

Tomb

Bashan Savage

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Smashwords Edition

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Chapter One

The evening sun basks over the conference room sized dinner table. The light reflecting off the polished extravagant silverware emanates an eerie glow onto the remains of a beautifully set dinner. The leftover portions of a roasted hog, stacks of fried chicken, platters of thickly sliced steak, and a pan of baked salmon makes up the center. Surrounding it are various partially or fully eaten side dishes of candied yams, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, pan fried noodles, potato salad, and macaroni salad to name a few.

Seated at the table are ten individuals all as different as night is to day. Standing at the master end is a man in black slacks, black muscle shirt, and with a black cloth covering from under his nose to the neckline of his shirt. His eyes are pure black with no pupils but they do appear to have a reflection of the candle on the table. Another man walks in wearing a monk-style robe. Black, bald, and seemingly in his 30's, he takes a place next to the man already standing at the master end.

"Welcome, how was dinner?" Each individual guest provides some sort of a response.

"Good, would anyone like dessert?" A few shake their heads either in agreement or disagreement, while others voice their personal choice.

"Let's get to the damn point!" says one of the guests, as he slams both of his fists on the table. Silence overtakes the room.

The Host says "Sure Mr. Explode. You're right. Enough of the small talk, everyone knows everyone by now, I'm sure."

A man who is overly handsome and dressed in some royalty-style get up says, "No, not everyone knows everyone. Who's the mute? We have been here almost six hours and she hasn't spoken a word..."

"...Yeah, and what's up with the face mask and completely hidden identity bit? Body looks good, but I want see the face too." Continued the identical twin of the handsome man, also wearing a matching outfit.

"Well Zarr and Razz, too bad you can't use your special ability to read each other's thoughts on her instead or you might already know the answers to your questions," replied The Host.

"Humph." Zarr and Razz sigh.

"She, ladies and gentlemen, is Shadow, she is on hire from the Katsuya Corporation. She..." added The Host until he was interrupted.

"Katsuya Corporation?" Interrupted a short, stout and rugged looking man with a face full of hair, and sporting lumberjack gear.

Another man wearing tan khaki's, Hawaiian shirt, and mirror-like sunglasses answers, "Yeah Rugged, it's a camera company,"

"Why do we need anyone from a capitalist camera corporation?" asks Rugged with rage in his voice.

"You idiot! You need to get out more. It's a front for the Japanese mafia," snapped the man in the sunglasses.

Slamming the palms of his hands on the table, The Host takes back control of the situation, "Enough!" This gets everyone's attention focused back on him.

"Back to the issue at hand, the reason you have been gathered here. Each of you has been asked to join this venture because each of you are world renown treasure and relic hunters, each with their own unique talents or abilities which will help ensure the success of this mission."

He surveys the room, "Each of you will be paid one million dollars, half will be paid tonight and the other half will be paid upon completion of the mission. You will also be able to keep all the spoils of the trip that you may happen to pick up. All I ask in return is one item. That item is the Stone of Sunfire." A few members seem to have heard of it, but most seem to have no clue as to what it is.

"It seems that some of you have never heard of it. Well, I'm not surprised. It's rumored to have only been seen by a handful of people, and the place it was last seen is considered a myth. Only a few believe it exists, Atlantis. Since proving Atlantis exists, which has been next to impossible to prove, the Stone of Sunfire is sort of a myth of myths."

In a jokeful manner, the man in the sunglasses says, "So you want us to find Atlantis? Good luck."

"No, Mr. Bebida Blood. Fortunately an even less known myth, told among several tribes in South America tells a tale that during the brief time of turmoil rumored to occurred before Atlantis sunk, a very skillful thief sent by King Foy mama stole this item and returned it to him," says The Host.

Trip wire, a skilled adventurer and expert on ancient traps and devices asks, "King Foy mama? The King of Greed?"

"What's so special about this king?" asks Gladiator, a very muscular, all American male wearing blue jeans and a "USA Pride" T-shirt.

"Glad you asked," continues The Host, "Foy mama let his wife, the queen, run the kingdom while he sent spies and thieves to steal valuable treasures and artifacts from other kingdoms. He also led several expeditions himself. Foy mama's main interest was in mystical

objects, items rumored to have some kind of magical forces within. He used some of these items' power to grow richer and more powerful. Then news came from one of his spies that several powerful armies were joining together to steal back their treasures and plunder much more. Being driven by greed and not wanting to lose his priceless artifacts, which was the largest collection the world had ever seen, King Foymama used the Horn of Calling to summon the Demon "Poss Chandela" and begged to be able to keep his treasures forever inside the tomb he built specifically to spend his afterlife with his immense treasure. The next day when the attacking army arrived there was no sign of the tomb, it had vanished."

"Then how the hell are we supposed to find it?" asks Explode in his typical angry way.

"The same tribe I heard the tale from is the Cristah tribe, who are the actual descendants of the Foymama tribe. They carry with them the Ranakan, the Stone of Awareness, which can be used to reveal the tomb. That's where you, Natural Hack, come in. Your tracking skills with your laptop are legendary. I will supply you with all the data on the tribe including their last location."

Natural Hack nods in agreement and adds, "Just call me Hack."

The Host asks, "Rugged, I do believe you are familiar with the Kung! tribal language and their use of clicking sounds to communicate, correct?"

"You are correct."

"I know I am. They use a very similar style. It should be no problem to figure out, I did."

Zarr asks, "So how much is this Sunshine or Firestone thing worth anyways?"

Razz adds, "I was thinking the same thing."

Zarr replies, "I know, that's why I asked." They both smile at each other.

"It is priceless. But so are many of the treasures in Foymama's Tomb. To guarantee that someone does bring it back to me or that the mission was a failure because of misinformation, I've planted a mole. One of you has been a business associate of mine for quite some time and is being paid 10 million dollars to be my eyes and ears. So if one of you does find the item and tries to run, I will kill you, which is of course after I've killed several family members. I found you once and I will find you again."

During this whole spiel, The Host made eye contact with all at the table and his facial expression and tone of speech didn't change one bit.

For the second time in minutes, silence controls the room. Everyone seems to be looking at each other with accusing eyes. The only ones not looking around are Gladiator, who had been refilling his plate at a regular pace during the whole briefing, and Xiona Chang, who has been silent since dinner was placed on the table.

Gladiator notices several eyes on him. Noticeably uncomfortable, he says with a mouthful of steak, "What? I'm not a mole. I've never seen this man before in my life."

Then all eyes turn toward Xiona, who in her red traditional Chinese evening dress, was already stunning to the eyes. Now she finds eyes looking at her quite differently. She looks up at everyone, yet says nothing.

The Host interrupts this awkward moment, "Enough worrying about that. Each one of you needs your rest. Sleep well. I must be leaving now. If you need anything, my servants will be glad to assist you."

The Host walks off, followed by his apparent bodyguard. Down the hallway and out of earshot, The Host stops and says to his companion, "Kain, you're probably wondering why don't I go, instead of sending them? After all I'm more qualified and skilled than all of them put together."

Kain says nothing, with the flames still visibly burning in his eyes.

"Simply, I have other plans instead of being stuck in there for 200-300 years if the mission fails, and who knows, it might be even longer than that before anyone enters the tomb again."

Kain still stands silently.

"What's that you say, Kain? The mole? Who is it? I planted no mole, I planted something much better, distrust. If the stone is there and I believe it is, then if even only two survive, it's guaranteed to be returned because of the fear of the mole. If more than two survive, I will be truly surprised, and as you know I haven't been surprised in years. Tomorrow will be very entertaining for you."

Chapter Two

Mr. Blood walks into the same conference room as the night before to find that he's the last one to come to the breakfast table. Standing at the master end is Kain, but noticeably missing is The Host.

"So what'd I miss?" asks Bebida.

"Nothing much, Gladiator has already devoured seven pancakes, six sausages, about ten eggs...um did I miss anything?" asks Razz.

"Yeah, four glasses of OJ and five glasses of milk," adds Zarr.

"Don't forget the four biscuits," laughs Gladiator with his mouth full.

"So nothing much then?" asks Bebida.

"Nope, not really but we now know who the mole is," says Trip wire.

Hack, who has been dealing with these acquisitions all morning, frustrated, yells, "I'm not the damn mole!"

"Sure you're not!" Then why the fuck did The Host put you in charge?" charges Explode.

"I'm not in charge! He came in last night to give me the data on the tribe and left me instructions to share with everyone, since he couldn't be here today."

"So what was he wearing?" asks Rugged.

"Fuck you!" Hack yells across the table.

Laughter echoes around the room, lifting some of the tension.

"Anyways, let's hear those instructions," says Bebida.

"Good, we were waiting for you to come down. I've tracked down where the tribe is located using my connection to a Global Positioning Satellite, don't ask how. Anyways, we are to leave at 1200 hours by helicopter, which will drop us off 10 miles away from the tribe's present location."

"10 miles? Why so far away?" asks Bebida.

"Because this tribe has a leadership structure that is quite unique and no central home. All in this tribe are equal, with the exception of the one responsible for the stone. He serves as Chief, then after roughly one week, a different person receives the stone and leader role. And with no central home, there's no telling who has it all any given time," explained Hack.

"So?" questions Bebida.

Xiona answers, "These tribe members don't sleep in close quarters, with only about twenty members of this tribe, they have been found sleeping separately almost one mile away from the nearest member."

Everyone looks at Xiona, some shocked that she knew that, others surprised she talked.

Bringing the attention of everyone back to himself, Bebida asks, "So, we are performing a dragnet to make sure none escape?"

"Exactly. Cause if the one with the stone escapes, it might take days or even weeks to find him. And now we have on our side the element of surprise." answers Hack.

Rugged asks rudely, "So where's The Host at, Hack?"

"I don't know, why don't you ask Kain?" retaliates Hack.

The massive monstrosity doesn't move.

Looking at Kain, Rugged replied, "Um..I'll pass."

Explode stands up swiftly, "Want me to ask him?!"

Zarr, still seated, reaches out toward Explode, "I would think twice about that, big fellow. Something seems very odd about that one there."

Razz extends his arm also and adds, "Yes, I agree. Haven't you noticed the fire in his eyes is still there from last night, yet there is no flame that it could be reflecting?"

Zarr says, "I was just thinking the same thing."

Razz replies, "I know you were."

They both look at each other and smile.

Explode now notices the flame but still says, "So, I'm not scared of no punks with trippy contacts!"

Xiona stands up, "It's not about being scared, it's about being smart. Something I can tell most at this table lack.

As she gets up from the table and starts to exit the room, Explode yells, "Shut up, mole!"

Hack asks calmly, "Can we all get back on track please? The helicopter will be ready for departure soon."

The remaining guests look at Explode.

Explode is wondering why everyone is looking at him, "What?"

No one says anything. Finally Explode sits back down, while Kain remains the same.

"Don't worry about Xiona's part. I'll brief her on the copter. Okay here's the plan..." Hack continues.

Finally, every member seems focused, including Gladiator, who has finally stopped eating.

Chapter Three

"Now!" yells Hack, from the cover of some bushes. A split second later an explosive device lands in the center of what resembles a central activity area of the tribe. A minor explosion is followed by plenty of smoke and villagers trying to flee.

"Bingo!" yells Tripwire, as four tribe people are slung up into the air and trapped in a net.

Two other villagers are double-arm clotheslined and dropped by Gladiator as they try to run into the bushes. "Oh yeah! Man, I really miss wrestling."

The smoke is clearing. Hack asks, "Is that every one of them?" Razz, as he holds a villager, answers, "Yeah."

"I believe so," adds Zarr, who also is holding one.

Shadow walks out of the bushes into the clearing with a villager already bound.

"Yeah, that's all of them, counting the six we caught on the outskirts," says Hack, as Xiona comes out of the brush with those six shackled together.

"So how we are supposed to know which one has the stone?" asks Rugged.

"I don't know aren't you the language specialist?" replies Hack.

"Um...oh yeah," Rugged turns toward the closest villager and asks in the tribe's native tongue, which he has been learning from the previous six hostages.

The villager replies back with similar clicking sounds.

"What'd he say?" asks Hack.

"Just like the other villagers, he says he doesn't know what I'm talking about."

Bebida adds, "It sounds like a damn old broken typewriter, you sure he understood you, old man?"

"I'm pretty sure he did, it's not a difficult language to understand, but most of you Americans are tone deaf from years of the boob tube and loud rock music," fires back Rugged.

"Hey, I'm not an American and I have no clue what either of you two said," states Tripwire.

Visibly frustrated, Hack says "Does it really fucking matter who else understands what? Just fucking ask him again, okay?"

"Yeah, whatever. Damn capitalist pigs," says Rugged. He then turns around and repeats his previous question to the villager.

The villager gives what sounds like the same answer.

"Well?" asks Hack.

"He still says he doesn't know what we are talking about."

Explode pulls out his gun from his leg strap, aims and shoots, "I bet he understands this!" The villager that Shadow was holding drops to the ground dead with a hole in his chest.

Xiona yells, "What the hell are you doing?"

Explode yells, "Shut the fuck up, bitch!" He turns his gun toward her but before he could make the full swinging motion, a ninja star knocks the gun out of his hand and another star sticks into the leg holster where his gun was, only inches away from his family jewels.

"If you ever aim a weapon at me or speak to me in that tone again, your gun won't be the only thing falling to the ground," threatened Xiona, now holding in front of her a sword, gripped with both hands.

Explode is pissed, but realizes he's in no position to argue. He removes the star from his leg and throws it to the ground.

Some of the villagers are now crying and struggling to no avail to be close to their fallen fellow tribe member.

"Maybe now, we'll get some damn answers," says Explode.

"Yeah, you're probably right," said Bebida, as he dipped his fingers in the fresh wound of the dead villager. He sucks the blood off his fingers, while standing in the face of another villager. Bebida smiles exposing some of his fanged teeth, "Just maybe, you're right."

Gladiator is standing nearby with the two he captured, who are now tied to a tree. "Awe, you're fucking sick, man!" He then turns and vomits in nearby bushes.

"Hmmm," Bebida smiles as he looks at the dead body, "A fresh new taste."

One of the villagers, a male, starts yelling something in his native tongue. Rugged walks over to him and starts conversing.

"Well?" asks Hack.

"Well it looks like Explode's tactics worked. This boy has the stone," replies Rugged.

Explode grins, "See, I fucking told you."

Hack approaches the villager who appears to be in his late teens early twenties. "Ask him where the Tomb is located."

Rugged and the villager exchange words, "He said he will show you if you spare his people."

"Brave for his age. Admirable. Okay, tell him no problem, consider it done," answers Hack to the dismay of Explode who mumbles something and walks off into the bush. Hack continues, "But assure him that if this is a trick, that we will return and slaughter every last one of them while he is forced to watch."

Rugged relays the message, the villager replies. Rugged confirms to Hack, "Understood."

"Good," Hack orders everyone to release the villagers and head back to camp. Everyone does as told.

Chapter Four

Back at camp, all the members of the expedition are present, including their new captive. Gladiator is over in a clearing doing push-ups. Explode is sitting on a rock cleaning his gun. Rugged is catching a nap in the shade of a tree. Zarr, Razz and Tripwire are sitting by a fire laughing about something. Bebida is leaning back against a tree, enjoying its shade and a drink from his canteen.

Hack walks past everyone toward Xiona, who is staring out into an open field. He passes the tree the villager is tied to. Shadow is perched above on a branch of the same tree. She stares down at Hack. He doesn't notice.

"Xiona Chang, right?" Hack attempts to make small talk as he sits down next to her.

"What is it that you want?"

"I just felt like talking, that's all."

"No you don't. All of you are so readable. You want information."

Hack feels uncomfortable and embarrassed that she saw right through him. He's never been too good at talking to women.

"Ok, you got me. As you can tell, I'm an information junkie. That's why I always have my laptop."

"Your point?"

"Well my point is. I don't understand why I was told to lead this part of the expedition."

"I thought you weren't told 'to lead'."

"I lied." Hack answered, smiling like a child who just got caught with their hand in the cookie jar.

Xiona finally breaks her usual serious demeanor and serene look with a slight smile. "OK, I don't have an answer to that question but what else would you like to know?"

Hack says, "OK. Well first, several members of this group don't seem to exist anywhere but here. There's nothing, nada, zilch on them. I've looked high and low and everywhere in between. And I have so many sources that I could tell you if Elvis is alive and if so, what he's wearing right now. Wanna know?"

"Don't care."

"Good, neither do I." Hack smiles

Xiona smiles a real full smile. "Who do you want to know about?"

"Shadow."

"What about her?"

"Anything. There's nothing."

“Well, there’s not much known about her. Just rumors.”

“Rumors like?”

“Rumors such as that she is a genetically enhanced assassin working for the Katsuya Corporation.”

“The Japanese Mafia? Oops, I mean camera company.” Hack laughs, as almost anyone who’s into information like him knows that the camera company is a front for the mob. Well everyone but the police, it seems.

“Yes. Rumor is she was a drug-addicted whore. She was taken off life support and her family assumed she was dead. Well at least, that is one of the rumors. Anyway, the Japanese public is terrified of her existence, since it is said that no one who has seen her has lived to tell about it.”

“Wow, what a story. Well I’m not scared. Ok, what about sick boy over there. Mr. Bebida Blood, I know the name means something with blood, I’m thinking drinking right? Anyways, what’s his story?”

“He’s a sad story actually. He was a soldier who was accidentally left behind during an unauthorized mission during the Gulfusta War. Not able to go back for him without admitting they were there in the first place, he was left for dead. Somehow the information got out to the media and back to his father, a high-ranking official who ordered a rescue mission, but it was nearly a month later.”

Hack interrupts her, “Hey I remember that, ‘Operation Bring Him Home’ The war was over but the Gulfustans had lost communication with that camp about the same time he was dropped there. The Gulfustans blamed it on the U.S.”

“Correct.”

“When the U.S. finally arrived at the camp, it was abandoned right? Something about the water supply ran out and some of the soldiers probably died in the desert and that others probably just went home but there was no sign of the soldier. Everyone guessed he died in the desert.”

“That is what the media was told. But rumor is that all 22 Gulfusta officers stationed there were found dead, most of the bodies drained of their blood. And there was evidence that someone had lived there in a cell. When the rescue party arrived they discovered fresh tire tracks and an unidentified body. This is how they believed the soldier ‘disappeared’.”

Hack and Xiona both look over at Bebida, who has just finished drinking from his canteen. He’s wiping away a red color liquid from the corner of his lips.

“Wow, some weird fucks we have out here with us.” Hack exclaims.

“Agreed. So how did you know that I would be able to answer your questions?”

“That’s why they call me ‘The Natural Hack’. I’ve got natural instincts. Plus you seemed very confident of yourself.”

“I am.” Xiona said. She looks forward into the direction she was when he first approached.

Trying to gain back her attention, Hack adds, “And very talented too, I might add. I never have seen anyone throw two stars at the same time at two separate targets with such accuracy.”

Without turning toward him and barely acknowledging him, Xiona says, “And you still haven’t. I only threw one.”

Confused and dumbfounded, “If you only threw one. Who threw the other?” Then Hack looks around for the only other member of the group who seemingly would even possess throwing stars. He finds Shadow in the tree not far away. He realizes that she has never taken her eyes off him from when he first approached Xiona.

“Whoa!” said Hack, who was startled to see her staring at him, “I see Explode has managed to make more than one person angry with that stunt.”

Shadow, still perched on the branch, looks away.

“Apparently.” Answered Xiona in a tone that makes it obvious that the charm of the moment is gone. She adds, “Now if you don’t mind, I would like to go back to sleep.”

Again confused, Hack asks, “Back to sleep? When I approached you, your eyes were open.”

Xiona confirms, “Yes, I know.”

Hack shakes his head as he gets up and heads back to join the group by the fire.

Chapter Five

The airborne helicopter, at full capacity, flies high above the jungle. Kain is at the helm.

Hack, who is sitting next to Xiona, leans over and asks her, “Can I please ask you one more question?”

Xiona doesn't look at him but agrees to answer.

“Ok, thanks. Any info on the twins?” Asks Hack.

“What do you know?”

“That they were one of Romania's most famous circus attractions until they were kicked out, but for what I don't know. And that's all I know about them.”

“They were sold to the Romania's circus as toddlers. Rumor is their unique ability scared the hell out of their parents, but made them world famous. They were kicked out of the circus after it was found out that they had been stealing items from the royalties where they would sometimes perform.”

“Oh I see.”

Rugged interrupted their conversation. “So what are we gonna call the captive?”

Hack answers. “Whatever his name is. What else would we call him? But I don't think any of you city folk could pronounce his name without breaking your tongues.”

Gladiator says, “We can call him Wednesday. Just like that little villager dude on that one old TV show.”

“I think his name was Tuesday, Wednesday was on that other show and that was a girl.” Adds Tripwire.

“Fine, whatever. Then let's just call him Friday.”

“That will not work either. That was the name of some cop on some detective show.”

“Well why don't you just ask Shadow or Kain?” Razz asked.

Zarr added, “I'm sure they're full of ideas.”

Razz and Zarr both look at each other, then both smile and laugh. Shadow and Kain have not spoken one word, since they've first been introduced, respectively.

“Fuck Kain,” Explode yells.

Kain remains unaffected by the comment that echoed throughout the copter. Shadow sitting up front in the co-pilot seat doesn't look back either.

“Can't we ever talk without an argument?” Demands Hack as he surveys everyone with accusing eyes. “Shit, we'll just call him “boy”. Now anyways, we are at the site and the copter is about to touch down.”

“I don’t see anything but jungle. I thought this tomb was supposed to be huge.” Said Gladiator.

“That’s because it’s not revealed yet. The tomb is trapped in time, at the exact instant the King’s wish was granted.” Explained Xiona.

“Uh, how’d you know that? Did I miss something?”

“No you didn’t miss anything. But the fact that she’s the mole.” Added Explode, but this time in a calm tone.

Finally frustrated with all the allegations, Xiona stands up in the copter as it makes its descent. “Don’t you idiots get it? There is no mole. This is one of the oldest tricks in the book. By building distrust, he guarantees the safe return of the item he wants, if it even exists.”

“Yeah, but you have to admit...”

Razz continued his brother’s words; “...you do seem to know a lot more about this mission...”

“...than the rest of us.” This time Tripwire finishes Razz’s comment.

All three of them look at each other and laugh.

“Exactly my point, mole!” Explode added.

Tired of explaining herself, Xiona sits back down and mutters, “Whatever, why do I even try?”

“Are we done with that subject, again? As soon as we’ve landed, I will use my laptop to determine where we can stand or not stand. You guys unload the copter.”

Bebida asks, “Where we can and can’t stand?”

Hack explains, “Yes. You see like Xiona explained earlier. The tomb is sealed in time. Bushes and trees and all the various things you see around you were not here in the past. The laws of Relativity states that two objects cannot be in the same place at the same time. Everything in front of you will probably cease to exist while the tomb is present. At least that’s the theory. And I don’t believe anyone of you want to cease to exist right?”

“Whoa! Too much at one time.” States a confused Gladiator.

“Gladiator, just please go help unload the equipment and gear, while I measure.”

Hack walks forward, while everyone else is busy unloading their gear.

Chapter Six

The helicopter is completely unloaded and everyone, including Kain, is standing behind Hack. Everyone's waiting to see what he's going to do with the Stone of Awareness that they took from the villager, a.k.a. 'boy'.

Hack is holding the stone. "I'm pretty sure that we are far enough back out of harm's way. Are you ready and you know what to say when I give you the cue, right?"

Rugged replies, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let's get this show on the road already."

Hack steps forward a step, to the mark he had previously made on the ground. He holds the stone upward toward the bright blue sky. "Ra-ja-ka. Stone of Awareness reveal to us what has been hidden, reveal to us the tomb of King Foy mama!"

As Hack holds the stone upward, the sky darkens and fills with clouds. Lightning flashes across the sky and thunder echoes as the wind picks up.

With the loudness of the wind and thunder, Hack must yell to Rugged. "Now! Say the words!"

Rugged steps forward, "Mauma sai mauma sai oh ahahah!" He keeps repeating the phrase.

The ground starts to shake. The villager is trembling so much that he grabs hold of Xiona tightly. She doesn't seem bothered by his clutch. Everyone else seems to be keeping their cool.

Slowly, but at an increasing rate, the temple is being revealed, as if an invisible blanket was being withdrawn.

"Now I've seen almost everything." Zarr states, as Razz stands speechless.

Almost everyone looking at the mostly revealed tomb seems speechless, except Rugged who manages, "Wow, talk about massive."

Finally the tomb is completely visible, yet the sky above it is covered with darkness. The line Hack made in the dirt is almost lined up with the visible line where darkness and light meet. The violent elements are somewhat subdued.

"Trippy." Gladiator mutters as he looks down at the line.

Suddenly, wearing her form fitting jet black ninja outfit and armed with tools of the trade, Shadow sprints off into the darkness toward the tomb.

"What the hell is she doing?" Explode exploded.

Xiona yells "Shadow!" But to no avail, Shadow was already passing through the temple entrance.

"What's going on with her?" Razz asks.

“Yeah, why she’d do that?” Zarr questions.

All questioning eyes turn toward Hack. “Like I know. Everybody’s guess is as good as mine.”

Explode yells, “Well I’m not gonna stand around here all day while she grabs all the good shit!”

“First time for everything, but I agree with Explode. Let’s go.” Rugged agrees.

“OK. I have the maps of the tomb printed out. Here are copies for everyone. We can keep open communication with these walkie-talkies. I have one for each of you, but we shouldn’t be separated in the first place. This is just in case one of you decides to run off on a wild goose chase, a.k.a. Shadow. There are only two paths that you’ll discover as soon as we are inside. One leads to the treasure room and the other path, who knows. But again, I’m pretty sure one or more of you will want to explore the unknown.”

“Enough talk, I wanna rock n roll now.” Bebida said.

Explode agrees, “Then let’s fucking go!” He flips on the infrared scope on his gun.

Explode’s infrared turns off as soon as he crossed the line between darkness and light. “What the fuck?” he yells.

Other members of the group experience the same as they crossed over. Hack explains that since the tomb is sealed in time, anything that was not conceivable during that time period probably won’t work.

Razz states, “Yeah makes sense but don’t you think it’s quite odd that the only person who didn’t bring any device of the sort...”

Zarr continues, “.... runs into the tomb like a bat out of hell as soon as the tomb was completely revealed?”

Razz and Zarr look at each other, “Hmmm.”

Tripwire adds, “They do have a point.”

Bebida agrees with them, “They sure do, and now what are we supposed to do with all this equipment, it’s useless.”

Hack, trying to make the best of out of a bad situation, “Well we can empty out all the bags or anything that carried something and use it to carry out artifacts. Plus rope and some other stuff are not useless.”

Rugged asks, “So we just gonna leave everything here?”

Explode erupts, “This is bullshit. I tell you what we should do with it. We should shove it up Kain’s ass. I bet you Shadow is the fucking mole. The Host said he hired her. I bet you, they knew all along that this was gonna happen. That’s why she fuckin’ high-tailed it out of here so fast.”

Hack tries to rationalize with him, “Calm down big guy. Don’t you realize that you’ve blamed almost everyone of being in on some kind of conspiracy? Don’t you see that Xiona’s theory is probably right? The Host said that to plant distrust.”

Explode is beyond reasoning, “Fuck you! Fuck Xiona! Fuck Kain! Fuck Shadow! And fuck The Host.”

The last comment has finally received a rouse out of the normally quiet Kain, who points at Explode, who is about 20 yards away. “Your mouth defiles you, insignificant bug. Kain ordered not to kill any of you but Kain is known to disobey orders Kain not like. So watch your tongue speaking about the Host. Take heed, you have been warned and Kain only warns once.” Kain’s voice was so deep and threatening that the birds and other animals in the surrounding area can be either seen or heard fleeing.

“Oh shit,” mumbles Zarr

“Now you’ve done it.” Razz adds.

The look on Explode’s face reveals that he’s even shocked that Kain spoke, but he holds his stance, “What will you do about it?”

Kain removes one of his gloves. He reaches down and picks up a rock about the size of a soda can. Kain’s hand is so massive that only a small portion of the rock can be seen through his grip. He starts to squeeze the rock. The flames in his eyes glow brighter and the veins in his muscular arm start pulsating. Suddenly, steam starts to come from the visible part of the rock. A red glow emanates from his hand. The rock explodes. Kain didn’t budge.

“Uh... I think he answered your question,” Bebida says, who had pulled down his shades during this display to assure that his eyes were not deceiving him.

Kain, with not even one bead of sweat, stands staring at Explode.

Explode visibly calmer, says to the group, “Grab some torches, I mean branches, so we can make torches.” He then grabs a couple of bags and heads off into the darkness.

Still in shock of what they just witnessed, slowly and pretty much one by one, each member grabs their usable gear and/or branches and head into the darkness leading to the tomb.

Rugged says to Hack as he walks by, “I’ve got the villager.”

Hack doesn’t acknowledge him.

Xiona walks over and grabs him by the arm, “Come on, let’s go.”

Hack asks her in an almost whisper, “What the hell is he?”

Xiona shakes her head, “I don’t know”

Xiona and Hack, the last two to depart, head into the darkness together.

Chapter Seven

The expedition, minus Shadow, heads down the poorly lit main hallway connecting the entrance to the ingress of the tomb. Lined up on each side of the corridor are magnificently detailed stone statues of ancient tribesmen and between each is a lit torch.

Gadiator asks, "How is it that these torches are still lit after so many years? Flames don't usually last that long."

Hack replies, "I think it has something to do with the tomb being sealed in time. Who knows, if that is the case we might even run into a few servants or even the King himself."

"So there might be people running around in here unaware of the fact that they are stuck in here and stuck in some horrible time loop?" Bebida asked.

"Possible but not likely. Foymama was very paranoid and trusted on a select few. After the tomb was completed, anyone found within so many feet of the tomb was executed on sight. You didn't need to be inside the tomb," explains Xiona

"Good, no unexpected greeters." Rugged adds.

"Can't agree with you. I hope there is one particular individual here. Taxa."

"Taxa the Weapon-Master?" Zarr asks.

"The woman-beast?" Razz also asks.

"So you've heard of her?" Xiona queries to the twins.

"What treasure hunter hasn't? Story is that this half woman, half Minotaur would go country to country and challenge their best warriors..." Razz said.

"...and she would fight any opponent with a weapon of their choice. The winner would get the magnificent weapon that had to be put up beforehand..." Zarr added.

"...and she would only fight if the weapon was mythical or had supernatural powers." Hack said.

"Rumor is she never lost," acknowledges Rugged.

Xiona states confidently, "And she never fought me."

"Ha!" Explode laughed.

Before Xiona can comment on Explode's laughter, Bebida asks, "and why would she be here?"

Hack answers, "Because she was a beast summoned by Foymama to win for him these weapons. She is his servant."

Xiona seems impressed that everyone seems to know so much about Taxa.

Gadiator asks, "So Xiona, you really think you can beat her?"
"I wouldn't have taken the invite if I didn't."

“So you’re not the mole.” Explode stated in an unusually calm manner.

“Why do you finally say that?”

“Cause you could care less about the damn stone.”

“Exactly. The closest thing we’ve probably ever had to a mole was probably Kain.”

“So you don’t think Shadow was either?” Bebida asked.

“Nope. I think she’s on a mission for the Katsuya Corporation.”

“You think the Japanese mob is using The Host to find the stone....” Razz said.

“Or something else?” Zarr added.

“Wouldn’t be the first time the mob used someone.” Bebida said.

“So, what about Kain? What the hell is he?” Rugged asked.

This question seemed to strike a nerve in Explode, who picks up his pace and distances himself from the rest of the group.

“I don’t know, but you seen what he did to that rock. Do you know how much pressure is needed to do that?” Hack asked.

“Don’t know....” Razz asked.

“...and don’t care to find out either.” Zarr finished his sentence.

They both look at each other and laugh.

“I’ve lived in the wilderness most of my life and have gained a sense of what’s natural and what’s not, good and evil. It’s something I can’t explain. With him, I felt a whole lot of evil,” stated Rugged.

Gladiator says “You don’t need anything special to sense that about him.”

“Agreed, but don’t you sense a whole lot of evil in this tomb also?”

“Yup.”

Tripwire warns, “Well guys. I do recommend watching where you step. Otherwise you might accidentally activate a whole lot of evil in the form of traps. We are only in the main corridor, which is not usually known for traps, but as greedy and paranoid as you guys make this King Foy mama sound. I do believe we will find our share of them.”

Hack agrees, “Yes, let’s keep our eyes peeled because once we’ve rounded this corner ahead, we should come to the fork in the path, and the fun begins.”

Out of sight and already around the corner, Explode yells, “what the fuck is this shit?”

The group starts to run immediately to catch up to him around the bend. When they arrive, to their collective surprise the path splits into three instead of two like the maps had shown.

“What’s this? I thought you said there were going to be two paths?” Bebida demanded.

Having no answer readily available, Hack stands speechless.

Rugged says, “Looks like the fun has already begun.”

Venting frustration Bebida yells at Rugged, “Shut the hell up old man, this shit ain’t funny!”

Grabbing his crotch, Rugged fires back “I got your old man right here, you fucking freak!”

“Freak?”

Xiona tries to calm everyone down. Explode yells at her. “Shut up bitch!”

Luckily for Explode, Xiona is about ten feet away and with Zarr and Razz in her way, because the look on her face is extremely serious, “I’ve told you about that.”

Hack screams at the top of his lungs, “Damn it everyone! This is not the time for this bullshit. We are on a time schedule. And unless any of you had planned on spending eternity in here, calm the fuck down!”

This gathers everyone attention but the scene is still amped. Red faced from yelling, Hack continues, “We are all professionals, some more than others but never the less, we need to work together. Please.”

The atmosphere seemed to lighten somewhat.

Hack continues. “The Host was right when he said that our unique individual abilities would help this mission. Razz. Zarr. Is there a certain distance in which you two lose your abilities to read each other’s thoughts?”

Razz and Zarr both simply answer at the same time, “No.”

“Good. You two will be split up, so that way you two can keep the other one’s group informed of your progress. This will also help everyone figure out how much time you have left before the Tomb re-seals itself.”

They both nod in agreement.

“Rugged, I believe you can tell how much time has passed without a watch right?”

“Yes, you are correct. No need to be trapped by technology”

“Good. You’re with me, so I don’t lose track of time. Explode and Tripwire, you two are with Zarr cause I can’t image you and Xiona teaming up.”

Explode agrees, “You got that right.” He starts down the far right path.

Hack speeds up realizing Explode’s not going to stick around to hear all of his improv directions. “Gladiator, you’re with me. Xiona and Bebida you’re with Razz. If any of you haven’t found the stone by roughly ten to eleven hours, meet back here and then we’ll get the hell out of here.”

Everyone that is left agrees, grabbing their gear and heading their separate ways.

Chapter Eight

Explode, Trip wire and Zarr walk down the path chosen by Hack. It's a cave tunnel. A contrast to the smooth, well-manicured main hallway they traveled earlier. This ten-foot high walkway is laced with jagged rock formations that are lined on the top and bottom of this cave. The rocks lined up resemble teeth and adds to the already creepy atmosphere of the tomb.

"This place is creepy and odd. It's nothing like where we were just moments ago. I wonder who designed this place." Zarr says.

"It's probably an additional path that was built out of necessity or convenience after the tomb was already completed. We should be coming to a room that was part of the original design real soon." Trip wire said.

"I sure hope so. My back is starting to cramp up." Explode said with a hint of humor, his first attempt this whole trip. It doesn't go unnoticed.

"So big guy, can I ask you a question without the fear of bodily harm?" Zarr asked.

"Maybe."

Zarr decides that it might not be best to upset this man, "Uh... nevermind then."

With a smile that seemed to light up the whole tunnel and catching his traveling companions completely off-guard, "Ok, I won't hurt you. Ask."

Stunned by Explode's smile and pleasant mood, Zarr pauses for a second in both movement and thought.

"Well?"

Mustering the courage, "Do you have a problem with Xiona, women in general or are you just plain angry?" Zarr instinctually assumes a defensive stance.

Explode stops walking. Zarr tenses up more and moves into a more defensive position.

Explode bursts out laughing, "Hahahaha, It's ok little man, I'm not gonna hurt you. So you can calm down."

A look of relief covers Zarr's face.

"Xiona is just a bitch, like most women. No, I don't have any problems with her or any woman. Actually, throwing two stars with that much accuracy kinda impressed me."

Explode's smile disappeared as fast it first appeared, "Now if you tell her that or anyone else. I'll hurt you bad, real bad!"

Zarr is once again visibly nervous until Explode explodes with laughter again. "Oh man, this is fun."

Tripwire, who had started to walk ahead yells back, “Yo, I’ve found a room.”

Zarr and Explode start walking again, when they catch up with Tripwire, they both are laughing.

“Did I miss something?”

Removing the smile from his face Explode says in his typical loud manner, “Nope.”

Zarr surveys the room and says. “Wow. Now this is more like it.”

The room is massive and appears to have been used as a meeting place of some sort. On each side are huge stone steps probably used for seating and enjoying the happenings. To the front is an elevated balcony, which probably was used for seating some people of importance, such as the King and his personal guests.

“So what do you think this room was used for? Gladiator sports or something similar?” Explode asked.

“Naw, probably used for performing shows or maybe executions. Gladiator style arenas are usually enclosed.” Zarr explained.

“Yeah this place was probably used for executions. Remember, no one was allowed in the tomb because the King was rumored to be extremely paranoid. So I doubt that he would let entertainers in here.”

They continue across the huge courtyard. Tripwire is out pacing them as he continues to talk. “We are probably still really far away from any real treasures, considering this place was made for some sort of spectating.”

As he walks and looks around for any evidence to prove his theory, he steps on something and immediately stops. “Shit!”

“What’s the hell wrong with you?” Explode yelled.

Embarrassed but knowing that this is more likely a life and death situation that he put himself in, he answers truthfully, “I stepped on a trap.”

Zarr starts laughing and Explode follows suit, “I thought you were the so-called ancient trap expert?”

Frustrated Tripwire yells, “This is not funny. This trap is going to affect all of us. Look above you.”

Standing next to Tripwire, they both look upward. Their collective laughter stops. Above them is ceiling of spikes spanning in almost a thousand square feet.

“What the fuck? That’s almost the size of this arena.”
Observes Explode, as they all stand under the dead center of the spiked ceiling.

“So this is how the King got his kick. Watching people getting squished.”

Tripwire explains, “He probably made the person stand here on the spot that I’m standing on and watched them as they tried to run for the edge. As you can see from the various bones stuck between the spikes near the outskirts of this contraption, most of them didn’t make it”

He continues, “What we need is something to slide over this damn box I’ve stepped on. Something to take my place, like a huge rock or something.”

“Well this ain’t our problem. We can just walk away now.”
Explode stated with an emphasis on the word “we”.

Shocked and trying to reason, “But without me, you won’t be able to disable other traps like this one.”

Zarr smiles and agrees, “He’s got a point, big guy.”

“Yeah, but he’s the dumb-ass who didn’t even see this trap!”
Stated Explode in his fiery temper.

Zarr is still smiling, “Now he has a point, I guess you guys are even.”

“C’mon guys, this is serious!”

Explode and Zarr look at each other, Zarr says, “Okay I don’t see why not? But you owe us one.”

A weary legged Tripwire says, “Okay, sure, whatever guys. Just find a good size rock, please.”

Explode turns to his left to look for a rock and notices a good size one nearby. “Hey this should work.” As he leans forward to hoist it up, Tripwire yells, “No!”

“What the fuck? First you want us to get you a fucking rock and now you don’t? Make up your fucking mind!”

“That rock is too convenient to reach, it’s more than likely part of this trap also.”

“For crying out loud, then what the hell do you want us to do?”

“Just find a different rock that’s outside the area of the spikes. That’s all.”

Explode complains, “And bring it all the way back over here?”

“Explode please, this is life and death we are taking about. Shit, I’ll give you first dibs on the treasure when we find any, okay?”

“Shit, I had first dibs whether you gave it to me or not.”
Explode and Zarr walk back up toward the tunnel they originally came from.

Tripwire feels his leg going numb from standing in the same stance. “Damn it! What’s taking them so long? I bet they found another path and said to hell with me.” He continues to wait patiently for a few more minutes.

With no sign of them, frustration and also leg numbness all bothering him, Tripwire starts to have a panic attack. “Damn. All the traps that I’ve barely escaped, all the missions and adventures I’ve been on, and I’m gonna die like this?” Venting he yells, “Well, fuck you too!”

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch, you little bitch!” Explode yelled as they appear at the tunnel entrance. Explode is carrying a massive rock.

“So this is how you thank your heroes?” Asks Zarr.

“What took you so long?”

“Do you realize how heavy that rock is?”

Explode answers, “Not like you know either. Shit, I’ve been the one carrying it all the way back here. So where do you want it, Trip?”

“Put it down next to my foot and when I slide my foot off slowly, you’ll push it onto the square.”

Explode places the rock next to Tripwire’s foot, then slides it slowly as told. Once Tripwire’s foot is completely removed, all three look up instinctively to see if there’s any movement. There is none.

“Whew, that was a close one.” Zarr stated.

“Naw. I knew everything would be okay, cause I’m that lucky. Thirty plus expeditions prove that.” Says a now confident Tripwire.

“Is that so? Then why were you whining like a little bitch when we were coming back here?”

“No comment.”

Explode erupts in laughter, and Zarr and Tripwire follow suit. They walk toward a doorway leading to another room.

Chapter Nine

As Xiona, Razz and Bebida walk toward their pre-chosen path, they come up to a tunnel similar to the one Explode's group had found.

"Talk about cheap," stated Bebida as he surveyed the walkway, "How could one part of the tomb look so nice and this look like this? At least they could have added extra spots for torches." The only light in this tunnel is from the torches they are carrying.

"Maybe the day that is repeating itself is the day before they had a chance to finish the tunnel." Xiona guessed.

"Could be. But do you think that they really have no clue that this day is repeating itself?"

"If there's anyone in here besides the King, they probably have no clue."

Changing the subject, Razz asks, "So why in the world would you want to risk your life fighting an unbeatable legend like Taxa if she does exist? I'm pretty sure that you know that legends state that she only fights to the death. If she's still alive, do I need say more?"

"I am fighting her for the Sword of Benskin. I only collect weapons used by great female warriors and heroes throughout history. A common villager named Leonna Benskin used the Sword of Benskin. The village in which she lived was in between two wealthy and powerful kingdoms. Some travelers between the two empires would stop there for rest, relaxation and rape. During the average week, at least one or two small bands of thieves, marauders and/or rapists would rage havoc on the helpless village. After her daughter was raped and killed, Leonna left on a journey to find a powerful mage named Gilica to help her protect the town and extract revenge. He enchanted the light sword she carried with her. The enchantment gave any female user the power of ten men and the speed and alertness of the most skilled warriors. She was able to successfully defend the town single-handedly, even in her later years. Until Taxa came along."

Bebida asks, "Let me get this story straight. This sword gave the lady incredible strength, agility and awareness?"

"Correct."

"Taxa beat her?"

"Correct."

"So why in the hell do you think you can beat her? When she fought Taxa, she used the sword right?"

"I'm fully confident I can beat her and yes she did use the sword."

Razz exclaims, "I can't believe he asked that!"

“Why not? It’s a valid question that I asked her.”

Realizing that he thought out loud about what his brother just asked Explode and that he wasn’t paying one bit of attention to what Bebida and Xiona were talking about. “Oh, I’m sorry. It was something that my brother just asked. Please go ahead.”

Bebida mumbles, “And I’m the freak huh?” No one noticed his muffled comment, “So how do you plan on beating her?”

Xiona explains, “Taxa is a very talented weapon-master and uses the weapon her opponent uses to help build a false sense of confidence. But little does her opponent know that the necklace that Taxa wears around her massive neck, gives her the same abilities and powers as the weapon that they are using against Taxa.”

“Same exact abilities?”

“Correct.”

“So they are on an even playing field then, right?”

“Not necessarily, unless you think that any human could ever be on the same level as an eight foot, four hundred pound Minotaur with the mastery of almost every type of weapon known to man.”

“Then how do you plan on beating her?”

“With skill and cunningness,” confidently Xiona states.

Razz says low and to himself, “I think he has a crush on her.”

Caught off guard by the comment, “What was that?” Bebida snapped.

“Oh, sorry I was talking to my brother. That Explode’s actually a funny guy.” Razz explained.

“Huh?” He didn’t realize he was talking to his brother out loud.

Bebida and Xiona realize that the twins must always have this line of communication through thoughts going on.

“So it must get annoying huh?” Bebida asked.

“Only when he gets lucky,” answers Razz with a huge grin.

“Anyways,” objects Xiona, “We are reaching the end of the tunnel.”

As they enter the room connected to the end of the tunnel a look of disbelief covers all their faces.

“You’ve got to be kidding?” Bebida states as he looks around the massive room.

This room is smoldering hot. Steam rises from the huge holes in the ground which would appear endless if wasn’t for the lava occasionally bubbling from the bottom of each pit. This appears to be the only way across. Each pillar is only about one to two square feet in width and the distance between them is about five to six feet apart. This

person would have to make at least six successful leaps in succession to get to the other side.

“No fucking way. How the hell are we supposed to cross that?” Bebida asked.

“I think that’s the point. We aren’t,” says Razz.

“Well you were in the circus, monkey boy. Show us your stuff.”

“It wasn’t that kind of act,” objects Razz, who then turns to Xiona, “do you think you could get across Xiona?”

“No. Even if I did how would you guys get across?”

At that moment before any of them could answer, Shadow drops from the ceiling right in front of them, with her sword drawn. Only Xiona reacts fast enough to have her weapon out.

“What’s going on?” Razz asks in nervous tone.

Shadow says nothing as she looks all three of them over as if she was inspecting them.

“I don’t know but I don’t like it,” says Bebida as he slowly reaches for his knife in its hip sleeve, Shadow looks them over one more time, then puts her sword away.

“Um.. what just happened?” Bebida asked as he stops going for his blade.

“Well, I almost soiled myself.” Razz stated.

“Are you okay, Shadow?” Xiona asked.

Shadow looks upward over the lava pits. Xiona looks up also and now notices a rickety old wooden bridge.

“A bridge?” Xiona realizes that is why Shadow looks up, she was trying to tell them about the bridge.

“But how are we supposed to get up there?” Razz asked.

Shadow turns toward the pits, and with the agility of a cat and Olympic gymnast she gracefully leaps from one pillar to another.

Shocked by what just happened and her skills, they just stand there and watch.

“I must have missed something,” says Bebida .

“I think we all did,” says Razz.

Once Shadow is on the other side, she walks up to a wall and pulls a lever, the bridge starts to lower.

“Was I the only one who had sensed that she was poised to kill us?” Razz asked.

“Nope,” says Bebida.

“And now she saves us.” Xiona added.

Once the bridge has come to a stop and they are able to cross, Shadow runs off into the doorway next to the lever. As they cross the

bridge, Bebida says to Xiona, “I don’t think you are the only woman here with her own agenda.”

“I agree,” says Xiona.

Chapter Ten

“So captain, is this the right way?” Rugged asks.

Tired of trying to keep his composure, Hack fires back, “I’m not a damn captain!”

“Calm down. I was just joking. I think you’re doing a good job despite all this unexpected stuff that keeps happening.”

“Thank you, I guess, but I’m not a leader. I’ve never been a leader and I don’t want to be one either.” Gladiator, who is trailing back, simply because he is admiring all the fine marksmanship in this well-crafted corridor, full of hieroglyphics, says “I think you’re doing great.”

This compliment seems to mean more to Hack than Rugged’s did, “Really?”

“Yup, I mean I don’t think I could’ve kept Xiona and Explode from killing each other by now.”

Hack and Rugged both laugh. Rugged adds, “I agree kiddo, also you being a man of technology, I thought you would be lost without it, but you’re holding your own.”

Turning the attention from himself, Hack asks, “Speaking of holding their own, how do you think the other groups are holding up?”

Gladiator fields the question, “Probably fine. We haven’t had any problems yet.”

“Speak for yourself, I’ve needed to piss for about an hour now,” says Rugged.

“Well why haven’t you? We aren’t that pressed for time,” says Hack.

“Well I guess, but you have to watch our little friend here. I don’t want him watching me take a leak,” says Rugged about their prisoner.

“Okay and you might wanna ask him if he needs to also.”

“Who cares if he does?”

“Just ask him.”

Rugged shrugs, then says something in the villager’s own tongue to him. The villager replies.

“He said no,” says Rugged.

“That sounded like a lot more than just ‘no’. What did he say?” Hack asked about the villager’s ten-second response.

“It sure did,” agrees Gladiator, who has now stopped to admire more artwork.

“Fine! If you must know. He said, “No, but please, please, please, I beg you to let me go home before I am cursed too. There are you guys happy now?”

“Um...not really,” gulps Gladiator.

“Cursed?” Hack asked.

“Don’t worry about it. All places like these are supposedly cursed. The only one cursed here is me. My curse is that I’ll never be able to take a leak.”

“Oh, sorry go ahead,” apologizes Hack.

Rugged walks over to a wall to urinate, “Damn idiots, every tomb is supposedly cursed and they call themselves treasure hunters?” he mumbled to himself. As he continues to unleash a lengthy one, he notices that one of the hieroglyphics in front of him has a ruby as its eye.

He thinks to himself, “Sweet. Finally some treasure.” He reaches out to touch the jewel, while he’s still doing his thing. As soon as he touches it, three huge axe blades swing from hidden crevices in the wall, each in the opposite directions of the next.

Gladiator is a little ways back and out of range of these blades. Unfortunately he was the only one so lucky.

Hack notices the front outer blade, the one closest to him, and manages to avoid it. His backpack wasn’t so lucky. The razor sharp blade smoothly removed the backpack from his back along with part of his jacket’s hood. He rolled to safety.

Their captive was caught completely by surprise. By pure luck and his thin stature, he stood safely between the two saw blades closest to him as they passed by each other and him.

Rugged was the true victim of misfortune, as he was standing next to where the farthest back blade emerged. The saw tore into his forearm, leaving a three inch deep gash. The three blades swing back into their resting places.

“Son of a bitch!” hollers Rugged from the ground.

“You okay?” Hack asked. Hack is several feet ahead, also on the hallway floor.

“What happened?” Gladiator asks as he runs toward Rugged.

“I thought that damn thing was a jewel but it was a stinking trap.”

Gladiator comes to a stop by Rugged, “That’s why I was only looking, not touching. I saw something like that on the wall over where I was standing.”

“A little late for the info. Ow!” Rugged says as he clenches his injured arm.

Gladiator helps Rugged to his feet, “Can you still walk or do you need me to carry you?”

“Shut up! This little flesh wound....ow!” Rugged can’t even finish the sentence because of the pain.

“Sure, flesh wound huh?” Gladiator then points at the villager, who’s still standing in the exact same spot he was when the blades passed him. “What’s wrong with him? Is he hurt?”

As he starts to stand Hack answers, “I don’t think so. Probably just feels that he’s cursed, that’s all.”

Rugged and Gladiator slowly make their way across where the blades had crossed. Gladiator grabs the villager and says in his best policeman impersonation, “Come on move it mister, there’s nothing to see here.”

He escorts him back over to where Hack’s standing.

Hack asks Rugged, “You gonna be okay?”

“Yeah.”

“What about him? He looks like he’s the walking dead or something.”

“He probably feels that way. The curse he spoke of is that no one messes with King Foy mama’s treasure and lives.”

“Well just like you said earlier, ‘Looks like the fun has begun’.” This playful comment doesn’t gain any kind of response from Rugged, but does get a big grin from Gladiator.

“Whatever.” Rugged mumbles as they head deeper into the tomb.

Chapter Eleven

“She had to come down this way” stated Xiona, referring to Shadow.

“Then where is she? She couldn’t be that far ahead of us” Razz replied.

“This whole thing with her stinks. I’ve stared killers in the eyes before, and just her body language and movements said that she was going to attack, but she didn’t.” Bebida stated. “Well she’s not gonna catch me off guard again.” He removes his knife.

“But if she was going to kill us, why would she help us then?” Razz stated with a puzzled look.

“That’s what I don’t understand.”

“If she was going to kill you two, you would be dead right now, instead of asking questions.”

Xiona’s firm statement didn’t mold too well with Bebida. “What?”

“You two were caught completely by surprise by her; frozen in time, like this tomb.”

Bebida rudely fires back, “Whatever. I see why Explode doesn’t like you.”

Xiona brushes the comment off with a light laugh.

“She’s right, well at least kinda. We do need to be more ready. You know, just in case.” Zarr pulls out a highly colorful sword that was in its backside sleeve. The sword and sleeve were undetectable to the naked eye.

“Pretty neat little trick. Didn’t even know you were armed.”

“That’s the most common, last words I hear.”

Xiona interrupts, “Enough of the ego checking. There’s a door up ahead. Let’s keep on our toes and eyes peeled for traps and Shadow. She might not be in such a helpful mood later.”

Once all three have passed through the doorway, a huge block of stone slams down behind them, closing off the previous path.

Bebida says, “That’s not a good sign.”

“Tell me about it.” Razz added.

They find themselves walking across an arena. This arena is completely surrounded with cement steps like the room Explode and company encountered, but this arena is enclosed from all sides. The seating swings around like a horseshoe, giving it the feel of a stadium of some sort. Up high above in the rock like rafters, in a circle that follows the flow of seating are statues of archers with arrow tips pointing upward toward the ceiling.

Xiona is the first to notice this. “This must have been used as some sort of arena for fighting or dueling.”

Sarcastically Bebida says, “Maybe you’ll find Taxa here.”

A voice that is so thunderous that it feels as if the ground was shaking, echoes out, “Look no further!”

“Oh my...” Razz started to say, but the sight of the creature approaching cuts that short. Taxa walks through the doorway opposite the way they entered. She’s over eight feet in height and weighing easily 400 pounds, with pulsating muscles. Razz is still stuck in thought.

Bebida is awe-struck, “Look at the size of her...If you’re sure she’s a woman.”

“This is my destiny.” Xiona walks forward toward Taxa, who’s approaching the middle of the arena, leaving her companions standing in place.

Taxa has a large chain draped over her shoulder which is hooked to a massive cart full of weapons. The squeaking of the wheels sends chills down the men’s spines.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Xiona?” Razz asked right before he gulped.

Taxa answers for her, “She has no choice, unless one of you would like to take her place.”

Both men remain silent.

Taxa continues, “You have summoned me by coming into my arena. Either you battle me and die, or just die.”

Xiona boldly adds, “I’m adding a third choice. Battle and win.”

Smiling and exposing her fanged teeth, “Sorry to disappoint you, but that choice is reserved for me.”

Bebida yells to Xiona, “You don’t have to fight her. Let’s just run!”

Razz adds, “Or we could help.”

Xiona looks at them at out of the corner of her eye, “That would not be very honorable.”

“And neither is losing your head.”

Taxa’s voice thunders again, “Little man, you don’t seem to understand. The only way out is past me in one on one combat. If you or anyone interferes, then you will feel the Rain of Arrows.” Taxa points up at the ceiling.

Everyone in the room looks up at the ceiling. The archer statues are now aimed downward toward them. Taxa once again continues, “It will also rain when she loses.” Taxa gives off another eerie laugh that makes the loose pebbles fall from the ceiling. “So runt,

what weapon do you choose to die with and what weapon are you offering up as the wager?"

"I offer the Dagger of Stealth. It was once used by Zuma the Thief to kill an entire thief's nest to avenge her brother's betrayal and death." She pulls out a dagger from a pouch. "And I will use my broad sword to fight."

Taxa replies, "A worthy weapon that has slain many. It will make an excellent addition to my collection but you failed to mention the name and history of your broad sword."

"No I didn't forget. It has no worthy name or history. It's just a weapon I picked up for my battle with you."

Taxa looks a little confused. Xiona explains, "Taxa, I know about the power of your necklace and how it copies the special abilities of similar weapons used against you, then multiplies it. So there will be no extra advantages for you or for me. Just a fair and level playing field."

Taxa smiles once again, "Fair and level? You versus me? You make me laugh, squirt. I eat rats bigger than you."

"Man, just her laugh would be enough to make me drop."

Razz states as he stands by.

"You can do it!" Bebida yelled.

Razz is shocked at Bebida's newfound faith

"I know I can." Xiona said confidently.

Razz asks, "Do you really think she can?"

Bebida replies, "Nope, not a chance. We need to try to edge ourselves toward that door. So we can haul ass when we get our chance."

"So you want to just abandon her?"

"She's as good as dead. Do you wanna die with her?"

"How can you be so sure? Xiona could probably whip you around."

"And definitely whip yours, but that's beside the point. When I get my chance, I'm gone and I advise you to do the same likewise."

Taxa reaches into her cart and pulls out a broadsword similar to Xiona's. "Are you ready to die, little one?"

"Let's go!"

The two combatants start to circle each other. Taxa makes the first move. Taxa's powerful swings are blocked valiantly by Xiona's broadsword but each powerful strike backs her up. The sounds of steel meeting steel echoes throughout the arena. Taxa backed Xiona against the cement stands. Taxa swung and missed, hitting the cement and removing a big chunk from the wall.

Taxa turns and faces Xiona, who has managed to put about ten feet between them, “You run well, bug, but let’s see how well you fight.”

Taxa charges again with more big shots meeting Xiona’s blade. The ones that don’t connect with steel barely miss flesh. Any one of these blows would kill her on impact.

Bebida slowly scoots toward the exit unnoticed by the combatants but not unnoticed by the archers, who have pulled their bows tighter. They also move along with him. Razz notices both, “Bebida, stop or they’re going to shoot. Look!” Bebida looks up and notices the same. He moves slowly back to his original place next to Razz.

He asks Razz candidly, “So who’s winning?”

“You know, you’re a real piece.”

Bebida ignores the insult, “So if she wins, she’ll get the weapon she’s after right?”

“She’ll get all of Taxa’s weapons.”

Meanwhile, Taxa had thought she had Xiona cornered again but Xiona had managed to escape yet again.

Taxa says through her fanged smile, “If you think you are going to tire me out, think again. This is barely a warm up.”

“Well, I pity you then, because this was my warm-up and I’m ready now.”

“Then bring it on, bug!”

Xiona charges Taxa and delivers several blows that are blocked by Taxa who holds her ground. Taxa tries to counter attack one of Xiona’s attacks but this was the opening Xiona was waiting for. She delivers a counter of her own, cutting a gash across Taxa’s midsection. It’s not a major wound, but Taxa is bleeding.

“Good one. You’re better than I thought you would be. Only one other person has ever hit me before. He survived because he’s immortal, but you aren’t so lucky.”

Taxa smiles and charges again. They exchange blows once more. Most of Taxa’s blows are dodged, while most of Xiona’s swings are blocked by Taxa. Taxa almost had Xiona trapped in the corner again. Taxa swings her sword with more control than power and doesn’t charge Xiona like she has both times before. Instead, Taxa leaped backwards. Xiona didn’t expect this maneuver and leaped as if she expected Taxa to charge again. This mistake proved to be fatal.

As she raised from rolling away from the non-existent charge, her eyes locked onto the downward motion of Taxa’s blade. The blow splits Xiona’s skull right down the middle and the blade doesn’t stop until it’s just above her neck.

Bebida tugs at Razz, who's frozen in disbelief, "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Taxa lets out an even louder laugh than before as she lifts Xiona's lifeless body, which is slowly sliding down the shaft of her blade. Xiona's head is squirting blood.

The sound of an arrow landing next to him awakens Razz from his daze. They hightail it toward the exit as arrows rain down from above, barely missing them. Taxa's laughter can still be heard as they exit the room.

Chapter Twelve

“Hey, they found Shadow! Or I guess she found them. Just depends on how you look at it.”

“Zarr, what the heck are you talking about?” Remembering that the twins can read hear each other’s thoughts, Tripwire adds, “Oh, you mean your brother’s group right?”

“Yup.”

Explodes expresses in his fiery tone, “Well, we need to worry about us. She chose not to be with us, so as far as I’m concerned, she’s against us. So the bitch best not get in my way!”

They continue their way down another pathway. This one is similar to the main corridor that Hack’s party had already come across.

“I’m not sure if she’s with us or against us. At least, that’s how my brother feels.”

Referring to the link between the twins, Explode yells, “Damn it, can’t you turn it off?” It’s now very apparent that his well-natured moments are short lived.

“No, I can’t and why would I? That would be way too weird.”

“Why? You wanna turn it off because it’s annoying the hell out of me. That’s why!”

Zarr says nothing. They continue walking.

Tripwire states, “Actually, we need to pay better attention to our surroundings so that we don’t activate any more traps”

In the most sarcastic tone he’s used the whole adventure, Explode says, “We? We didn’t step on any traps. You did Mr. Trap Master.”

“Go ahead and rub it in. Even us pros mess up every once in a while.”

Zarr laughs quietly to himself about something his brother said to his party.

Tripwire says, “I feel moisture in the air. We must be close to a large body of water.”

“In a tomb?” Zarr questioned.

“Not normally, but this tomb doesn’t have the normal tomb feel either.”

“Agreed.”

As they exit the tunnel, they find themselves standing in front of a mini lake inside a cavern. Explode asks in a smart alec manner, “So what’s the trap here?”

Tripwire didn’t notice, “Probably huge pits with spiked bottoms because this lake appears fairly shallow.”

Zarr says, “Nope, no bridge.”

Trip wire asks, "What? Bridge where?"

"Nevermind."

"Turn it off before I do!"

Zarr starts off into the water without acknowledging Explode's threat. Tripwire and Explode follow.

Trip wire says, "Starting with me. Let's all try to be careful where we step."

About a third of the way across, Zarr drops his torch by accident. He bends over to pick it up, "Ouch! What in the world just bit me?"

He lifts his hand out of the water to find a piranha locked onto it. "Ahhhhh!" He tries to shake it off as he runs across the lake.

Trip wire frantically asks. "What happened? What's going on?"

Explode feels something gnawing at his boot, "Oh shit! There's something in the water! It's piranhas, snakes or something!"

They all start to race across the lake. Explode is doing double time as he passes Tripwire and accidentally bumps into Zarr. Zarr falls face first into the water. Explode doesn't realize this and continues on. Trip wire is so worried about self-preservation that he didn't notice Zarr submerged under the water as he passed by him.

After both men have passed him, Zarr raises out of the water grasping for air and with about a dozen piranhas locked onto various body parts. The splashing and panicking of Explode and Trip wire drowns his screams out.

Zarr starts to run again with these flesh-eaters dangling off him, until he trips over an elevated ridge that barely avoids breaking the lake's surface. This sends him into the water again. He fights and kicks to gain his footing again as these razor tooth fish continue to rip at his flesh.

Once Explode and Tripwire make it to dry land, they shake, swing, bat and do everything they can to get the watery leeches off themselves. Finally, once all the fish are removed, they realize that Zarr is not with them.

Explode shows concern in his voice, "Zarr? Little buddy?"

They both survey the lake from the dry land for any sign of him.

"Zarr, stop fucking playing!"

Trip wire notices several feet outward, Zarr's body floating facedown, moving several feet away, with a few jerky movements. He points it out to Explode. Immediately, Explode starts to head back out into the water.

“He’s dead, Explode.”

“No. He’s moving!”

“No....that’s the fish...eating him. He can’t breathe in the water facedown like that.”

Explode stops in place. Reality has set in. He turns and screams, “Fuck you, Foymama! I’m coming for your ass!” He then heads off toward the new exit, stomping on the flopping fish removed from their clothing and bodies. Tripwire decides it’s probably best for him to remain quiet and just follows him, keeping a good distance.

Chapter Thirteen

After a long walk, Bebida and Razz find themselves in a small room that's only about 20 square feet. Once again, a cement block falls down and blocks their exit.

"Damn it. Razz this is becoming very bothersome."

"I still can't believe that she's dead."

"We'll believe it, cause she is and there's nothing we can do about it. We need to worry about our own survival."

"Are you really that cold-blooded?"

"You have to be to survive places like this. Or have you forgotten about the fact that there are probably things in here that want us dead too?"

"No, you're right, and I have thought about that. Speaking of that, I have a bad feeling about this room too."

They both turn their attention to the center of the room, where there's a stand that has a cube shaped puzzle box resting on top of it. There's an inscription on the side of the stand.

Bebida looks around seeing no visible exits. "It appears that the box must either be our way out or our death trap activator." The only exit other than the one they came through, which is now blocked, is a door on the opposite side of the room. This one is sealed.

He reads the inscription, "Fix the cube before the cube is filled. What is that supposed to mean?"

Razz had assumed that this was going to be in some old ancient dialect, "You can read that?"

"Um yeah. It's in plain English."

"What? Let me see this." Razz inspected the words. "No, it's in Romanian."

"I'm looking at it right now, and it's English."

"Something is definitely not right with this tomb. It's translating the words in each of our native tongues."

"Weird."

"Very weird."

"So do you know how to solve this puzzle so that we can open the door?"

"It's identical to what you American's called the Rubik's Cube but instead of colors, it has symbols."

Bebida inspects the cube without touching it. "You're right, it is. So can you solve it?"

"Can a Romanian woman cook?" Razz asked with a confident smile.

"I don't know, never met one."

Razz is still smiling, “Just watch.” He lifts the cube off the stand. Two brick size holes open on all four walls. Water rapidly flows from them.

“So that’s the trap huh? If you don’t solve it fast enough, you drown. Well, you better hurry up then.”

“Well Bebida, you could always do it yourself.” Razz then taunted him like he was handing him it to solve.

“Shit! Stop playing!”

Razz was already at work on it. “Calm down, this is a piece of cake. I’m almost done and the water isn’t even to our knees yet.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I solved one of those before and I know it might seem like you’re almost done when you’re not.”

The water is a little past their knees when all of a sudden Razz starts flipping out and screaming. “They’re in the water! Get them off! Get them off!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Demanded Bebida as he frantically looks around in the water. “I don’t see anything! What are you talking about?”

“Somebody help him. Somebody! Explode, come back! Ahhhhhh!”

“Explode? What are you talking about? You’re not making any sense.” Suddenly it dawns on him. “He must be talking about something going on with his brother. Snap out of it man! The water is chest high man! Damn it, you gotta snap out of it.” He’s shaking him as furiously as he can in the chest level water.

As suddenly as he started yelling, Razz stops. He drops the cube, which starts to sink to the bottom.

Bebida screams, “What are you doing?”

In an almost whisper, Razz squeaks out, “Silence...nothing but silence.”

“What?” Was all Bebida said before he dove into the water to retrieve the puzzle box. He searches the floor. He finds it and swims back to the surface. No longer able to stand and have the water not over his head, he swims and tries to remember how to solve the puzzle at the same time.

He thinks to himself as he stays afloat, “C’mon Mike, you can do this. Think!” Running out of breathing space, as the water is nearing the ceiling, he takes one last deep breath and dives down by the pillar. He works on it there. He fumbles the cube but regains control and turns a few more parts.

“Yes! About damn time.” He thought as he reached out to place it on the pillar. Once in place he turns it to the right and both

exits open slowly. Water flows outward. In a few seconds, that felt like hours, the room is empty of water.

Bebida, lying on the room's floor, is drenching wet and short of breath. He tries to stand but can't. He decided to crawl out of the room just in case the door decided to shut. Once out and into the hallway, he sits up and turns around to see Razz's lifeless body sprawled out on the floor.

Bebida stands up and heads down the hallway opposite the room. After a few steps he stops and turns back and looks at Razz one last time. "I can't say I feel for you cause I have a real bad feeling you might just be the lucky one of us two." He turns and heads down the latest tunnel until he hears an unrecognizable voice. He wields his knife. "I'm ready for you this time, motherfuckers." Then he creeps down the corridor, ready to strike.

Chapter Fourteen

“So how’s the arm holding up?” asked Gladiator.

“Fine. It’s just fine” answered Rugged as the two walk side by side. Hack’s in the lead along with the prisoner walking in between.

“I don’t understand why we are still holding him hostage. We’ve already found the tomb.”

Hack agrees.

Rugged answers, “Because we can’t just let him go. What if they know a way to seal us in here?”

“Highly unlikely.”

“But I’m not willing to take that chance.”

Gladiator nods in agreement.

Hack ponders out loud. “I wonder how everyone else is doing?”

“Probably just as good as we are. Maybe a scrape or two but nothing too serious probably.”

Rugged adds, “Yeah, as long as they didn’t set off any traps.”

Hack continues to ponder out loud, “I wonder what Shadow’s up to?”

Rugged smugly says, “Probably already got the stone and high-tailed it out of here. It’s not like she would stop and tell anyone or be able to.”

“What do you mean by ‘able’ to?”

“She works for the Katsuya Company right? The Japanese Mob? And now that I think about it, I think my son Archan told me that they cut out the tongues of their secret operatives so that they can’t talk.”

“That’s absurd. That makes no sense at all. Why would they do that?”

“So she could never talk about the Mafia to the police.”

Gladiator asks, “Well, couldn’t she just write it down?”

Rugged realizes that his theory is flawed but instead of admitting it he says, “Then why do you think that she doesn’t talk?”

“Maybe she does. Just not to us.”

Again frustrated, Rugged decides to keep his mouth shut.

Hack laughs, “Rugged speechless? These walls do seem to have magical powers.”

Rugged quickly changes the subject, “Haven’t we pretty much been walking down one long hallway?”

“Pretty much. But this peaceful walk sure beats the hell out of dodging swinging axes.”

Gladiator adds, “Well, at least the scenery changes a little.” He referred to the stone statues of knights. “First we had hieroglyphics, then the clay pots, followed by stone animals and now knights.”

Hack adds, “Yeah, it’s kinda like walking through a museum.”

“Yeah, a really creepy one.”

They continue down the path. Unnoticed to them, two of the statues that they passed have come to life and are approaching fast from behind. One statue follows about thirty feet behind the first one.

Gladiator is pulling up the rear with Rugged, “Well, at least when we find some treasure, we’ll have a straight shot out of here.”

Hack looks back to acknowledge him but to his dismay he notices the closest statue which is directly behind Rugged and Gladiator. “Look out!”

Both men turn at the same time, notice and try to avoid the halberd coming down from above the attacking statue’s head. Gladiator was successful. Again, Rugged wasn’t so lucky. The weapon swipes his already injured arm, this time a little higher up, right above his bicep.

“Damn it!” Rugged yelled as he hits the floor.

The villager, who also hit the floor in panic, is frozen once again with fear, this time out of harm’s way by tripping over Hack’s foot.

The statue lifts its halberd above its head again, readying to deliver a deathblow to the downed Rugged. Gladiator snatches the weapon out its hand. He hoists the stone knight above his head in a wrestling style press. Instead of dropping it, he runs with it toward the closest wall. The knight’s head shatters like a piñata. As the now motionless body hits the floor, the cavity reveals things usually not welcomed as treats. Hundreds of black dung beetles crawl out of its neck. This sight immediately serves as a motivating reason to get off their butts for Rugged and the villager.

Rugged, looking down at the beetles escaping in all directions, says “Yeah, that was pretty sick.”

Gladiator throws up both hands in a victorious manner. He yells, “Whoa!” He stops yelling and his eyes open wide as if he’s seen a ghost.

Suddenly the tip of the spear that the second statue was carrying extrudes from his chest. Blood forms a crimson circle in the center of his chest. It starts to drip down his shirt. The big man collapses dead with his eyes still wide open and the spear inside him.

Rugged, who is now standing, pulls out his machete, swings it at the neck of the now unarmed and exposed stone knight. “Die you bastard!” The swing decapitates the stone monster. It follows suit of

its companion and collapses to the ground. Once the body has come to a full rest, fist size rats run from the exposed neck.

Hack exclaims, "What the hell is going on here?"

The rodents scamper away into the same cracks along the walls that the bugs did.

"I don't know, but let's get out of here before any more of these statues come to life." Rugged and party look around nervously as they are still amidst rows of statues.

"Agreed!"

Rugged puts his weapon away, grabs the villager by the arm with his good arm. They hastily head down the corridor.

Chapter Fifteen

Explode and Tripwire continue to walk down corridor after corridor with no sign of a room, and with no conversation. That is, until Tripwire notices light shining through a crack in a wall. “You see that?” He points at the crack.

Explode was in deep thought about something, “Huh? What?”

Tripwire reiterates. “That crack. There’s light coming from behind those rocks. Maybe it’s a hidden room.”

“About damn time we find some treasure. Shit! I thought this place was supposed to be loaded with treasure.”

“It’s probably all in one room deep in this tomb. If he is as greedy as we’ve been told, then he would want to keep a close eye on it.”

“Shit, aren’t we deep enough already? We’ve been walking for hours.”

“Certainly feels that way. Well, let’s check it out.”

They both head over and inspect the crack.

“You’re right. There is something back there. And I think I hear voices or sounds, something. You hear it?”

Tripwire leans forward with his ear to the wall, “Yes, I hear something too.”

“How you figure we get in?”

“There should be a switch of some sort close by.”

As Explode searches for the switch, “I hope the damn king is in here. You think you seen me mad before.”

Tripwire winces at the thought, “Scary.”

“You don’t know the half.”

“I found it!” Tripwire adds in a cautious tone, “Well, at least I think I did. Who knows with this place? Let’s just be ready for anything when I press this.”

Explode nods in agreement. Tripwire puts his hand back in between a pair of rocks on the wall. The crack grows as the wall separates, revealing a well-lit room. Also, something that is hard to believe inside this tomb.

“Are you seeing the same thing I’m seeing?” asked a stunned Tripwire.

“Are you seeing beautiful half-naked bitches?”

“Yup.”

“Then yes, I am too.”

This good size room is elegantly decorated. Purple, blue and golden curtains cover the walls. Expensive Persian like rugs are laid out in an orderly fashion. Torches are placed throughout the room, so

that no crack or cranny is hidden in darkness. One of the ladies is playing a musical instrument that hums a comforting and inviting melody. A long sectional like sofa is the centerpiece of the room. Several feet in front of it is a metal stand with a dish on it. It's burning something scentless. On the couch are several beautiful ladies in belly dancer outfits.

"What do we have here, a brothel or something?" Explode asked with a huge grin.

"Naw, probably more like the King's personal play toys. As you probably already know, it wasn't uncommon for Kings to have many women on the side."

"What you talking about, Poindexter? That's not uncommon nowadays."

The women motion for them to come closer.

Explode starts walking over toward them. Tripwire cautiously asks, "How do we know this is not a trap?"

"A trap? Come on now, if we can't handle a few unarmed women, what kind of men are we? Plus how many traps have you ever came across that were hidden like this room?"

Two of the women come and grab Tripwire gently by the arm. "Well, that does make sense. That would defeat the purpose of a trap if the intruder couldn't find it."

Already with his shirt off and barely visible underneath three women on the couch, Explode laughs, "Exactly. And if I can't fuck up King Foy mama, I can at least fuck a few of his women right?"

Lying on the other end of the sectional, Tripwire states, "You're one weird man." He starts to make out with one of the ladies while another licks his ear.

Explode hollers, "Oh baby! So you like it rough too, huh?"

Tripwire manages to get un-lip locked long enough to say, "You're truly are a weird one for sure. Hey, we can't be here long. We're still on a time schedule."

Explode, who is virtually covered by half-naked women, doesn't respond. Tripwire notices one of the women with her hand down Explode's unzipped pants. "Oops, sorry never mind. Handle your business big guy."

Shadow steps into the room through the same opening leading to the main hallway. Unnoticed by any of the participants in this game of sexual twister, she draws with each hand a dagger from each side of her hips. These daggers are longer than most standard ones. What she sees is not what Explode and Tripwire sees. Shadow is unaffected by the incense and sees the true scenery.

There are torches but no curtains, no rugs, no sofa and definitely no beautiful women. Instead there is a carved out rock shaped similar to a sofa and hideous humanoid monsters licking, sucking and biting at various parts of their hapless victims.

Shadow leaps forward at the ones on Explode first. She stabs one in the back of the head killing it instantly. Another one looks at her as she cut its throat like a hot knife through butter. The one who was playing the music earlier, but is now on Explode, jumps up and tries to escape and knocks over the incense stand. Shadow throws one of the daggers at the fleeing she-beast and nails her in the back of her neck. It lets out a terrible shriek.

This yell grabs the attention of the two on Tripwire and Tripwire himself. "What the hell was that?" He looks over in the direction the noise came from, to see the woman beast looking half woman and half something else not recognizable. As he looks at the ground the carpets seem to disappear right in front of his eyes. "What's going on? And what's up with the carpets?" He looks up at the woman on top of him to find a hideous beast.

"Aghhhh!" He reaches up to protect himself. That's when he finds out that he's missing two of his fingers as blood drips down onto his face. He screams again. This time louder as the reality of that his fingers have been gnawed off sinks in and the anesthetic effect of the incense wears off. The head of the beast on top of him but near his legs, flies off thanks to Shadow's short sword. Tripwire manages to get the beast directly on top of him off. Shadow slits it up its backside. Most of the creature's vitals spill out onto the floor.

Tripwire is hysterically screaming and trying to take in everything that just happened. Shadow walks over to the dead beast by the turned over pedestal and removes her dagger from its head. She wipes it off with the rags the beast wore. She replaces the dagger back in its resting place. She repeats this cleaning routine until all her weapons are back into place.

Tripwire has finally stopped screaming. He looks over at Explode and starts screaming again as he finds he's fared a lot better than Explode, the top of his head had been eaten away. Tripwire has been reduced to an infant like stage as he sits crying and talking incoherently.

Shadow walks over and visually inspects Explode's body. She does the same to Tripwire. Afterwards, she exits the way she entered, leaving Tripwire by himself.

Chapter Sixteen

“How’s your arm?”

“Considering there’s two chunks missing? Not too bad.”

“So you think anyone else has died?”

“Yes. I’m sure of it.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Cause if it weren’t for luck, you would be walking this path alone right now.”

Hack stops walking as he realizes just how correct Rugged is.

“Hey Hack. I bet you this is why The Host sent us in the first place. He knew this was a death trap. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was paid to gather us and kill us.”

“What? Why would anyone want us dead? That’s absurd.”

“Is it? Then can you explain why he didn’t send Kain with us? You’ve seen with your own two eyes what that guy is capable of. His creepiness rivals this tomb.”

“Maybe Kain is just what he appears to be. Hired muscle. Hired creepy muscle, but just that and not an adventurer.”

“Yeah, whatever. Believe what you want.”

“Well, I do believe that someone does want us dead and that someone is King Foy mama.”

The villager sits down as these two continue to talk.

“No, he needs to get back up. We need to pick the pace.” Hack stated.

Rugged motions for their captive to get back up. He does.

As soon as they start walking, Bebida leaps out of the darkness of a side tunnel. He’s wielding a knife. “Die, Motherfuckers!” He lunges toward the villager who was up ahead of them. Bebida cuts a slight gash across his exposed stomach. The villager screams and once again is on the floor, balled up in fright. Bebida doesn’t seem to recognize him as a non-threat. Bebida readies himself for another lunge.

“Bebida, what the hell is wrong with you, man?” Hack demanded at the top of his lungs.

The familiarity of Hack’s voice grabs his attention. Rugged pulls out his machete and readies himself for possible combat.

Bebida looks up at Hack, then back down at the scared villager. He looks back at Hack, then over at the poised Rugged.

Bebida came back to his senses, “You better put that away before you get hurt...” He notices Rugged’s wound and continues, “...again.”

Rugged stands his ground and keeps his weapon out. Bebida puts his away.

Hack asks Bebida, "What was all that for?"

"They're all dead."

"Who? Xiona and Razz both?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

Rugged says as he puts away his machete, "Let me guess, you drank their blood?"

Bebida fires back, "Nope, I like my blood like I like my wine, old man...aged!"

They both glare at each other.

Hack interrupts, "No, seriously, what happened to them?"

Bebida explains, "Xiona got her wish. She found Taxa and that's the end of that story."

Hack used the cavern wall to brace himself as he sulks in disbelief.

"And I believe both of the twins are dead. I know Razz is. He drowned by one of these fucking traps. I believe Zarr drowned too or was eaten by something."

Rugged is now curious, "Eaten?"

"Yes, Razz was saying something about something in the water and to get them off his brother. That they were everywhere."

"Strange."

"Tell me about it. So where's the rest? Are they alive? Any sign of them?"

Hack answers, "We don't know. We haven't seen anyone besides you."

Bebida notices Gladiator is missing, "And Gladiator?"

Their faces answered his question.

"Damn it! Something really strange is going on in here. Well, have you seen Shadow?"

"Nope. You?"

"Yeah, she came and did some amazing acrobatic flips across a pit of lava. Nothing too big."

"What?"

"Yeah, you heard me right. She's some kind of super woman or something but she did help us cross the lava."

Trip wire says as he walks up an adjacent corridor toward them. "And she saved me!"

The party now turns their attention to the other lone survivor who has just arrived. Bebida asks, "So you the only survivor too?"

"Unfortunately, and you?"

“Same.”

“What happened to them?”

Bebida re-explains their deaths, “So what happened to Explode and Zarr?”

“Both eaten. One by piranhas in a lake and the other by some indescribable beast like women.”

“So you were the lucky one?” Hack asked.

“Not too lucky.” He then shows the group his missing fingers.

“Ouch!”

Bebida asks, “So you saw Shadow too?”

“Yeah, she saved my life.”

“How?”

“Please don’t ask.”

The other three men look at each other and have no clue why not, but they all let the subject drop.

Tripwire asks the group, “So...any treasure yet?”

Everyone shakes their head no. “What about you?”

He responded with the same answer.

Frustrated and in pain, Rugged vents, “This is a wild goose chase!”

“Naw, I don’t think so. Shadow is looking for something real hard. You should have seen the way she looked us up and down back at the lava room.”

“Come to think of it. She did look at me and what remained of Explode, up and down pretty good also. Like she was trying to see if we had something.”

Hack deducts, “Well, whatever she’s looking for, she hasn’t found it yet. Otherwise she would have left by now. I know I would have.”

Out of nowhere and off the subject, Bebida asks Tripwire, “Hey, didn’t you say there was a lake in here?”

“Yeah, so?”

“Don’t you find it kinda odd that in a man-made tomb there’s a lake and a deep ass lava pit?”

Rugged answers, “It’s possible, but highly unlikely considering that this area has never been known for volcanic activity.”

“My point exactly. So what is really going on in here?”

As each assess in their own minds this unlikelihood, all eyes slowly turn toward the only descendant of the King in their presence. He’s been sitting on the floor quietly during their conversation.

Hack looks at Rugged, “He mentioned something earlier about a curse. Ask him about it in more detail. Something isn’t right in here.”

Rugged leans down toward the villager and starts speaking in his native tongue. They exchange words several times. Rugged raises suddenly, "Shit, so that's what's going on. I should've known it."

"What?"

"The story about the demon sealing the tomb is only partially correct. It seems that the demon also agreed to help protect the King's treasure from outsiders forever."

Bebida asks, "So, we are going up against a demon?"

Tripwire is visibly upset, "I knew we were going up against something supernatural and not just traps. It makes so much more sense now. Damn it! We're screwed."

Rugged agrees. "How are we supposed to beat a demon with the power to seal a whole damn tomb in time?"

Hack calmly states. "I truly doubt the demon is still here."

Tripwire holds up his hand where two fingers used to be, "His damn traps are!"

"That's why we need to stay together. So it's good that we found each other. Now we can get our shit together and find some treasure."

They all agree, but seemingly half-heartedly. They start back down the hallway deeper into the tunnel. As they make their way around a bend, a dark figure leaps out of the darkness ahead of them. Rugged yanks out his machete with his good limb. Tripwire pulls out his knife. Everyone's stopped.

Hack notices first. "It's Shadow!"

She was poised and ready to attack until she noticed it was them. She puts her sword away and walks toward them. The party stands like they expect her to stop and start up a conversation. She doesn't. She walks past them like they didn't even exist.

"What's going on? Are we invisible now? She didn't even look us over."

Tripwire agrees with Bebida. "You're right. She must have found what she was looking for." He decided to show his appreciation for her saving his life. "Thank you!"

She's far enough down the hallway that she's starting to fade in with the shadows.

It dawned on Rugged that their quest might be over. "Hey, did you find the stone?"

She kept on walking until she finally disappeared into the darkness.

Hack yells a heart-filled, "Isn't this a mission for you? Shadow we need you! We can't do this without you! Please!"

All three of the other men look at him as if he's lost his mind. He explains, "Didn't you hear Bebida say something about her being able to do all kinds of amazing flips? And she saved Tripwire from something that easily killed Explode while eating your fingers. And did any of you notice that she didn't even have one scratch on her? Not even dirt? While we look like the remains of some horror movie."

He paused for this to sink in. He continues, "Bebida almost lost his mind, Tripwire lost two fingers, Rugged almost lost his life and arm twice and the villager loses his balance almost every time something happens."

Bebida adds. "And you can't fight."

"Exactly my point. We truly do need her to help us. We probably won't survive this without her."

The party was so deep into their discussion that none of them had noticed that Shadow had come back and was standing only a few feet away.

The villager was the first one to notice and he stumbles backward and falls. They all turn quickly to find her standing behind them. The men get a good laugh at the villager falling once again.

"So, I take it this means, yes you will join us?" Hack asked Shadow who is standing face to face with him. He stares into where he thinks her eyes are behind the mask. She says nothing and starts walking toward the inner part of the tomb again.

Bebida says, "I guess that means yes, 'Mr. Smooth' talker." They all head deeper into the tomb.

Chapter Seventeen

For the first time, Shadow walks with the others and they are exploring as a group. Rugged and Hack lead with the villager; Shadow, Tripwire, and Bebida make up the rear.

Tripwire tries to make small talk with her. "So, you found what you were looking for, didn't you?"

Shadow doesn't respond.

Tripwire tries again, "So ummm...how was it that the trap you saved me from didn't affect you?"

Again nothing. She keeps walking.

Already thin on patience and growing tired of Tripwire's persistence, Bebida says "Damn it! Haven't you realize that she's not going to answer you? Shit, she probably can't even answer you."

"Can't answer me? What are you talking about?"

Frustrated and in no mood to explain, Bebida decides to respond with the hope that this will shut him up. "It's rumored that the Japanese Mafia cut out the tongues of their ninja spies and assassins so they can't talk about the family."

"That's so stupid."

Shadow suddenly stops and turns toward Bebida. Even though he can't see her face, he knows when he's being stared down.

"See, even she can't believe the dumb shit you just said."

Hack and Rugged notice that they had stopped. "What's going on back there?"

Shadow turns back forward and starts walking again.

Bebida is confused on exactly what happened. "What was that all about?"

"You probably pissed her off."

"Oh well."

Everyone starts walking again.

Hack asks Rugged, "What do you think that was all about back there?"

"No clue and don't care."

They enter what appears to be a new room.

Hack says, "There you have it. A room finally."

Rugged looks around, "Not exactly a room, more like a bigger hallway."

"You're never happy, are you?"

"I'm happy there's no statues in here."

Hack laughs out loud.

Shadow, Bebida, and Tripwire are just now entering the same room. They are about 100 feet behind them. After they are about

twenty feet inside, the ceiling behind collapses and a huge smoothly rounded boulder drops down. It's several tons and shaped like a giant marble. This rock is almost a perfect fit to the room.

Bebida yells "Shit! And we're on a slope too!"

Rugged says to Hack, "There's a door ahead. We can make it, let's go!" Along with the captive they head toward the doorway.

Shadow and company are running toward the door also, but the boulder is gaining on them and scraping against the walls as it approaches. Bebidia notices recesses along the wall that the stone didn't rub up against and each are just big enough to hold one person. "We aren't going to make it to the door but see those spots along the wall. I think those are the room's fail-safe spots. The rock can't hit them. They're too deep."

When they approach the next series of recesses, each one of them settles into different spots. As the massive rock rolls past them, it doesn't touch them but the weight of the rock activates the trap door in the recesses. All three fall backwards and slide down long and winding chutes.

Meanwhile Hack, Rugged and the villager try to outrun the rapidly approaching boulder. Rugged yells at the villager. "Hurry up!"

Hack is in the lead, easily clearing the doorway and out of sheer panic, he runs through the doorway at full speed. Rugged, trying to fight off the pain in his swinging and damaged appendage continues to run. The villager seems to have taken his advice as he passed Rugged. Rugged looks back to see the boulder is closer than he thought and looks forward to find the doorway farther than he thought.

He shuts out the pain and musters all he has left to avoid becoming a human pancake. Seconds after the villager goes through the doorway, Rugged dives through as the boulder slams into the door. It stops the massive boulder and to Rugged's surprise the doorway stayed mostly intact. Wiping away beads of sweat from his head, "Whew, that was too close. Way too close!" Rugged exclaimed.

Chapter Eighteen

Trip wire yells as he slides down the dirt chute. He lands flat on his face on a dirt floor. “Ouch!” Then he hears two more thuds, one right after each other. He tries to see if it was Bebida and Shadow but the room is pitch black and there is no visible light anywhere to be found.

“Shadow? Bebida? You guys here too?”

“Yeah, I’m here.” replied Bebida.

“Is Shadow?”

“Like I know. I can barely make out my own hand directly in front of my face. And you know she’s a mute.”

“Well, I believe the other thud I heard was her. Where are we at?”

“I have a feeling somewhere we don’t want to be.”

“Me too.” Both of them draw their weapons.

Trip wire suggests, “Hey, I got an idea so that none of us are left behind. You follow my voice. That way we can find each other and help each other get out of this place.”

“Okay, just keep talking. I know you’re good at that.”

“Fuck off!” But even Tripwire can’t avoid laughing at what Bebida said about him. “Shadow, I know you can hear me. You should do the same thing, so we can all get out of here together.”

“Hey Trip, you know what I just thought of.”

“What?”

“What if there’s someone or something bad in here. It’s gonna find us by our voices too.”

Trip wire’s pleasant mood disappears, he realizes that Bebida is correct. He also realizes that he has no choice. “You’re right, so you need to get over here ASAP.”

Bebida stops when he sees to his left, what appears to be a pair of red eyes glaring at him. “What the hell is that?”

Trip wire doesn’t see it, “What is what? What are you talking about?”

The eyes disappeared. “You didn’t see that?”

“See what?”

“We are not alone in here. And I don’t mean Shadow either. Arm yourself”

“Already did.”

“Good. Keep talking but keep your eyes peeled.”

“Talk about what?”

“I don’t know, recite the fucking alphabet for all I care, but keep talking because something is in here with us. We’ll have a better chance together.”

Tripwire starts the alphabet and the whole time frantically swinging his blade around. Bebida is trying to follow his voice, when another pair of red eyes opens, directly in front of him this time. “You don’t see that? Come on you gotta see that! I’m not hallucinating!”

“Maybe you are because I ain’t seeing anything but darkness. And that is how Explode and me got tricked, by some hallucinogenic in the air. It was scent-less too.”

This theory doesn’t comfort Bebida at all, especially when the second and third pair of eyes appears, also in front of him. Finally, a fourth pair appears to his right. “I’m not hallucinating shit!” Bebida starts to feverishly swing his knife in front of him. “Come on, motherfuckers! I’m ready for you!”

Tripwire looks in direction of the yelling but still sees nothing. “Damn it man, you’re spooking me out. Knock it off, there’s nothing here!”

Bebida screams in pain, then yells, “Take that!” An eerie squeal shoots across the room.

“Oh shit! There is something in here. Hang in there. I’m on the way!” Tripwire yells as he runs blindly in the darkness toward the sound of blood squirting, teeth tearing flesh and steel meeting flesh. Bebida exchanges screams with squeals. There is total silence. This sudden and eerie silence makes Tripwire slow his pace to a slow walk.

“Bebida?”

Nothing.

“Bebida? You okay?”

Nothing. Tripwire keeps walking toward where he believed he heard the ruckus. That is until he trips over something. He falls flat on his face again. As he put his hand down to stand up, it lands in a puddle.

Afraid that the puddle is blood but with a need to confirm it, he lifts his hand right in front of his face. It’s covered in blood. He figures it’s most likely Bebida’s. As he lowers his hand from his face, he sees the last thing he will ever see. A pair of red eyes glaring at him, directly in front of him.

Chapter Nineteen

Rugged, exhausted, stands up and says, “Man, how in the world are we supposed to get back out now with that rock blocking the exit?” He directed that question at Hack who he believed was standing behind him.

The villager tugs on Rugged’s injured arm, “Ow! What the hell are you doing?” He turns around to see that Hack’s momentum must have carried him right into a giant spider web. A mazed, Rugged says, “Wow! This has to be the world’s biggest web ever constructed.”

Hack struggles to move around and mumbles something incoherent. He’s stuck face first into the web.

“Well at least I know you’re still alive,” says Rugged as he cuts away with his machete, “You’re very lucky the creature that created this wasn’t home, otherwise you would be either devoured or full of some kind of body-numbing, and probably fatal substance.”

Almost on cue, the villager starts to scream, “How come I have the feeling I don’t even need to look to know why he’s screaming.”

Once his head is free from the web, Hack yells, “Look at the size of that thing! It’s coming damn it! Get me out of here! Chop! Chop! Chop!”

A giant black spider is making its way down from the top of the spider web, where it was resting. Rugged cuts the last piece holding Hack up and he falls to the floor.

“Let’s get out of here!” yells Hack.

Rugged replies, “To where? The exit is blocked and I don’t see another way out!”

The spider gets closer as it edges down the massive web. The villager once again tugs on Rugged’s injured arm.

“Ouch! Not now!”

The villager then tugs on Hack’s arm, Hack turns, “What?”

The villager says something that Hack doesn’t understand but he does figure out that the captive is trying to point out something by his gestures. Hack looks at where he’s pointing and notices a hole behind a bush that might be an exit. Hack yells to Rugged, “Look, let’s try that hole unless you think you can take out this spider?” Rugged replies by heading to the hole. Hack and the prisoner follow safely behind.

Chapter Twenty

In a dark tunnel, a block of wall is rotated revealing a secret panel. Emerging out of it is a battle worn Shadow. She staggers out of the darkness, into the dimly lit passageway. She staggers and uses the opposite wall to brace herself from falling.

Her outfit is torn and ripped in numerous spots. From these exposed parts, visible are claw marks covered in blood, most of it greenish in color. Her facemask had been ripped at the bottom exposing a section of her face from the bottom of her nose down. The back of her pull on mask is only partially tucked in with her dirty blonde hair sticking out.

She tries to walk down the corridor with a firm grip still on her two daggers, as if she was expecting a fight. Both daggers are covered in green blood. Every few steps she either stops to gain balance or use a wall for leverage. She spits out a mouthful of blood.

Despite looking as if she's in bad shape and experiencing unimaginable pain, the exposed part of her face shows no sign of it. One of her sleeves, almost completely torn off exposes an elaborate half gauntlet on her wrist. She leans against a rock, once again in effort to gain balance. After shaking her head in what looks like an effort to shake out the cobwebs, she continues stumbling down the hallway leaving a very visible blood trail. She tries to lean against another wall, but the wall was a fake. It was made out of some brittle substance that crumbled easily under her weight, sending her to the floor of a new found room.

She tries to stand but can only manage to get to one knee before she can regain her senses. She looks forward. It seems that she has found a hidden oasis, complete with palm-like trees with a shallow pool between. The pool starts to bubble. Shadow grips the dagger that is still in her hand, the one she didn't drop when she raised to one knee.

The water starts to rise and form into a shape, the shape of a woman. A very soothing voice emanates from it. "I am Julia, a water elemental of wishes. Welcome, traveler."

Shadow has her head locked in the direction of Julia but doesn't respond to her.

"I sense you are in great pain. Unfortunately, I'm under the control of the one who summoned me. I can still grant you a single wish as long as it does not concern my master, the treasures of this tomb or your life force, which I must regretfully drain once your wish is granted."

Shadow has mustered up enough energy to stand fully erect. She readies herself for battle but then suddenly collapses. She lays motionless on the sandy floor.

“Poor child.” Julia said. Then she dissipates back into the pool in which she came.

Chapter Twenty-One

Rugged complains, “We’ve been crawling through this damn crawl space for a good minute now.”

“Yeah, but it beats becoming a human fly waiting to be devoured.” Hack is following right behind Rugged.

“Yes, but all this hands and knees stuff is killing my arm. Hey, where’s the villager? Did you leave him behind?”

“No, he’s right here behind me.”

“Why didn’t you put him between us? He could have escaped.”

“And go where? Back to Bram Stoker’s version of Charlotte’s Web?”

“I see your point.”

Rugged notices a light off in the distance. “Hey, finally a place where we can probably stand up.”

Rugged comes to a small square exit with a golden color cloth covering it. He stops.

Hack asks, “What you waiting for?”

Rugged shakes his head, then moves the curtain and crawls through.

Once all three are out of the crawl space, each one has a look of disbelief. Rugged speaks out first. “We finally found it!” He almost has to squint his eyes because of the brightness of the room thanks to the light reflecting off the massive amounts of gold piles.

Hack smiling says, “So it does exist? There must be billions of dollars in treasures and artifacts in here.”

Rugged has already started to dig into a pile and emerges wearing a crown and holding a scepter. “I’m the new king!”

Hack laughs then says in a serious tone, “Hey, we need to find that damn Stone of Sunfire. It’s a fiery red ruby embedded into a necklace.”

Looking around the room and at its numerous, massive piles of wealth, Rugged replies, “There must be at least one hundred red rubies in those piles.”

“I doubt that it would be in any of these piles. Remember? Foymama collected treasures and artifacts that had special powers like the Stone of Sunfire. So it must be over there.” Hack points at a row of chests, and other royal boxes lined up by a golden throne. Seated on the throne is a solid gold statue of the king.

“Talk about vain.”

Both men head over to the row of chests and start opening them.

“So that is what he looked like huh?” Rugged asked.

“Yeah, pretty close. Well, at least as the old portraits of him portrayed him.”

“Pretty mean looking dude.”

“And was pretty mean too. Hey, I just thought about something. How the hell are we supposed to get out of here with the treasures and our lives?”

“Well, we both are pretty knowledgeable. Maybe we can find something that with the power to protect us. Like Johan’s Stone of Protection.”

“Who knows? It’s worth a try.”

They start digging again through the various boxes.

The head of the golden statue turns toward them and frowns. They don’t notice it or the fact that it’s starting to stand up out of its seat.

“Hey what is this? Why does it look so familiar?” Hack asked as he held up a bracelet.

“I believe it’s the...” Rugged started to say until he noticed the approaching and angry looking golden king.

“Look out!” Hack didn’t move fast enough as the top half of his head is cut off cleanly.

“Oh shit!” Rugged screamed as he leaped away and pulled out his machete.

The golden king gives pursuit. Rugged swings his machete and hits the statute on the arm and the blade breaks without leaving a mark.

“Damn.”

Walking backwards, Rugged trips over a treasure chest.

Realizing that his life is about to end, Rugged shrugs. “Oh well.” He closes his eyes right before the statue slams its sword tip through his heart.

The statue pulls out the sword that is dripping wet with blood. It turns and heads toward the last remaining intruder. The villager, who was still over by the covered entrance, drops down to the ground and balls up into a fetal position. Shaking and crying, the villager watches helplessly as the golden statue of the king approaches.

The statue stops in front of him and lifts the mighty golden sword high above its head. The villager screams and covers his face as the king brings the blade slicing through the air toward him.

Shaking feverishly and crying for what seems to him a long time, he starts to wonder if he’s dead. He peeks though his fingers and has to squint immediately from the sun glaring down on him.

With a confused look of disbelief, the villager slowly spreads his fingers and comes to find that he's lying down outside. It's a bright sunny day.

He stares forward to find the jungle in front of him. No sign of the tomb. He looks down at his chest. The Stone of Awareness rests in its usual place around his neck.

Completely confused and starting to wonder if he daydreamed all this, he wipes off beads of sweat that are forming on his forehead. In his native tongue, he says out loud, "Was it a dream? Did I pass out? Must have been the heat."

He turns around to head home and falls to the ground in shock as he discovers all the non-functioning equipment that was left behind when they first entered the tomb.

He continues to stare at the equipment and shake in fear.

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