

THE TOMB OF AZIRIS

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Short Gamebook Fiction

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Welcome to Varra! It's not a very pleasant city, on the edge of a desert that used to be a sea.

Before you begin your adventure through the city of Varra and its environs, you'll need to define who you are, and what your strengths and weaknesses are.

CHARACTER CREATION

Roll one die and add six. This is your WIT score. Enter it on the character sheet. WIT is a measure of your skill at reading people, bartering, and talking your way out of sticky situations.

Next, roll one die (the same, or a different one, it's up to you) and add six again. This is your DEX, or dexterity score. Enter it on your character sheet. This is a measure of your general coordination and speed. It is used for combat and to measure your reflexes.

Finally, roll two dice and add twelve. This is your initial END, or Endurance score. It is a measure of your ability to endure hardship, of the kind you will face over the course of your adventure. At times you will lose END, through combat or due to paragraph descriptions. If it ever falls to 0, your adventure is over, because you are dead. At times your END will be restored, but it can never go above its initial value.

Checks

At times the text will tell you to make a check, either against WIT or DEX. To do so, roll two dice. If the result is *below* the score of whichever stat you are checking, you have passed the check, while if it is *equal to or above*, you have failed. The text will tell you what to do next.

Inventory

There is a space on your ADVENTURE SHEET to record your inventory — that is, items in your backpack. There is no concept of weight in THE TOMB OF AZIRIS. The only restriction is that you may only use one weapon and one piece of armour at a time.

Combat

You will probably have to punch someone at some point in your adventure. You may even have to stab them.

In combat, the text will give you a DEX and END score for your opponent simply roll two dice.

Add to this your DEX score, and any other modifiers that the text has noted. If your equipment gives you any modifiers (see INVENTORY, above), add these as well. The total is your ATTACK ROLL.

Next, roll two dice again and add on your opponents DEX score, together with any other modifiers from your inventory or the text. The total is your opponent's ATTACK ROLL.

If your roll is *higher than or equal to* your opponents, you hit them. Otherwise, your opponent hits you.

Whoever is hit reduces their END score by 2, adding or subtracting to this number of any

modifiers that are outlined in the text or from your inventory.

Combat example

Anaximander the Shrewd has got himself into a spot of bother with a pit rat. He must fight it.

PIT RAT: DEX: 7 END: 4

This is how your enemies will appear over the course of the book. Anaximander has a DEX of 10 and an END of 15.

Anaximander goes first, rolling two dice and scoring 7. He adds his DEX score of 10 for a total ATTACK SCORE of 17.

The player then rolls for the pit rat, rolling 4 and adding the rat's DEX of 7 for a total of 11. Anaximander wins this round, and the player subtracts 2 from the pit rat's END score, leaving it with 2.

The player then starts again, rolling a 5 this time for a total of 15. She then rolls for the pit rat, ending up with 10 and adding the pit rat's DEX for a total of 17. The rat has won this round! She subtracts 2 points from Anaximander's END, leaving him with 13.

The player then rolls again for Anaximander, ending up with 4 for a total of 14. For the pit rat, she rolls 7, for a total of 14. Because Anaximander has rolled *higher than or equal to* the pit rat, he hits. The pit rat loses its last 2 points of END, killing it. Anaximander is a victorious slayer of vermin!

Water

You will be traveling through a desert, and as a result you will need to drink water. There is a space to record how much water you have left on your ADVENTURE SHEET.

At times the text will tell you that you have to drink, and to lose 1 water. If ever you are told this when you have 0 water, you must roll one die and subtract the result from your END. If your END ever reaches zero or falls below it, you pass out from thirst and die.

Certain items will increase your water consumption. These will only apply if the text tells you that you lose water through thirst, and not if the water is stolen or lost over the course of your adventure.

When you are ready, turn to section 1 to begin your adventure...

ADVENTURE SHEET

WIT: _____

DEX: _____

END: () _____

Water: _____

Equipment:

Inventory:

Notes:

1

The sunlight burns your eyes, followed by the stench which burns your nose. You are lying in a gutter. Clearly, it was a rough night, though you remember little of it.

Varra. A stinking cesspit masquerading as a city. You came here to seek your fortune, like so many others, drawn like moths to the flame. Stories about Varra are told across the known world, from the Tyranny of Tharkos up to the Thousand Princes. It lies on the edge of what was until a few hundred years ago a sea, and is now a desert basin. There are riches out there, shipwrecks now exposed to looters and tombs older than the oceans. Dangers too, Damn'd cultists and stranger beasts. All kinds of excitement.

The reality, as you have found, is quite different. Oh, there's adventure to be had out in the desert, but the monsters in the city are far more dangerous. Hoteliers and merchants that charge a king's ransom for board and food, because they know you can pay. The water-sellers are the worst, and they collude with the city watch to keep prices high.

A few sure-fire tips for money, a few loans, falling in with the wrong people, you can chart it all, misstep after accident that's led you to this sorry position, owing money to one of the oldest and deadliest banks in the city.

You climb up out of the gutter and dust yourself off, trying not to think about what you were lying in, and shake your head to clear the cobwebs. It's then that you notice three men standing in front of you. Thugs, wiry and rangy, poorly dressed with missing teeth, but handy enough to be a concern to you, especially in your slightly addled state.

Turn to 66

2

The thief drops down from his perch on the wall as you approach, still looking past you at the blacksmith.

"Isn't she beautiful?" he says "those lithe arms, those wonderful eyes," you look over your shoulder. The smith is still glaring at him, her arms folded. Lithe doesn't seem to describe them, they seem more 'enormous' or 'potentially deadly' to you. Still, you think it better to avoid upsetting the man.

"In any case, what can I interest you in? Going to the desert? I have just the things! Rope, lock picks, even some nice new loaded dice."

He seems to spot the confusion in your face "Ah, you have not heard? There's a new Damn'd cult, I forget what they call themselves, got those long Damn'd names, but they worship chance and gambling. So some loaded dice might get you a long way with them, provided they don't realise you're using it. Anyway, have a look, everything's a mark each."

ROPE: 1 mark

LOCK PICKS: 1 mark

LOADED DICE: 1 mark

When you've finished buying things, subtract any money you've spent and add items to your ADVENTURE SHEET.

Then, return to the market by **turning to 55**

3

The thugs drive you to the ground and kick and punch you for what feels like hours, then two of them haul you up, while the middle one leans forward, his breath stinking of alcohol.

“You gonna come with us now?”

You don’t even have the strength to nod, so they drag you away.

Turn to 81

4

You break into a run ahead of the ship, hoping to outpace them. However, as you run and glance over your shoulder, you see a number of Damn’d jumping from the ship’s deck and chasing after you, as the ship itself creaks to a halt. There are far too many of them to fight, and they are holding a large fishing net.

Make a DEX check to outrun them.

If you succeed, **turn to 98**

If you fail, **turn to 73**

5

You see something on the horizon, roughly human shapes, but as you stare at them something seems wrong. It takes you a moment to realise they are dolphins. Sea creatures with arms and legs grafted onto their sides. No-one knows where they get the limbs from, but there are a lot of rumours and none of them pleasant.

It is rare for Dolphins to come this far out of the deep desert, and they must be after something. They are dangerous, and are known for their strength and hatred of humans. If you’re careful, you might be able to skirt them without being noticed, or perhaps they’re not interested in you.

If you wish to try to avoid them, **turn to 72**

If you wish to approach them, **turn to 47**

6

The Damn’d champion stands triumphant over you, grinning.

“Weak,” he says “we take your water now.”

You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and you fall into a sleep from which you will never wake up.

THE END

7

The raiders pause as they approach, and they notice the fossilised fish tail hanging from your belt. They nod to you, and hand you a skin of water, but say nothing.

Add 1 WATER to your ADVENTURE SHEEET.

Turn to 30

8

The room beyond is grand, and wide, with a broken fountain in the middle. There are old light fixtures on the walls picked out by the flickering light of your torch, and the walls depict a garden, using tricks of forced perspective to make the room appear far bigger than it really is.

Raised planters filled with long-dead plants lie in geometric patterns on the floor, but they cannot hide the approach of the hulking creatures in the room.

A swam of muscular pit rats, each the size of a small dog, leap out at you. You must fight them as one creature.

PIT RATS DEX: 8 END: 10

If you win, **turn to 9**

9

Beyond the garden chamber the corridor continues northward, before splitting with a second path heading west. The corridor leading on grows ever grander, with even more gilt work in places and settings for jewels that have long been robbed.

The corridor heading west, meanwhile, appears far more utilitarian, with only occasional murals and far more neatly rendered messages, many of them on the floor.

If you wish to continue north, **turn to 22**

If you wish to turn westward, **turn to 82**

10

As the last bandit falls, groaning, down the steps, you climb gingerly over them. As you do so, the ground shakes and dust falls from the ceiling. The whole tomb appears to be unstable. You don't have time to search the corpses, but in the hand of the last bandit you find something like a coin, though a little larger. On it is an androgynous face, looking to the left, and wearing a lot of jewellery.

Mark a NOBLE TOKEN on your ADVENTURE SHEET.

Then, **turn to 91**

11

As you walk, you notice that one of the ships has laughter echoing from its shattered bilges. As you come closer, you notice that there are a group of Damn'd inside, rolling dice and gesturing with flagons.

If you wish to avoid them, **turn to 43**

To approach them instead, **turn to 18**

12

The old man stands up from his chair and looks at you from beneath weary brows. He's not Damn'd, but he looks like he's been in the desert for a very long time.

"Been looking to kill that thing for years," the old man mutters, "killed my friend. Drove another of us mad, he went to that tomb back there. You planning on seeing it for yourself? Aye,

you are, I see it in your eyes. Hmph." He takes a sip of water from a canteen "Here," he says, handing it to you "I'll not be needing this any more. Everyone I've known is dead, it's time to see if Untus really is merciful."

He turns and walks away down a side gully, leaving you behind holding the flask.

You gain 1 WATER.

Turn to 60

13

Amid the swirling maelstrom, you see a lump of masonry spinning towards you.

Make a DEX check.

If you succeed, **turn to 61**

If you fail, **turn to 45**

14

"I see."

The banker rises from its seat, and steps closer to you, gesturing for you to stand. You do so, and the banker offers a gloved leather hand.

"Failure is unfortunate, but hardly the end of the world."

You shake the proffered glove and try to keep the disgust from your face. Whatever is in the glove is not a hand.

But then there is the sound of punching through leather, and something sharp stabs you in the hand. Immediately, your hand feels cold, and it falls limp.

"Not the end of *my* world, that is," the banker says, returning to its throne "*your* world will be coming to an end any second now."

The cold, limpness reaches your shoulder, and then crawls across to your chest. You can't breathe, and you become aware of a rushing in your ears.

"I cannot let my rivals know, you see. The other bankers would treat me worse than I have treated you. Goodbye."

You fall to your side, staring at the banker as darkness clouds the edges of your field of vision. The darkness closes around you, smothering you, until there is nothing but blackness.

THE END

15

You see a cluster of wrecked ships on the horizon, emerging out of the gloom, hunting trophies for the reefs above, from back in the days when the sea still had water. As you walk, the storm wind suddenly picks up, driving you to your knees. Large pieces of stone and masonry spin about you. There is a shipwreck nearby, but any holes or gaps in its hull have been barricaded up.

If you have a BONE DICE NECKLACE **turn to 62**

Otherwise, **turn to 13**

16

The Damn'd stares at the dice, and then looks back up to you, grinning.

"Untus smiles upon you! Yes, yes he does! Well, you are friend to us now. Friend! You must tell us of what you seek in our desert home."

You tell them about the tomb and they stare at you in shock. The elder claps his hands together. "It is dangerous, but we do not judge the actions of our friend. No! No we do not. The tomb is home to unaligned raiders," the elder spits, as do all of the others "they are scum. You can get past them using some rope, but do not be tempted. Face them! Kill them. For Untus shall reward you. Deep in the tomb there is a beast of metal and stone that the elder kings used to do their bidding. It has grown mad with disuse, and will attack any who come upon it. But feed it rope, and it shall be sated, for a time, yes. Here, join us in sharing our water!"

The elder Damn'd hands you a flask of water. It looks cloudy, but you suspect it is drinkable. He also offers you a length of rope, and demands you wear a necklace of bone dice.

Mark 1 extra WATER on your ADVENTURE SHEET and add the BONE DICE NECKLACE. You may also add some ROPE if you choose to take it.

Turn to 67

17

The stairs soon become steep, and wall art and carvings on the walls depict warnings and terrible fates in artful carvings. Paint has all but rubbed away, although in a few places you can see where there were once enthusiastic blood spatters. Some of the written warnings are in languages you half recognise.

Shells crack underfoot, from when the sea had still held jealously on to this desert, but in your descent you pause, and hear cracks from ahead, and light appears on the walls.

Four strongly built men come around the corner, Damn'd, though unusually muscular and well equipped. One of them sneers at you, and then grins, charging forwards with a bellow. In the narrow staircase they will be forced to fight one at a time.

FIRST BANDIT: DEX: 9 END: 8

SECOND BANDIT: DEX: 7 END: 10

THIRD BANDIT: DEX: 11 END: 6

FOURTH BANDIT: DEX: 8 END: 7

If you win, **turn to 10**

18

As you approach the shipwreck, the laughter halts suddenly, and all of the Damn'd turn to face you. They stare as you approach.

Initially, you try to be convivial with them, assuming them to be relaxing, but you soon notice things amiss. The laughter ended too quickly. The flagons are all empty. The stares are ceaseless.

One of them, a little older than the rest, speaks up. "You must join our ritual," he says in a dry monotone. The other Damn'd start to laugh and swing their empty flagons around, and the oldest one takes you by the shoulder and leads you to the table, grinning.

"Yes, you will join us. Take the dice, take your chance, and see if Untus smiles upon you," he

hands you a pair of dice.

“You shall roll the dice, until you roll a double. A double below ten is Untus’s smile. Above ten and... well.”

You hold the dice in your hand, and see no other choice.

If you have **LOADED DICE** and wish to use them, **turn to 97**

Otherwise, roll two dice until you get a double.

If the double is under 10, **turn to 16**

If the double is over 10, **turn to 85**

19

You take the crown out of your pack and hand it to him. Raglan takes it, staring at it, glee fixed on his face. He laughs once, twice, and then more.

“Come. Come! We must visit the appraiser. Put it back in your pack.”

Together you walk out to banker’s row, passing under the gaze of the hooded guards, the artist walking with a swagger. He leads you into a bank, gilt doors and incredible plaster finery, to the desk of a man in long robes. He takes the crown, looks at it, determinedly unimpressed, and then places it in a safe drawer. He pulls from another drawer a wooden box, which he hands to the artist.

Together you walk out, and the artist takes you to a tailor, offering to buy you many fine clothes. From the box he produces an improbable number of marks and dresses you as a noble, and together you go about the coffee shops and wine bars and taverns, in that order.

In the morning, you awake in a hotel bed in your finery, to an apologetic note from Raglan. He has left with the money, but he did leave enough to clear your debts.

Still, at least you made it out of the tomb alive.

THE END

20

Outside the market, a short thoroughfare takes you over a bridge crossing the slow-moving river Var. A number of Damn’d are swimming in it, marked out by their cracked white skin and sun bleached hair. They’re lying on their backs, sculling through the water, staring into space. They look somewhere between drug-addled and in a state of religious bliss. It could even be despair. Or, perhaps, it is all three.

On the other side of the bridge you follow a few more adventurers and caravaneers up to a squat watchtower, at the end of what was once a pier. You can still see the fittings for a lamp at the top of the tower, for it used to be used to guide ships into harbour, back when the sea had water in it. Now, it was the site of the stair.

Beyond the tower you can see a ramshackle structure of wood and stone and dirt, a ramp with wooden piles and wide stairs, leading down to the basin below. The stair is crammed with Damn’d, seeking to find work in the city or work among those descending the stair itself.

If you wish to go back to the market, **turn to 55**

To carry on and descend the stair, **turn to 41**

21

The smith glares across the market at the thief on the other side, perched high up on his wall.

"I will break that man," she mutters as you approach, and then meets your eye. "Ah, desert is it? Money is it? Well, I've got some old stuff in the back you might be able to afford." She turns away and rummages among crates, before returning with a sword and a few plates of armour.

"The sword's still good. Plain, a lot of people don't like that, but it's well balanced and will serve you well. I'll let it go for five marks, no less. Got to clear some room."

"The armour's good too. Few of your type wear armour out in the desert though. I know it's hot and you'll probably have to drink more, but this stuff will keep you alive. Anyway, your choice, buy it. Or don't."

SWORD: +1 damage every time you make a successful ATTACK ROLL. 5 marks.

ARMOUR: Only take 1 damage when successfully attacked, but double the amount of water you lose (for example, when told to lose 1 water, lose 2, when told to lose 2, lose 4, etc.). 3 marks

When you have made your purchases, note what you've bought on your ADVENTURE SHEET and subtract the relevant number of marks. Then return to the market by **turning to 55**

22

The next room is wide, tall, and was once richly decorated, though any jewels or diamonds in the tomb have long since been taken. It looks like it once contained a number of stone warriors as well, though most of these have been shattered or stolen. As you walk, you keep half expecting one to turn and attack you, for you have heard tales of such in similar tombs. But your suspicions turn out to be false, and you pass through the chamber unassailed.

There is another tremor. You will need to get out of here soon.

At the end of the chamber is another set of immense double doors, similar to the set that you saw on entering the tomb. This has marks suggesting someone has tried to knock it down, but they didn't persist. In the middle of the door is a small slot for inserting something about the size and shape of a large coin. Text surrounds the slot in a huge variety of ancient languages, some you almost recognise. You soon get the gist of the message: only the worthy may enter, and to insert a token.

Amid the strewn rubble of the room you see a token that should fit, made of copper and with an androgynous face on it looking to the left, scarred and with their hair bound in a utilitarian bun.

If you wish to put the token you have found on the floor into the slot, **turn to 36**

If you have a NOBLE TOKEN and wish to use it instead, **turn to 86**

If you would rather go back down the corridor and take the westward route, **turn to 82**

23

As you walk around the edge of the pit, a sudden tremor causes you to lose your footing. You slip, and before you can react an antlion bursts out of the bottom of the pit. It is huge, the size of a cart, with immense snapping mandibles

Make a DEX check to scramble out of the pit.

If you succeed, **turn to 26**

If you fail, or if you want to stay in the pit, **turn to 46**

24

Banker's cannot smile, or if they can it's not something perceptible through their thick pressure helmets. But you suspect the creature is doing something like that, as it stands from its throne and steps down to meet you.

"On your feet," it says "yes, that's good. Well done," it offers a leather glove outstretched, the fingers splayed. You take the hand and shake it, instantly regretting it. Whatever occupies the glove is soft in places, hard in others, and almost certainly not a hand.

"You have done well. Your debts are cleared, and I may have future work for you. For now, a stipend." The banker gestures, and a burly guard throws a bag of marks at you.

"Go, and imbibe toxic chemicals or whatever it is your creatures do for fun," the banker says as the door opens.

You step out into the street, smiling at your new bag of cash.

You have conquered the Tomb of Aziris.

THE END.

25

The corridor turns north sharply after a few dozen feet. The art on the walls changes suddenly after the corner, becoming more utilitarian. Instructions cover the walls, the correct way to carry a plate, how to serve nobles, how to repair various mechanisms. The negative examples are all followed by a slave or servant on their knees, with a glowing white lash flogging them.

And every other image, every other warning, has the image of a screaming woman, impossibly tall, face contorted back in that monstrous scream, the same as you saw at the tomb entrance.

You keep walking, trying not to look at any more murals.

Turn to 64

26

The ANTLION continues to crawl after you, but now it is on the edge of the pit, and you are both on equal footing.

ANTLION: DEX:9 END:10

If you win, **turn to 12**

27

The dolphin screams. "The whales! The whales must be protected!" The other dolphins turn and run north, leaning forwards and balancing on their long flukes, while the one that screamed lunges for you. You must fight it.

DOLPHIN DEX: 11 END:14

If you win, **turn to 56**

28

The tomb is enormous, richly furnished, and filled with gold. Whatever looters or miscreants have passed through this tomb have not entered here. Unfortunately, it would take a horse and cart to drag everything out of the tomb, and you doubt it will be standing much longer, as another tremor makes you almost lose your footing as you enter.

Amid the gold and jewels and rich plate bowls lie countless sarcophagi, some on the floor, others suspended from the ceiling, and still others in carved niches in the walls. Some of these niches stretch backwards into the wall, like spur corridors, with dozens more coffins stretching back into the distance.

At the end of the chamber, on a raised dais, lies who you assume to be Aziris himself, a statue of him sitting high and proud, staring down at you, with that same screaming woman carved behind him. As you approach, you discover that the screaming woman's maw contains a door, once hidden, now rotted away, and a breeze rolls in through it.

You turn your gaze back to the statue, and to his brow, where a crown glitters. You climb the larger-than-life statue, stand on Aziris' lap, and pluck the crown free.

You climb off, eager to get out, and as if in answer to the thought the tomb begins to shake anew, the tremors lasting longer this time. You duck out through the maw of the woman, and run as fast as your feet will carry you to wherever the passage leads.

Mark the CROWN OF AZIRIS on your ADVENTURE SHEET

Then, **turn to 90**

29

The Corridor continues east for a short time, then turns sharply north. As you walk, the murals on the corridor walls grow ever grander, depicting images of kings and rulers and fine gardens, but you notice that there is always the image of a woman fixed in an overly-wide scream, just like the tomb entrance itself. What was this? A goddess, or a monster, or a person? You shake your head and continue along the corridor as tremors beset you. You don't have time to think about such questions while the tomb falls about your ears, no. You came here to get something, and you must retrieve it or your life is forfeit.

You come to a grand set of gilt double doors, slightly ajar. You open them, and proceed through.

Turn to 8

30

Lose 1 water.

You trudge through open desert, having to hope you don't get lost, when out of the gloom emerge a number of strange shapes. Dolphins, with the arms and legs of men. They turn and glare and hiss at you, but only one approaches you.

If you have a FOSSILISED FISH HEAD, **turn to 83**

Otherwise, **turn to 65**

31

You continue north through the desert. The dunes are getting worse, hiding more and more of the territory beyond, and you feel exhausted. Eventually, you can resist it no more, and must drink something.

Lose 1 water.

If you wish to continue North, **turn to 74**

If you would like to turn East, **turn to 63**

32

The double doors give way after a little pushing, and within you see that they were barred from the inside with a piece of wood, now long rotted through

Beyond the bland double doors lies a chamber so without decoration it is almost jarring to the eye after your journey through the tomb. The walls once bore a white lime wash, though this has almost entirely flaked away.

The only furniture in the room is a single desk, over which a corpse lies hunched, and a number of large chests. You rifle through these, but find only mouldering clothes and dead rats.

In the hands of the corpse lie a journal page, covered in scrawl written in a language you do not know, and a strange object shaped almost like a pistol crossbow, with a fat, flat-ended cylinder where the bow part should be. You accidentally squeeze the trigger as you pick it up, but the device only thrums uselessly.

Mark the RADIAL DESPUNGIFIER on your ADVENTURE SHEET

Then, **turn to 90**

33

You shout up to the old man, "This is what you want, isn't it?"

The old man grimaces, and stands up, drawing an immense spear from the folds of his coat. As you slide towards the beast, he throws it, and it transfixes the creature through the head.

You crawl out of the deep nest, and the old man offers a hand to help you, his face set in a grim scowl.

Turn to 12

34

The scrub desert opens out here, and you can see a long way towards the edge of the sea-cliff, leading to the deeper desert. You thank the gods that you'll not have to go down there, where the sands are even hotter and more dangerous things lurk.

The horizon is a rippling mirage, taunting you with broad lakes of water. You try not to think about drinking, but you are so fixated that you do not notice the Wheelship approaching from the east until it is almost upon you.

The Damn'd of the deep desert have many differing rituals, through which they seek to bring the return of the water. One of the most dramatic of these are the wheelships, where they attach huge wheels to ancient triremes and row them about the desert, plying old trade routes to attract the attention of the gods. Perhaps one day it will work.

The ship will outpace you easily, but it cannot turn easily. If you sprint ahead, you might be able to outrun her. However, you have heard the ship captains can be pliable, and they might trade with you.

If you wish to avoid the ship, **turn to 4**

If you wish to flag them down to parley, **turn to 70**

35

You make it perhaps a half a dozen strides before your toe hits an uneven cobble. Your foot slips and you fall on your face, sliding head first into a stinking midden.

One of the thugs hauls you up and grins in your face. His breath stinks of cheap alcohol.

“You’re coming with us now. Don’t think I won’t remember this.”

Turn to 81

36

As the token lands in the bottom of the slot, you here a series of thump and grinding clicks as ancient mechanisms slowly, ponderously grind into life. You hear a crack, and taste something sour in your mouth, and then your vision turns light and you know nothing but pain for perhaps a second. You fall to your knees, and you feel as if you are being flogged by an angry slave master.

Ahead, you’re dimly aware of the huge double doors opening.

Roll two dice and deduct the total from your END.

If you are still alive, **turn to 28**

37

You rush them, taking them by surprise. None of them have a chance to draw their weapons. In the narrow alley, they have to fight one at a time. Move on to the next thug when you defeat each one.

Thug 1: DEX: 7 END: 3.

Thug 2: DEX: 8 END: 5

Thug 3: DEX: 6 END: 3

If you lose, **turn to 3**

If you win, **turn to 80**

38

“Ah. Oh. I see. Well, lets not be too upset with one another, shall we? Yes, I’m sure we’ll have another chance. Listen, why don’t you take the marks and head back to the market, yes? You might be able to make it out of the desert with the crown this time. Sunk, you say? Well, we might be able to dig it out. Tell you what: I’ll come with you this time. That sandstorm will drive most of the Damn’d away. Should be safe, hey?”

You turn to leave, just in time to feel a knife sink between your shoulder blades, followed by pain. Incredible pain.

“Sorry, friend,” the artist says “I’ve got to look after my own skin in this, see? There’s a price on

your head, you know. Come in lads! See? That irritating miscreant you were after? Dead, you see?" Raglan's babbling fades away, as does everything else.

THE END

39

You slide back down the dune and creep along its back. They all seemed focused on the fight so you may have a chance if you can just stay quiet. Unfortunately, when you get around the dune you find an area of desert littered with skeletons, bleached by the sun. Stepping on one will make a loud enough noise to startle the silent fighters, so you will need to be careful.

Make a DEX check.

If you succeed, you successfully navigate the bone field. **Turn to 60**

If you fail, your foot crushes a sternum, and the Damn'd come rushing to meet you. **Turn to 87**

40

The old man continues to sleep, or at least appears to. The antlion snaps at you continuously. You must fight it, amid the shifting sands of the pit.

ANTLION: DEX:14 END:15

If you win, **turn to 60**

41

You join the queue for the stair, behind some desperate looking caravaneers and men of ill-repute. There seem to be unusually few today.

When you reach the tower, you enter through a short oaken door, where a man checks your equipment, mainly to make sure you're not carrying any unlicensed water. Finding your gear in acceptable shape, he grunts and moves behind a counter, melting a piece of wax over a slip of paper and handing it to you.

"You'll need this to get back in," he grunts "you've not the look of a Damn'd, but we can't be too sure these days. Not with all the trouble out there. Oh, you didn't here? Ha. Haha! You're in for a fun time, my friend. Now go, I have work to do."

Confused, you step through the other door onto the top of the long, rickety, wooden staircase. A few beggars come at you with hands outstretched, but rather than ask for money or even water they simply look into your eyes. One of them moans, and they all back away.

You carry on down the stair and arrive at the bottom, where a dark-skinned old man sits on a barrel, smoking a pipe.

"Dark times out there," he says, pointing out to the desert. "See the storms on the horizon? Either side they are, and moving in together. The desert will become no place to be hanging around in tomorrow, and no mistake. Storms could even hit today, if the Tyrant's so willing. And worst of all, the storm's driving some Damn'd cults together."

You ask the man about the Tomb of Aziris.

"No, no Aziris is not someone of which I've heard. Out north of here, is it? Should still be able to get to it between the storms, if you hurry. I can tell you of the tribes out there, if you would listen? Yes, in the west live 'those-who-seek-apotheosis-through-blood', a violent band of ne'er-do-wells,

but, ah, simple folk, I suppose you could call them. If you prove your strength to them, they'll not bother you.

"In the east, though, dwell 'those-who-seek-ascension-by-chance'. Worship the die and the coin, gamblers and thieves the lot of them. Few of them are fighters, but they'll have the shirt off your back given half a chance. Live in the ship graveyard out there," he gestures to the east.

"Then again, you could just cut north. The space between the tribes is safe for now, but I couldn't say what manner of thing you could find out there."

If you wish to head west, into the territory of those-who-seek-apotheosis-through-blood **turn to 58**

To head east towards the ship graveyard and those-who-seek-ascension-by-chance, **turn to 77**

To go directly north, **turn to 93**

42

You wave to the old man and shout at him across the pit, but he does not stir. Either he's sleeping very heavily indeed, or he's ignoring you.

There's nothing left but to try and edge around the pit.

Turn to 23

43

You avoid the shipwreck, passing among two others, and are soon on your way. If the Damn'd are aware of your presence they don't seem inclined to follow you.

Turn to 67

44

The dolphin nods, seeming almost grim in spite of the smile frozen on its face.

"It is good that you seek not the whale," it screeches, "protect the whale!" the other dolphins join the first in chorus.

"Here, take a thing," one of the dolphins says, and hands you a fossilised fish head "wear, so we know you."

"We not tell apart!" screeches another, and it gestures northward. Confused, but grateful, you carry on, watching over your back for the dolphins. But in the distance you can see they are just kicking the sand as if looking for something, bodies tilted downwards.

Mark the FOSSILISED FISH HEAD on your ADVENTURE SHEET

Then, **turn to 56**

45

The spinning rock hits you square in the face, throwing you onto your back.

Roll 1 die and subtract the result from your END.

If you are still alive, **turn to 61**

46

You slid further into the pit, the antlion biting at your boots. You happen to look up and notice the old man standing over you. Make a WIT check.

If you succeed, **turn to 33**

If you fail, **turn to 40**

47

The dolphins turn to meet you.

You have heard of river dolphins, or ocean dolphins, but desert dolphins are very different. They stand upright, their bodies vertical and their necks twisted so they face forward. They cannot turn their heads, and must move their shoulders to look around. They have arms and legs grafted onto their bodies, each set identical, thick, stout and hairy. The arms emerged from above their pectoral fins, the legs from a little further below, leaving the creatures standing eight feet tall with their flukes almost touching the ground. They carry long spears made of bone or glass or whatever they can scavenge, with sharp points.

They hiss and click to one another, and speak with their blowholes in a strange, high-pitched, insistent squeal.

“You seek the whales?” the dolphin screeches at you. You must answer.

If you answer that yes, you seek the whales, **turn to 27**

If you answer that no, you do not seek the whales, **turn to 44**

48

The next room contains a huge, hulking construct of brass and bronze in the centre of the room, in the rough shape of a statue. At the edges of the room lie little niches, each one with a single skeleton inside, rotten fabric lying around them revealing the meagre accoutrements these individuals were buried with.

As you enter, the statue suddenly hisses. Its huge brass fists collide and it rises upwards, casting unblinking metal eyes down upon you. It roars at you in a language you do not know, and approaches.

If you have some rope and you wish to use it, **turn to 69**

Otherwise, you must fight the hulking automaton. **Turn to 95**

49

You return to the niche where you last saw the artist Raglan, but he is not there. As you walk around looking for him, a hand grabs you and drags you into another room.

“Ah!” he says “yes, sorry. Um. Right. How did it go?”

If you have the CROWN OF AZIRIS, **turn to 19**

If you do not, **turn to 38**

50

You don't make it to cover before the sandstorm rolls in. The choking darkness makes it impossible to continue, and you drop to the ground, trying to protect yourself from flying debris.

A rock hits you in the arm.

Subtract 2 from your END score.

If you are still alive, **turn to 31**

51

You spin around and run. The alleyway is clogged with refuse and midden heaps, which should slow your enemies down, as long as you don't trip.

Make a DEX check.

If you succeed, **turn to 92**

If you fail, **turn to 35**

52

You walk down a long thoroughfare, trying to figure out how to pay off your debts, when suddenly a pair of hands dart through an open doorway and drag you inside, before you even have a hope of reacting.

You shake the hands off easily, and their owner looks at you, briefly terrified, holding his hands up to prove he means no harm.

"Hey, hey, easy," he says "I'm not trying to hurt you or rob you. Not that there's, ha, anything worth robbing, right? Alright, look, that sounded weird. Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Raglan," he bows theatrically. He's wearing what were once well-made, foppish clothes, but they are now a collection of burst seams and loose threads, the buttons and fasteners long since cut off and sold. His speech is refined, his manners courtly.

"I," he continues, "am an artist. Quite a good one, actually! Alas, I have no paints or media to work with, so I'm stuck out here. I'm also a gambler, you see. Though not quite as good at that. Ha," he laughs mirthlessly. "In any case, we both owe significant amounts of money to the same person, yes? I'll not speak his name lest it summon his angels, but you know of who I speak, correct?"

You nod, albeit a little hesitantly

"Right. So, I might have a job that will save both our skins. Out in the desert there's a tomb, called the tomb of Aziris. Desert winds uncovered it not so long ago, so we need to be quick before any other vultures descend on it. In the tomb is a crown, it lies on Aziris's head. Find it, bring it back here. I have a buyer in the inner city, very discerning collector who can spot a fake a mile off, but he doesn't want to go through middle-men, see? They're the ones who usually get all the profit off this stuff. We sell him the crown and split the cash, it'll be more than enough to pay off your debts and mine, and leave us with a pretty little investment besides. What do you say?"

Given that you don't have much choice, you agree, but resolve to keep an eye on this man

"Good. Good! Look, you'll need water, so here's some cash I, uh, acquired. Ten marks."

Mark then 10 MARKS on your adventure sheet, then **turn to 55**

53

The Damn'd champion falls onto his back, and looks at his brethren in fear as he starts to pass out. The rest of the cult but one gather around him, while the remaining cultist approaches you.

"Proven yourself," the cultist says "you seek the tomb, we see it in your eyes. Here," he hands

you a small copper disc, with a face on it, pointing to the left. You can't tell if it's a man or a woman, but it is wearing a lot of jewellery. He also hands you a fossilised fish tail.

"These will aid you. Tomb over there," the cultist points, and you follow his finger, seeing broken pillars on the horizon.

"Fight well," the cultist says, and bows, before turning back to the other cultists, gathered around the body of the one who has fallen. They are mumbling to one another, and start to descend on their fallen comrade. Screams echo out between the dunes, and you beat a hasty retreat.

Mark the NOBLE TOKEN and the FOSSILISED FISH TAIL on your ADVENTURE SHEET and **turn to 60**

54

The water seller grins at you through missing teeth. Gold rings adorn his fingers.

"Greetings," he says "you seem the adventuresome sort. I will do a deal for you, as I like your face. Two marks for a flask of water," he says, gesturing with two fingers "Two. No less. No bartering. If you try to barter, Tiddles here will break you in two," he says, waving a hand at a particularly heavy-set guard, wearing an executioners hood and with a chest that has muscles on it you didn't know existed.

If you wish to buy any water, mark it on your ADVENTURE SHEET and subtract two marks for each flask.

Turn to 55

55

The Dervish's Market lies on the northern side of the city, by the river and close to the great stair leading to the empty basin itself. This will be your only chance to buy supplies for your journey.

The market is noisy, with traders yelling at one another, leading to frequent fights. Many people try to draw your attention, but you try to remain focused on what you will need, rather than wasting your marks on life insurance.

A water-seller stands at the edge of the market, smiling to himself with steeped hands, surrounded by amphorae of water, smaller water-skins and flasks, and a number of slaves and thick-set guards. He's easily the richest man in the market, with the most important wares. Fresh water isn't hard to come by in the city, but the stair guards have a deal with the water-sellers, and will only let through flasks that carry a specific, difficult to forge seal. Ostensibly this is for the sake of the Damn'd economy, given that the desert cultists in the basin trade with and worship the water.

A blacksmith stands, arms folded, on the other side of the market, with a collection of weapons and armour beside her glowing forge. Her leather apron and thick arms are dirty, and her hair is pulled back in a long braid, a fashion common up in the Thousand Princes.

An old ex-thief sits on a wall above a stall of supplies specific to his profession. He smiles at the blacksmith a lot, while the smith glares back.

If you wish to visit the water-seller, **turn to 54**

If you wish to see the blacksmith, **turn to 21**

For the Thief, **turn to 2**

To leave the market and head for the desert, **turn to 20**

56

You pass through open desert, and must drink. Lose 1 water.

To the north, there are more broken rocks and open desert. To the west lie dunes, and to the east scrubland.

To continue north, **turn to 63**

To head west, **turn to 74**

To head east, **turn to 34**

57

You scramble towards the nearby rocks and find a set of stones arranged almost like a shelter. You hide in there as the sandstorm rages outside. While it rages, you wonder who built this shelter, for it was certainly constructed, and feel the carvings in the walls with bare fingers. When the storm clears you are none the wiser, so you find your feet and continue north.

Turn to 31

58

You are in the open desert, though towering storms to the west will make it impossible to go any further. Dunes rise and fall like waves on a beach, and the going is hard, and hot.

Lose 1 water.

Then, **turn to 89**

59

You pick your moment carefully, noting the times when the guards move among the rowers. They don't pay any attention to the rowers themselves, none of whom look like they plan on escaping any time soon, frozen in religious ecstasy as they are. You notice little antagonisms among the crew, including two guards that dislike each other so much, they seem to be ready to break into violence at any moment.

You palm a wet sponge, then complain that you lost it over the side. An exasperated guard hands you a new one. Then, when the shifts next change and when there are only two guards on deck, you throw a wet sponge at one of the guards, then return to scrubbing. The guard turns, enraged, and immediately accuses his rival of deep insult. Before long a fight has broken out, and you are able to sneak away, climbing over the gunwale and down to the desert sands. You lie down as the ship passes over your head, avoiding cuts or grazes from the stone barnacles carved into the ship's hull. You then get up and sneak head north as quickly and quietly as you can. By the time they notice you are gone, they will be miles away and you doubt Captain will bother turning around.

In the distance, you see a set of pillars around the edge of an enormous sculpture of a woman's screaming face. The tomb entrance seems a little ominous.

Turn to 60

60

Amid broken columns and shattered statues sits the tomb itself. Drifts of sand still lie against the ruins, but the entrance sticks out clearly enough, shaped like a face of a woman, mouth open too wide in a petrified scream.

You look behind you, and see the sandstorm clouds rolling in. The journey back will not be easy, but you have to survive the tomb itself first. You tighten the straps on your pack, and hope you have prepared well enough, before walking into the gloom.

Turn to 94

61

At last, you make it back to the stair. After ascending the rickety edifice and arguing with the guards, you make it back into the city, amid the bustle of those trying to escape the storm. The sandstorms aren't as dangerous this high up, but they still obscure most of the streets and provide discomfort to the more cultured inhabitants of Varra.

If you need to see the Banker, **turn to 88**

If you have to visit the Artist, **turn to 49**

62

The storm worsens, and you see a lump of stone the size of your fist hurtling towards you. There is no time to dodge, but as you contemplate your fate, a hand grasps your pack and you are hauled out of the way. You find yourself on the floor of the nearest ship, as a Damn'd cultist puts the barricade back into place.

An older, bewhiskered Damn'd looks down at you, and gives you a smile with many gaps. "Fortuitous, no? Untus *does* smile upon you."

You wait out the storm, largely in silence, the gamblers having put their rituals away and choosing instead to stare tentatively at the whirling storm outside. When it passes, they pull down the barricade, and you leave, seeing the Stair back up to the city in the distance.

Turn to 61

63

You continue your journey northward, down from open desert into a maze of steep sided gullies, the walls the petrified remains of corals from centuries prior. It is here that you see something truly surprising; were you in the desert you would have thought it a mirage.

Amid a tangle of rocks is a chair, and on this chair sits an old man. He is on the opposite side of a pit, slouched backwards with a wide brimmed hat over his face. Going back and finding away around the pit would take hours

If you wish to try and talk to the old man, **turn to 42**

If you wish to walk around the edge of a pit and carry on, **turn to 23**

64

You enter a large, oblong chamber lit by a brazier to find an elderly man hunched over something on the floor. As you enter, he suddenly looks up, staring at you. He is wearing a tall hat,

with a mad white beard and rolling eyes, the whites visible.

“Aha. Aha! A student! Yes, yes, a student, that’s very appropriate, yes. Look! See? On the floor! They wrote instructions on the floor, the servants were always to look down, you see? At the floor. So the orders and reminders there were all for the servants, these were all on the floor. See, here? The proper way to lay out a table decoration. Now the images on the walls, these were for the servant masters, those slaves who acted as an interface, yes? A halfway house between the lowest slaves and the nobles. Yes, it’s all very satisfying-“

He is cut off suddenly by a tremor in the room. His face snaps up again, looking at your face.

“What was that? Leave? No, never! Never. No, they never understood me in the outside, and I said all of these things and none of them believed me. No, laughed me out they did. But this tomb is dying, it will fall back into the earth, and with it my hopes of recognition, or even...” he becomes breathlessly quiet, and whispers “...tenure.”

He sinks into sobs, his shoulders shaking, and no matter what you try you cannot rouse him. Another tremor, and you decide it is time to leave, and the old, mad archaeologist is left to his fate.

Turn to 48

65

The twisted creature stares at your belt, then at you. Behind it, the storm grows fiercer, obscuring its compatriots. It growls, and clicks, the smile still carved in its face as it stabs out at you with its spear. You must fight it.

DOLPHIN RAIDER: DEX:10 END: 10

If you win, **turn to 15**

66

“Mornin’ sunshine,” the first thug grunts “There’s a fellow what wants to see you. You know who I’m talking about. So why don’t you come with me to the bankers’ row?”

In your addled state it would be a challenge, but you think you could take them. However, they are also all standing at one end of the alley, and the other end is open, so you might be able to outrun them.

If you wish to fight them, **turn to 37**

If you want to run away from them, **turn to 51**

If you’re happy to go with them to the bank, **turn to 81**

67

The ship graveyard gives way to broad, flat, scrub desert. You grow thirsty, and must lose 1 water.

If you wish to continue north, **turn to 34**

To turn West, towards some rock gullies you can see in the distance, **turn to 63**

68

You have made it out of the tomb, with at least some treasure intact. The passage has brought you out on a slight rise above the rear of the tomb, and you can see the back of the screaming woman's bald pate, and the large chamber with the skylight, slowly sinking into the desert sands, as pillars fall and crash. Perhaps one day the shifting sands will reveal it again, but you doubt it will be any time in this century.

Ahead, you can see the path back to the city, but only for a few hundred metres. A sandstorm has rolled in fully, and the choking mass of sand obscures anything in the far distance. You can't risk staying here, though, not with the sands so restless. Grimly, you tighten your pack and start walking forward, into the gloom.

Turn to 76

69

You dodge a slow swing from the automata, trying to understand what was meant by using the rope on this enormous brute. Had they lied to you?

And then you see it. In the creature's waist lies a pair of rollers running in opposite directions. That must be where you need to insert the rope.

Made a DEX check. If you succeed, **turn to 71**

If you fail, you must fight the machine. **Turn to 95**

70

The ship slides to a halt, and a number of rough looking Damn'd jump down and surround you. One, the oldest with a long white beard, stands before you.

"I am captain," he says, not specifying if it is his rank, or name, or both. "You should be slave."

You notice that two Damn'd behind you are brandishing a net. There are too many to fight, you will need to talk your way out of this. You lick your lips.

Make a WIT check.

If you succeed, **turn to 78**

If you fail, **turn to 73**

71

You feed one end of the rope between the rollers and dodge away. The automata approaches, but as it moves you can see the rope get pulled in, and appear in places around the machine, on its shoulders and under its chin. It starts to slow in its swings, the movements becoming ponderous and easy to dodge. Soon, steam starts to emerge from places between its plates and it slows down even more. Before long it is still, and all you can hear is a loud whirring.

There is a cracking noise, and one of its arms drops off, soon followed by another. The machine falls on its face, and you are able to leave unmolested.

Turn to 82

72

It'll be hard to avoid the creatures in open desert, as they will see you on the horizon. You need to make yourself less of a threat to them.

Make a WIT check.

If you pass, **turn to 56**

If you fail, **turn to 47**

73

A huge net falls on you, and you are dragged to the floor. The Damn'd pull on it, hauling you along the ground and back to their ship.

Turn to 96

74

As you climb and drop down the dunes you spot something in one of the gaps. Realising you are on the ridge of the dune and will be easy to spot, you drop to your belly and shield your eyes, hoping you haven't been spotted.

In the gap between the next set of dunes wait a number of Damn'd, all stripped to the waist, cracked white skin like alabaster despite the desert heat. They are fighting among each other, two paired off while the others watch grimly.

You don't think they spotted you, but you can't be sure. Still, you might have a chance to avoid the fight.

If you wish to try and avoid them, **turn to 39**

If you would rather approach them, **turn to 87**

75

You tie the rope to a sturdy looking part of the guardrail and throw it over. You climb down, the rope creaking but the stone remaining unmoving as you climb down to the floor of the pit. The walls are rough and it is easy for your feet to get purchase, and they are also decorated. Signs of warning and words carved in ancient languages. Many murals, damaged over centuries of seawater, dimly visible against the backdrop of pitted stone. They seem to have involved a lot of blood, as there are artful blood spatters everywhere.

You gingerly touch down on the floor of the pit. There is a single entrance, also the carved face of a screaming woman, the entrance more than wide enough but so low that you will have to crouch to get through. Seashells and dead crustaceans litter the floor, together with fishbones, the flesh long since rotted away. A single torch lies guttering on the floor, and you pick it up.

The ground shakes, and dust comes free of the walls. You can hear shouting above you, and footsteps as someone rushes to get out. You would join them, but there is still work to do. You duck through the doorway into the passageway beyond.

Cross the ROPE off your ADVENTURE SHEET.

Then, **turn to 91**

76

Lose 1 water.

You plunge on through the boiling storm, stumbling forwards and losing your footing repeatedly. You are in a maze of canyons and narrow gullies, and they focus the wind into a howling gale. Before long a number of figures emerge out of the gloom.

They are Damn'd, muscular stripped to the waist but with masks over their faces. They are crowded around the dead body of an antlion, the huge, cart-sized creature lying on the sands, transfixed by a massive spear. Nearby lies an overturned chair.

They start as you approach, and you have no way to escape their notice.

If you have a FOSSILISED FISH TAIL, **turn to 7**

Otherwise, **turn to 84**

77

You arrive at a cluster of shipwrecks, once at the bottom of the sea, now exposed to the desert winds. There's a wide variety of them, from shattered wood to steel to other, stranger materials, soft and pliable like wood but with the strength of metal. Some have tall masts for sails, or at least spots where you can tell a mast would have stood, while others have no obvious means of propulsion. Mysteries of the distant past abound in the empty sea.

None of the ships have anything. You've been out here before, and know for a fact that these were all looted hundreds of years ago, anything of value stripped out and taken back to the city. Sometimes archaeologists still come down here to study the more mundane aspects of the distant past, but they are growing less and less common, as raiders are growing more and more restless in this area, and bodyguards are expensive.

As for why the wrecks are here, that is no mystery. To the south you can see the huge, jagged rocks that once were just below the surface of the water. Storms in these parts sunk many vessels, even after the lighthouses were built along its shore line.

Despite the shade, you grow thirsty as you walk, and must consume 1 water.

Turn to 11.

78

You try to keep your tone respectful, and don't gesticulate too much. The captain seems to be terse, so you try to match his speech patterns and body language. He doesn't quite smile, but he seems to relax as you explain yourself.

"We are traders," he mutters. "We trade with you."

He offers you flasks of water for 3 marks each. He is also willing to barter any one piece of equipment for 1 water.

When you are done trading, mark any changes on your ADVENTURE SHEET.

He nods to you. "The tomb you seek is over there," he points, and you see broken pillars on the horizon. "Go with Untus," he says, before returning to his ship with his crew.

Turn to 60

79

As the thirst grows, you start relying on brackish water provided by the Damn'd rationed out. You start to listen to the drums, watch the rowers row, and speak to the rest of the crew. Something changes in you, and you start to join the crew in the shrine to Untus below decks. Your skin begins to crack in the desert heat, and your hair becomes bleached by the sun. You are now one of the Damn'd, and your adventure ends here.

80

The last thug falls with a bloody nose.

"Gah!" he spurts through broken teeth "Tyrant's eyes, the boss'll have our hides for this."

If you would like to spare the bandits a hiding by going with them to the banker anyway, **turn to 81**

If you would rather just leave, **turn to 52**

81

Banker's Row is one of the richest parts of the city, the buildings on each side adorned with gilt façades. This is where the great and good of Varra live, trying to pretend their money isn't propped up by the indentured Damn'd and the poor of the city.

It's also not where you're being dragged, although you go past the gates at the end of the street, watched by hooded guards. Instead, you're taken behind Banker's Row, to the alleys and streets that run parallel to it. Some of the buildings are ramshackle while others are clearly well constructed, but with flat, authoritarian architecture, a more brutal quality. This is where the bankers do their dirtier business, where the criminals and ne'er do wells of Varra meet with the great and good, while they try to avoid mixing anywhere else.

You are dragged to a particularly underwhelming building, one that would look like it has been abandoned for years, were it not for the fine, modern locks and the guards trying to look inconspicuous as they hang around on the street corner.

The thugs take you in, drop you on the floor, and walk out. The room is pitch dark for a few of your rapid heartbeats, before dim lantern light suffuses the room. Despite the broken and rotting exterior, the inside consists of walls, ceiling and a floor of featureless steel. There is a door behind you and another on the opposite wall. Two more burly, hooded guards stand in the room, halberds at their side, and in the centre sits a banker on a simple chair.

"Hello," the banker bubbles.

Like all bankers, it wears a pressure suit of thick steel, with flexible joints allowing it some movement. The suit has two arms and two legs, but that doesn't mean anything, as so far as you know, no-one has ever seen a banker without their pressure suit. The spherical helmet has a simple grille on the front, making it impossible to see what lurks within. Beneath the grille is the voice box through which it talks, some arcane artefact that no-one quite understands.

The banker is sitting with its hands steepled, and speaks with a dry monotone.

"It has come to my attention," the banker continues "that you owe my company rather a lot of money. I have invited you here to collect on your debts. But you cannot pay, can you? Ah, but you can.

"I have need of your special services. There is a tomb, out in the desert, that of an ancient emperor by the name of Aziris. It has recently become unburied by the desert winds. You are to go to it and enter the servants quarters, and obtain for me a device, a Radial Despungifier. It is

roughly crossbow-shaped, with a circular disc in place of the bow. You will bring this to me, and upon doing so, I will declare your debts null and void. Oh, and there's this."

The banker throws a small coin purse onto the ground.

"You have no money. I know this. But you will require sustenance and various paraphernalia to keep your body intact in the desert. I know this also. You will take this money and you will purchase what you need. Then, you shall go from the city. You will return with the Radial Despungifier. Or, you will perish in your quest. Or, you will be rendered down into your constituent parts and fed to my spawn. Is my request clear?"

You nod, and the door opens behind you.

"Go. Now."

You hurry out of the little building with your skin intact, and the steel door slams shut behind you. Looking in the coin purse you find 10 tyrannical marks. Note them on your ADVENTURE SHEET.

Turn to 55

82

Beyond the room, the corridor stretches towards another set of double doors, these even more utilitarian than the rest. The walls have grown increasingly bland, but the floors are even more intricate. Some areas still have paint, and those that do not have been rubbed off by the passage of countless feet in a few neat lines.

The corridor continues north, but branches off eastwards down to a sharp bend. You can see that the decoration on the walls grows grander, and there are some even more prescriptive warnings on the floor as the corridor approaches this sharp bend.

If you wish to take the eastward branch, **turn to 9**

If you wish to continue north, **turn to 32**

83

The dolphin sees the fossilised fish head on your belt, and clicks with glee. The other dolphins come closer, and they surround you, helping your trudge your way through the sandstorm for some distance, until at last handing you a flask of water.

Add 1 WATER to your ADVENTURE SHEET.

Turn to 15

84

One of the Damn'd raiders lunges for you. You must fight him.

DAMN'D RAIDER: DEX: 11 END: 12

If you win the fight, **turn to 30**

85

The elder glares at you. "No, Untus does not smile upon you. I suspected as much. We should kill you."

The other Damn'd stand, and block the exit. "Yes," they intone "kill you."

"But Untus is merciful, brothers!"

"Aye, merciful!"

"We shall excuse you, for a price."

"Yes, price."

They lay pawing hands on your pack and find your water flasks. Lose 2 water. If this reduces you below zero, you do not take damage. If you are wearing armour, do not double the amount lost.

The Damn'd shove you out of the shipwreck and jeer at you as you head north.

Turn to 67

86

As the token hits the bottom of the slot, you hear smooth mechanisms rolling into position. The lock clicks and the door slides open easily, as if constructed by modern artisans only days ago. From somewhere you hear horns trumpeting a gentle fanfare, as if in the distance. You step over the threshold into the room beyond.

Turn to 28

87

Like most Damn'd, these are wiry and appear malnourished, but they seem a lot more sinewy than many of the others you've seen. Damn'd should never be underestimated anyway, in your experience.

They surround you, circling, spitting out at each other in their harsh, desert tongue. Then, one of them steps forward.

"Must be worthy to pass," he says "you prove strength, against me."

With the cultists surrounding you, you have no way to escape. You must fight.

DAMN'D CHAMPION: DEX: 9 END: 12

If you defeat him, **turn to 53**

Otherwise, **turn to 6**

88

You return to the featureless edifice behind Banker's row. It feels like a lifetime since you were last here, fearing for your life.

Suddenly, the world is filled with a flash, and when you come to, you are inside the building. As you shake your head at the unnecessariness of it all, lights suddenly pierce the far end of the room, and the banker appears, still sitting on his chair.

"Well?" the banker bubbles, fingers steepled.

If you have the RADIAL DESPUNGIFIER, **turn to 24**

Otherwise, **turn to 14**

89

The towering sandstorm spills across your path. You scramble for cover in some nearby rocks.

Make a DEX check.

If you pass, **turn to 57**

If you fail, **turn to 50**

90

The passage is rough hewn, and you have to be careful to avoid spurs of broken stone. As you run, the tomb starts to shake again, and rock break free of the ceiling above, stalactites threatening to spear you.

Make a DEX check. If you fail, roll one die and subtract the result from your END.

If you are still alive, **turn to 68**

91

The corridor continues on, rough hewn and littered with shells and dead fish, until at last you come to a set of stone double doors, enormous and standing wide open. They have been broken by a battering ram of some description, then shoved aside. Beyond the threshold there are few shells or fish bones, those that are you guess have been kicked across by looters.

Beyond the shattered door the corridor seems better constructed, with well laid stone and fewer frightening murals on the walls. The corridor branches here, heading east and west.

If you wish to go down the east path, **turn to 29**

If you would rather head west, **turn to 25**

92

You hurdle over middens and narrowly miss broken flagstones. Near the end of the alleyway, an old, dusty amphora leans against a wall. You grab it and drag it across the alley, where it shatters into pieces, spilling old spiders and corpse-flies. You take a sharp turn out of the alley, followed by another, and soon find yourself in a crowded street, with no sign of the thugs.

You try to act natural and hide a smile as you walk down the street, trying to decide what to do about money.

Turn to 52

93

Open desert lies to the north, and you walk for hours through it without incident, save your thirst growing more dire and your legs growing tired in the shifting sands.

Lose 1 water to thirst.

Then, **turn to 5**

94

After the entrance and a shallow ramp, the tomb opens up impossibly wide, far broader than it seemed from outside. The entrance is dimly lit by skylights from above, but there are a number of lit torches near the entrance, and you take one for use deeper in the tomb.

The atrium is broad, wide, and empty aside from pillars holding up the roof. In the centre lies a circular pit with a stone guard rail around it. You can see the bottom by the light of a torch lying on the ground, and it doesn't appear to be too far to climb down by rope.

Alongside the pit there is the entrance to a staircase. It appears to spiral downwards, following the walls of the pit but outside of its walls.

If you have a rope and you wish to use it, by tying it around the guardrail and climbing down, **turn to 75**

If you do not have any rope or would rather take the stairs, **turn to 17**

95

The clanking, whirling machine advances on you.

AUTOMATON DEX: 10 END: 15

If you win, **turn to 82**

96

You are dragged away onto the Wheelship, and given a bucket of salt water and a stiff wire brush with which to scrub the decks. The trireme's rowing ports are manned by Damn'd who seem to be in a religious trance, and when they start to row their faces contort into pure fervour.

You need to get out of here while you can. Being a slave is no better than what was planned for you in the city, and even if you try to escape at one of their ports, The Banker's agents will find you wherever you run to. You have a chance of escaping if you time things correctly. And the wheelship slavers are unlikely to kill you, because they need someone to swab the decks.

Make a WIT check. If you fail, then lose 1 water and make another, until you run out of water. If you have already run out of water, you still get one chance.

If you pass a WIT check, **turn to 59**

If you run out of water without passing, **turn to 79**

97

You palm the loaded dice from your pocket and replace them with those the Damn'd gave you. Fortunately, they look the same. You roll, hoping they haven't noticed your subterfuge.

Make a WIT check.

If you succeed, **turn to 16**

If you fail, **turn to 99**

98

As you run you glance over your shoulder, and soon see the Damn'd falling back. They eventually slow to a halt and turn, walking back to their ship, judging you too difficult to catch.

However, the exertion has its price, and you must lose 1 water to thirst.

Turn to 60

99

The elder Damn'd sees the loaded dice in your hand, and slaps it away, sending the dice skittering across bilges. He glowers at you, as do the others.

"Seeking to cheat Untus earns his ire," the man growls as he draws closer.

Turn to 85

Author's Note

Thank you for playing through The Tomb of Aziris. I hope you enjoyed it! This is my first attempt at a gamebook, so I would welcome critiques. So if you have any thoughts or feedback to offer, feel free to contact me at sambeaven@gmail.com.

Kind regards,
Sam Beaven
North Wales, 2014