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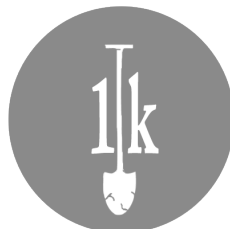
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IN PANKECH: THE GHOST'S CHAMBER

A tale by D. Vincent Baker

Illustrated by Nate Marcel

So it was that Jakko Orange and Tam-tam took residence in the apartments occupied formerly by the Garusco. The Garusco had been five in number, but had considered it appropriate to maintain a sixth suite for their household sponsor ghost. It was into this sixth suite that Jakko Orange installed himself, allowing Tam-tam her choice of the rest, or indeed all of the rest to occupy if she chose.

They were in the city Pankech, where the great Tabic falls into the Bay of Bau. The city Pankech was small, high, and rich, an intricate labyrinth of buildings, customs, and the interests of the wealthy. Jakko Orange could see that Tam-tam was eager to explore it, eager to test that thing within her against its walls.

He filled an empty barley crock with coins and set it beside the outmost courtyard door. He sat down with her to give her instruction.

“Niece,” he said, “when the grocer comes, put a coin into his hand and take what he brings. When the landlord comes, put a coin into his hand and decline to admit him. If he insists, do not allow him, but put another coin into his hand, and another, one by one, until he departs. If soldiers come, or beggars, or burglars, or rough folk with sticks for beating, or if the mayor of the city comes (you will know her by her ivory robes), the same.”

Tam-tam looked at the crock of coins. She remained skeptical of the use of money.

“If any come who refuse coins, they must be our enemies. Them you should admit. Lead them into whatever chamber you choose and murder them. If they are not our enemies, they will accept coins.”

“What am I to do with their bodies, uncle?”

“I think none will refuse coins. Sleep by night and wake for the day. If you become hungry but the grocer has not come, take a coin, go down to the street, and buy the first food you see. Do not be away long. We will explore the city after. Without you I will be more vulnerable, so I thank you for staying near me.”

She frowned, but nodded. He thought she would probably obey him, and when she did not, that his own safeguards would be adequate. They dined together on pressed curd simmered with nuts and vinegar.

Jakko Orange bade Tam-tam goodnight and went into the ghost's chambers.

It was a spacious apartment of two rooms, with a tiled alcove for ablution. Night air came through the windows' lattices, with the smells of the sea, of their neighbors' suppers, and of the evening-blooming flowers in their neighbors' balcony gardens. The barking, calling, sing-song of a city after the sun has



set. There was no true door but a folding lattice. This Jakko Orange closed. He would have preferred to seal it utterly, but this was impossible, so he only rubbed a little wax onto its edge and pronounced it closed. He did the same to each window, carefully, in turn. He lit none of the sconces, but drew cold water into the alcove basin and from it filled a little stone bowl. He composed himself on the floor with the bowl of water at hand. He drank from the bowl. He said a word. He had wrest this word from an ancient tablet in the sullen land of Mamnoro. He had overthrown its guardian, stolen the word, and smashed the tablet so that none after could read it. It was a considerable sorcery, this word, and Jakko Orange worried too late whether its power might overcome him.

He rose from his body and paced a slow ring in a place made by his sorcery into a vast expanse of fiery pillars. The ghost of the Garusco was not as he expected. It resembled the Garusco not at all. It was a squat hulk, a muscular and ugly toad-man with eyes from whom the stars radiated, in whose two hands were a gutting knife and a human liver, black and oozing. These it held out before it, and advanced upon Jakko Orange.

“Where are my sons, and their sons, and their son’s sons...?” it said. It recited its male descendants to the hundredth generation, but in the sorcerous state this was neither lengthy nor tedious. Jakko Orange understood its distress and felt the pang. He and Tamtam had ended its lineage upon the earth.

“We will talk of them soon, if we are able,” Jakko Orange said, to ease the pang he felt. He knew that by speaking instead of acting he revealed his guilt, and indeed the ghost’s eyes flew wide with fury and pain, and it drew in its unearthly breath for an anguished shriek. In a moment, it would fall upon Jakko Orange, devour him in its toothless mouth, dismember him with its knife and powerful arms, squat upon him and defile him with its filthiest nature. Preflections of its acts assailed Jakko Orange, but he spoke his first safeguard and they bore down upon and overwhelmed his shadow instead.

He left his shadow to suffer and writhe. He moved glittering like a fish. His hands, or in them, were cruel spiritual hooks. These he fixed into the face of the ghost of the Garusco, one in its nostril, one in its eye. The hooks’ barbs caught and held and when the ghost

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"I WOULD HUNT
THE WOLF,
SEE THE TERROR
IN HIS EYES..."

"...AND DRIVE HIS
PACK INTO
THE EARTH."

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of the Garusco made its departure, howling, Jakko Orange went with it.

They plunged into one of the flaming pillars. It was eternal, boundless above and below. They ascended or descended at great speed for some time. The heat was awful. In it, the ghost of the Garusco sizzled and crackled, its gray skin blistering then peeling, fluids boiling within and bursting out in splattering steam. Jakko Orange spoke his second safeguard, and where the fire touched him it was reduced to a pale and unharmed blue softness. Whenever the ghost of the Garusco tried to leap out of the fiery pillar, kicking frantically with its powerful legs, Jakko Orange twisted the hooks in its nostril and its eye and bore it ever more necessarily within. Only when it stopped struggling and hung still, suspended in the flame, cooking, did he release it. He fell out of the fiery pillar alone and stood in an unfamiliar place.

There was cool pale marble, or a blanket of spasming torment, upon which he seemed to walk. The pillars of flame here were white-hot and still, like rods of light. Water lapped nearby at the verge of a gracious reflecting pool or else bubbled from a thousand slit throats, the fallen of battle granted mercy. Overhead arched a sky of blackened bone, from which sometimes fell a cool rain of refreshing gore. In comfortable repose upon a bed of razor-sharp flints and poisons was a vast he-devil. Grotesque, broken creatures fanned it with their sobs and groans.

Jakko Orange crept close to it, not eager to awaken it. This was the he-devil Koeq, a great master of its kind. Upright, it would stand as tall as an earthly watchtower. It had three eyes, all closed, three arms, and three legs. Upon its lips as it slept were seven spells. Such was its wickedness, it had stolen these from the world in the childhood of humanity. Jakko Orange came near. The attendant creatures withdrew to the ends of their chains, whimpering, trailing blood, as he approached. He spoke his third safeguard. His image faded, dissolved into a vaguery, like a mist or the light cast by reflection off a surface of water. The he-devil

Koeq shifted in its sleep, murmured, and twitched one enormous bird-taloned foot. Jakko Orange froze still and waited for it to settle again, which it did, before coming closer yet.

He was at its very head. He leaned his ear close to its gargantuan lips and he could hear the hissing riot of the seven spells there. He listened, and listened more, until his sorcerous senses were all he knew and all else was gone. One of the spells slipped loose, floated up, lodged in his ear and set his brain humming, like breath sets humming the reed.

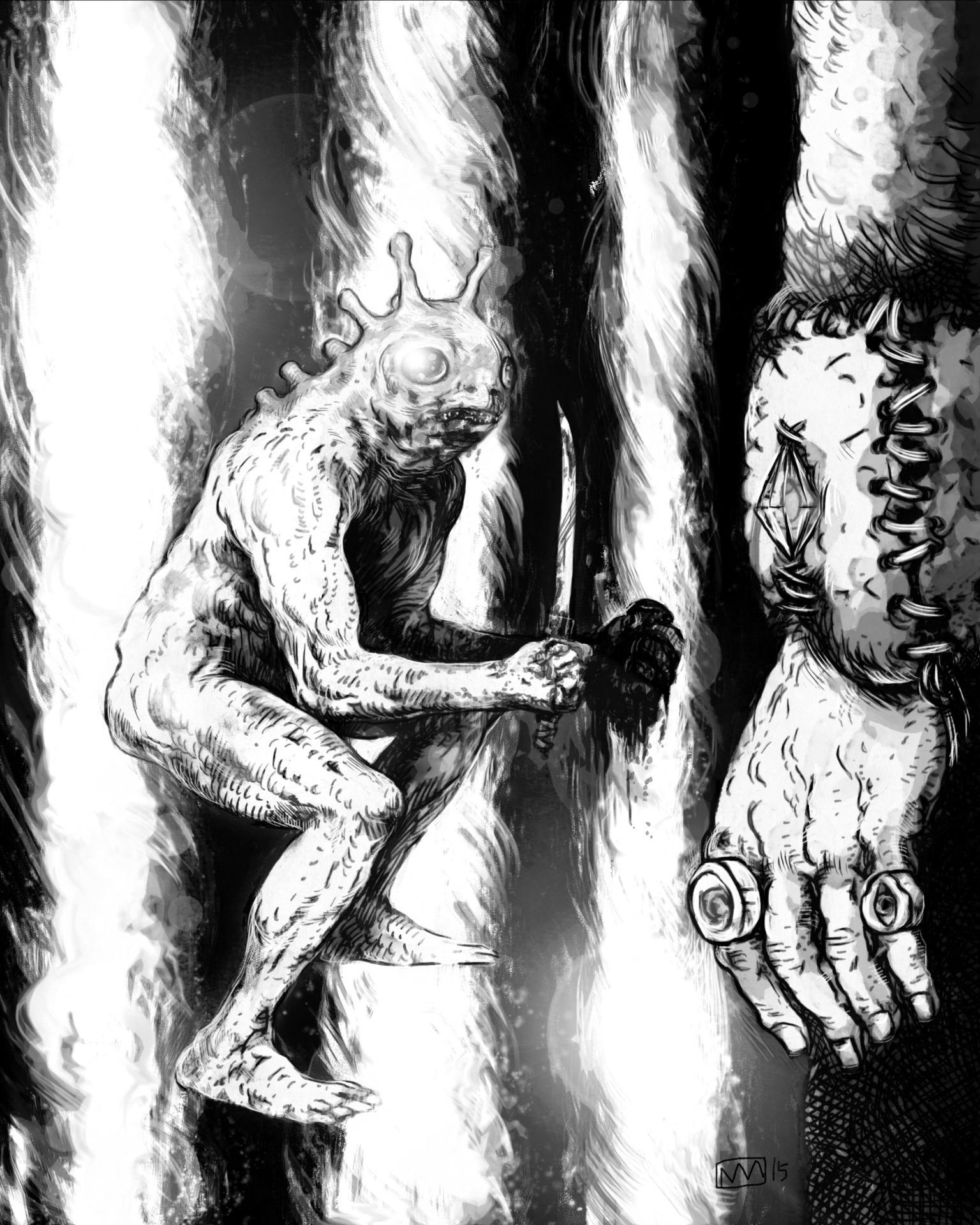
Jakko Orange removed the spell from his ear and placed it into the hollow space under his jaw for safekeeping. He leaned out again, always slowly, with perfect patience, to steal the next, and it was then that the he-devil Koeq opened its three terrible eyes. They first impaled his safeguard of invisibility and tore it to slivers, like the wedge and hammer tear a log into split staves. Then they fixed upon Jakko Orange directly and he felt himself dismayed.

The he-devil Koeq smiled. Behind its lips thirty-two sharp serrated beaks clicked open and closed instead of teeth.

Jakko Orange fled. He ran across the marble courtyard, seeing no end to it. He did not know whether he should try to descend again by one of the fiery pillars, if he could manage it without the ghost of the Garusco to carry him, or even which pillar to try. Behind him, the he-devil Koeq made sounds of amusement and hove itself upright on its couch. There was the crunching sound of shattering flint and a stench of poison fumes.

"I do not pursue you, Jakko Orange, though you have stolen from me and I hate you," said the he-devil Koeq. The voice issued from each of its thirty-two beaks at once in a terrible creaking discord. Jakko Orange ran, but the distance between them did not matter.

"I see with whom you keep. She has seized upon you. You imagine that you can tame her, Jakko Orange! Such is your arrogance. I am delighted by it." It made



again its sound of amusement. "Go, Jakko Orange, to pursue your arrogance where it will take you. My spell which you have stolen from me, I begrudge you, yet I think I will take more pleasure from the destruction you visit upon yourself. I, mere I, am not the torturer that is she. Remember that I hate you, Jakko Orange. Fear her."

Jakko Orange remembered suddenly his fourth safeguard. He spoke it. Far away, his mortal body lifted the small stone bowl and tried to drink. Water spilled and he fell into his body. He cried out, flung out his arms and legs. The bowl tumbled.

He did not recognize Tam-tam at first, but put from his mind what he saw when he saw her.

He had been in sorcerous trance for some days. Tam-tam was not reliably certain how many. She had been exploring the city without him after all. She wouldn't tell him what she had seen or done there.

In one of the abandoned apartments of the Garusco, he found the body of the landlord. A terror came over him and he stood staring at it. When Tam-tam came to stand beside him he could barely speak. She reached up to put her small hand in his, a gesture which did not

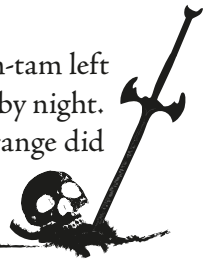
come naturally to her but which she had studied, and which he now rebuffed, clenching his fist shut.

"He would not accept coins?" he said. He managed to say it and his voice did not quite fail.

"He pressed me for more coins than I chose to give him," Tam-tam said, with some indifference. "He was not adequately polite."

Jakko Orange stared at the bloody body in dismay, and did not speak, and would not turn his face to look at her.

So it was that Jakko Orange and Tam-tam left the city of Pankech, in hushed hurry, by night. Where they would go next, Jakko Orange did not think. They only went.



IN SEARCH OF A SLAYING

A tale by Epidiah Ravachol

Illustrated by Patricia Smith

There, in the rain, Sister Buzzard sulked. She watched the strangers dry in her hollow, taunted by the scent of the rabbit they cooked. She knew this would not be meat enough for the four of them, even before they sucked the bones. And yet she waited. She waited because waiting was her talent, one she was born with and one she honed for decades. The rabbits fed themselves by foraging. The strangers fed themselves by hunting. And Sister Buzzard fed herself by waiting.

She knew there were no true divisions among diner, guest, and course. If these four strangers could see her waiting in the dark, they would send swift and angry stones to invite her to the meal, and this was not the fate she would choose this night. So she brooded in private, knowing that it would earn her no bone.

She could have wallowed there in the storm until the dawn cut across the wasted plain. But their laughter grew tedious as the hour grew late. So she stretched her massive wings to the span of human corpse and loped towards the strangers, flashing her throat and belly to the fire just before taking flight, as if to say, "Behold, the meal I deny you even as you deny me yours."

The storm had driven most of the plain's denizens into their holes, where they huddled in prayer, imploring their gods not to drown them. Those that remained

aboveground cast long and fleeting shadows in the occasional lightning. Shadows that Sister Buzzard could easily see as she rolled along with the thunder. There was yet another stranger far out on the plain, making its way towards the fire set by the others in her hollow.

This could be a meal worth waiting for.

Humans, who tended not to enjoy each other as meat, would on occasion make a gift of one another to Sister Buzzard and her kind. But this was not always the case. And her dignity would not allow another insult like the scent of the rabbit meat. If this was to be the meal she awaited, she would need a more reliable accomplice. So she set out to find Old Lost Cat before this stranger could reach the safety of the others.

Old Lost Cat had no love for the rain. It blinded her nose, dampened her bones and left her with little patience. Sister Buzzard found her soaked beneath a lone, sickly tree that bent in the wind. When the bird alit upon its stoutest branch, Old Lost Cat growled and hissed at her before prowling away.

Sister Buzzard leapt to the ground to follow, and the lioness pounced. With a powerful beat of her massive wings, the bird danced back. A great flurry and caterwaul rose up. Within the breadth of a lightning



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strike, it seemed as if these two old beasts would set to each other's throats. Many who nestled now in their tunnels would have rejoiced at the scene.

But the two had long been dinner companions, and while this was no guarantee of Sister Buzzard's body, it did mean she knew well the cat's moods. Old Lost Cat was tired and annoyed. The bloodlust was not upon her.

"Dear friend," Sister Buzzard shouted above the thunder, keeping a wary distance from the circling cat, "how long have we known each other?"

"Too long!"

"Since you wandered, wounded, and dazed from the western mountains, and we shared the bear cub you dragged with you."

"Ever the thief," Old Lost Cat growled.

"And in all the seasons that have passed, how many times have I led you to a warm and nourishing meal?"

"None. I have always found my own meals. And you have always found mine."

"Then let me make amends on this miserable night."

The lioness ceased her circling and lounged in the rain, grooming herself. Encouraged, but still cautious, Sister Buzzard hopped toward her, teasing forth the cat's attention with her proximity.

"There is a lone human wandering the plains just south of here. A larger meal than most, but one, surely, that has little defense from your mighty fang and claw."

"I have seen her," Old Lost Cat said, without interrupting her grooming.

Sister Buzzard cocked her head, peering at Old Lost Cat.

The storm rattled the plain as the bird waited for the cat to prowl and the cat for the bird to hop closer still. This was a long game that both had mastered many

times over. But Sister Buzzard knew that while the stranger could navigate by the distant firelight, time was no friend of hers.

"Inscrutable cat! Where is your hunger? If you have seen this stranger, why have you not slain her?"

Satisfied in her victory, Old Lost Cat luxuriously stretched out, as if the sun had sped its way into the night sky and seared the clouds away to provide her with a patch of warm, dry ground to nap upon. "I have seen her and I have caught her strange and sorcerous scent. There are two that reside within that flesh, and neither of them are prey. She is no meal for us."

"You are no hunter!"

"I am an old hunter. And we do not grow old by ignoring our wits. We must await another meal, dear friend, and I would have us wait together."

With two mighty beats of her wings, Sister Buzzard threw herself well clear of Old Lost Cat. She held no illusions about their relationship. "We do not grow old by ignoring our wits," she agreed. "I will, in my way, find us another meal. Though I fear none as bountiful as this."

"Patience, Sister Buzzard. There is another hunter on the plain tonight and he stalks your human. I caught wind of him to the south of here before the storm came. Wait here with me. We will let them sort out what meal to leave us tonight."

"Clever cat," Sister Buzzard cooed as she hopped further yet, "I shall find your hunter and speak to him myself. In case he is in need of a guide." She then took flight again, not looking back to see if Old Lost Cat had pounced or not.

The storm lulled. Distant thunder heralded more strong weather to come and a soft rain persisted, but bold stars peered through intermittent breaks in the clouds. The slick plain below shimmered with rippling moonlit pools. Instead of washing the scents from the

air, each raindrop kicked up a cacophony of damp odors. It was no time to be a hungry bird.

Sister Buzzard did not find the stalker as easily as she had the woman he stalked. He was tall for a human, but not nearly as tall as the woman. They had the same dark skin, but the woman stood out against the lightning walking with a proud gait. He was splayed out on the wet plain with only a single wide ribbon of purple cloth draped down his back—a well-thewed morsel to comfort her on this miserable night.

She circled only momentarily before descending. The storm robbed her of her grace and her hunger robbed her of her caution. In the space of the final heartbeat before her claws dug into the mud, she knew regret. She saw, in a puddle that had collected about his face, the reflection of a single star rippling, not from rain but from the air escaping his nostril.

Too late she began beating her wings to throw herself clear of his reach. He snapped out and seized her by her shoulder. His arms coiled about her body, drew her to his chest, and held her there.

She feared for her life and she feared for her wings. They were one and the same. She let her wings go

limp and struck with her beak and talons instead. She would have torn his abdomen open and spilled his hot porridge into the mud to lap up at her leisure after he had bled out, but he was as a serpent, twisting about her with his arms and legs. As they tossed in the mud, he took possession of the leverage and swiftly took possession of her.

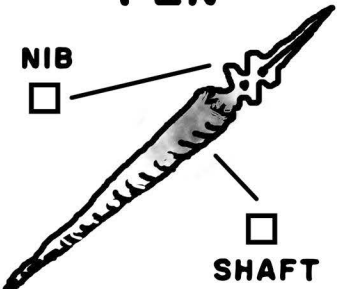
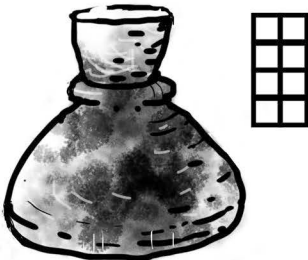
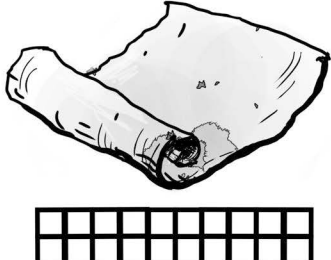
But he did not hurt her.

He whispered uncanny syllables that forced their way into her skull. As his embrace held her and struggled to control her movements, his words contended with her panic. In his arms, she learned his strange tongue.

“I seek not to harm you, Sister Buzzard. I have only questions for you.”

She would not answer. He had her pinned to the ground and her eyes wildly drunk in this new and terrifying perspective. She thought of the scurriers and slitherers who saw only this immediate horizon their entire lives until the very moment she plucked them from their tiny world and drew them into the broad, beautiful sky. She began to miss the sky, certain that she would never return.

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Knowing that she could not let melancholy edge out her fear, she began thrashing in the mud. He did not tighten his grip, but twisted about to swaddle her in her own wings.

“Do not toy with me,” she squawked, “like Old Lost Cat with her meals!”

“You are no meal to me, Sister Buzzard,” he said, with an unmalicious laugh. “I do not kill for my food.”

After a pause, he added, “Or eat what has been killed.”

“And yet you have the cunning and prowess of one who does. I do not believe I shall trust you, stranger.”

They had rolled over so that Sister Buzzard was atop her assailant, staring into the rain while he lay in the muck. A moonbow faintly arced through the sky above them.

“I am Muaphet. I will not harm you, whether you trust me or not. But I have need of trusting you. So know that I am also Raum and to be Raum is to be death’s own shadow. Wherever I am, you can be certain of a meal.”

“You do not ease my doubts.”

“I have lost my way, Sister Buzzard. I will release you and you will be free to soar and hunt the plain. But if you do not help me find my way, I cannot lead you to a meal.”

His limbs slipped loose and Sister Buzzard threw herself into the sky.

The storm swelled again. An unrestrained wind cut across the flat land. For the sixth time, Sister Buzzard had circled back to watch Muaphet press against the sheets of rain. What little progress he made was in the wrong direction. This would not feed her.

She landed a wary distance from Muaphet and shouted through the downpour. “Why do you seek the woman who is really two?”

Water sprayed from Muaphet’s lips as he laughed, “You know much. More than I expected.”

Flattery had long been her tool against Old Lost Cat, and Sister Buzzard was too suspicious of it to accept it herself. “I know only that you hunt her and that two beings reside within her flesh. All else confounds me.”

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“They are Tynru, a devil-swallower, and Vi Lohn, the devil that resides within.”

“I have swallowed many things, but I am still and only Sister Buzzard.”

Muaphet laughed again. There was richness in the laugh that Sister Buzzard savored. It was not the laugh of the jackals whom she had occasion to dine with or the laughter of the four strangers that even now sat warm and dry in her hollow. His laugh was far more gratifying to her ears.

“I know many priests and sages who would disagree with you. But I also know many who would disagree with them.” Muaphet paused in his wanderings to contemplate this as rain ran down his naked pate. “And I may disagree with them all. But a devil-swallower does not swallow a devil as you would a mouse. It is an ordeal of many days and takes months more of preparation.”

Sister Buzzard, who had wandered closer to Muaphet to better hear him, hopped back. “There are none who can wait for a meal as I do!”

“Truly! I meant no offense. But a devil is no meal. It is a burden, like a throne or an oath. Only the very foolish undertake such endeavors impulsively.”

Sister Buzzard took flight once more, calling back, “Your riddles bore me! We will meet again at some future meal!”

It had been a threat, but Muaphet only laughed again. It was still not unpleasant to her, despite her irritation.

Coruscations of lightning stretched out across the sky, turning Sister Buzzard away. She landed further along Muaphet’s path and preened her feathers, awaiting his arrival.

“Ho, Sister Buzzard. Are we to eat now?”

Ignoring his mockery, she asked, “If a devil is not food, why swallow one?”

“This devil is very old and slumbered for many years on a very distant plain. There it would remain, content, were it not for a lord of the humans who, out of idleness, called it to his court and made to keep it as a pet.”

The word “pet” stung Sister Buzzard’s mind. She did not quite understand all that Muaphet was saying, but she had over her many years seen a few creatures domesticated by human hands. Not so long ago, she was confounded by an alien peregrine that stole her kills and brought them to her human mistress. The encounter left Sister Buzzard wounded and wise with fear.

“But as you know, the oldest things are often the cleverest. This devil, pet as it was, found ways to make mischief. Mischief that terrified this lord of humans.

“A devil-swallower was called to court, to swallow the devil and carry it into exile.”

Slowly, without menace, Muaphet had advanced on Sister Buzzard. It was a trick that Old Lost Cat knew, but one that had never worked on the bird before. She found herself peering up at the towering Muaphet and hopping along with him as he continued to trudge in the mud. “I know where this devil-swallower is and I will tell you, if you tell me why you seek her.”

“That is a fair deal. Tell me, Sister Buzzard, what do you know of grudges?”

“If they cannot be eaten, I do not care to know of them.”

“I would wager you have eaten a grudge in your many years. Or at least, a grudge has served you a meal. They are human fevers that make them slay for reasons other than food or defense. Vast and bountiful fields of human corpses have been reaped by grudges and left ripe for your kin.”

Sister Buzzard cawed gleefully. “Why all this talk of devils-who-are-not-meals and pets when you could have spoken of these grudges?”

Muaphet crouched to look Sister Buzzard in her eye, rivers of rain pouring around the dark apples of his cheeks. "Tynru swallowed Vi Lohn and fled the city of the human lord, but the night of their flight, at a banquet that would have made you senseless with jealousy, the human lord's chimerical brother-in-law was slain, opened by a steely dagger held in the devil-swallower's hand. Now they are hunted by grudge-seekers."

Giddy, Sister Buzzard danced about, shaking the rain from her great wings. "Then you have the grudge-fever, Muaphet! You will serve dinner for this old bird! I know where your prey is headed! I know where to find her!"

"You mistake me, sweet Sister Buzzard," Muaphet laughed, rising from his crouch. "Grudge-seekers do hunt them, but I am not among them. For it could have been either devil or devil-swallower that commanded the knife. I seek to discover which and protect the other from a fate they had not chosen."

Sister Buzzard loped into the air. "Damn you, Muaphet! Find your own devil-swallower!" And she soared off in search of a grudge-seeker.

A plan startling and elegant began to float above the storm and hunger in Sister Buzzard's thoughts. She scoured the plan for Old Lost Cat. Perhaps, with the right flattery, the proper appeal to a common interests, she could lead the lioness into Muaphet's path. There, where writhing flesh met fang and claw, a meal was sure to be born. Regardless of the victor, Sister Buzzard would finally be sated. Some alien thought within her whispered promises of satisfaction beyond a full stomach.

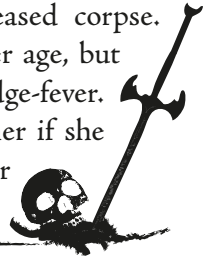
But we she landed before her old friend, she caught Old Lost Cat licking her chops. "Traitor! You have hunted after all! And have you left any for poor Sister Buzzard?"

Old Lost Cat's lips peeled back in a scarlet grin. "It was no more than a vole. It would have only whetted your appetite and further agitated your impatience."

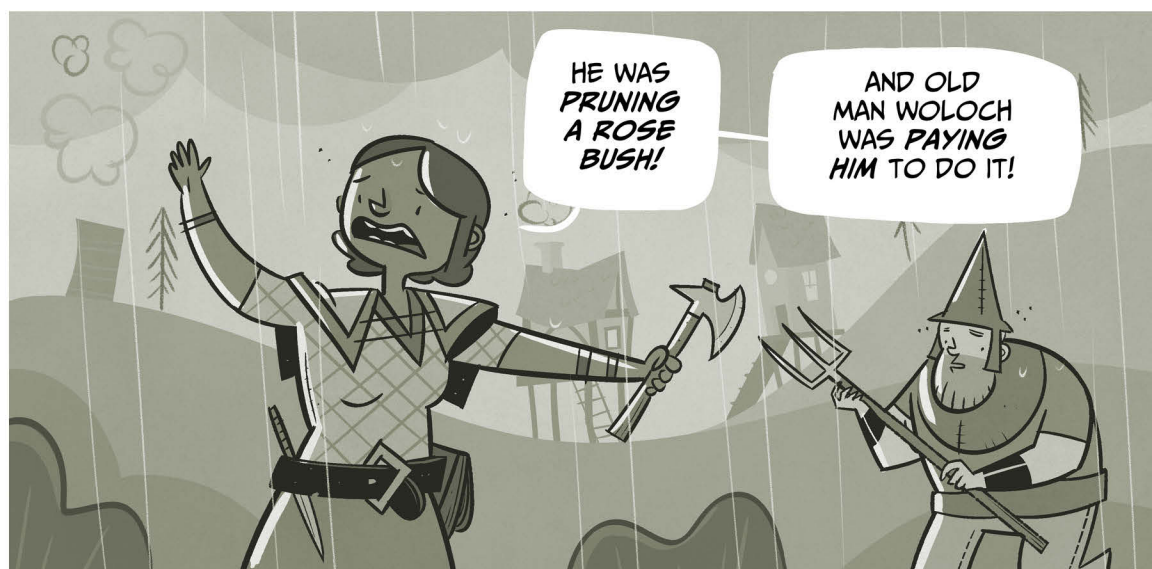
The insult drove the plan from Sister Buzzard's brain as she abandoned flattery and appeals to screech curses upon the cat.

"But dear friend," Old Lost Cat mocked, "I have found what you seek. Yet another human crawls along the plain tonight. He is riddled with pustules and burns with a fever. He will not last long in this storm and would make a fine meal for a stomach as stout as yours."

Sister Buzzard laughed at last. "My gratitude, friend," she shouted as she took to the violent sky. Old Lost Cat would have no part of a diseased corpse. Neither should Sister Buzzard at her age, but she knew now the secret of the grudge-fever. A meal would yet present itself to her if she just waited long enough. And Sister Buzzard knew how to wait.







* I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS --ED.



IT WAS
STEALING OUR
JOBS TOO?!



YOU KNOW THE QUEEN
IS A LIZARDMAN, RIGHT?



FIRST OF ALL,
SHE'S A
LIZARDWOMAN.



SECOND OF ALL,
NO SHE ISN'T.



IT'S JUST THAT GREEN
SKIN, NICTITATING EYES
AND TAILS WERE ALL THE
RAGE IN THE '80S.



AND BESIDES,
SHE DIDN'T STEAL
ANYONE'S JOB.



IT WAS
GIVEN
TO HER
BY DIVINE
FIAT.



WHICH
WE'RE COOL
WITH,
CULTURALLY.

NO LONGER WITH US

A game by Dymphna Coy & Josh T. Jordan

Illustrated by Jabari Weathers

“She died doing what we love, stealing from fat princes and killing pox-nosed slave dealers. Now it’s time for her funeral.”

No Longer With Us is a game you play in one sitting. It takes at least an hour. You and two to four friends sit down, play cards, and tell a story about a group of adventurers at the funeral of an adventuring partner. Kendra of the Fringe, a true companion and sibling-in-arms, has perished under the wicked blades of the Dog Prince’s press-gangs, and you are gathered to lay her to rest.

HOW TO TEACH THIS GAME

Gather a deck of cards and a group of three to five players. One player should read aloud the Drawing Cards section below.

Next, a second player should read aloud the Exposition section.

Now, a third player should read aloud the Conflict section.

You are now playing the game. The first player should keep describing what happens until two or more players are in conflict. After that conflict is resolved, the player to the left of the first player takes over describing the scene. Every time a conflict is resolved,

the job of describing the scene passes to the left. When it is your turn to describe, focus on what is happening to the characters as a whole and especially on the character of the player to your left.

Drawing Cards

Take a standard deck of fifty-two cards with no jokers. Put all the nines, tens, jacks, queens, kings, and aces face down in one pile. Each player draws two cards from that pile. Then remove that pile from the table. It will not be used during the rest of the game.

Look at the two cards in your hand. Consult the Background Cards section below and choose one card to represent your Relationship with the deceased and one to represent your Agenda at the funeral. Show your Agenda card to the player to your right.

Shuffle the rest of the cards (twos through eights) and deal three cards to each player. Each player should now have five cards in her hand.

Exposition

Take turns briefly describing your relationship to the deceased to the other players. You may keep secrets from the other players at the beginning of the story, if you wish. Your characters are probably keeping secrets from each other. Reveal all secrets by the end of the game.



The first player describes what happens as the last character arrives and the funeral is about to begin. She should focus on what is happening to the characters as a whole and especially on the character of the player to her left. Each player should briefly describe what their character is doing.

Conflict

You may always describe what your character is doing, no matter who is describing the scene as a whole. You may interrupt any other player's description if it affects your character in a way that you disagree with. Whenever players disagree with how a description affects their characters, those players and the player describing the scene are in conflict and must use their cards.

During conflict, all involved each play a card face down, then flip their cards over. High card wins the conflict. Aces are high. The winner narrates the results of the conflict.

If you tie, another player not involved in the conflict narrates what happens. In this case, neither player completely wins the conflict. At the end of conflict, players involved each draw another card, so that everyone has five again.

If you play one of your face cards, interrupt the current scene and describe a Background Scene that explains your Relationship to the deceased or your Agenda at the funeral. This is an important moment that reveals something hidden from the other characters.

During the Background Scene, you are the only one who talks. None of the other players' characters appear in your scene, though the deceased may. A Background Scene is the only time when no player may interrupt your description. It should take you less than five minutes to describe what happens. After that, return to the current scene and resolve it as normal. High card wins.

The game ends when all the nines through aces have been played. At this point, players should take turns describing one important or interesting thing their characters do on the day after the funeral.

HOW TO PLAY WITH A FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Some groups may want to play *No Longer With Us* with a Funeral Director, a player who doesn't control one of the adventuring characters but who describes most of what is happening. If you choose to play this way, the following rules also apply to the game.

The Funeral Director reads this section, *How to Play With a Funeral Director*, after the Conflict section is read.

If you are the Funeral Director, your cards do not determine your relationship to the deceased character. They are just part of your hand.

All players should show the Funeral Director their Agenda card before the Funeral Director begins describing the setting of the funeral.

The Funeral Director describes what is happening in the story. She decides everything except what the other players' characters do, and what happens during a conflict.

CUSTOMIZING THE GAME

If you've played a roleplaying game before, you've probably told the story of a group of mighty adventurers exploring a dangerous place. One of those characters probably died. *No Longer With Us* can help you tell the story of what happens at that adventurer's funeral.

In order to use pre-existing characters from another game, just make sure to choose a character whose relationship to the deceased matches your relationship card or make sure to ignore any parts of the relationship card that don't make sense in your story.

BACKGROUND CARDS

Each player will begin the game with two background cards. One is your Relationship card. It tells you about your character's relationship with the deceased adventurer.

The other background card is your Agenda card. It tells you something about your character's goal for during the funeral. It may also tell you more about your relationship with the deceased or with another character. These cards are creative prompts for your imagination. Interpret and combine your Relationship and Agenda card in a way that makes sense to you.

Once you have your two cards, look at the list below. You may choose which of your cards is your Relationship card and which is your Agenda card.



Ace of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: You were superficially friendly with the deceased, but you deeply disliked them. What is the root of your ambivalence? What do you want out of this funeral?

AGENDA: You were complicit in the death of the deceased. You're at this funeral to keep up appearances and make sure that no one else knows.

King of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: You were a mentor or teacher to the deceased. How did your teachings fail them?

AGENDA: A map leading to a fantastical treasure miraculously appeared on the back of the deceased post-mortem. You would like a copy of it before the body is buried, cremated, or otherwise put beyond your reach. How can you do that without interrupting the funeral or violating the body?

Queen of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: You are the deceased, attending your own funeral in disguise. Why did you fake your death?

AGENDA: As a final request, the deceased asked you to apologize to someone on their behalf. The person they wronged is attending the funeral. Will they accept this posthumous apology? How will you make amends?

Jack of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: The deceased was a confederate in a crime that only the two of you knew about. What was it? Are you sure that no one else knows?

AGENDA: You know that the deceased had a huge cache of treasure hidden somewhere. You're not sure where it is, but someone at this funeral has to know something. Can you find out where it is without alerting the proper heirs to its location?

10 of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: You are a revenant, killed by the deceased. Are you here for vengeance, or have you changed your ways?

AGENDA: The deceased wronged you terribly once. Have you forgiven them, or are you here to finish exacting your revenge on their heirs?

9 of Spades

RELATIONSHIP: You idolized the deceased. Why do other people at the funeral view them differently?

AGENDA: The deceased appeared to you in an enigmatic dream, telling you that terrible misfortune would befall the funeral attendees. Can you figure out what they were trying to tell you before it's too late?



Ace of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: In the past, you and the deceased were both romantically involved with the same person. This person is now at the funeral and is telling lies about the deceased. Will you let their deceit go unchallenged?

AGENDA: The deceased's wealthy spouse or heir is making romantic advances toward you in a manner that is completely inappropriate for a funeral. Do you go along with it and praise your good fortune? Is there something more sinister at work here?

King of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: The deceased loved you more than anything else in the world but they never told you. Why not? How did you find out?

AGENDA: The deceased's family is arguing with the deceased's impoverished spouse over the estate. Can you intervene before the argument escalates?

Queen of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: You loved the deceased more than anything else in the world, but you never told them. Why not?

AGENDA: The corpse of the deceased is exhibiting unusual properties. It is incorruptible and exudes a balsamic odor, but even more miraculous is that the corpse blinks whenever a falsehood is spoken around it. Priests, civil authorities, and the family of the deceased are all squabbling over who gets possession of the body. How will the matter be settled?

Jack of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: The deceased rebuffed a romantic advance from you once. Have you forgiven them? Do you still carry a torch for them?

AGENDA: The corpse becomes possessed by an otherworldly entity. It demands that you offer it an

exorbitant sacrifice or the soul of the deceased will never rest. Has a powerful demon really taken over your friend's body, or is it just a small spirit bluffing its way to a big sacrifice? Is it just the work of a con artist magician?

10 of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: You and the deceased were lovers but you drifted apart long before their death. You tell yourself that it never could have ended any differently. Could it?

AGENDA: A funeral is a party, and you're here to be the belle of the ball. You want to cry harder, wail louder, and dress more outlandishly than anybody else here. Do you have what it takes to be the talk of the biggest social event of the season?

9 of Hearts

RELATIONSHIP: You and the deceased were secretly married. Why did you keep it secret? How will this affect their estate?

AGENDA: The deceased's funeral pyre explodes during cremation, causing the corpse (and all of the funeral goods) to disappear. Is this a theft, a joke, or something even more bizarre?



Ace of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: The deceased owes you a lot of money. Will you reclaim some of your lost goods through their estate?

AGENDA: A good friend insists on demonstrating their grief by being buried alive with the deceased or burning to death on their funeral pyre, citing either extreme grief or cultural tradition. Can you talk them out of it? Should you?

King of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: You are the godparent of the deceased's now-orphaned children. Will you fulfill your responsibilities to them?

AGENDA: The deceased is talking to you from the funeral bier. You seem to be the only person who can hear them. What secrets are they telling you?

Queen of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: You and the deceased were part of a politically subversive or otherwise forbidden secret society. Is your secret safe?

AGENDA: A magistrate shows up at the funeral, saying that the deceased is guilty of a terrible crime and must be brought to justice. They demand that the corpse be taken to a court and put on trial. Funeral-goers are outraged and say that the idea is ridiculous, but the magistrate does have the legal authority to do this. What do you do?

Jack of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: You are the religious authority that the deceased turned to in their life and you are now presiding over their funeral. What wisdom do you have to share with the funeral-goers?

AGENDA: An angry god or demon appears at the funeral. It claims that the deceased promised their soul to it, but it appears that their soul has peacefully gone to the afterlife or is otherwise beyond their reach. Now it demands that it receive the soul of the heir in the deceased's place. It threatens to lay a powerful curse upon the funeral party if not placated. Can this creature be appeased or driven off?

10 of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: The deceased laid a curse upon you that has prevented you from engaging in an activity that you've wanted to do for a long time. You see a perfect opportunity to start up your old habits at the funeral. Do you take it, or have you changed your ways?

AGENDA: You are a member of a professional guild, political party, or noble household that is feuding with another organization. High-ranking members of your rival organization are at the funeral and looking to pick a fight with you. How do you handle it?

9 of Diamonds

RELATIONSHIP: You and the deceased were the last two members of a tontine used to determine ownership of a powerful but dangerous artifact. Are you pleased with your good fortune or are you now cursed with a terrible burden?

AGENDA: Funeral games are being held in honor of the deceased. Some people are here to honor the dead. Some people are here to show off. Others are here to sabotage the games in order to assassinate their rivals. What role are you playing today?



Ace of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: You swore an oath to the deceased—if they died first, you would avenge them, no matter what. How do you feel about that now? Is it even possible?

AGENDA: Suddenly, an unidentifiable tree sprouts from the chest the deceased and rapidly matures into a full-grown tree. Describe the tree. What happens to the people who eat its oddly alluring fruit?

King of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: Unbeknownst to you until now, the deceased left their entire estate to you with specific instructions to keep the estate out of the hands of their heirs-apparent. They are, perhaps understandably, furious. Do you obey your friend's wishes and enjoy your good fortune or do you find a way to make the disappointed family members happy?

AGENDA: The spectre of the deceased appears, claiming that this funeral is not nearly lavish enough

and that they (and the rest of the family's ancestors) are disappointed. How can they be appeased?

Queen of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: At the funeral, you discover that one of your worst enemies is a close relative of the deceased. Can you put your feud aside for the duration of the funeral? How does this change the way you view the deceased?

AGENDA: You suspect that foul play was involved in the death of the deceased and that one of the culprits is attending this funeral.

Jack of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: You are expected to present a great work of art as a tribute to the deceased. What is it?

AGENDA: The funeral is taking place in the midst of the local temple's annual ecstatic rites. How are the funerary ceremonies affected by the surrounding bacchanal?

10 of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: You and the deceased were creative partners. The partnership was rather one-sided, however, with the deceased doing most of the work and you getting most of the credit. How will you carry on after their death?

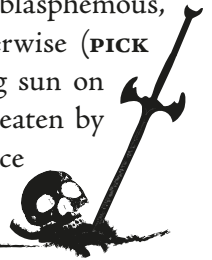
AGENDA: An angry young person interrupts the funeral. They were promised a duel with the deceased, and their honor demands that someone fight on their behalf. Will anyone take up the challenge, or will you convince them to back down?

9 of Clubs

RELATIONSHIP: You once drunkenly promised that if the deceased died first, their soul could live in your body. It was just some silly drunk-talk, wasn't it?

AGENDA: One branch of the deceased's family is insisting that the corpse be treated per their customs (**PICK ONE:** buried, ritually dismembered, left in the

wilderness for animals to eat) but the other branch of the family says that their method is blasphemous, and the body must be treated otherwise (**PICK ONE:** cremated, left facing the rising sun on the top of a mountain, cooked and eaten by the funeral party). Can you make peace between the families?



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THREE DOZEN TREASURES TO BE SOUGHT, HIDDEN, GUARDED & LOST

A miscellany by Epidiah Ravachol

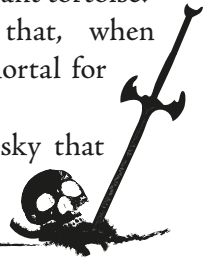
- A counting tablet of clay recording a debt so old it now eclipses the wealth of any empire by sevenfold.
 - A pearl the size of a child's fist with glyphs of disturbing import in its opalescent depths.
 - A silver labyrinth set in a marble floor whose contemplative turns and twists can reveal paths never taken and regrets not yet known.
 - A long and golden sword, its blade delicately etched with minute murals of battles and possessing a rotting stench while not scabbarded.
 - Six coins stolen from three graves that can be spent on favors from their former owners.
 - A brass mirror that reflects the ocean at the dawn of time.
-
- A single fig that will sate you for a whole day and return to you whole, to be consumed again should you have the stomach for it.
 - Shards of a fire frozen solid on a winter night not too long ago.
 - A swarm of locust trained to steal food and jewelry.
 - A puzzle box of ivory and gold in the shape of a pyramid.
- A scepter, tarnished and striped of its jewels, that yet holds sway.
 - The pelt of an animal of unknown origin and unnatural color.
-
- An ancient tome that contains only a litany of names, one of them yours.
 - A goblet that turns all it contains sour for the first two sips and offers visions to those who quaff a third.
 - A crystalline palace, shatter and fed to birds who have carried it across the world.
 - A sphere of radiant red that illuminates the contagious in an aura of fiery orange and yellow.
 - A fully articulated human skeleton wrought of silver.
 - A chest of petrified wood worth more than the handful of coins locked within.
-
- A tapestry of lush colors and exquisite details woven from human hair.
 - A helm made of intricate moving parts that cover your eyes and simulate the night sky.
 - Mummified elephants yoked to a massive obsidian wheel.

- ☛☛☛—Seventeen false maps of the world that expose the hubris of past conquerors.
- ☛☛☛—A stillborn star secreted away in a pool of fragrant oils.
- ☛☛☛—The plain and humble cloak of the most beautiful man ever to have live.

-
- ☛☛☛—A saw that unflinching cuts wood to the proper length.
 - ☛☛☛—A pouch filled with grains of sand, each from a different world.
 - ☛☛☛—A kaleidoscope filed with vibrant precious stones.
 - ☛☛☛—The song of a now extinct bird still echoing in a clay jar.
 - ☛☛☛—A throne cut from a single piece of emerald, carved by the wind over eons.
 - ☛☛☛—The bitter-sweet fruit of a plant that flowers only once a generation.

-
- ☛☛☛—The blood of an ancient queen kept in sheep's bladder.
 - ☛☛☛—An archway that leads to the dawn of a day three years hence.

- ☛☛☛—A soft and violet feather that has never touched the ground.
- ☛☛☛—The quartz-riddled shell of a giant tortoise.
- ☛☛☛—A gray and black stone that, when swallowed, renders you immortal for a single day.
- ☛☛☛—A meteor that fell from the sky that holds a bizarre key within it.



— Advertisement —

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

D. Vincent Baker is a game designer who hails from Western Mass. His works include *kill puppies for satan*, *Dogs in the Vineyard*, *Apocalypse World*, and *The Sundered Land*. <http://lumpley.com>

Gennifer Bone hails from the far-off land of Columbus, Ohio. She lives there with her wife, three cats, and a snake. You can find her work here: <http://onwingsofink.blogspot.com/> and here: <http://razielart.deviantart.com/>

Dymphna Coy is a native of Los Angeles who now lives in Nova Scotia for some reason. She got this gig by sending Josh a story about love triangle between a warrior queen, a shaman, and a severed head. It will probably become a Twine game someday. She has written for *Vampire: the Masquerade* and *Changeling: the Lost*. She also writes for <http://gamingaswomen.com>.

Bryant Paul Johnson is a cartoonist, illustrator and essayist who hails from Northampton, Massachusetts. His works include *Teaching Baby Paranoia*, *Dropped Frames* and *Equip Shield: The Role of Semipermeable Cultural Isolation in the History of Games and Comics*. <http://bryantpauljohnson.com>

Josh T. Jordan is a teacher, game designer, and storyteller in Texas. He is obsessed with talking to different kinds of storyteller, teaching people to love literature, and creating strange, beautiful games. <http://ginger-goat.blogspot.com/>

Nate Marcel is an artist, parent, and educator who hails from suburban Oregon. His works include mural projects, illustrating jewels in the independent gaming crown, and when time allows, making his own comics. <http://nates-notes.blogspot.com/>

Patricia Smith is a freelance illustrator who lives in Oregon. Her clients include, Sasquatch Game Studio, Fantasy Flight, Pelgrane Press, Block 15 Brewing Company, Galileo Games and Worlds Without Master. She likes to think of herself as a genre illustrator with works in each of fantasy, science fiction and horror. Her website: <http://www.studiosmugbug.com> and you can support her work at her Patreon page: <https://www.patreon.com/patriciasmith>

Jabari Weathers is an illustrator based in Baltimore, Maryland. He uses his work to foster and explore worlds of strange, fantastic and sometimes horrible realization. Armed with some paints, inks and a computer, he's managed to stay alive yet! You can see the fruits of his exploits at jmwillustration.com, or follow him during his travels at fortuneandfey.tumblr.com and twitter.com/JabariWeathers.

THE REALMS

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

Listed below are the stories, games, articles, and miscellanies in this issue that represent worlds available for you to craft your own adventures in. If you should so desire, you may take the characters, settings, and situations from any of these, create something new, and submit it to *Worlds Without Master*.

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

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

The Free & Chaotic Realms

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

The Curated Realms

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

Other Shared Realms

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

Edicts

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

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

"Three Dozen to be Sought, Hidden, Guarded & Lost" belongs to the Free & Chaotic Realms.

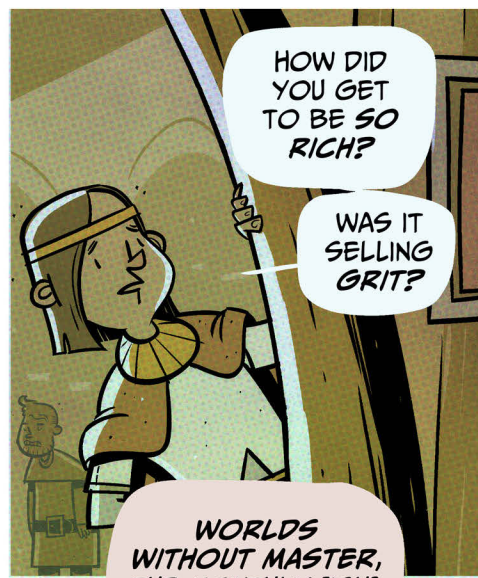
"In Search of a Slaying" belongs to the realms curated by Epidiah Ravachol. Its edicts may be found at: WorldsWithoutMaster.com/edicts.





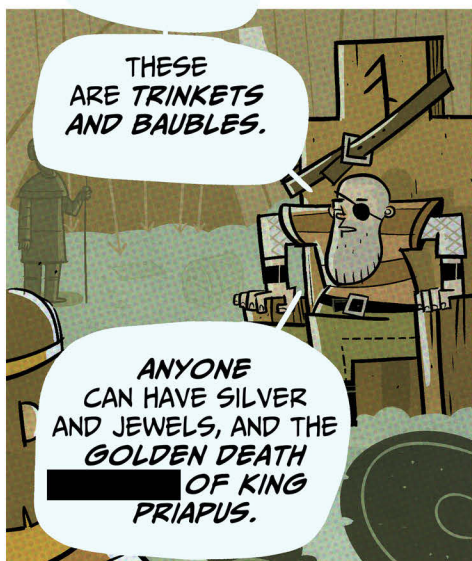
FAVORITE UNCLE?

BAH. YOU CALL THIS RICH?



HOW DID YOU GET TO BE SO RICH?

WAS IT SELLING GRIT?

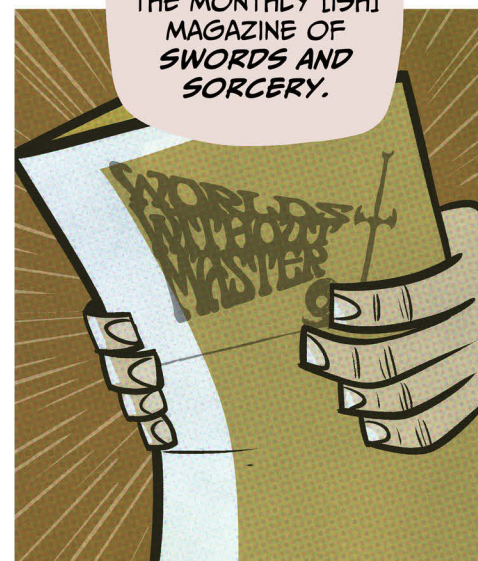


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