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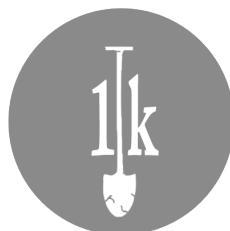
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NINE YEARS OF MOURNING

A tale by P. H. Lee

Illustrated by Kim Sokol

“When a man’s father is alive, observe his ambitions. After his father has died, observe his actions. If in three years he has not changed his father’s ways, we can call him a good son.”

—*Analects*

When Qimei was twelve, she watched her father die.

No longer content with hiding in the hillsides, Bandit Liu and his band had come to sack Mayou township. Arriving at the magistrate’s office, they found he had already fled to the provincial capital, leaving behind Qimei’s father, his most trusted clerk. Angry at being denied a hostage of any value, they seized him and Qimei’s younger brother and dragged them to the town square. First, they made him watch as they killed his only son, so that he would see his family line die out. Then, they made him beg for his life. Then, they killed him.

Qimei and her mother watched through the window of their house. Her mother tried to shield her eyes with the corners of her robe but Qimei watched, not crying, quietly, purposefully studying each of their faces in turn. Her father had taught her the importance of truth and knowledge.

Qimei’s father was a kind man, overflowing with learning and discernment, but without the drive or wealth to sit for the examinations. *Poor, but rejoicing in*

the way. At night he would stay up and read Mencius by candlelight, and when Qimei woke up from a bad dream he would scoop her up onto his lap and explain the passage he was reading, telling her about each of the commentators until she felt like they were her uncles, teaching her about how shared humanity, propriety, and care for others are the greatest forces in the world, and how they could set the world to right.

She watched as he begged for her brother’s life, then his own. She watched the bandits laughing at him exhorting their shared humanity, calling him pathetic and unmanly, and then killing him without a moment’s hesitation.

For three years after Qimei’s father died, her mother tried her best to keep their household just as it had been. But there was a hole between them, the absence of her father, and neither of them could fill it or even bring themselves to acknowledge it. When they spoke at all, it was formal and brief. And though Qimei’s mother did her best, Qimei watched as one servant after another left to find better work, then watched as the meals got smaller, plainer, less regular, and then watched as her mother stopped eating at all. She wanted to say something, anything, but the only words she could bring to mind would have hurt her mother more.



Three years to the day after her father died, Qimei burned her mourning clothes, dressed herself as a traveler, and without telling her mother, set out before dawn, walking west, over the pass. It was the farthest away from home that she had ever been.

When she arrived at the house of her maternal uncle she sat outside all night until the household awoke, then walked right in, ignoring the servants fussing over her, and stood in front of her uncle at his breakfast.

"I need you," she said to him, "to teach me how to kill."

Once, her uncle had been Little Ox, one of the three Ox Brothers, warriors errant and defenders of justice throughout the province. These days, long since retired after his own tragic ending, he preferred to drink tea and dabble in calligraphy and poetry. So, although he laughed when he heard her speak -- his laugh was deep and rich and loud -- when he looked up and met her eyes he saw her as she was, and as she needed, and his face became drawn and serious.

"All right, then," he said, "we start today."

Every day, he trained her to fight, first with her bare hands, then with swords, spears, fans, staffs, anything that came to hand. She studied him carefully, perfectly, earnestly, taking in everything he said with her whole body and heart. In mornings before he awoke, she would practice, reviewing each and every movement until it was perfect and exact. In the evening, after he went to bed, she would study the secret manuals that he had hidden away where he thought no one would find them, practicing the techniques that he had hoped would die with him.

She was not an ungrateful student or an unpleasant niece. She talked with him, laughed with him, helped him with his chores. But both of them knew the reason that she was staying with him, and its purpose.

One day, when she had been with him for almost three years, Qimei looked up at her uncle and asked "Uncle, when are you going to teach me what I asked you for?"

He laughed, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"You have taught me how to fight in so many ways, with so many weapons, against so many foes. But you have never even begun to teach me how to kill."

"Oh," he said, and was suddenly quiet. He thought for a moment, and then turned away from her.

"Qimei," he said, without showing her his face, "you are the most talented fighter I have ever known. With time, I don't doubt you could surpass even my brother-in-arms Big Ox, gone these many years. But to become a killer -- that isn't something I can teach you. Everyone who kills must first kill their own human heart, and no one else can do it for them. Even if I could teach you, I would not. Your father was a good man, Qimei, a kind and humane man. He wouldn't have wanted this, not for you, not for him. The path you're on will lead you nowhere good. Turn away while you still can. If you stay with me as my devoted niece I will find you a good man to marry and give you a good dowry, as I have no children of my own."

The whole time, he wouldn't face her. She stared into the back of his head.

"Uncle," she said finally. "For three years I kept my father's ways. Now is the time I will pursue my own ambitions. Thank you for all you've done for me." And, with that, she left.

The next morning, six years to the day after her father died, she woke up, took her uncle's sword Autumn Leaves from its resting place, and without telling her uncle set out before dawn, heading north to the provincial capital. Her uncle, knowing, woke up and watched her leave, without saying a word. She didn't notice him.

That day, he wrote the only good poem of his career.

She found Bandit Liu, now a respectable Mr. Liu, two provinces away, entrenched in a village a few days travel from the Ancient Capital. An imperial pardon, pension, and official title had done nothing to reduce

his rapacious appetites. Surrounded by his old gang and backed by a pet magistrate, he and his men plundered the peasantry for miles around without hesitation, fear, or shame. When Qimei came into town, holding Autumn Leaves and walking with the bearing of a fighter, the whispers began almost immediately. Could it really be a warrior errant come to overthrow their oppressor and restore justice?

They came to her, alone or in groups, telling her their stories, about their husbands, fathers, wives, daughters. "Taken," they said, not wanting to admit the word "dead" past their lips. She listened, nodded, smiled. She told them she understood, because she did. They gave her food, tea, places to sleep, and all their hopes.

She entered Bandit Liu's estate without warning or remorse. The two guards at the door, whose faces she recognized, did not even have a chance to lower their spears, let alone raise the alarm. One of the guards at the inner gate was new. Younger, probably a local boy, no more than a year older than Qimei.

"Run," she told him after she had killed his partner, "and never come back."

He ran. He never came back.

Inside the estate she turned a corner and came face to face with a girl servant, who took in a sudden breath to scream. Qimei looked at her, smiled calmly, and put a finger to her lips. Shhh. Quiet. The girl nodded, smiled back, let out her breath slowly, and silently shuffled away.

Qimei found Bandit Liu behind a desk, going over his accounts with two lieutenants. He looked up as she came in, and started. The man on the right moved to draw his sword but was dead before his hand could touch it.

"Who... who are you?" said Bandit Liu. He did not recognize her. He had never seen her face.

She wanted so much to tell him about her father, about how he had been a righteous and honest man, about what he had done to him and for so little reason. But her father had been a kind man, a man of peace and rectitude, and Qimei knew that he would not have wanted this, not even for Bandit Liu, and certainly not for his only daughter. And she did not think Bandit Liu was the sort of man who would care. So she said nothing while she stabbed him through the heart, and nothing after he was dead.

While she was distracted, the second lieutenant did manage to draw his sword. He was a capable swordsman, trained in the Falling Tiger school. It took her almost a minute to finish him.

Standing over the body, wiping the blood from Autumn Leaves, she thought over the men's faces, bringing each one to mind in turn. Who had fallen? Who remained?

There were two left.

She stalked through the house, servants scattering around her, but could not find any trace of them. Finally, in the stables, she saw two missing horses. She pointed to the stablehand, still inside, desperately trying to keep the horses calm.

"You!"

"I... I wasn't a part of this miss, I swear I was just..."

"There are two horses missing. Who took them?"

"I-I mean..." he stammered.

"Who took the horses?"

"Wan Da and Lucky Cho, miss, they came in here with a terror in their eyes and they just grabbed the reins I tried to..."

"What do they look like?"

"Uhm... Uh... Are you going to..."

Qimei took a deep breath. "I'm not going to hurt you. Those men are dangerous, and I owe them a debt of revenge. I must stop them."

The stablehand breathed out, relaxed a bit but still trembling "Uhm, that is, Wan Da is a big man, thick mustache, always laughing about something horrible he's done. Lucky Cho is younger, small, no beard and doesn't talk much, but when he does it's always to say something cruel. They were heading to the Old Capital!"

"That's them," she said. "What's the fastest horse here?" He pointed. "Thank you," she said. "Take care of the other horses! There's no blame to any of them."

"I'll do my best!" he yelled after her, but she was already gone, riding towards the Old Capital.

She rode as hard as she could towards the city, but she was not a skilled rider, and had never passed this way before, whereas the two bandits were traveling on familiar mounts, through familiar terrain. By the time she reached the Old Capital she had lost them completely.

The city was overwhelming, full of more people, smells, and languages than Qimei ever knew existed. For two weeks she dug her way through seedy bars and villainous flophouses, looking for Wan Da, Lucky Cho, or anyone who'd seen them, only to discover that they'd signed on with a westward caravan the minute they set foot in the city. She went straight to the nearest caravan den and signed up with as a guard for the next train out. The caravan master didn't want to take a girl -- "bad luck, you see" -- but she stared into his eyes, unwavering, until he cowered and agreed.

The other guards were for the most part a fraternity of ne'er-do-wells and layabouts, suspicious of both Qimei's sex and confidence. After they were attacked by bandits two weeks out, though, no one doubted her. A week beyond that, she was as close to them as kin.

In Qurighar, she protected a group of shepherds from both bandits and her own caravan's guards. Grateful, they followed along with the caravan, providing them guidance through the treacherous roads and patchwork of tribal lands. By the time they reached Kashgar, she had learned how to eat lamb instead of pork, how to speak a few words of Turkic, and that one young shepherd had fallen desperately in love with her. She turned him down politely.

When she arrived in Kashgar, she found that the two men had already moved on, further west. She wasted no time finding another caravan and, with the recommendations of her previous master as well as the entire crew, had no trouble at all. The day after market she was on her way.

She travelled long. She travelled far. She learned how to ask after "two men, Chinese, one big with a mustache, one small and clean-shaven, both mean and vulgar" in more languages than she could count. She started covering her hair. She learned that people here served One God, and prayed to Him facing west. She lit incense and prayed facing east, towards her father's tomb. She came to town, she asked, she moved on, never far behind.

Every night she dreamed about sitting in her father's lap, him reading Mencius to her, answering all her childish questions with the gravitas of a learned scholar. Every morning, she tried to hold on to the memory of his face, his voice, but they vanished with the dawn.

Flat broke, she hired on with the Merchant of Kermanshah as a guard for his harem. If only she would follow the ways of the prophet, he said, he would marry her and make her first among his wives. The Merchant's third wife -- quick witted, fond of learning foreign tongues and the most beautiful girl that Qimei had ever seen -- made her an even more tempting offer. But she got paid on the same day she got word of her quarry, so she turned down both offers and left without looking back.

Separated from her caravan, wandering in the desert, she came across a barbarian knight, metal strapped to every part of him, grievously wounded, dying alone. “Are... are you an angel?” he asked her in a language she barely understood. She shook her head, but sat with him as he died, stroking his ash-white skin and feeding him water until he was finally still. She took his horse, and kept on.

She began to see the ruins of old Daqin, buildings still standing from before the great empire of the West had collapsed into barbarism. Here, the people prayed facing east. She fit in better. She bought a map and stopped hiring on to caravans, preferring to ride alone and make better time. Where before the men had been months ahead, now they were only a week, only a few days.

She still dreamed about her father every night.

When she finally came to Rabat, at the edge of the world, she looked out over the ocean and there was no further west to go.

“Oh, yes, those two. Strange foreign men. They were here yesterday. I think they’re camped out in the ruins to the northeast. My son can show you the way. Are they friends of yours?”

“I owe them a debt.”

She came on their camp in the hours before dawn. Lucky Cho was up, tending the fire, Wan Da was still asleep. She left her horse well outside, and walked silently into their camp without hesitation.

Lucky Cho looked up from the cooking pot and gave half a yelp before he died. Wan Da woke, and stared at her, his eyes full of uncomprehending terror.

“You’re the one! You’re the one that’s been hunting us all this way! Please! You’ve killed every friend of mine, you’ve destroyed everything I’ve ever had, please, I don’t know what I’ve done, but please spare my life.” He was speaking her own language, which she hadn’t

heard in years. It was strange to hear, and to hear him begging, so much like her father had begged him.

She remembered Wan Da, sneering and laughing, calling him a weak and pathetic unman.

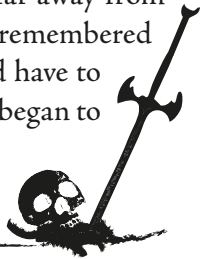
She stopped.

He was on his knees in front of her, bowing repeatedly, banging his head against the rock. “Please,” he said. “Please.”

She leveled Autumn Leaves. “Begging didn’t help my father.” She ran him through the neck.

In the early dawn light, nine years to the day after her father died, Qimei sat in the dead men’s camp, lit some incense for her father, and prayed. She stood up. Here she was, at the edge of the world, as far away from home as anyone had ever been. She remembered her mother, and her uncle. She would have to go home. She pulled out her map and began to study it anew.

That was how her adventures began.



HIGH UPON THE TABLE OF THE WORLD

A tale by Epidiah Ravachol

Illustrated by Jeff Brown

Behold your legacy, child. Feel its heft and slickness in your grip. Marvel at its opalescent depths. When my own hands were younger, more able, they carved this sorrowful history upon its surface. A history you will now learn if you but promise to hear it in its entirety.

In the hot, dry afternoon of a summer years before your birth, the wizard came and summoned five of us to the hunt. Six went with him. Stout Fehha and I were chosen first, as we were a hunting pair, equal in age and endurance. I threw better, but he had the greater reach. Swift and persistent Tenyan was chosen despite her age for the tenacious adventures she had in her youth. Though neither his father nor I knew it yet, your brother also joined us, hidden within my own body. And the Kavan twins who, like their mother and father, were deaf and specifically bred for the hunt.

We were all, in our own ways, bred for the hunt. In your great-great-grandmother's generation, the wizard sealed a pact with our people. A magnificent beast lived high upon the Table of the World, and though none alive then had seen it, even longer ago our ancestors once worshiped it as a god. They made the Table a sacred place and forbade us from scaling to its verdant plateau even as we made our homes in its scarlet cliffs. The wizard knew such a way to butcher this god-beast and harvest from deep within its chest a beating organ that granted those who supped upon it a single wish.

If we consented to scale the plateau, he would teach us to hunt the beast and to teach our children to do the same. So that, one day, he would return to lead the best of us on his quest and share in his eldritch glory.

So my parents' parents' parents turned from their toils in the bitter earth and set about birthing a generations of god-hunters. Each generation that followed was born with harpoons in their hands and hope in their hearts. We were taught to run without exhaustion, to quell our own fears and hungers for days, to throw harpoons high and clear of the trees we only ever saw from beneath the plateau's mur, to knot and hook the Great Cords, and to wish for the wishes of our ancestors.

By the time I was born, it had all become solely a matter of faith. None alive had ever seen the wizard. So when he strolled into the camp, swaddled in rich green robes and silver jewelry, he was almost slain and stripped of his wealth to feed our hungry tribe. But he held in the palm of his hand a tiny cage, delicately carved from ivory much like the legacy you hold now. Within its lattice walls raged a thunderhead like a bruise caught in the air.

We were stupefied. You could smell the coming storm. He promised us that he was our benefactor by way of our ancestors' pact and as long as he remained



unharméd, the rain would nourish and refresh. But any harm done to him would be visited upon us through storm and flood.

He was young to the eye in every way save his weathered and ancient hands. But it was not hard to believe him. He called the five of us by name. He knew our talents, what glories we had earned, and the line of our heritage back to our parents' parents' parents who stood before him and sealed our fate almost a century ago.

Since our birth, we had been taught the way to knot and coil the Seven Great Cords so that they would not tangle and their hooks would not grab each other as they unfurled. Every morning, each of the Seven would be so prepared. That evening we packed all seven for the first time on mules. Along with these, we brought our own knives, harpoons, rope, and little else. After a brief, solemn ceremony, we embarked before the sun set.

It was a precarious caravan that ascended the Table of the World by way of a slight and subtle ledge-trail discovered by Tenyan when I was a babe myself. The enormous coils of the Seven teetered upon the mule's

backs, unsuring their feet. In the blue-dark of twilight, one of the hapless creatures slipped and sped to the rock below taking *Anterban's Hope*—the third of the Great Cords ever to be braided and the first untouched by the wizard's own hands—with it.

Oh child, the wonders we witnessed there for the first three days and four nights we hunted the beast and the dreams of our ancestors! Trees so tall and numerous they blotted out the sky. Some thick with green needles and others possessing a silvery-white bark that made them look like long arcs of moonlight. When morning came, birds the size of thumbs flitted about the branches, chirping, as purple-maned lizards mimicked their cries, attempting to lure them to breakfast.

One midday, I stumbled upon a sunlit glade, lush with ankle-high grass dancing in the breeze. Fehha and I would have wandered into it if Tenyan had not called out a swift warning. She lobbed a rock into its shaggy depths and every blade bent toward it, like an inverted ripple. We saw then that it was a field of thin green serpents half buried in the soil and masquerading as plants.

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w w w . j e f f b r o w n g r a p h i c s . c o m

Late one evening, we watered the mules at a calm, circular lake. Even in the twilight the water was clear enough for us to peer to its distant floor. As the moon rose over us, luminescent pink-and-green bubbles lit across the sandy bottom and leisurely floated up to greet their cousins in the night sky.

We spoke very little on the hunt. The Kavan twins had their own silent language of gestures and glances. The wizard remained aloof and busied himself by examining the conditions of the remaining Great Cords. Fehha, Tenyan, and I were at turns awed and alert. The game there was huge and plentiful. We could feed the entire tribe for a month on a single day's worth of hunting. But also great were the scavengers and predators. There were cats the size of Fehha and I combined. The few times we rested, we had to loop the Great Cords around our mules and pull them into the trees out of the reach of a wolf pack that trailed us by day. The mules would bray their complaints as we dragged them up but by morning they were so stricken with fear, Fehha and I had cut the branches out from under them to return them to the ground.

As we crossed the Table of the World, our surroundings would change in tenor three or four times a day. A blue vine-flower with a heavy scent would dominate the terrain for a morning's hike only to be replaced with a sallow and odious fen, which in turn fell away to lichen-covered boulders that divided the trees enough to allow the orange glow of the setting sun to fall upon our faces. We had become so familiar with these gradual but distinct shifts that we did not mark the distant creaking of trees and the rising musk as a sign of anything new.

It was the stubborn reluctance of the mules to continue that revealed the beast. The Kavan twins rushed ahead, disappearing in the trees. I tried to drag the team forward. Fehha, ever at my side, pulled with me. Tenyan lashed the mules from behind with a length of rope. They frothed and their eyes rolled with fear, but we had no patience. The sinew of generations past also

tugged on the reins. The pact was upon us and these animals would be made to do their part.

The panicked animals broke into a run and we led them to a clearing of bent trees where the Kavan twins stood before a rising hill covered with violet birds lazing in the sun. Before I could comprehend what we were seeing, the twins turned back to us, eyes wide and wild. They rushed to the mules and latched their harpoons to *Pact Keeper*, which was the first of the Great Cords, woven for us by the wizard himself, and *Abundance*, which was entrusted to the care of my mother and me and would have been yours to watch over if it had not betrayed us. With two perfect lofts the harpoons soared through the faded blue sky, carrying the two barbed cords along grand arcs before burying themselves deep in the fleshy folds of the hill.

The hill stood up, shattering the flock on its back across the sky.

The beast had a thick hide that folded on itself like the meat of a walnut and was covered in soft, short red-brown fur. Its massive frame was supported by six legs so stout that no two of us could reach around an ankle. If you had stood the whole party—five hunters, six mules, one wizard, and your unborn brother—one atop each other, we would have just reached the rumpled crest of its brow. Its face was flat and hid its features beneath the shadowy furrows of its skin. From its awesome lower jaw sprouted three giant tusks of opal that curled up and around its cheeks—the tip of one you now hold in your hands. It was not hard to imagine such a face peering down from the plateau at our ancestors and appearing as a grimacing god haloed in prismatic fire.

The ponderous sight held our awe, but our muscles had instincts of their own. I latched my harpoon to *The Last Hunger* and Fehha latched his to *Mother's Gift*. *Last Hunger* flew high and true, striking the beast before it screamed. But Fehha was delayed by the wizard. He had stuffed his ears with clay and threw some to Fehha, yelling something no one ever heard

because the beast had opened its cavernous mouth and cried out.

That cry, that horrible cry. As the beast bellowed, I felt everything I had and would ever feel. An intense love for both you and your brother, though neither of you yet to be born. The grief that held me helpless for the fortnight following your brother's early passing. The embrace of both your fathers and all my other lovers. My own painful birth into this world. The cacophony of disgrace and pride that was the sum of the triumphs and failures Fehha and I shared on our hunts. The shock I was moments from experiencing when I would be witness to Fehha's gruesome end. The long, blunt rage I yet carry with me for that cursed wizard. The tearful release that would wash from me as I stood upon the giant carcass of the beast. My own cool, content slipping into an eternal peace years from now.

And the fear, the great and shameful fear that the pact was unraveling. That my life and three generations of lives before mine had all been unnecessary.

The trees rattled as the beast howled and began to laboriously shamle into a run. But all other animals, save the wizard and the Kavan twins, were caught in

the spell. Birds, forgetting their wings, drifted out of the sky. The mules stood blankly, refusing to even complain. Fehha let his harpoon drop from his hand. Tenyan's face ran with tears.

Pact Keeper, *Abundance*, and *The Last Hunger* uncoiled from their mules' backs and snaked along the ground, growing taut as their hooks snagged at the underbrush and the beast accelerated. Three of the Seven would never be enough. With five or six harpoons sunk into the beast, hindering it as they dragged their Great Cords and hooks behind them, it would not gain speed enough to pull itself free. We could then easily trail it, awaiting its exhaustion. Three were but a thorn.

The wizard was not born with a harpoon in his hand nor any heart to hold hope. He scrambled to scoop up *Mother's Gift* and threw it shamefully short. One of the Kavan twins, who had assumed we were following them, returned to find us shuddering in the final echoes of the beast's cry. The twin glared at us accusingly as the wizard yelled with futility.

Trees creaked and splintered as the beast trampled them and dragged the Great Cords across them. The first plaintive cries of wounded birds rose from the

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surrounding forest. The wizard shoved a jar of clay into Fehha's hands. Then a tree that had been bent low as the Cords were dragged over it, snapped back, pulling a harpoon free from the beast and flinging *Abundance the Traitor* back across the sky.

It flew between Fehha and me with such force that it stripped my hunting mate of his clothes and flesh before we even heard the whip crack.

The pact was broke. His ancient hands shaking, the wizard pulled from his pouch three coins tied together by a leather thong and slung it into the air. A gold serpent with the gossamer wings of a moth swooped from the sky, catching the coins in its fangs and wrapping its long tail around the wizard before carrying him off to a land of cowards.

I will not recall the rest of that grim day, my child. I had already lived it twice. Once upon the Table of the World and once within the beast's cry. By nightfall, we had buried Fehha and cursed the wizard. Tenyan was crippled by the kick of a mule who had been startled by *Abundance's* betrayal. And one of the Kavan twins ruined a hand on one of the Great Cords that yet chased after the beast.

We released the mules and set up a camp for our injured. I made Tenyan swear to tend the fire, to keep the torches lit. So all we had to do to know they yet lived was to climb a tree and turn our eyes to their hill.

The other Kavan and I carried *Mother's Gift* between us and set out on the beast's prodigious trail. What else could we do, we who had been born to hunt it?

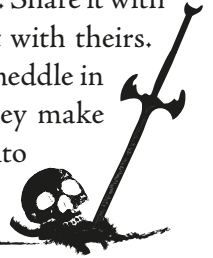
I had stuffed my ears with the wizard's clay and we followed the beast in silence from a cautious distance, collecting *The Last Hunger*, *Pact Keeper* and *Mother's Gift* as each of them was pulled free and spearing the beast with them anew.

We did not count the days. Eventually the fires on the hill went dark, your brother began kicking to let me know we were not alone, and I learned some of

the secret language of Kavan twins. We ran without exhaustion. We quelled our fears and our hungers. We threw the harpoons high and clear of the trees. We knotted and hooked the Great Cords as needed. And we forgot the wishes of our ancestors.

One bright night in a grove of fruited trees, the beast fell at last, its final, rotting breath visible in the cold air. The Kavan and I climbed atop it and drove all of our harpoons into it, one after another, deep enough to assure us of its end. There we wept together as the predators and scavengers spilled out of the night to share the bounty.

You now hold all that has returned with us from the beast. It is yours to keep, as is this tale. Share it with your children as they should share it with theirs. Carry with it my wish: seek out and meddle in the affairs of wizards and should they make you promises, drive this tusk deep into their hearts.













MASKS OF THE MUMMY KINGS

An adventure game of tomb robbing by Nathan D. Paoletta

Illustrated by Everyone

To play, you need:

- ♦ One Game Master (GM), who prepares the obstacles and treasures to be found in the tomb beforehand.
- ♦ 2-4 players, who play individual rogue characters.
- ♦ 3 different colors of tokens, similar to the touch (such as poker chips or glass beads). These are Player Tokens. Action and Luck share the same color (approx. 8 per player), then Treasure Tokens (approx. 5 per player) and Legendary Treasure Tokens (approx. 3 per player) have their own individual colors.
- ♦ An opaque bag or container from which to blindly draw tokens (The Well of Treasures).
- ♦ Printouts of the Mask sheets, approx. 2 per player (or the ability to print out more as needed).
- ♦ A printout of the GM Obstacle sheet and any maps or other prep material the GM decides to use.

INTRODUCTION

You are a crew of thieves, outlaws, and scoundrels, come together for one purpose: to discover and claim the fabled treasures that lie within the Ziggurat

Tomb of Nabû-Nâzir, the Zodiac Emperor of ancient Babylon.

You have no names. As wanted and mistrustful rogues, others knowing your identity is a liability you cannot afford. You are known only by your masks.

You have cut the back-alley deals and executed the cunning plans necessary to bring you all undetected to the great entrance of the Ziggurat Tomb. It is impossible to scale the walls on the outside, guarded as they are by fell sorceries, strong winds, and the worshipful eyes of the surrounding tent city.

Overcoming the challenges that lie within the Ziggurat Tomb requires Might, Wits, and Sorcery. By going into the tomb, you take the first step on a new road. Material and metaphysical rewards await at the end of the road, but you will be changed by the journey.

The only way in lies before you.

BEFORE PLAY: PREPARING THE TOMB

There will eventually be three Levels to the Tomb. The rules here are for playing through Level One.

The GM prepares the Tomb before the game begins.

Gameplay consists of the rogues exploring a series of rooms. Each room features Obstacles (which will be overcome by the player's creative use of their rogue's abilities). In order to create a sense of continuity between rooms and aid your own evocative description of the environment, you should use some kind of map. This can be one you find or make before play, or you can draw it as you go.

Depending on the number of players and how tough you make each Obstacle, expect the rogues to pass through 4-8 rooms (and thus, 4-8 Obstacles) in order to make it through Level One. Whether you use a pre-existing map or create one on the fly, come up with some key Obstacles that you want to see in play (or pick off of the list provided). Each Obstacle is of Might, of Wits, or of Sorcery.

You have a budget of Treasure Tokens (equal to 3 x the rogues), which you spend to set the strength of each Obstacle. Each Obstacle starts with 1 Treasure Token on it. You can decide how strong each Obstacle is now, or wait until play and do it on the fly.

Your prep can be as little as a list of Obstacle or as much as a full map with assigned Obstacles, a set of images for the denizens of tomb, and a list of traps and treasures you want to see. This game requires you to improvise lots of evocative descriptive material, so the balance between prep and in-the-moment flexibility really depends on your comfort and experience level with making things up on the spot.

Once you have prepared the tomb, you are ready to begin the game.

STARTING PLAY: THE MASKS OF THE ROGUES

Players start by choosing the Masks for their rogues. Each rogue's Mask is made up of two halves, left and right. Print out the Mask sheets and cut them in half; each player simply picks a left and right half from the Starting lists below.

Each mask gives the rogue:

- ♦ The arenas of challenge they can spend Tokens to overcome (Might, Wits, or Sorcery).
- ♦ Their total limit of Action Tokens, found by adding the values on each mask-half together. Rogues start the game with no Action Tokens.
- ♦ Their total Luck. Rogues start with Luck Tokens equal to their Luck number.
- ♦ What happens when they are Out of Luck (all of their Luck Tokens have been spent).
- ♦ Abilities they can leverage to spend Action and Luck Tokens. In the tomb only actions that fall within the listed abilities can affect Obstacles!
- ♦ A Goal, the backstory driving the rogue into the tomb.

Starting Right-Side Masks

- ♦ Thief - Rogues who seek treasure.
- ♦ Outlaw - Rogues who seek freedom.
- ♦ Scoundrel - Rogues who seek power.

Starting Left-Side Masks

- ♦ Ox - Rogues who are brawny, strong, and resilient.
- ♦ Monkey - Rogues who are cunning, clever, and mischievous.
- ♦ Scarab - Rogues who are trained in the mystical arts.

How to Choose

Challenges requiring Might, Wits, and Sorcery lie ahead. If the group ignores one arena, it will not keep them from success, just demand that they come up with more creative ways to overcome the Obstacles. That said, having two options will probably be more rewarding in play. There is no particular advantage to "doubling up."

Everyone wearing the same right-side Mask shares the same Goal. It's possible for multiple rogues to gain their Goal if any of them recover the noted Legendary Treasure.

Before Entering the Tomb

When the rogues first meet, everyone is already wearing a mask. Ask them some questions. The goal of these is to generate some tone and feeling to help paint the picture in everyone's mind.

- ♦ What does your mask actually look like?
- ♦ How are you dressed?
- ♦ Do you have any signature weapon or other object that we can see?

While the players answer, gather your Treasure Tokens (3 x the number of players) and decide on the first Obstacle for the first room of the Tomb.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Describe the first room in as much detail as you need to convey the challenge of the room, and then some. Generally, you should be clear about what the Obstacle is - is there a giant snake rising from the floor? Animated skeletons drawing bone swords? A curtain of swirling sand that scours away everything it touches? Add any additional details or scenery that occupy your mental picture of the room. This game runs smoothest when the challenges are obvious and there are numerous fictional details for the players to respond to. You want to give them a platform to jump from with their own creativity.

Overcoming Obstacles

As you describe the room, place 1 Treasure Token on the Might, Wits, or Sorcery space on your Obstacle sheet. This assigns the Obstacles to that arena. Spend additional Treasure Tokens out of your budget to make the Obstacle more challenging (three total Treasure Tokens is a good amount for the first room).

This placement is technically secret, in that the players don't know exactly what the nature of the Obstacle is at the beginning, and they don't know how many Treasure Tokens are on the Obstacle. In practice, the nature of it is often obvious or becomes known shortly. Your job is not to trick the players, but rather to encourage them to experiment with the opportunities they have available to them from their rogue's abilities.

Players describe their reactions to the challenges in front of them, and then their actions to overcome those challenges.

Action Tokens

They start the first room with no Action Tokens. They keep any Action Tokens gained between rooms, until they hit their Token Limit on their sheet, at which point they can no longer gain Action Tokens through narration.

To gain Action Tokens, a player narrates how their rogue struggles, slips, or is fooled by what they're facing. Retreating from the snake's fangs, freezing in terror as the skeletons advance, or crying out in pain as the sand scours their flesh would all be ways to demonstrate how a rogue is threatened by the Obstacle.

Sometimes the rogues will simply react without really struggling—you should feel free to turn their reaction into a stronger slip or struggle by making the Obstacle more threatening, in order to model the idea of showing weakness in order to gain Action Tokens.

Action Tokens can also be regained from the Well of Treasures, see below.

Once Action Tokens are gained, a player spends them when they narrate how they use the abilities on their Masks to fight against, get around, fool, or destroy the challenge before them. The player specifies which arena they're spending the tokens on. Might must be used to overcome Might, Wits to overcome Wits, and Sorcery to overcome Sorcery.

Every spent Action Token discards a Treasure Token from the Obstacle on the GM's sheet if they match the arena of the Obstacle.

The rogue's abilities define what they do that can impact the tomb and its Obstacles. They vary in specificity and are open to contextual interpretation. Anything that the rogue does that clearly falls outside of their abilities still happens, but it doesn't spend any Action Tokens or generally influence the tomb. A rogue can use any ability to spend tokens for either arena on their sheet. That is, they don't have to match the ability to the Mask it's printed on.

If a player spends an Action Token to discard a threat that isn't present (spending Might to address a Wits Obstacle, for example), describe how their opposition is unaffected in clear terms. The challenge to the players is to narrow down their options then overcome the challenge, not for you to fool them into wasting all of their resources.

Luck

They start the first room with the number of Luck Tokens on their sheet (2 for starting rogues). Luck and Action tokens share the same color (they're both Player Tokens), but occupy different parts of the sheet.

Luck Tokens represent powerful abilities that require a certain amount of good fortune to pull off. Like Action Tokens, they are spent when the matching ability is narrated.

Every spent Luck Tokens discards a Treasure Token from the Obstacle on the GMs sheet, regardless of arena.

Luck Tokens can occasionally be gained back from the Well of Treasures (see below), and sometimes gained from the effects of another's Mask. In addition, when the player gains a new left-side Mask, they regain Luck Tokens equal to its rating.

Discarding Tokens

All Action Tokens spent and Treasure Tokens discarded from the Obstacle sheet go into the Well of Treasures.

Luck Tokens go out of play.

OVERCOMING THE ROOM

Once the final Treasure Token is discarded from the Obstacle sheet, the room is overcome. The GM narrates how the Obstacle falls, if it's not already part of the player's narration.

Once the room is overcome, the players draw from the Well of Treasures to discover their rewards. If any of the rogues is Out of Luck, this is when they trigger the listed effect on their sheet, *instead* of drawing from the Well.

Pushing On

Sometimes it becomes apparent that the rogues won't be able overcome a room on their own due to general creative exhaustion, or there's no clear path to fictionally overcome the obstacles with the abilities they have on their sheets.

In such a case, a player may use of all their Luck tokens remaining in order to narrate an epic or dramatic solution to the obstacle, unconstrained by their abilities. The GM discards all remaining Treasure Tokens off of their Obstacle sheet, but does *not* put them in the Well of Treasures. Of course, this means the rogue is Out Of Luck.

THE WELL OF TREASURES

Once a room is overcome, it's time to consult the Well of Treasures. Use an opaque bag, box, or other container.

The Well of Treasures starts the game with 1 Treasure Token in it. All Action Tokens spent and Treasure

Tokens discarded go into the Well of Treasures as well. Luck Tokens do not go into the Well of Treasures.

Once the Well is filled, shake it to randomize the tokens. Each player who spent Action Tokens in the previous room blindly draws a single token from the Well. Players who spent no tokens draw nothing.

If all of the players spent Action Tokens to get through a room (whether they discarded a Treasure Token or not), place a Legendary Treasure token in the Well of Treasures after the draw.

There are three different colors of tokens: Player Tokens (both Action Tokens and Luck Tokens are represented by the same color), Treasure Tokens, and Legendary Treasure Tokens.

- ♦ If a player draws a Player Token, they put it back on their sheet as an Action Token. If they are already at their Action Token limit, it becomes a Luck Token.
- ♦ If a player draws a Treasure Token, they find a treasure! Pick a treasure off the list and narrate how they find it. The rogue can choose whether to reveal that they've discovered treasure, or keep it secret. Players keep the Treasure Tokens they accumulate throughout the game.
- ♦ If a player draws a Legendary Treasure token, they find a Legendary Treasure! Legendary Treasures are either Masks or the object specified by their Goal. The player picks whether they want a new Mask, or the Goal Treasure. See the Legendary Treasures section for details.

If the Well becomes too full, simply remove pairs of Player and Treasure Tokens until it's manageable again. Leave all Legendary Treasure tokens.

CONTINUING ON

Present rooms, and thus Obstacles, in any order that makes sense. To maintain a sense of flow and progress it often makes sense to switch up the nature of the

Obstacle, with the occasional doubling-up to break patterns as they form.

If you do use a pre-existing map, Obstacles do not need to live with a specific room. One of your jobs during play is to pace the nature of the Obstacles to what will best support the rhythm of play.

The Treasure

Make a list of basic treasures ahead of time, use the list here, or come up with them on the fly. Whoever has the most Treasure Tokens at the end of the game is assured of a comfortable life when they return to the surface, regardless of whether they get their Goal or not. Treasure Tokens can be traded between players during the game, but are otherwise not used during play.

Legendary Treasure

When a player draws a Legendary Treasure Token, they pick whether they find a new Mask or one of the Legendary Treasures listed in their current Goal section. They can also save the token to decide later.

If they choose a new Mask, look at the remaining Right-Side Mask options and pick the one you think makes the most sense for how they've been portraying their character thus far.

- ♦ Soldier - a mighty warrior with dreams of grandeur.
- ♦ Mystic - a cunning wizard who thirsts for power.
- ♦ Assassin - a subtle killer who seeks revenge.

What happens when two players share a goal, but one of them pulls the Legendary Treasure token and takes their goal Treasure? The players can:

- ♦ Agree that whoever found the Legendary Treasure is its master, and continue on.
- ♦ Agree to share the Treasure. This means that both characters count as possessing the Treasure for the sake of their Goal, but that their fates are now

bound together—this comes into play at the end of the game.

- ♦ Roleplay out striking a bargain to trade the Legendary Treasure, including trading Treasure Tokens or even Masks. If Masks are traded, all Player Tokens remain with the original players. If this would give them more Tokens than they have slots (like if you trade for a Mask with a lower Action Token limit), additional tokens are discarded.

The Last Room

The last room of the Tomb is the most challenging. Once you spend the last Treasure Token in your budget on an Obstacle, that room becomes the last room; in addition to the existing Obstacle, the last room has a Mummy King in it!

The Mummy King is assigned to either of the remaining arenas—for example, if the original Obstacle is one of Might, the Mummy King is either Wits or Sorcery. Use that arena to tone the appearance, nature and capabilities of the Mummy King. The Mummy King Obstacle has three Legendary Treasure Tokens on it in addition to the GM's budget.

The last room is overcome when all Tokens are discarded, both the Treasure Tokens from the original Obstacle and Legendary Treasure Tokens from the Mummy King. Anyone who draws a Legendary Treasure Token from the final Well of Treasures can request the Mummy Mask, if they wish.

The End and Beyond

Once the last room has been overcome, the rogues have reached the end of Level One!

- ♦ Anyone who has gained their goal narrates a brief epilogue about what this means for their rogue, and any notable events that happen as a result.
- ♦ If two or more rogues have their fates bound together, whoever possesses the Legendary

Treasure in question narrates for all those who gain the same goal.

- ♦ Anyone who is wearing the Mummy Mask is claimed by the Zodiac Emperor and narrates how they take up their new position within the tomb.
- ♦ Anyone who hasn't gained their goal or been claimed by the Zodiac Emperor sums up their Treasure tokens. The player with the most Treasure is assured of a comfortable life, whatever that means for them.
- ♦ Any other player is still mired in a life of want, and despite their gains will certainly need to find a new source of treasure in the near future...

Or, the rogues can pass on to more levels. Keep a wary eye on Nathan D. Paoletta's website and Patreon for more *Masks of the Mummy Kings*:

- ♦ ndpdesign.com
- ♦ www.patreon.com/ndpaoletta

CREDITS

This game is heavily inspired by Epidiah Ravachol's *Swords Without Master*, Tim Kleinert's *The Mountain Witch*, and shares features with Tony Lower-Basch's *Capes* and John Harper's *Danger Patrol*.

Playtesters: Nathan D. Paoletta, Dave Michalak, Jenn Martin, Lance Martin, Willow Palacek, Megan Pederson, Eric, Mark Redacted, Tim Jensen, Shari Corey, Rebecca Frey, Mark Malone, Sarah Richardson, Benjamin Rowe, Avril DeBat.

SOME TREASURES

- ♦ A bag of gold
- ♦ An ancient cuneiform tablet
- ♦ A single flawless ruby
- ♦ A jeweled dagger

- ♦ A jade statue from distant lands
- ♦ A set of fine paintbrushes in a box of masterful craftsmanship
- ♦ A shawl of the finest linen
- ♦ Fine leather boots with silver buckles
- ♦ A golden ring set with three small diamonds
- ♦ A scroll of papyrus inscribed with the ritual of the breaking dawn
- ♦ An ensorcelled diadem
- ♦ A torch that lights and snuffs on command

THE LEGENDARY TREASURES

- ♦ Obsidian Scarab (Outlaw)
- ♦ Tears of the Nile (Thief)
- ♦ Scepter of the Sun (Scoundrel)
- ♦ Scroll of Dominion (Soldier)
- ♦ Emperor's Burial Shroud (Mystic)
- ♦ Heart of Anubis (Assassin)

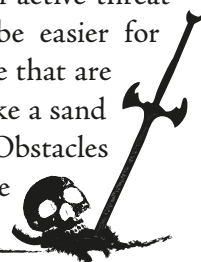
OBSTACLES

This list is a starting point with recommended Obstacle types. You are encouraged to come up with your own Obstacles and change around which type these ideas are assigned to.

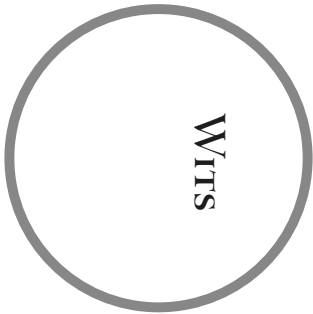
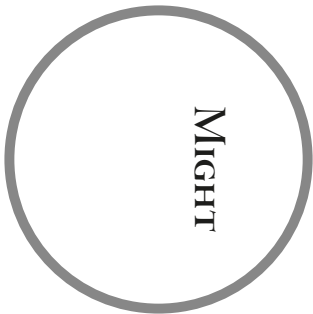
- ♦ A false floor, slowly collapsing into a pit of angry vipers (Wits)
- ♦ A single enormous, poisonous spider (Might)
- ♦ A polished mirror of bronze that reflects your fear into the real world (Sorcery)
- ♦ A seamless room with no doors or other openings (Wits)

- ♦ Two starving Hyenas (Might)
- ♦ Animated skeletons rise! (Sorcery)
- ♦ An enormous snake coiled around the perimeter of the room (Wits)
- ♦ A treacherous broken floor covered in live insects (Might)
- ♦ The room is the interior of an enormous mouth (Sorcery)
- ♦ Sand quickly fills the room (Wits)
- ♦ An animated jackal-headed statue that blocks all attempts to pass (Might)
- ♦ Complete, utter darkness (Sorcery)
- ♦ Every surface is burning hot to the touch (Wits)
- ♦ A squadron of elite guards from another plane of existence (Might)
- ♦ A dancing scimitar (Sorcery)

In general, Obstacles that feature an active threat (like animated skeletons) tend to be easier for players to struggle against than those that are an automatic or inexorable threat (like a sand trap). The latter can break up your Obstacles well, but you should probably use them sparingly.



OBSTACLES IN THE ZIGGURAT TOMB



— *Obstacle Description* —

Room 1			
Room 2			
Room 3			
Room 4			
Room 5			
Room 6			
Room 7			
Room 8			
Room 9			
Last Room			

The last room has a **Mummy King** in addition to the existing Obstacle. Assign the **Mummy King** to either of the free arenas and narrate it's threat accordingly.

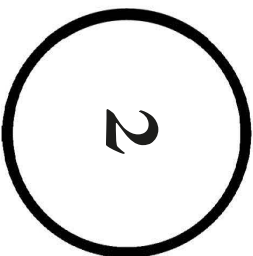
Ox

Spend for MIGHT

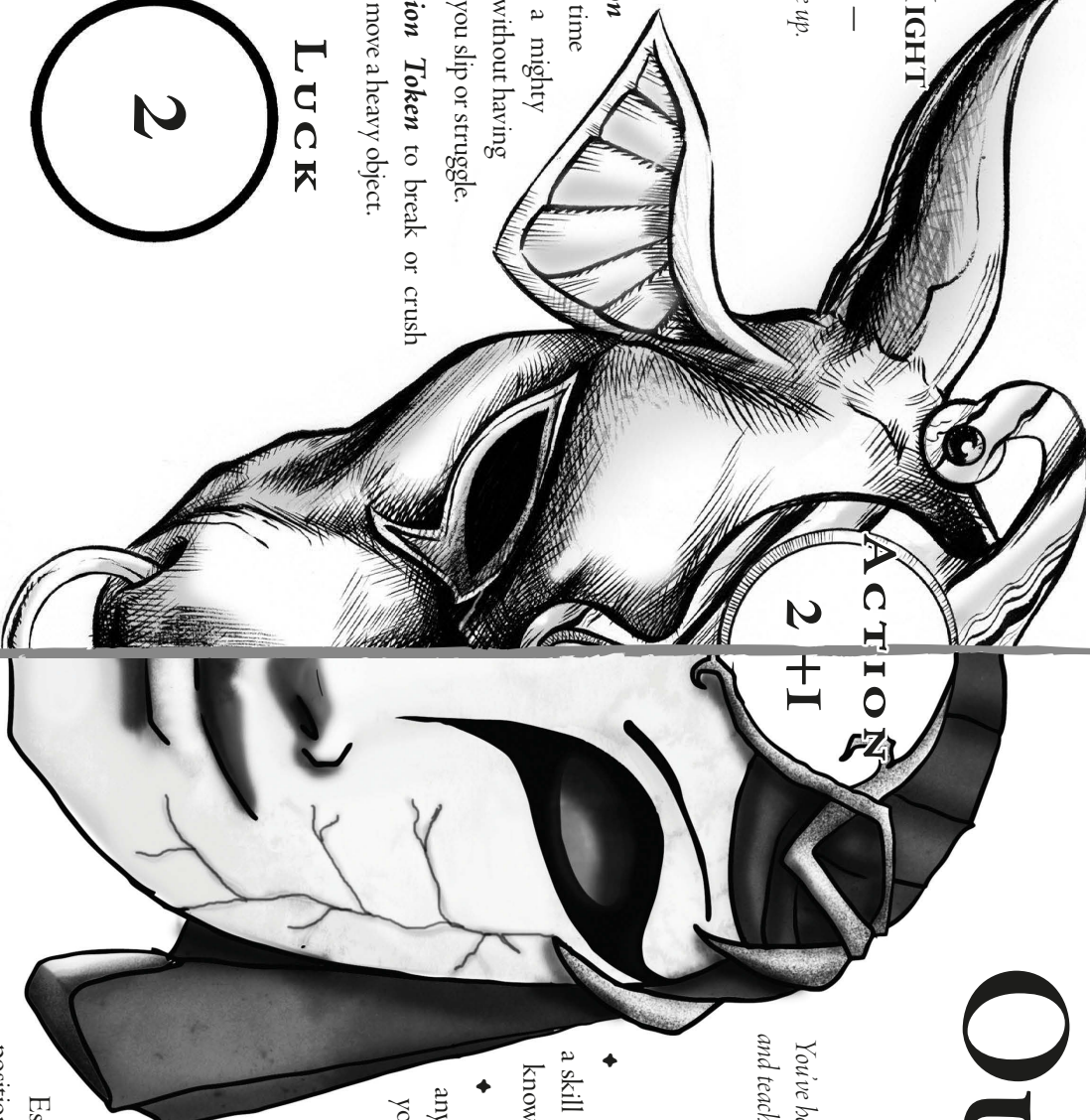
— Stubborn —
You refuse to give up.

- ♦ **Gain 1 Action Token** the first time you withstand a mighty blow in a room, without having to describe how you slip or struggle.
- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to break or crush something or to move a heavy object.

LUCK



- ♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to overcome an impossible task.
- ♦ **When Out Of Luck** you are overcome by the power of the Zodiac Emporer. Turn in your Ox Mask for a Mummy Mask.



OUTLAW

Spend for MIGHT

— Jack of All Trades —
You've had a number of odd jobs, experiences and teachers in your life, and you've picked up a wide variety of skills.

- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to reveal a skill that nobody knew you had, or use a known skill in a novel way.
- ♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to do anything that seems beyond the reach of your present companions.

—Goal—

Once a noble in a neighboring kingdom, you were party to the murder of the Swamp Queen Eshapeti. Her dying curse cost you your position and has followed you ever since. You paid handsomely for a divination that indicated your salvation lies within the Ziggurat Tomb.

Discover the **Obsidian Scarab**, a magical artifact that will lift your curse and free you to resume your birthright once again.

MONKEY

Spend for WITS

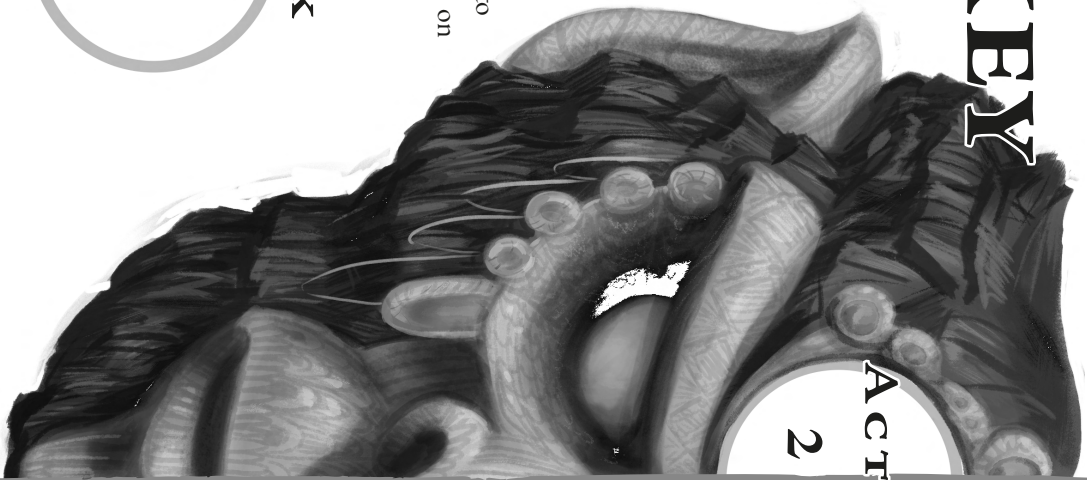
— Agile —

You have amazing control over your body.

- ♦ **Gain 1 Action Token** as soon as your body is threatened, without having to describe how you slip or struggle.
- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to to jump, climb, or balance on something precarious.

LUCK

2



- ♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to do something physically impossible.
- ♦ **When Out Of Luck** you are overcome by the power of the Zodiac Emporer. Turn in your Monkey Mask for a Mummy Mask.

Illustrated by Andrea Scott

THIEF

Spend for WITS

— Professional —

You are well-acquainted with traps, disguises and the methods for gaining things others don't want you to have.

- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to disarm a trap or unlock something that's hidden for all to see.
- ♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to do anything else that falls within your thieffy abilities.

—Goal—

You heard from old Ali One-Tooth that the **Tears of the Nile**, a legendary necklace of priceless diamonds, lies within the Ziggurat Tomb.

If you can return to the surface with it, these unique gems are one of the only ways you know of to buy off the blood debt you owe to the Shadow Masters.



Illustrated by Ed Hell

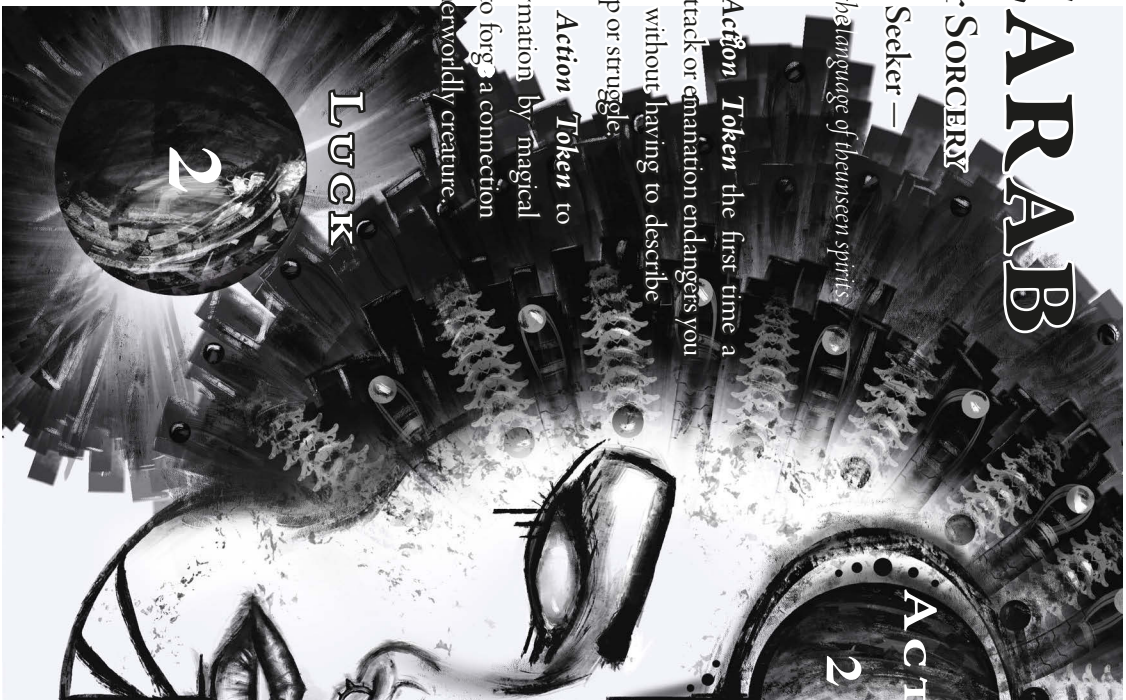
SCARAB

Spend for SORCERY

— Spirit Seeker —

You speak the language of the unseen spirits.

- ♦ **Gain 1 Action Token** the first time a sorcerous attack or emanation endangers you in a room, without having to describe how you slip or struggle.
- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to learn information by magical means, or to forge a connection with an otherworldly creature.



- ♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to bargain or cut a deal with an otherworldly entity.
- ♦ **When Out Of Luck** you are cursed! Turn in your Scarab Mask for a Cursed Mask.

Illustrated by Jenna Kass

SCOUNDREL

Spend for SORCERY

— Illusionist —

You are skilled in the art of distraction.

- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to create a sensory illusion.
- ♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to create a simulacrum or otherwise provide an illusion with temporary physical form.

— Goal —

When apprenticed, your Master told you of the **Scepter of the Sun**, a magical rod of many parts that bestows the bearer with the power to clothe the visions of their minds eye with real form and substance.

Now that you've disposed of your Master, you are free to seek the power of the Scepter yourself.



Illustrated by Dagmara Matuszak

CURSED

Spend for SORCERY

— Cursed —

You have brought the attention of malevolent spirits upon your own head.

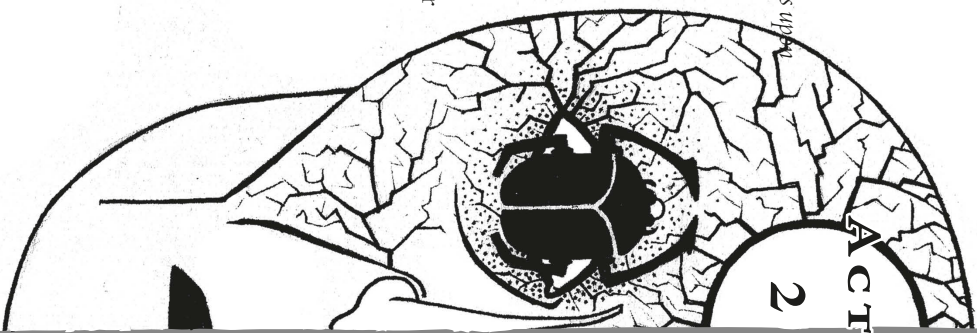
- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to bring the world of the dead and the world of the living closer together.

LUCK



- ♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to endanger the life of one of your comrades. They narrate how they barely survive, and they gain 1 Luck Token.

- ♦ **When Out Of Luck** you pass on! Turn in your Cursed Mask for a Faceless Mask.



Illustrated by Tina X Filic

SOLDIER

Spend for MIGHT

— The Martial Arts —

You have superlative fighting skills.

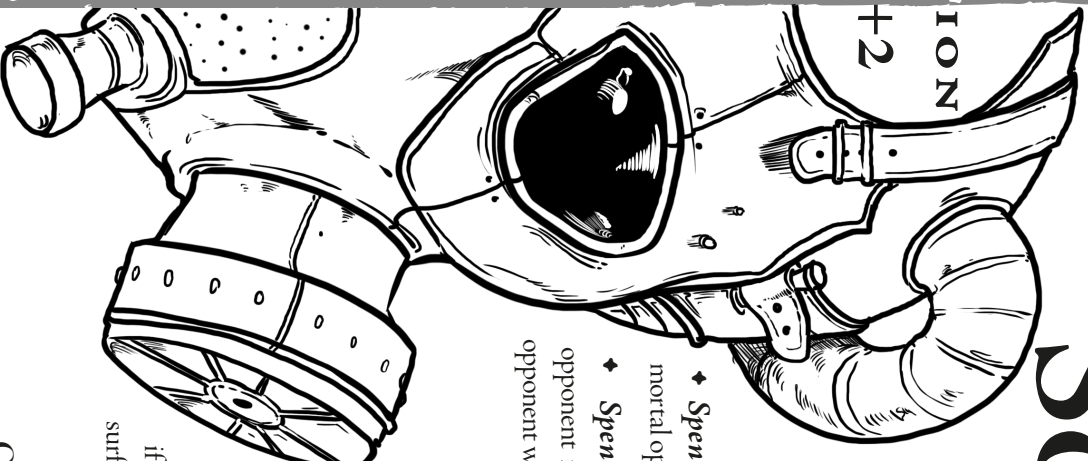
- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to overcome a mortal opponent in a contest of arms.
- ♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to overcome any opponent in a contest of arms, or impress any opponent with your skills.

—Additional Goal—

Your ambition has grown while in the tomb. You know that the Zodiac Emporer was buried with the **Scroll of Dominion**, an ancient artifact that will ensorcle any military force to your command, if you can bring it back with you to the surface.

—Original Goal—

Note the goal from your first Mask:



Illustrated by Eric Gungley

FACELESS\$

Spend for WITS

— Enigma —

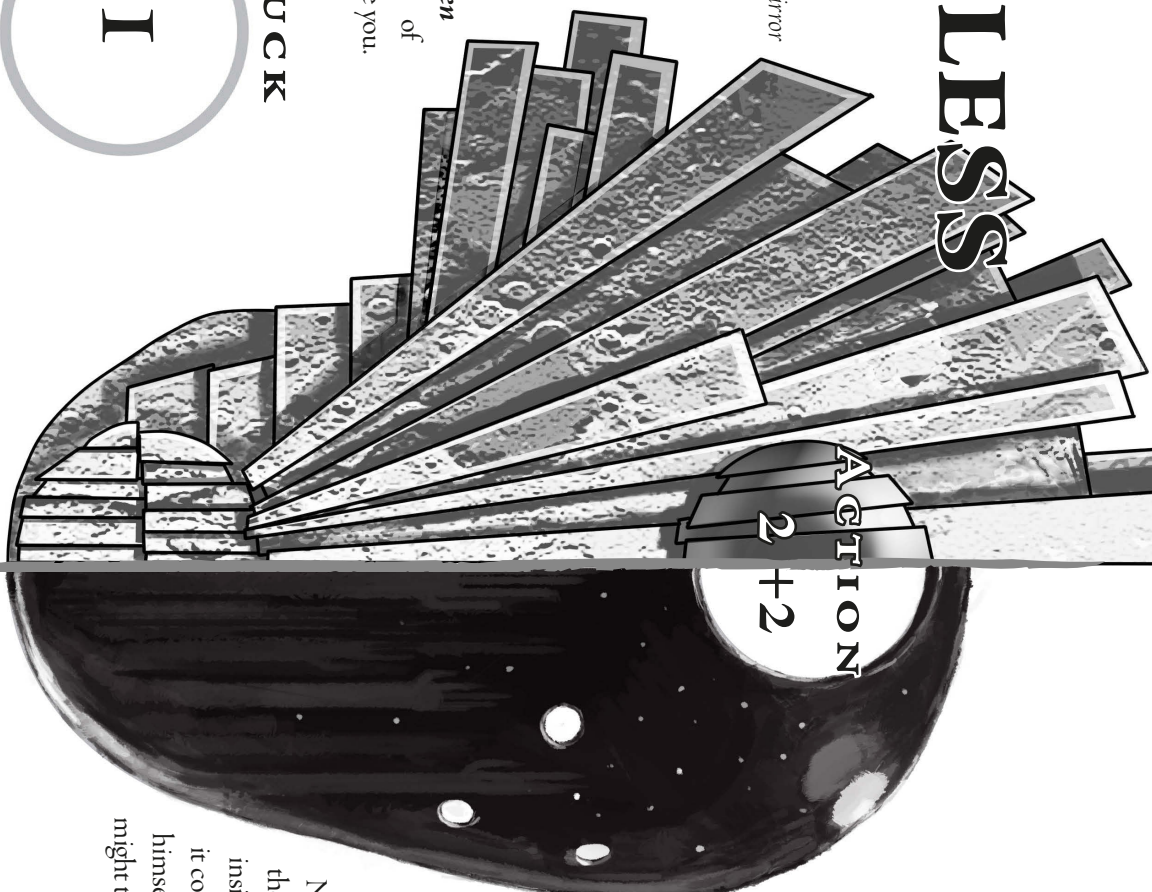
You are a conduit to the mirror realms.

- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to create a reflection of something you see before you.

LUCK

I

- ♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to save the life, body or sanity of one of your comrades by sacrificing your own.
- ♦ **When Out Of Luck** you pass into the Mirror Realm! Turn in your Faceless Mask for **any left-side Mask not currently being worn**. Whether the rogue behind the mask has changed is up to you.



MYSTIC

Spend for SORCERY

— Name Speaker —

To name the thing is to command it.

- ♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to speak something's true name, gaining it's attention or interrupting its actions.
- ♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to rename something, shaping it into that which you command.

—Additional Goal—

Nabu-Nazir's True Name is stitched into the hem of the **Emperor's Burial Shroud**. It cannot be spoken inside his own tomb. On the surface world, however, it could potentially summon the shade of the Emperor himself to your side, providing you with the eldritch might to gain your heart's desires.

—Original Goal—

Note the goal from your first Mask:

MUMMY

Spend for MIGHT

— Undead —

You walk the passages between the worlds of the living and the dead.

♦ **Spend 1 Action Token**

to ignore pain, overcome injury or otherwise shrug off anything that could injure you or impede your progress.

LUCK

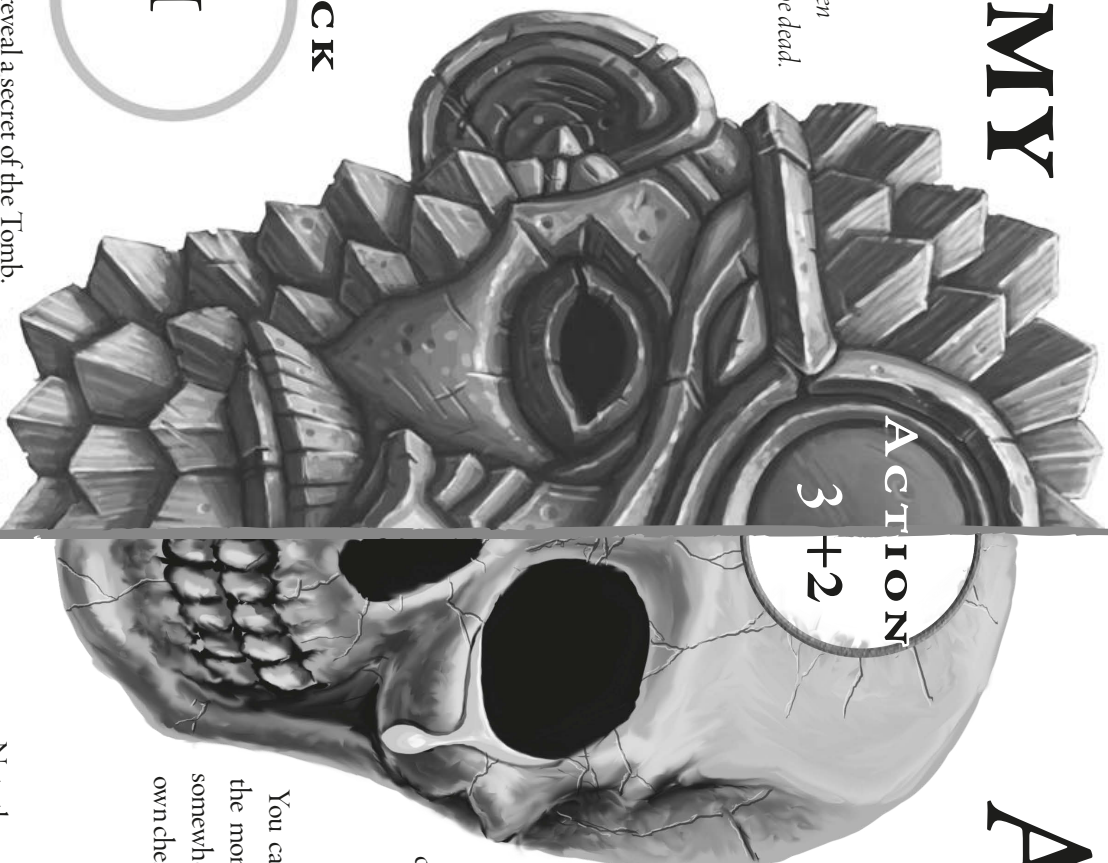
I

♦ **Spend 1 Luck Token** to reveal a secret of the Tomb.

If one of your comrades capitalizes on it, they gain 1 Luck Token.

♦ **When Out Of Luck** you are claimed by the Zodiac

Emperor. You keep your **Mummy Mask**, but at the end of the game your fate is to remain in the Tomb, regardless (or alongside) any Goal you've gained.



ASSASSIN

Spend for WITS

— Secrets of the Flesh —

You know all the weaknesses of the flesh.

♦ **Spend 1 Action Token** to incapacitate,

paralyze or otherwise end a mortal opponents ability to harm you or others.

♦ **Spend 2 Action Tokens** to slay a mortal opponent or to incapacitate one without a corporeal body.

—Additional Goal —

You cannot gain what you truly want if you pass from the mortal world. Thankfully, the **Heart of Anubis** lies somewhere within the tomb. Once this jewel occupies your own chest, you will be barred from entering the underworld.

—Original Goal —

Note the goal from your first Mask:

THREE DOZEN TOMBS, CRYPTS & GRAVES

A miscellany by Epidiah Ravachol

- .□.—A vast and tangled net of cadavers, kelp, and grave goods that floats just beyond the charted seas.
- .□.—A rolling, grassy plain covered in wildflowers whose roots dig deep.
- .■.—Gold and black urns carried by yak caravan over the northern mountain range and into the chaos beyond.
- .■.—The stained glass memorial halls of the Rainbow Horde.
- .■.—The feast of remembrance which must begin as a funeral and end as a marriage.
- .■.—Lord Nokro's bier, attended by trumpeters who must never let a moment pass without the sounding of a horn for fear that the lord may rest.
- .□.—A labyrinth of stone and ice that confounds the living so that they remain that much longer with the lonesome dead.
- .□.—The High Tomb of the Slender God, which rests atop a barren peak, baring its alien corpse to the sky from which it came.
- .■.—A mausoleum that recalls the scent of the dead as it was in spring of their youth.
- .■.—A hedge of spears planted in a forest grove to protect the deceased from scavengers and tomb robbers.
- .■.—The week-long pyres that burn along the banks of the Amura River following the return of those who have fallen in battle.
- .■.—The bronze tombs of the nine queens, each a replica of its queen's castle at the moment of her greatest glory.
- .□.—An ancient well of unknown origin and depth into which the executed are thrown and from which blasphemous echoes emerge.
- .□.—The bodies of great warriors in full iron armor held to vaulted ceilings by slabs of lodestone.
- .■.—A crypt out of time that carries the last corpses of humanity back to the origin.
- .■.—The Floating Garden of the Silent Emperor made of orchids planted in corpses hung from trellises along a banquet hall.
- .■.—The gleaming hoard of a forgotten empress protected by an army kept on the edge of death by waning alchemical stores.
- .■.—The skulls of the patriarchs buried beneath the humble hearthstones of their usurpers and their children.
- .□.—The sealed library of a hermit who died among his treasured tomes, all of which are now dust, save one.
- .□.—The still waters of an underground lake whose bed hides the bodies of six traitors.

■□.—The remains of ancient kings, queens, their personal guard, and war-prizes encased in great glass bulbs and buried beneath shifting dunes of sand.

■□.—Seven thousand silver rings, each carrying a shard of bone from the tyrant Ykruhaziha so that she may never be whole again.

■□.—Stacks of gilded alabaster pillars atop of which rest the bodies of the wealthy until their rivals pay enough to have such a pillar placed up them.

■□.—The Spire of the Damned, a great and towering catacomb stretching into the sky to lay bare the shame of the dead.

■□.—A necropolis of blood-red yurts scattered across a frozen vale to house plague victims.

■□.—Five throne-bound corpses arranged on a pentacle, facing each other so that none may be taken by surprise.

■□.—Ancient hulks stranded upon land by a century of drought, now used by locals to hide their dead.

■□.—A colossal statue of the goddess of the dead, those given to her care resting in her palms,

facing the heavens, and the offerings of the mourners at her feet.

■□.—The crystal sarcophagi of the Ophidene that preserve the corpses of that sorcerous race until the time foretold of.

■□.—A warm and inviting mead hall, draped in furs which hide a single, malicious cadaver.

■□.—An empty hole in the ground that whispers your name as its freshly turned earth trickles back home.

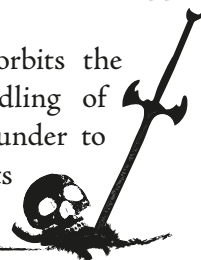
■□.—The 13 graves of heroes now scattered along the sun's path across the sky.

■□.—A ziggurat of skulls, all of them facing inward.

■□.—A suspended graveyard of desiccated husks decorating the sacred webs.

■□.—A thousand alcoves carved into an east-facing cliff, each home to a mummified worshipper of the dawn.

■□.—An obsidian pyramid that orbits the moon, far from the meddling of adventurers who seek to plunder to mystical grave-goods of its sole denizen.



— Advertisement —

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

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THE REALMS

You do not take up sword and spell to tag along with someone else's adventure. You do it to change the course of your destiny. To mold the world to your wants and desires.

Listed below are the stories, games, articles, and miscellanies in this issue that represent worlds available for you to craft your own adventures in. If you should so desire, you may take the characters,

settings, and situations from any of these, create something new, and submit it to *Worlds Without Master*.

By default, any submission to *Worlds Without Master* is not part of any shared world. Creators have the usual controls over their creative properties. The following options exist only for creators who expressly want to take part in this endeavor.

Additionally, the following agreements exist solely between the creators and *Worlds Without Master*, and do not govern the creators' rights in regards to any other publication.

The Free & Chaotic Realms

Anyone may submit material using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work as if it were their own as long as they also agree to make their work part of this Free & Chaotic Realm. This is as open as it gets, with the only curation being the *Worlds Without Master* submission process.

The Curated Realms

Material submitted using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work will be sent to the original creator or the creator's designated curator for approval before being accepted by *Worlds Without Master*. If accepted, this new material is bound to that particular curated realm.

Other Shared Realms

Groups of creators who wish to find their own agreement on how to share their worlds are welcome to do so however they wish.

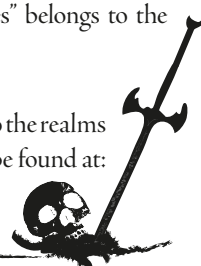
Edicts

Creators are welcome to make up a list of rules other creators must follow while using their works. These rules are set in stone. *Worlds Without Master* will not accept any work that appears to violate an applicable edict that is not also created by the original creator.

More about the realms policy can be found at: WorldsWithoutMaster.com/realms.

"Three Dozen to Tombs, Crypts, and Graves" belongs to the Free & Chaotic Realms.

"High Upon the Table of the World" belongs to the realms curated by Epidiah Ravachol. Its edicts may be found at: WorldsWithoutMaster.com/edicts.





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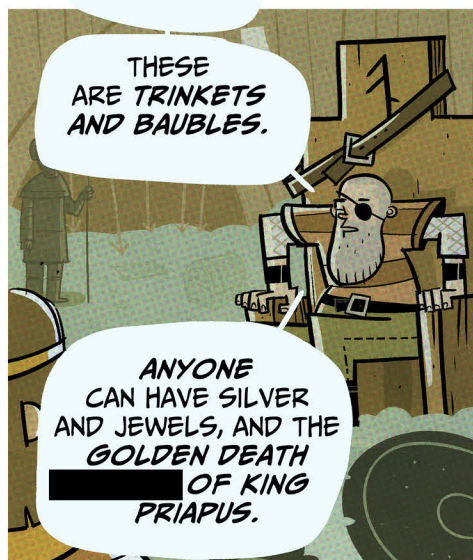
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THIS IS REAL
WEALTH.



HOW DID
YOU GET
TO BE SO
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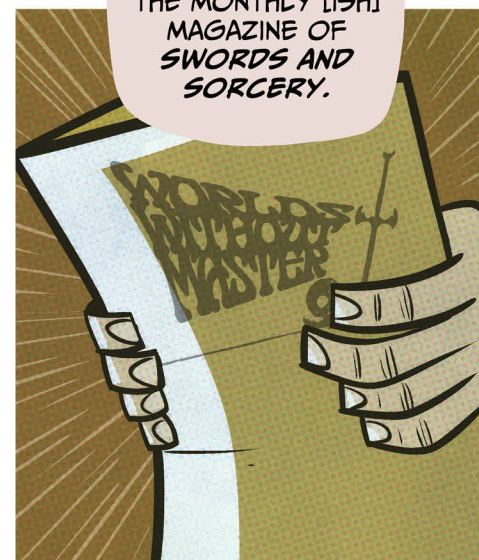
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