. Anyone exposed to the poison automatically becomes inimitable to magic. That is to say he cannot cast spells or cantraps, and repels magic items from his person with surprising static force. The upside of this is that he also repels all spells as if wearing Laccodel's Rune. This effect lasts for an entire week (or another time limit as set by the GM). In here is a *Cloak of Flame Retardation* (CC - p6), a *Peregrinating*

Gem (CC - p10), an *Unbalanced Goblet* (CC - p12), and *Yart Cog’s Ring of No Consequence* (CC - p13). Bear in mind that the PCs will not know what these do, except by trial and error or paying someone to tell them. Also bear in mind that if he has been ‘poisoned’ the objects will ricochet away from him at some considerable velocity.

Large Chest 3: This lock is also trapped, and a failed picking attempt breaks a small glass tube - which releases a liquid. This liquid immediately turns into a cloud of gas that fills this end of the room. Anyone who breathes the gas and fails to resist Magic is unable to answer questions with anything but the absolute truth for the next 24 hours (or a time of the GM’s choosing). Inside here is *Hoptile’s Bridle* (IT - p43), *The Jade Fish* (IT - p44), and the *Talisman of Anthropic Imposition* (IT - p53). The PCs will have no idea what these do, and may try them out – oh dear. The bridle doesn’t work on anything with full sentience (does work on half-men), the fish activates in any body of water (and swims away)¹⁵, and the talisman could cause them a lot of trouble!

Small Chest 1: A trap in the lock is coated with poison. Anyone infected with this poison becomes totally immune to Gourmandism for the next week, and in fact finds most foodstuffs other than light salads pretty much unpalatable. In here is also a cloak of invisibility, though of course the chest appears to be completely empty. State this in a matter of fact way. If the PCs do not then search the chest the cloak will not be found. (Nonetheless, the cloak does work, and can be draped over oneself to render oneself invisible. This might be of immense assistance in the next couple of adventures, but should of course somehow be lost or stolen after that – as it really is too powerful for Cugel-types.)

Small Chest 2: There is a trap here, but the trap is within the chest, so picking the lock makes no difference. When the catch is released, the chest springs open with a small explosion, and fine white powder is spread across the area in a cloud. Anyone who breathes it must roll to resist Magic. If they fail they are suddenly, and for the next full day totally disinterested in wealth of any kind. This does not mean they will totally empty their pockets, and they may still hold on to items that are of other interest, but they certainly won’t carry or help carry heaps of cash, and will need to be Persuaded to try to move the sarcophagus lid. Anyone very close automatically breathes this powder, anyone fairly close may attempt to get an IS with their Athletics or Wherewithal to hold their breath. However, don’t initially ask people to make these rolls – describe the expanding cloud of powder and ask what each PC is going to do.

Small Chest 3: A trap in the lock is coated with poison. Anyone infected with this poison must try to resist it with their Magic. Should they fail they become charged with electricity and unable to hold or stand near any metal objects. (This lasts for an entire week.) A single large book is here. It is a treatise on magic, and contains several spells. Anyone spending a few hours of study with this book may then make – if they want to try and learn any spells - a Magic roll. On an IS they learn three spells, on a PS they learn 2, and on a HBS they learn 1. On a DF they lose 1 point in their Magic rating due to calamitous misunderstanding of the sequential pervulsions. The spells are¹⁶: *A Conversation with the Restless* (SVG - p62), *The Charm of Amorous Inclination* (SVG - p149), *Phalajun’s Perfection of Manners* (SVG - p80), *The Green and Purple Agency of Gathering* (SVG - p149), and the *Green and Purple Intelligence of Equipoise* (SVG - p159). Note that each and every one of these spells works to the lesser or greater detriment of the caster, and furthermore that such is **not** apparent in any spell description or elsewhere in the book. This is a tome written by a prankster for the purposes of causing mischief. It is your duty to realistically adjudicate a PC’s first attempt to learn ‘real magic’, and to describe the ruinous effects of their first ‘successful’ casting/s. (Bear in mind that on a DF something useful will actually happen.)

Small Chest 4: A peculiar hand-held mechanical contraption with many moving parts. It is an *Inestimable GyrationaL Locator* (CC - p8) and is set to detect anyone with demonic plasm in their nature, within a mile of the user. Also there is a *pair of cursed dice*. Anyone who rolls both dice together gains a bonus of 1 to their Gambling (perceived as being able to often roll exactly the dice result that they want). This happens only for the first person to roll the dice in any game, but this can be an experimental roll before the game proper begins. However, anything won during this game is lost within the next 48 hours – either to thieves or unexpected damage or by running away, or confiscated by authorities etc etc. (It may take some time for the owner of these dice to work out what is going on.) Also, these dice appear in one’s hand

¹⁵ GM’s should describe its glory and hint at the ease of transport it presents, not to mention its obvious great value in purely monetary terms – all moments before it starts up and swims away (since the activation and control words were neglected). Likely they will encounter this device later down the road, having been found, claimed, and now used by someone with sufficient Magical knowledge to control it.

¹⁶ Should you suspect that any of your players have a copy of the SVG change the names and descriptions of these spells to further equally discommoding magics.

whenever one plays dice, so no other dice can be used. And they cannot be given away, but only leave the owner when stolen. (Something that is probably not too difficult to arrange when the owner has worked out what is going on.)

Large Urn 1: (The carving on this urn depicts a tall man in unusually loose and oddly exotic clothes.) This is sealed with wax that must be dug out. Inside the urn is a rather irritated eastern daihak that has been bound here for a very long time. If released he casts a curse that affects anyone who doesn’t make an IS with Magic resistance. This turns their clothes to rags (except any clothes obtained within the tomb), and in fact every other item of clothing they put on for the next week turns instantly to rags.

Large Urn 2: (The carving on this urn depicts two women washing themselves.) This is also sealed with wax. If the wax is dug out, the jar is found to be completely filled with a sweet-smelling oil. Should anyone anoint themselves with this all over (so that at least 90% of their skin is covered) they immediately and permanently gain an extra point to their Health rating. It only ever works once for any individual.

Small Urn 1: Filled with 700 gold coins (each potentially worth three times face value due to ancient make)

Small Urn 2: Filled with 2,100 silver coins (each potentially worth three times face value due to ancient make)

Small Urn 3: Filled with 2,100 silver coins (each potentially worth three times face value due to ancient make)

The Sarcophagus: This magnificent sarcophagus is not decorated at all - except for the lid. That is apart from a number of old runic phrases carved around its sides. At Cugel-Level no character has sufficient Pedantry to work out what these say - except that they talk about Axomber and his deeds and works. Only on an IS will anyone see and understand the phrase: “Beware those who disturb my immortal rest.” The sarcophagus lid is very heavy and fits well. A crowbar or pick will be needed to pry it up before anyone can get a good grip. Inside the sarcophagus are the preserved collected works of Axomber, each in separate volumes.

Each book is cursed, and whenever anyone so much as glances at a page inside, they are compelled to open the book at the beginning and read the whole thing. (Looking at the titles is fine, and the GM will need to invent such.) Such a process typically takes 3-8 (D6+2) hours, since the language is old and the concepts often obtuse to the congenitally uneducated. The vast difference in times is because some works are humorous (travelogues, biographies, social commentaries), and others are academic or philosophical texts. Anyone who reads three such books gains a point of Pedantry, but this advantage may happen only once. Taking a book by force from someone physically pains them, and they lose 1 Health point for each such attempt. (They continue to scream and writhe in pain, and lose 1 point each round until the book is returned to their grasp.)

An Appraisal roll on the sarcophagus lid estimates its worth at approximately 25,000t. This reduces in increasingly greater increments if any gems or inlay are prized out, so people must Resist Avarice if they want to do so. If anyone watching such an action does not Resist Avarice, they are impelled to stop despoilers - up to and including the point of lesser violences. The lid requires a minimum of four people to lift, and with only four it is a long slow process to take it anywhere. If carried by four or five, whenever anyone makes a DF with Athletics they let go and it topples, and may well (50/50) crack or break when it hits the hard ground. If six people carry it things will go a little easier, but eight is ideal. Trying to get it up out of the chasm is a ridiculous concept without suitable magic, or a sturdy block and tackle and some beast to take the strain.

If the sarcophagus lid is cracked or defaced, Axomber’s ghost will manifest. This spirit should be described in suitably chilling detail. Use the Supernatural Terror rules available now at the Violet Cusps page, since every time the ghost touches or confronts someone (with its wailing emaciated face) they must resist temporary insanity. The ghost cannot otherwise harm anybody, but his ashes were mixed into the bindings of the various ornaments on the lid. Some GMs may wish to make this ghost even more detailed or threatening - such is entirely permissible. If the PCs flee the room (or are temporarily bereft of motivation), the ghost will drag the lid back onto his sarcophagus and perhaps even repair it. (Although he might wait to complete any repairs until the PCs have left the area.) Valuable ornaments pried off the sarcophagus lid vanish when the PCs pass a half-mile radius from the lid itself - reappearing back in their former settings on the lid. (This effect ceases once the lid is transported more than a mile from the crypt.)

Timing: For simplicity, have them finish in the crypt in the very early hours of the morning. Thus they can have a few hours rest before attempting to travel to the nearest town. (When they finally emerge from the crypt to see what time it is, the first signs of false dawn will be appearing. Although if they only do this after spending large amounts of time moving the sarcophagus lid, then make it later.)

10) Back in the Sunlight

The Draft Animal? First things first. How did they arrange for the safety of the draft animal? It’s easy enough to hide the cart, but what about a domesticated creature. If they merely left it and hoped for the best a generous GM will roll a 50/50 chance of whether a semi-sentient beast is still here. If it isn’t there any more roll another 50/50 chance to see whether it has disappeared (run away or stolen) or lies eviscerated amongst the brambles nearby. It is even less likely that a non-sentient beast is still here. If the beast is gone, one solution is to wait for more dubious travelers (which may not occur for some days) or to travel back into tedder territory and liberate a suitable creature. (Possibly their very own beast ran in that direction and now has new masters from whom it might well wish to be liberated – since the tedders are unlikely to be as eager for its good-natured assistance as the PCs.) NB: In the playtest, the PCs worked out – through talking to the ghosts – that half-men cannot get into the shrine, so advised their mermelant to take refuge there. It agreed, but said that it would only wait one full day. After that it said it would depart at speed the very next first light, heading back to civilization. Since the PCs presumably will take at least a full day to progress through the traps, the GM might wish to roll 50/50 as to whether it stayed an extra day.

Packing the Cart? The GM needs to realistically assess how much the PCs can fit into any secret compartment within a cart. Chances are they underestimated how much space is available, or what the maximum width of the compartment is. Certain items may not fit into the space – certainly no chests or urns will, so loose coins and gems will rattle around and may begin to fall out through cracks that open and close between the planks when the cart goes over obstacles.

Side Trip for Block and Tackle

If the PCs decide to go back for a block and tackle¹⁷ in order to support the sarcophagus lid’s being raised up the chasm, they will know that Taun Tassel is the only nearby settlement of any size. However, they are unlikely to have extreme good confidence that they can transport the rest of their loot there and back safely. This state of affairs creates a dilemma, the simplest answer to which is probably to take their goods to Kaiin and leave the lid behind. However, they may also decide to hide their loot in a crypt or bury it, and return as quickly as possible. Any intelligent hiding method should be allowed to succeed. Any less smart or poorly executed attempt has at least a 1 or 2 in 6 chance of finding their loot gone when they return. Any return trip to Taun Tassel – or a side trip to Viliyat – runs exactly the same risks of being suspected tomb robbers – except likely they will not have tomb-robbing gear hidden with them.

The Return of Xallops

If they quickly depart and return for any reason, on their arrival back at the tomb, they will find Xallops and a band of serious (Turjan-Level) tomb robbers hard at work liberating the sarcophagus lid. (“Many thanks for your sterling work. My spell of sighting past events allowed me to review the difficulties you faced. I was therefore able to resist both the soporific gas and other enchantments with the aid of specific magical items.”) His people have also taken anything else of value that the PCs left inside. They have two large wagons parked on the roadway below, disguised as wine storage vehicles - with false bottoms both in the wagons and the barrels themselves. Note also, that if the PCs are incredibly quick, they may beat Xallops here and have a chance to escape with the lid before he arrives – or just to do the hard work and have it taken from them by him and his burly assistants. If Xallops usurps all their spoils he will relent and allow them to take the cash and a single magical item each. (He is after all well aware of the Law of Equipoise.)

Taking to the Water

If the PCs have been smart or lucky, at the end of the crypt exploration they can load their loot onto their disguised cart and travel back via road. However, it is possible they will try to join a passing rivercraft heading downriver. You might like to reserve this option for if they try to transport their loot by river, or you might wish to avoid any such possibility and use this information on river travel only for a side trip to collect a block and tackle. If they transport their loot this way, this section comes into its own. It is in fact one of several major hazard sections designed to present the likelihood of then losing all or part of their new wealth. Should they be lucky and choose the pirates, make sure that in future they understand that most riverfolk are as avaricious as themselves.

¹⁷ Merely to know theoretically how to use block and tackle requires an Engineering EF or better. To erect one capable of supporting the weight of a sarcophagus lid requires an Engineering IS/PS. (And the attempt is at a levy of 1 unless at least one assistant also makes an Engineering success.) Or one could hire capable assistants, or find/buy a Construction book.

Rivercraft

First Craft of Sufficient Size: Several silver-cloaked monks stand at the prow of this pristine vessel. The only regular persons on board seem to be the tillerman and a woman at the prow standing ready with a plumb line. Only she turns to regard the PCs. The rest will studiously ignore them.

These austere monks are bound on a mission. (They may be some version of ‘The Pilgrims’: SVG - p166). They will not help the PCs, although they may be tempted ashore by convincing trickeries. Possibly then their vessel could be taken.

Second Craft: This rickety-looking craft is manned by tattooed sailor types, and the man who is presumably captain stands seven-feet tall and is scarred about his bare upper torso. He is also missing an ear and wears an eye-patch. He stares at them suspiciously as the vessel draws abreast, but says and does nothing.

This is former pirate captain ‘Groglin’, originally of the Sea Goose, and his remaining followers. During a run-in with a giant sea-keak, Groglin prayed to Ethodea the Goddess of Mercy, and in a series of freak coincidences he and many of his men managed to survive. He has now pledged his life - and the lives of his surviving followers - to Ethodea, and travels around performing acts of charity for those who request his aid. (The aid must always be requested, to symbolize the way he called upon Ethodea himself, so he will not offer any help in the first instance, nor even make contact.) Depending on which direction he is going, the vessel has either just been to the Ethodea Hospice in Azenomei (most likely option for the basic thrust of this scenario), or is on its way there. If hailed and asked for help, Groglin will run them to Taun Sferé - depending on the direction he is going. He will require no payment, only that they help clean the ship and cook meals and the like. The pirates are all ardent worshippers of Ethodea and will try to convince the PCs to make a 10% donation of their wealth to Ethodea. (This would be as best calculated from a portion of the spoils using Appraisal ratings.) However, they will not insist, though they will hint that Ethodea may withdraw her mercy from the ungrateful. All this can be played as suggestively sinister, but in fact Groglin and the former pirates are all totally above board.

Third Craft: A regular-looking river craft; a small merchant barge. Three of the crew are sitting on crates smoking, and there is also a helmsman and the bow-watch. One of the crew, presumably the captain, waves at them and calls out to ask if they need any assistance.

Captain Rorbrink and his crew are from Murant (a small village - SVG: p15), and regularly ply the Scaum (major and minor) between Osier and Kaiin, taking goods for a fee. They are well dressed, well mannered, scrupulously reliable to their employers, and also charge only a low transportation fee - thus maintaining regular work. However, they are able to charge such a low fee because they are all thieves and smugglers - taking on whatever clandestine work they can and stealing anything not nailed down (that they can take without bringing suspicion onto themselves). They will feign disinterest in whatever the PCs have with them, and ask only a nominal fee - say 3t per person - to transport them to Azenomei or Taun Tassel. However, at the first available opportunity, they will feed the PCs soporific soup. Then, whilst the PCs are sluggish, each will be clubbed about the head and hefted onto a sandbar in the middle of the river. (After having been relieved of their valuables and weapons.) The soup also blurs the memories of the person’s last few hours, thus making it impossible to remember clearly who did this dastardly deed. If the PCs refuse to partake in the soup (which the crew also eat because they also secretly take the antidote) the crew will act offended and begin to make preparations for stopping the boat and asking the PCs to leave. Should the PCs remain adamant, the crew will continue this subterfuge of pulling ashore, and use it as a cover for attempts to toss the PCs overboard.

11) Downriver To Kaiin

GM Note: Although mentioned elsewhere, here are more specific notes for the GM to easily set up Kaiin again as the goal for the PCs from this point. (Since Players may have other ideas they consider safer/wiser.)

PCs will have to roll Resist Avarice (at a penalty of 1) in order to go anywhere other than Kaiin (IE they will not). If an explanation is needed for this, explain that: (a) the PCs know that Kaiin is the only place where sufficient wealth exists to get anything like the maximum cost for the historical coins, (b) their haul is not that substantive and they desperately need to maximize this profit, (c) Kaiin is also the only place where reliable lesser magicians are common - and thus the only place the PCs are likely to get magical items identified and curses lifted for a reasonable cost, and (d) Kaiin is a mere few days away downriver through well-populated and civilized¹⁸ lands - how large can the risks be?

Extremely well-prepared PCs, or those who have abandoned the sarcophagus lid, may now proceed onwards to Kaiin by cart. They may be faithfully going to report to Xallops that they are unable to get the lid (after perhaps first having

¹⁸ We can presume that the PCs although recently in this part of the world are not locals and don’t know the exact nature of these settlements. Presume also that they traveled to Azenomei some other way that upriver along the Scaum road.

reburied the crypt entrance). Or they may simply be going back to that city to look for new opportunities. If the sarcophagus lid lies broken at the base of the fissure they may feel like going somewhere else entirely. However, by far the best prices for their spoils (and indeed the only local market for antique coins in this part of the world) is in Kaiin. So it is highly likely that they will travel that way.

You may notice as you read further that it seems unlikely that the PCs will arrive in Kaiin with anything whatsoever. Unfortunately this is entirely possible. The PCs need to learn that this is a harsh world. If they have any sense they will spend as much as they can as quickly as possible, use bribes to gain friends, and take immense precautions. Only those who role-play in the most cunning fashion are likely to arrive in Kaiin with a haul intact.

Although these entries are in brief format¹⁹, use the SVG make sure to continue running the scenario in its full glory. (Rather than charging through encounters willy-nilly.) For instance describe each period of uneventful travel in artful style, as the river passes them on one side and low hills and picturesque farmsteads are visible on the other. Small hamlets and large farms also feature alongside the road, and other travelers will greet them as they pass. (Despite the nature of this RPG, most travelers in these parts will be relatively decent folk only looking to enjoy lives of peace and prosperity.)

Obtaining a Boat: If possible discourage this. The road route is far more fun. Boatmen are notorious thieves, and boats are occasionally robbed. If PCs are not good at Seamanship they will be at the mercy of the boatmen and the currents. Simply advise them that this is not something the PCs consider safe. If they still insist on stealing or hiring a boat (for instance they may claim that surely somewhere in Taun Sferre is an honest boatman willing to transport travelers to Kaiin) explain that reliable merchants and traders are usually booked up well in advance and that a wait of 3 weeks or so is likely. Locals usually have inferior craft that might not make the trip. Basically, the PCs will either have to buy a boat or steal one. This should be role-played to the full, with the full measure of the law coming down on them if they break it and are caught. (In their case, confiscation of riches is likely to be the total extent of the penance required, plus the instructions to get out of town and not to return for some weeks at the very least - and even then only if reformed in their ways.) This latter risk also needs to be explained, as does the dangers inherent in sailing a boat without the appropriate skills. If they do succeed in stealing or buying a boat then use the river options from earlier in this piece.

12.1 – Day 1

Suspicious tedders may possibly be a problem as the PCs continue to pass through the valley, but we advise in this instance that their suspicions be perfunctory – unless any PCs show obvious signs of suffering some curse or another. If the PCs seem innocent and have a good excuse, the tedder gang that approaches them mid-afternoon will be relatively easy to satisfy.

Viliyat (SVG: p78/79)

Viliyat is a distinguished small settlement standing on an inselberg some twenty miles upstream from Taun Sferre. Viliyat is most notable from the river due to the promenade of massive time-worn sculpted human heads of both genders that line the ancient roadway to the settlement. The houses of Viliyat are distinctive because the ground floors are all storage areas unconnected to the house above – which must consequently be reached by ladders. The largest building in town, which has a common room instead of a store on its ground floor, is the Viliyat Inn – which serves food and wine of quite acceptable quality. However, no regular accommodation is to be had here, because most travelers do not come this way (as explained earlier). The landlord and his family live upstairs, and travelers (usually only small merchants and other visitors from Taun Sferre) requiring a place to rest must sleep on or under the tables (a practice which is common). The industry of Viliyat is wine. The majority of its population is involved in the growing of vines, or the processing, bottling, storage, transport, or sale of wine. Thus, those travelling through the valley might be questioned suspiciously as to their purpose – since wine saboteurs and spies are often suspected - and forced to account (Ψ PERSUASION) for themselves. Likewise, tomb robbers are also given short shrift – known locally as persons that not only walk casually through carefully tended vineyards, but even have the audacity to create unsightly excavations – and as often as not release unhappy spirits or lumbering undead to plague the tedders for seasons afterwards. Such folk are rudely discouraged from such activities, and are lucky if their tools of the trade are merely thrown into the river. Those who fight back or persist might find that they themselves are tossed (naked) into the flow²⁰. The PCs run the risk of their goods being

¹⁹ One of the reasons for this brevity is the very real option that the PCs may simply hire a boat.

²⁰ All round, it is far easier for those heading from the east into the Valley of Graven Tombs. However, for those PCs that enter

rifled if they stay at Viliyat overnight. This will depend on whether they can come up with a convincing reason (Ψ PERSUASION) for who they are and what is in the cart. If this is an HBS or worse, suspicions will be aroused, and local bullies will search the cart in the night. If tomb-treasures are found all will be confiscated and the PCs are likely to be tarred and feathered and driven out of town.

The Palace of Delights - Note that on the south bank of the Scaum a few miles closer to the Valley of Graven tombs is an inn (a building marked on the map) called the Palace of Delights (SVG: p77) which is a popular stopping place for Scaum Boaters. If the PCs are knowledgeable about the area, they may choose to stay there rather than in Viliyat. However, the bargees here are again all unwilling (Ψ REBUFF +1) to transport obvious treasure-seekers even as far as Taun Sfere, for fear of annoying the local tedders. (Who are likely to note their identities, and their propensity to assist tomb-robbers, and make sure to sabotage their businesses.) PCs will still be far better advised to somehow convince a bargeman to come and collect them and take them across the river to this place for the evening, then to go on to Viliyat. (Nonetheless, unless they are knowledgeable or make good Pedantry rolls, they may just ignore this place, so don't over-emphasize its existence.) Since Viliyat is only a half-hour away the bargefolk may be suspicious of reasons for their wanting to stay here instead – with all the attendant trouble of getting them and their goods/wagon/draft-beast across the river. For those GMs with a flair for the dramatic, the PCs may end up fighting a dozen or more treasure-hungry bargemen in the middle of the night. Should this occur, it is quite possible that they will lose all their worldly possessions at this time. (Since the road is on the north bank of the river, the PCs will also need to be ferried back in the morning.)

Playtest Note: The PCs wisely decided to stay here after leaving the tomb with their spoils, rather than continue to Viliyat for the night. Through shouted calls and offering of coin they were able to attract the attention of a barge-owner who came and collected them. Their pathetic attempt to strike a bargain with him meant that the trip was quite expensive. Since they paid with the ancient coins, the bargee was tipped off to their success in the Valley. Fortunately, two PCs chose to sleep in the wagon, thus preventing it from being ransacked by thieves (which woke them during the night and had to be driven off).

12.2 – Day 2

Lake Island (SVG: p81)

On the west (Taun Sfere) side of Viliyat, the Scaum widens considerably as it meanders across a broad floodplain for around a dozen miles. This is not truly a lake, as it is full only in the wettest of seasons. Nonetheless, the low and broad hillock of land at its center is known as Lake Island, and even in seasons of normal wetness, some kind and amphibious or aquatic transportation is required to reach it without experiencing extreme dampness. This 'island' supports the palatial home of Lady Shaunica – a woman of wit, charm, wealth, some small magical capability, and a strong desire not to be bothered by base scoundrels. As such it is not a recommended stop for roaming vagabonds, although passers-by cannot fail to notice the sunlight glinting from numerous bay windows in the house's upper floors. The only major encounter this day (apart from various merchants and travelers) is with Lady Shaunica of Lake Island. She senses the magic they have with them and sails on over in her magically-powered swan-shaped boat. Though arrogant, wealthy and powerful she is not greedy and simply asks for a present. Should they give her something worthwhile or even amusing, and/or charm her successfully, she will condescendingly let them proceed without further trouble. Should they oppose her, she will strike them with a blast of 'Felojun's Second Hypnotic' and search them at her leisure, taking whatever pieces she finds interesting. Fortunately for them she has no interest in cash, nor in things that she does not know what they are. Nevertheless, she will take at least a few things. If anyone is resistant to magic and treats her well when they could easily run her through, she will appreciate their reserve, apologize and let them continue unmolested.

Taun Sfere (SVG: pp82/83)

Some call Taun Sfere a city, though in reality it is merely a large and densely populated town. During spring high waters the town's dike is barely adequate to hold back the waters from the lower district, and it can be cut off for weeks at a time. The upper town takes advantage of a wide rise in the ground and does not suffer the threat of flooding. Instead, the upper town suffers from minor earth tremors on a reasonably regular basis, and stout headgear is recommended to avoid receiving blows to the skull from falling masonry. All visitors are required to register at the Civic Buildings (two domed basilicas at the base of the hill). Here all town records are stored near the ceiling (to avoid the consequences of sudden flooding) and cunningly accessed by a system of ropes and pulleys. Accommodation for the low of income is a

from the west, we feel it necessary to detail the full hazards of the trail.

choice between the musty *Water’s Edge* (where the river literally laps at the windowsills), or the *Bauntberd’s Distress* – a noisy place supported on stone pillars. Most travelers heading along this part of the River Scaum take the south road from Taun Sferre to Taun Tassel (and vice versa) - availing themselves of rustic but passable accommodation in the numerous small settlements along the way. Thus PCs continuing along the river road from Taun Sferre towards Viliyat will notice far fewer persons on the way. In fact, those few they do meet will all be on local business (rather than being seasoned travelers) and this will be obvious to anyone who makes any Perception success at all (or even an EF).

Adventure Idea: The town has its own substantial general archive beneath the civic buildings, a place where travelers might research their loot, or any other topic. Should the PCs express a desire to do so, they will be told that the archives are closed due to flooding. However, should they continue to show an interest, the clerk will advise them (Ψ PERSUASION) that in return for a morning’s labor amusing Bauntberd (SVG: p82) they will be allowed an afternoon to clamber through the half-submerged stacks. Many of the works long ago had enchantments cast upon them to repel dampness and so are still in reasonable condition, especially those on the higher shelves. (The civic records are not so well protected and thus require the protection of being raised above water level. The folk of Taun Sferre are these days far less educated than their predecessors, and matters of civic minutiae have gained far greater precedence. If the PCs inquire as to the neglect of the formerly impressive repository of knowledge, they will be told that interest has simply waned.) Both plans to entertain Bauntberd, plus the rolls required to navigate the half-flooded catacombs should make some amusing play.

Since Taun Sferre is the first town of any note they will come to, it will be advisable to spend a wedge of cash here (presuming they have any left). If they book into a good inn, this will have relative security. The Five Owls is the most prestigious in town, but not too expensive if the PCs have any funds. Baths and haircuts, and clothes cleaning can be obtained. The biggest problem is likely to be if the PCs are dressed in rags, in which case they will be turned away unless they come up with some good story. Wherever they stay, there is the chance of petty thievery, since anyone perceived to have money becomes the target of cunning street urchins. (But less likely in a posh establishment.)

12.3 – Day 3

Note that between Taun Sferre and Kaiin the roads are well-kept, and this should be mentioned from now on as the PCs proceed. The mighty magician Rhialto the Marvelous lives in his manse Falu (SVG: p85) atop a hill to the south of the river. He will detect any major artifacts, of which several may have been taken from the tomb, and will come to investigate who carries such things past his house. He will appear as a dashing middle-aged magician, sitting casually by the roadside as they round a bend. He will ask to travel with them for a while - as he is “out on his constitutional”, and ask who they are and what they are doing in these parts. If they treat him cordially, he will finish his detections and depart. If they are rude to him, or suspiciously cagey, he will cast the spell of Temporal Stasis, take a choice souvenir and then depart. (Describe oddness of experiencing this.) He will definitely take the cloak of invisibility if this happens – presuming they have it.

Magicians of Merit - In my campaign, arch-magicians do not exist - though magicians of tremendous powers do. It is possible that the PCs may hear about Rhialto (or Ildefonse a little later) and seek their help in removing various curses. (After all the PCs do not know how long these will last.) Though not in need of terces, either of these magicians, if approached cordially and respectfully might deign to cast something simple like the Liberation of Warp in return for some of the amusing magical trinkets. Various locals might be asked for advice on such things, and both Ildefonse and Rhialto are known as odd and aloof, but nonetheless reasonable magicians. (Who, more importantly, do seem to care somewhat about local folk and are happy from time to time to use their magic to help people in genuine distress – though not fools who deserve all that they get.) A lot will depend on how amusing/convincing/flattering the PCs are if/when they approach one of these two powerful figures, and of course they will first need to bribe the typical crotchety major-domo even to get to speak to the manse owner.

Zoken - Just before Zoken is Boumergarth (SVG: p91) the manse of Ildefonse the Preceptor. It is visible on the hill and pictured at SVG: p92. If the PCs were rude to Rhialto, Ildefonse will also greet them in the guise of a travelling sage - and again if they are rude or cagey he will evoke Temporal Stasis and take a souvenir of his own. (Of course if they have nothing good left, Ildefonse may re-appear and throw down whatever he took, before vanishing. Or, if they were particularly rude, a sandestin might appear, pull the nose of the offending character out to a foot from his face, throw down the item – and then vanish.) The town of Zoken (SVG: pp93-96) is a surprisingly civilized place, and the PCs are unlikely to face any dangers staying here overnight. However, again Zoken’s Old Inn does not permit tattered-clothed vagabonds onto its premises. Those denied entry may try to bribe a towns person to rent a room for the night, reside in the wild and risk the attentions of erbs, or seek the hospitality of Ildefonse at Boumergarth.

12.4 – Day 4

A very long day through farming country. We shall allow this to pass without incident

Dawngallow - The PCs arrive very late in the evening at this town (SVG: p96). The bodies dangling on the gibbets are a bit of a worry, but the small tavern can accommodate persons – albeit only on the floor. Nonetheless, sleeping in one’s wagon is not allowed, and so other travelers might ransack their belongings during the night. If the PCs are still ragged, hopefully by now they have evolved some kind of story to tell the innkeeper when he looks at them **very** suspiciously through the hinged panel in the barred door. (See also Haskel below for a description of the demeanor. It is lucky that the PCs will arrive at night, and so do not have to engage in prolonged social intercourse.)

12.5 – Day 5

Nothing untoward happens on the road, although the local peasantry seem surly and unhappy. (They are not overly impoverished, so this seems odd. The true reason is the intense rivalry between Haskel and Dawngallow – SVG: p99)

Haskel – This town (SVG: p99) is described as a horrible place, with residents only too glad to unfairly convict lone ‘felons’ at the drop of a hat and subject them to cruel deaths. Presumably such things happen only to thieves and rascals who try to rob them, or perhaps this is the DE equivalent of a redneck town – with folk looking for excuses to bully and torture those neer-do-wells who pass through. (Scuttlebutt might be an appropriate skill to warn the PCs to watch their P’s and Q’s when stopping in this place.) Locals in the unimaginatively-named ‘Haskel Tavern’ will pester the PCs with questions, and if the PCs go out into the street they may make some rude transgression without realizing it.

(Looking at a lady without being introduced, walking on the wrong side of the street etc.) For groups of armed travelers - who may actually be notables (IE they have money and so one can never be too careful) the penalties are hefty fines rather than a race against the gibbet (SVG: p99). Thus, the PCs may lose substantial funds here unless they merely stay in the bar drinking quietly, or better yet take to their room as soon as possible. Various games occur in the tavern, but are arranged on the quiet. Inciting someone to gamble is an offence, and subject to stuff fine and a night in the cells.

12.6 – Day 6

Again, after the difficulties at Haskel, the PCs will be glad to know they are now entering the more civilized regions, and nothing untoward happens to them during the day. They arrive at Quanonq (SVG: p105) late afternoon. A group of Duke Tambasco’s guards will see them, and will question the PCs unless by now they look like relatively well-off travelers. If they do look well-off (for instance are posing as nobles) the Duke himself will invite them to stay overnight at his palace and come out on a hunt (SVG: p108) the following day. It is **very** difficult to refuse a polite request from the Duke, so they will need to declare and store their valuables if they wish to avoid them being stolen. If they take any valuables with them, the PCs will be separated during the hunt and meet up with a hawk-riding pirate Twk-Man (SVG: p108). If not they will merely have fun surviving the charges of enraged and wounded erbs to the best improvisational capacity of the GM. Quanonq is a well kept and lovely place, and the peasantry seem quite happy. There is even a large, safe and cheap ferry across to Sferre.

Sferre – The PCs may not draw the attention of the Duke, or may be able to Persuade his servant well enough of some good reason why they can’t possibly hunt (some religious proscription is the only acceptable thing I can think of at the time of writing). If so, they may spend the first night in Sferre (SVG: p110) - rather than at the Duke’s weird and wonderful palace. If they end up going on a hunt then they will stay the following night in Sferre²¹. Sferre is a small town but very prosperous. The Guild Hall (SVG: p110) is the only accommodation, but it has not storage for large valuables. Thieves are not common here, so the GM will need to invent fellow travelers of dubious integrity. If they opt to spend the night in the open just outside town, as long as they are seen heading off to do so²², the locals will warn them of the glefts (SVG: p110). If the guard at any time falls asleep (Resist Indolence as frequently as the GM sees fit) glefts will come, and are (5 in 6) likely to stir the brain of any sleeping person. One of the unfortunate side-effects of their meddling will be uncharacteristic altruism. (IE the giving away of wealth.) This is not such a coincidence, as the glefts basically temporarily turn around the most prominent current habits of their victims. Oh how sad it would be to have come so far and lose everything to the glefts²³.

²¹ To stay at the palace any longer is to risk being invited on every more increasingly dangerous activities – as some servant or local or traveller will warn them.

²² This will not happen if they sneak out.

²³ And yet also how amusing.

12.7 – Day 7

From Sfere numerous commercial and private barges travel in and out of Kaiin every day. Thus it is easy to arrange cheap transport – even if one appears to be a ragged rascal. (Though in this state one is unlikely to gain a premier cabin even if one does have money.)

Three Golden Swans – In the estimable SVG, I have noticed but one omission. Here on the road to Kaiin there is no noted establishment or settlement for the last (or first – dependent on your direction of travel) night outside the city. Hence should the PCs decide to continue on the road, I will fall back upon the very worthy ‘Three Golden Swans’ article (XPS: Vol 1, Iss 2, pp61-67). Review this article before running this scenario, and make a few notes about what might go on here – according to the level of brevity or complexity you wish to embrace. My thinking at the moment extends to merely two options – the chance (Resist Avarice) to make a few wagers at the evening’s quortaz race, and the fact that when the PCs first arrive the rooms are all taken by supercilious pilgrims naming themselves as the Hierophants of Marguzh.

12.8 – Day 8

The PCs will arrive in Kaiin in the early evening if they travel by road, and in the late afternoon if they travel by river. This latter option is preferred, as in Kaiin shops stay open late and this allows a more seamless transition into the next scenario I am writing – the ‘Kaiinese Drakeling’. Unless they are obviously odd in some way they will not be bothered by vigils either at the East Threek Gate or nearby Dock. If they obviously have money, the Vigil Captain will call on an ancient ordinance to allow him to subtract a 10% importation tax.

The Tedder Crossbow Pistol

For simplicity, roll a single dice for any shot fired:

DF: Pistol jams. Roll again. On a DF/QF it is broken and must be taken back to the workshop. On an EF/HBS it may be repaired using ‘Craftsmanship (Dart Pistol)’ and the correct tools. [*If the person doesn’t have the requisite specialty, the roll is at a penalty of 1. If they do not have the correct tools then also apply a penalty of 1. If the repair result is QF/DF the pistol is broken and must be returned to the workshop. Otherwise repair takes 10rds on an IS Craftsmanship roll, 3 minutes for a PS, 10 minutes for a HBS and half an hour for an EF.*] On a PS it simply requires jiggling and tapping and can be freed in 3 rds. On an IS it was a momentary problem and one can attempt to fire again the next round.

QF: You miss your target. (Even at relatively close range it passes through the clothing or is merely a minor flesh wound resulting in no significant damage.)

EF: You hit your target a glancing strike in some non-vital place like through the flesh of the arm or the leg, or in the buttocks (of a fleeing target) or grazing the side of the head. Target loses 1 Health point.

HBS: You hit your target a slightly more serious strike in such a location. Target loses 2 Health points.

PS: Your target takes a direct hit to the main body and loses 3 Health points.

IS: If a tedder is firing, the GM decides whether (a) a PC is hit in a strategic location (IE weapon arm, or leg if fleeing). Although the PC still only loses 3 Health, this location is temporarily disabled, or (b) the PC is hit in a more critical location and automatically takes an injury. If a PC is firing, the result depends on the player’s stated intent. If they were aiming for a specific location then use option ‘a’. If they were simply looking to make maximum damage to their target then use option ‘b’. (NB: The injury option is only available for creatures of roughly human size. Significantly smaller creatures may become injured – or even be slain – much more easily, whereas significantly larger creatures take damage only as Health point loss.

*Note: If a PC gains access to a pistol, then Quick Fingers is the base ability for firing it. For ideas about further variations on this theme, see the new ‘Action Enhancement’ ruling available on the Violet Cusps page. When calculating adjustments, the pistol jams only on a natural DF. Since this is a short-range device (1-20ft; drop rolled result by one success level for 21-30ft, insignificant damage thereafter) avoidance attempts are without use unless the target is both alert to the possibility of being shot **and** makes an IS with their Athletics or Defense (Dodge/Intuition/Misdirection – only). This reduces the success level by one degree. GMs can apply other variations as they see fit – for instance applying bonuses if the target is utterly unaware of the danger, penalties if the target is moving fast etc.*

Tag Lines for “Axomber’s Crypt”

SESSION 1 (Azenomei to the Valley of Graven Tombs)

Character 1

“For now, let us drink deep; who knows what awaits us around fate’s fickle corner!”

“You seem to have assumed pretensions of leadership, whereas I am clearly the more competent in that capacity.”

“I sense that you are a person adept at games of chance. Perhaps you would care to join me in a friendly contest.”

Character 2

“The valley is less than two days from Azenomei. Rumors of cannibal half-men are merely exaggerations to frighten tomb robbers.”

“With my share of the spoils I may open a small hostelry on the banks of the Scaum, and there sell river whelks to travelers.”

“Nothing is so urgent that we must neglect first to sample this finest of all wines.”

Character 3

“His manner is convivial, and his jacket lined with finest erb-fur. To me this defines a man of utter probity.”

“I find your disposition offensive, and may be driven to admonish you by means of rude force.”

“I am beginning to suspect that our presence here is not uniformly welcomed.”

Character 4

“Fortune has granted us a golden opportunity. Let us not respond with plaintive wheedlings.”

“As the task of assigning duties can be arduous, I feel I must offer my services as expedition leader.”

“I am becoming vexed with such trivial diversions; for I am not a gardener – but a person of decisive conduct.”

Character 5

“I have had sufficient experience of dining on third-rate fare and sleeping in ditches. Let us go boldly forth to claim these treasures.”

“A sturdy wagon will no doubt aid us significantly, and I shall drive it with my customary expertise.”

“My worthy presence alone has already contributed much to this undertaking. I suggest you withdraw that baseless canard.”

SESSION 2 (Valley of Graven Tombs to the Crypt)

Character 1

“I decline to take such a risk. Since it is your notion, I suggest you be the one to test its merits.”

“Regard my delicate fingers and fashionable garb. I am most evidently not suited to feats of crude labor.”

“Take care, for this place echoes curiously with the dark phantasms of ages past.”

Character 2

“Do not take that tone with me, for I am clearly your superior in both intellect and aptitude.”

“The presence of these unfortunates need not cause undue alarm. Perhaps some outlandish accident laid them low?”

“Come now, apply yourselves with vigor and I shall prepare a succulent repast for when the task is done.”

Character 3

“My companion suffers a tragic perturbation of the brain, and cannot be held accountable for these actions.”

“Surely a secret mechanism exists; one that will allow us to avoid unnecessarily arduous feats?”

“In my estimation, you should move with extravagant caution, lest you blunder into sudden and violent peril!”

Character 4

“We are savants of the highest integrity. Is that not obvious to even your rustic perceptions.”

“It is our duty to salvage such treasures as we can, for reason of the edification of future generations.”

“This is not an insignificant obstacle. I require adequate time for consideration.”

Character 5

“Be on your guard. I suspect that he means you significant mischief.”

“These are not mere fortuitous scratchings, but rather, I sense, sigils of dire consequence.”

“I refuse to be daunted. Great wealth and numerous items of magical potency surely lie virtually within our grasp.”

SESSION 3 (Inside the Crypt)

Character 1

"It appears that our efforts have all been for nought. I have become somewhat more than disconsolate."

"It seems clear that in his later years Axomber was inflicted with a peculiar derangement of the mind."

"Ah what riches I see before me. Were I of lesser character I might be inclined to unseemly gloating."

Character 2

"This pitiful wretch perhaps indicates the appalling fate that lies in store for our mortal shells."

"And here was I, assuming that our circumstances could not possibly become more dire."

"Your foolish actions have endangered us all. Can we expect no greater contribution from you towards our brave enterprise?"

Character 3

"My nose for deception alerts me to the possibility that all here is not as it first appears."

"Take heart. We are folk of uncommon resource, and I refuse to accept that our days will end in this den of deviousness."

"Whilst I am no stranger to fine dining, such gluttony as displayed before us seems more than marginally sinister."

Character 4

"Such behavior portrays a person of base desires, and is singly unbecoming. I demand that you desist from such antics at once."

"Though obsequious, his manner to me reeks of subtle villainy."

"The scholars and magicians of Kaiin will pay handsomely for such curiosities of the past."

Character 5

"Let us fill our sacks and pockets with zestful abandon. Sufficient surely exists for all our needs across the years to follow."

"Grasp your rapiers and set about you with a will. Now is not the time for timidity!"

"Perhaps we can evoke great magics to lend a solution to our current predicament?"

SESSION 4 (Still inside the Crypt)

Character 1

"Nonsense. Your talk of dangers and the necessity for haste lack convincing foundation."

"I blame my harsh upbringing as the cause of my congenital nefariousness. In other circumstances I would surely have become a saint of startling renown."

"I shall purchase a fine new manse overlooking the river at Azenomei, and there entertain guests of the highest nobility. Such is only fitting."

Character 2

"I suggest that we rest here a while and avail ourselves of the rewards that we so clearly deserve."

"Tish and piffle. The accusations that you deliver lack convincing foundation."

"Full and complete recovery of this invaluable sarcophagus lid might not be such a simple undertaking."

Character 3

"Your athletic capacity is remarkable. Were I not otherwise engaged I would spend long moments in wonder."

"What your plan lacks in lucidity it more than makes up for in rampant folly."

"Thus I bid adieu to the Valley of Graven tombs, and another freakish episode in the cruel farce that is the tale of my life."

Character 4

"Perhaps it might be possible to obtain several of these creatures for future scientific study?"

"I suggest abandoning reason in preference for feats of frenzied momentum."

"I could claim that the sight of such wealth leaves me unmoved, but that would be an unqualified fabrication."

Character 5

"Stand back, and prepare to observe the true meaning of debauchery."

"Once again my plans are thwarted. Oh cruel fates; oh devious fortune. What have I done to become as putrefaction beneath your heels?"

"In the light of recent events, the risk of encountering mere deodands now seems somewhat laughable."

SESSION 5 (The Road to Kaiin)

(GM: Should you imagine that this section will take two sessions, you must device another set of tag-lines.)

Character 1

"The avariciousness of Scaum bargees is renowned across all Almery. I trust them no further than I could hurl a deodand."

"I caution you that the efforts undertaken in securing these articles lend me to singular resolve in their defense."

"Alas, we have been the victims of a cruel injustice. I am minded to ask why must it always be so?"

Character 2

"The road to Kaiin may be long, but it has the advantages of solidity and consistency."

"I do not necessarily expect the worst, but am nonetheless inspired to take advantage of my wealth without delay."

"I think you may have overestimated my capacity for rash heroism. I suggest you seek your champion elsewhere."

Character 3

"Your appearance is that of a misbegotten wretch. Were I to travel with you, all folk of fine bearing would spurn us both."

"Something about this fellow fills me with suspicion. I suggest you turn him away with brusque gestures."

"At last, the walls of Kaiin. Were I not so weary I would throw my fine hat high into the air."

Character 4

"The sun is high, the day is warm. Let us set out with calm assurance of a pleasant journey to our destination."

"I am dubious that this offensive hostel will provide the ease and security we desire."

"Though my good manners would normally counsel against it, if you utter another word I shall simply run you through."

Character 5

"You seem to have developed an unhealthy interest in my rightful spoils. Beware that your avarice may be the end of you."

"Such an invitation is both intriguing and terrifying. My first inclination is to flee at once."

"Too long have the comforts of fine couch and magnificent foodstuffs eluded me. I intend now to surrender to their welcoming embrace."

The Frosted Text on the Door in the Reception Room:

"Welcome to my final resting place. Since you were not dissuaded by the fact that my crypt appeared to already have been plundered, you must indeed be professional robbers of great tenacity. ¶, Axomber, scourge of thieves and nemesis of despoilers, now invite you to retire from your despicable trade and spend your last days in comfort and fascination here in this cave so far beneath the ground. Alternatively, you may pass through this door and chance your abilities and resolve against the tests of my tomb. ¶f by some freakish fortune you survive to reach the outside world once more, you must have far greater self-restraint and nobility than ¶ can imagine. ¶f so, perhaps your nefarious tendencies will have been somewhat tempered, and your respect for the dead enhanced. Once you have passed through this door there is no returning, so think well before you surrender the comfort of this room to an uncertain fate."

The Parchment

I was there in the valley, surrounded by tomb after tomb. The crypt of Axomber was before us, I recognized the sigils on its door. We did not expect such a prize. In our glee we neglected to post lookouts as we began to dig, and Morten and Hoyk were taken by deodands before we even knew we were being attacked.

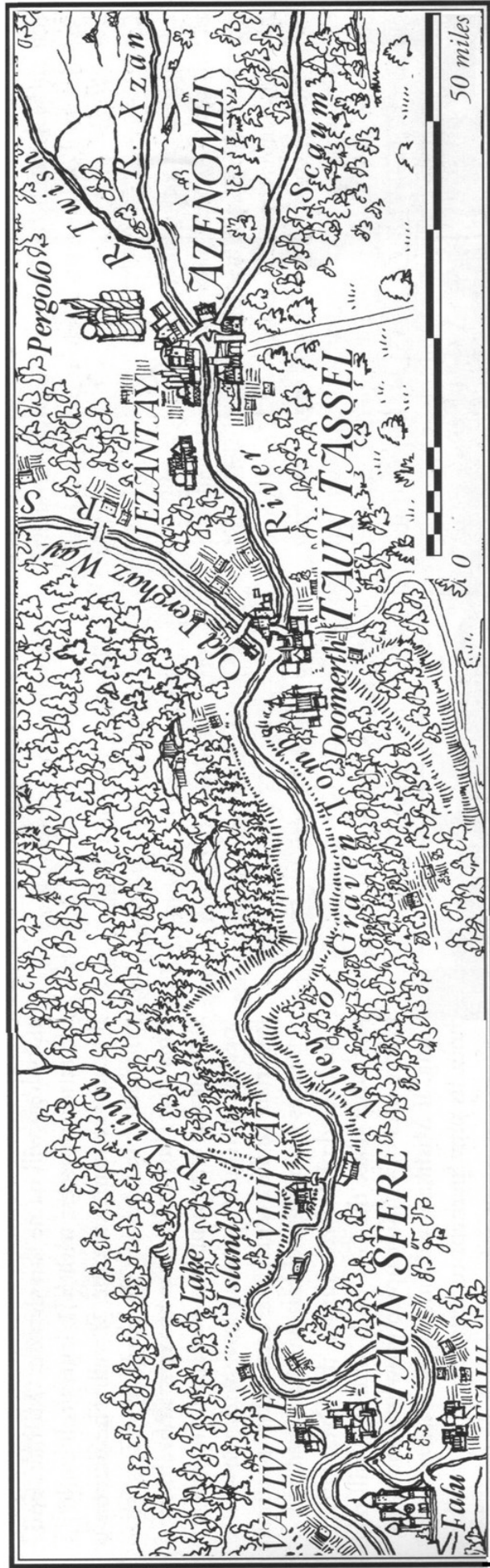
How rare it is for these man-beasts to lurk in gangs; oh how I cursed our misfortune. We fought our way down to the river, losing first Kyqui, then Tarn, and finally Lessowalt. Only Massnalbur and I reached the water, and he was lost to the icy cold on our way to the far bank.

I somehow survived the night and then floated back to Viliyat gripping onto a branch. In a few days I shall depart once again for that place, before I am too old; and I hope to return with fortune sufficient to provide for all of us provide for the rest of our days. I leave these notes for you Algrord, in the case that I do not survive.

Axomber's Crypt is close to the mid-point of the valley between Viliyat and Taun Tassel. When you are near the great gray inselberg on the south side of the river, you will know that you are in the vicinity. On the north edge of the river is a small ruined shrine with two domes. It is waterlogged now. Turn then up the wide row between the tombs, and travel past seven intersections. At the eighth, turn right and cut across towards the little mock temple with the twin statues of Fate and Fortune on top.

Upslope a short way back and to the right behind the little temple is a gully. And at the end of the gully is the entrance to Axomber's crypt. We had to clear away thick brambles. Post guards should it be your lot to visit this place, for the deodands came at us down the sides of the gully by ambush. No doubt they had been trailing us, waiting for just such an opportunity. Oh, those fiendish blasphemous beasts.

I shall hide this in your musical box, and alert you to its presence only on the morning of my departure, for you are yet too young to accompany me – even though I know that you would wish to. If I do not return, be respectful to your mother and do not fight with your brother.



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