

City of the Lost God

Part 13 – Items of Power

“He could see bits of her internal organs through the claw marks and other parts of her insides never intended to be seen outside of her body”



“Well you can’t possibly think I killed them.” Said Sajaha.

The waggon handlers hadn’t shown up at the doors to the underground vault, so Muzzie and Lilleth had gone looking for them. They hadn’t had to go far; the badly mutilated bodies hadn’t even been covered, just left to rot behind a fallen wall.

“If I’d wanted them dead, you’d never have found them.” Said Annun.

Muzzie could see the sense of it, Annun would have simply incinerated the bodies and Sajaha didn’t seem the sort to cut his victims about in such a frenzied manner. Besides there wasn’t much time to get into the vault and get the doors locked behind them. No matter how you calculated it, this would be their twelfth day at the Ring of Volkin.

“Help me get them in a hole,” he said to Lilleth, “then we can fill the hole with rocks.”

“There isn’t time.....” Began Sajaha.

Lilleth spun on him, it was as though two weeks of anger had finally reached boiling point.

“One more word,” she shouted, “just one more word and you’ll be here on your own.”

“I’ll help.”

Annun joined them in putting the bodies down a hole grave robbers had created in a nearby barrow. They filled up the hole with stones, until they were satisfied it would prevent passing scavengers from digging them up.

“Anyone want to say anything ?” Asked Lilleth.

“Always sad to lose regular customers of the tavern.” Said Muzzie.

Muzzie and Lilleth exchanged a grin, while Annun looked shocked.

“Forgive our humour,” said Lilleth, “we’ll say a prayer over them if we come out of the vault alive.”

They picked up their weapons and walked to the broken outer door to the vault and climbed in.

Muzzie took a last look at the lightening sky and ducked inside.

“If we get out of here, the drinks are on me at the tavern.” Said Muzzie.

Sajaha was waiting just inside the metal doors, next to the piles of tools and provisions they’d brought into the passage. So far none of them had advanced more than a few feet into the vault that they were about to seal themselves into.

“You’re confident the air is fresh ?” Asked Sajaha.

“Yes.” Replied Lilleth.

“Let’s close and bolt the doors then.”

The doors closed easily and there was a reassuring heavy clunk as they met, leaving no light apart from the glow from two yellow lamps. Muzzie pushed the bolts across and then he used several iron spikes to wedge the hinges. Muzzie never even thought the word nothing, it would tempt fate, but he spoke to them with some confidence.

“It would take a miracle to get through those doors now.”

They walked down the passage and into a round ante-chamber, with four rooms leading off it.

Sajaha took them slowly through each of the rooms, touching nothing, just muttering to himself and

looking at the various sarcophagi that filled the rooms. Eventually they were back in the ante-chamber.

"Arcadis the greatest sorcerer who ever lived is buried here," said Sajaha, "they'll have put him in one of the twenty three sarcophagi in the rooms we've just looked in. Unfortunately to prevent grave robbing there will be no markings to tell us which one he's in."

"Sounds as though we need to split up into two pairs then." Said Lilleth.

Muzzie automatically paired up with Lilleth and picked up a hammer and few spikes from the pile of equipment.

"Try not to do too much damage," said Annun, "there are mighty people buried here and they are watched over."

"Do you mean there are traps?" Asked Muzzie.

Sajaha came closer to them, he looked concerned.

"Am I right in assuming that visitors to the ring weren't always attacked?" He asked.

"The deaths are only reported for the last hundred years or so." Answered Lilleth.

"As I thought, the deaths may have started as a result of the grave robbers disturbing the ground. I believe there was a watchman given the task of protecting the barrows, a mystical watchman. We may be safe down here, or we may not, but we should keep any damage we do to a minimum."

Sajaha let them digest his ideas as he walked into one of the rooms, Annun following behind with his own supply of tools and spikes. Lilleth chose the room diagonally opposite to begin their search, but before Sajaha was out of earshot Muzzie shouted a question.

"You still haven't told us what we're looking for?"

"Anything that looks out of place, I'm sure you'll know when you've found it."

Sajaha was now just the glow of a lamp in the distance, so Muzzie followed Lilleth into the room she'd chosen and looked around. There were six sarcophagi, all made of a dark black shiny stone and each covered by a heavy looking lid of the same material.

"Start with the first on the left?" Asked Lilleth.

"Sounds as good a plan as any."

They approached the sarcophagus and examined it, the cover looked very solid and heavy.

"We can get it off, but how do we stop it from breaking when it hits the ground?" Asked Lilleth.

The cover looked like it must weight twice as much as their combined weight, lowering it to the ground would be impossible.

"Sandbags," said Muzzie, "they had a few on the waggon. I just hope they were brought inside."

By the time he was back at the pile of tools Annun was there too.

"Sandbags?"

"Have you found them?" Replied Muzzie.

There were four, so they each picked up one and carried it off, before returning for a second. Once back with Lilleth Muzzie placed the sandbags in what he considered to be the best spot to cushion the falling cover.

"Best we can do," he said, "the watchman story may be nonsense anyway."

They'd had experience with removing sarcophagi covers, even if had been only brief. Lilleth placed a spike in the slight gap between cover and base and Muzzie hit the spike with the large business like hammer. When the gap was quite wide they both pushed as hard as they could on the lid and by some miracle it fell onto the sandbags without breaking. Muzzie picked up the lamp and they both looked into the now open sarcophagus. The body was now another powdery skeleton, but it had been buried with a huge number of grave goods.

“Anything look out of place to you ?” Asked Muzzie.

Everything twinkled in the lamp light, it all seemed to be made of precious metals and encrusted with gems. A small mace by the skeletons right hand, enough rings for two on every finger, a light sword across the chest. Then there were various jars and boxes laid beside the departed.

“This is impossible.” Said Lilleth.

Muzzie had no idea what half the grave goods were, let alone if anything was out of place, but he did have what he thought was a sensible plan.

“We have about twelve of these to open, with the ones in the other room,” he said, “so how about getting all the covers off and then seeing if anything in one of them looks.....”

“Weird ?” Added Lilleth.

“Yes, weird or strange.”

It sounded a decent plan, so they carefully pulled the sandbags out from under the lid and placed them next to the second sarcophagus.

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“Of all people, I never thought you were serious about it.” Said Chillan.

Babaef had an office in the guild building, but he preferred to invite people into his home, it gave him more privacy. Shadow was in her usual place in his workroom, which was another reason he’d brought Chillan into his home. The ancient sorcerer scared him a little, but he was confident that Shadow could deal with him..... if the need should arise.

“Supposing,” he said, “if I was to tell you that the reason I wanted to be head of the guild, was purely to be in a position to exploit the powers trapped in the catacombs.”

He didn’t mention Nigon, even a half mad ancient sorcerer like Chillan might balk at releasing one of the more suspect of the older deities.

“About time,” said Chillan, “but have you the determination to stay the course, pay any price, suffer any sacrifice that may be needed ?”

Babaef wished the ancient sorcerer had a better grasp of personal hygiene, the smell of stale sweat and urine was beginning to make his eyes water. As to sacrifice, hadn’t he already lost his wife to the cause ? For some reason Babaef knew that although he might be crazy, Chillan was a fanatic who he could trust.

“I’ve already sacrificed my own wife,” said Babaef, “and I will continue until the powers within the catacombs are released.”

The slightest sign of horror or disgust and he’d order Shadow to destroy the sorcerer, but Chillan was smiling at him.

“And Sökkolf, I suppose that was your doing too ?”

“In a way.” Muttered Babaef.

There was no way he could invoke a chaos creature, not yet anyway, but he wasn’t about to admit that to his new accomplice.

“As far as the rest of the guild is concerned I’ll be just another pen pusher like Sökkolf. There will be the usual sacrifices to chaos on the annual festivals, but nothing to worry the guild member. But you and I will meet here every day and we alone will gain the power.”

“Yes master.” Said Chillan.

Babaef was beginning to feel a little light headed. He’d never had an acolyte before and he was quite enjoying the feeling.

“There may be work required that may put us at risk of reprisals,” he said, “work it would be wise to leave to others. I already have contacts, but perhaps you know of two or three more junior sorcerers we could trust with such tasks ?”

Chillan thought for a while before answering.

“There are plenty of young sorcerers with ambition, but few I’d trust to keep their mouths shut. But there are two I know who I’ve used before, obtaining..... items from the slums.”

“Perfect,” said Babaef, “bring them here one evening this week.”

So Chillan had a taste for something illicit from the slums, he would file that information away for future leverage. Babaef had brought home the two great books of the epic struggle of the guild to release the undead from the catacombs. Officially it was forbidden to remove them from the guild building, but no one cared anymore. The second book, the one that covered the last two hundred years was useless, full of bureaucratic nonsense and pointless observances. The first book though, the one that went back many thousands of years, that one held vital information. Babaef cradled the ancient tome on his lap and pointed at a fading section of text. Nigon had given him clues about what to search for, but Babaef was pleased that he’d found the correct paragraph himself.

“It’s all here,” he said, “the location of the power centres that we need to disturb in some way.”

Chillan leant across him and read the dead language perfectly, out loud and with the correct inflections. Babaef was now certain that he’d chosen the right person to help him.

“The first location is in the worst part of old town.” Said Chillan.

“I’ve no intention of going there until we’re completely ready. We badly need extra power, dark or light, it matters little which it is. There is an old summoning circle in the basement of the guild building. Tomorrow night, you and I will use it to summon something that can help us.”

Chillan now had his head bowed.

“Yes Master.”

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“You realise I can’t come here often.” Said Louelle.

Her guards looked nervous, Tarin’s house was well known, someone would see a group of strangers coming and going. She went through his things without seeking permission, scowling at the number and variety of pain killing drugs distributed around his home.

“These won’t help,” she said, “they’ll just sap your will power and reduce your ability to control your urges.”

“I need something for the pain; it can still be very bad.” Replied Tarin.

“It’s not pain you need the drugs for Tarin, you’re becoming addicted. Galla probably thought she was doing the right thing, but I’ll take the drugs with me.”

Tarin collapsed into a chair.

“I won’t be able to work without them.”

She glanced in the direction of her guards and a chair was placed in front of Tarin, onto which she placed herself as best she could. Louelle was big and having a serpentine tail didn’t help her fit into or onto furniture designed for two legged creatures.

“I came to help and I will,” she said, “do you trust me Tarin ?”

The weapon smith looked dejected, but he nodded at her and kept still as she put her hands around his head. She leant forward and bit his cheek, drawing just enough blood to get a good taste of him.

“I can’t draw the bad out,” she said, “but I can push it deeper in, hide it away so it bothers you less.”

The chaos in him didn't want to be hidden, it wanted to come out and enjoy killing and maiming. Louelle used all her abilities to push the urges deeper into him, cover them with his pride in being a smith, his almost fanatical loyalty to the City itself.

"It hurts !" He screamed.

The seer ignored him and pressed harder on his soul, driving the chaos deeper until it was just a glimmer deep within his being. It would always be there, watching for an opportunity to rip and maim, but for now she'd rendered it impotent.

"How do you feel ?" She asked.

"Worse than when I was using the skinning knife on myself !"

She chuckled and motioned one of her entourage to bring her a jar of ointment.

"Chaos was helping you then," she said, "providing anaesthesia to keep you conscious, but now it doesn't think you're a friend anymore. This ointment will help, but you mustn't ask Galla for any more drugs, do you understand."

Tarin muttered an affirmative, while she rubbed the ointment into his neck and scalp, feeling him instantly relax.

"I'll leave the jar with you," she said, "but once you've used it all, there is no more, so use it carefully."

As she uncoiled herself from the chair one of her guards approached.

"The glow will have been seen, we must leave."

Tarin had needed the help, but she knew that a seer using her powers would create a glow that many would see. Hard to pin point, but many would now know that she was in the City and many wanted her dead. The dark angels, most of the sorcerers, even the old fool who ran the library had at one time or another sent assassins to kill her.

"Very well, we'll leave." She said.

Two of the female guards were powerful empaths in their own right and they began to feel the streets outside, sensing the moods and motivations of those nearby.

"You'll need to feed three or four times a year," she told Tarin, "don't fight it, but only take those the City will be better off without, or at least won't be missed."

"I understand."

Her guards indicated it was safe to leave, so she gave Tarin a last touch on his shoulder and left the house. Louelle and her entourage of a dozen or more vanished silently into the streets and headed for their temporary base in the old town.

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"We're moving out," said Olvir, "we'll make our camp at Bredon's Edge, wait for them there."

There was only one road back to the City, if any of Sajaha's team survived to take it. His lookouts had reported the recent activity and the death of the waggon handlers.

"You're certain he killed them, on his own ?" He'd asked.

"Yes sir, we were surprised."

Olvir didn't think he'd had it in him, but the rifts seemed to bring out the best and worst in some. Then Olvir had seen something moving through the scrub near the outermost barrows and he'd decided to leave.

"Do you want one lookout left behind ?"

Something large and heavy, or several things, the distance was too far to see details, was pushing the bushes aside and nudging its way through the trees. The air seemed to chill, the sky darken,

though Olvir admitted to himself that might have been imagination. There was something about the thing or things that were searching the Ring of Volkin that terrified him.

"Everyone leaves," he said, "and we leave now. There is a small store and a tavern of sorts in Bredon's Edge, it'll be nice to get a little comfort again."

Once they reached the small farming village he'd organise a watch on the road, but for now Olvir just wanted to leave. As they packed he was sure he could hear the screech of something unnatural coming from where they'd seen Muzzie and Lilleth bury the waggon handlers.

"We're going now !" He shouted.

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As the last cover came off the twelfth sarcophagus Muzzie and Lilleth started to examine the contents of each in detail. If this Arcardis character was supposed to be the most powerful sorcerer the rifts had ever seen, there was nothing in any of the grave goods to indicate that. Lots of expensive looking jewellery in all of them, the same kinds of jars and boxes, almost identical weapons and ceremonial paraphernalia.

"Maybe he's in one of their burials ?" Said Lilleth gesturing towards Sajaha and Annun.

Lilleth started to walk towards the room where Annun still seemed to be having problems getting the covers off.

"I'll give them a hand." Said Lilleth.

Muzzie was going to follow her, but something caught his eye, it looked like one of the skeletons had a fake finger. He leant over the sarcophagus, placing his lamp right beside what was left of the chest of the deceased. Yes, it was bizarre, the skeleton had what appeared to be a perfect finger, with no signs of decomposition, the flesh seemed to glow with life.

"Lilleth, you won't believe this."

She was gone, helping the others, so he picked up the finger and realised it was a fake left hand index finger, there was even a thread where it had been screwed into the bones of whoever was buried in the sarcophagus. In life it must have been almost impossible to tell the excellent fake from the real fingers. It was strange and bizarre, but perhaps the long dead owner of the finger had enough money to afford such an expensive piece of vanity surgery. Muzzie examined the finger for a while before putting it in his pocket.

"It'll bring in extra customers to the bar." He muttered to himself.

He found Sajaha getting very angry as they still had another three covers to remove. The sand bags were in place, but they hadn't built up the routine he and Lilleth had, or maybe they lacked the brute force.

"If Annun and I push together." Said Lilleth.

Muzzie watched as the cover came off, seemed to bounce off the side of the sarcophagus and break into several pieces. They all held their breathe, looking around as though expecting an attack of some kind.

"Maybe the watchman is having a day off," said Muzzie, "let's just push off the last two covers."

"I am inclined to agree, we've wasted enough time." Said Sajaha.

Muzzie and Lilleth simply shoved the last two covers off, watching as each broke on hitting the floor. Sajaha instantly started to examine the contents.

"We've been looking at the contents as we went," said Sajaha, "I'm assuming you found nothing ?"

"Nothing at all." Replied Lilleth.

Sajaha and Annun looked inside the final two sarcophagi, even pulling out a few items, but nothing seemed to satisfy the sorcerer as being the item he was searching for.

"I was certain it must be here," he said, "someone like Arcardis must have been buried with unique grave goods. Perhaps his burial place is elsewhere?"

"But what does this thing you're looking for do?" Asked Muzzie.

Sajaha ignored the question and moved towards the sarcophagi they had opened, no doubt to check if they'd missed the much sought after artefact. As they were all in the round ante-room they heard the first loud bang on the outer doors. There was no build up, no rising volume of hits against the door. There was silence and then there was the near deafening noise of massive blows against the doors, at the rate of about one every fifteen seconds. Muzzie approached the doors, holding his lamp up to see what effect the blows were having, the others behind him, but keeping back.

"Will they hold?" Asked Sajaha.

With every blow dust was coming away from the walls either side of the doors, but the doors themselves weren't buckling.

"No," said Muzzie, "the hinges are being knocked out of the stone walls."

"How long have we got?" Asked Annun.

"A few minutes at most," said Muzzie, "what is this thing? Can we fight it?"

Sajaha was looking around, as though looking for somewhere to hide.

"I only know a few legends," he said, "talk of a watchman set over the barrows. For something that's been here for millennia it still seems very strong. I have no idea if it has any weaknesses."

Muzzie nodded at Lilleth and they both began collecting weapons from the pile of equipment just inside the doors. Sajaha still looked shocked and Annun was staying close to his master.

"Grab weapons," shouted Lilleth, "there is nowhere to hide and no other exit. We either fight or die where we stand. Personally I'd rather fight."

Annun picked up a sword, but Sajaha started to weave spells, his fingers sparkling with blue and white flashes of power. Muzzie felt a little relieved to have a sorcerer on their side. A hinge on one side of the door gave way and they all saw a claw come through the gap and grasp the edge of the doors.

"Here it comes!" Said Muzzie.

As the door came away from the wall another claw came through and grabbed the doors, pushing them in and widening the gap. Eventually a face appeared at the gap, a strangely human face for something that had broken through seemingly immovable doors. There was the sharp twang of a bow string as Lilleth fired at the creature, her arrow bouncing off its face, but leaving a wound, a wound that bled dark red blood.

"If it bleeds, we can kill it." She said.

The creature's head came around the door and it screamed at them, a long drawn out scream of hate that chilled the blood. The doors exploded inwards and caught them all unawares. Muzzie was thrown into the room where he'd found the finger, his lamp going out. He could still hear the others fighting and see flashes as Sajaha used some kind of arcane fire against the creature. There was dust in the air, a lot of dust and he almost walked straight into the claws of their attacker. It was standing on Annun's leg and lifting its right claw and preparing to rip the manservant apart. Another arrow came out of the semi darkness and hit the creature in the eye, Lilleth had made an amazing shot or a very lucky one.

"Use your fire against it Sajaha!" Shouted Muzzie.

As Lilleth appeared carrying their one remaining lamp he realised Annun was unconscious and Sajaha had retreated into another room. There was a lot of blood coming from the creature, sticky blood flowing from its pierced eye and several deep gouges on its leg. There were also burn marks

on its upper torso, it looked like Annun and Sajaha had been giving the monster a hard time. The blood made the floor slippery, but the creature was pulling the arrow out of its eye and looking as dangerous as ever.

“Careful Lilleth !”

His call came a second too late and the creature had grabbed her bow while sending her sprawling with a blow from its claws. Muzzie saw a spray of blood the same colour as Lilleth’s, but hoped she’d survived the blow, as he put himself between her and the monster.

“I could do with some help here Sajaha.” He called.

It only had one eye now, but the mystical watchman glared at Muzzie with it, a look of pure hatred. It advanced on him, with Muzzie getting in several good sword blows, but none of them seemed to slow it down. Then as the creature took a swipe at him his heel found either a loose bit of rubble or a patch of blood and Muzzie was on his back and looking up at the creature. His head had hit the ground and the creature’s face was going in and out of focus, but for some reason he put his left hand in his pocket and gripped the fake finger. He could see Annun trying to get up, but the creature was already raising its huge claw and there was no sign of Sajaha or Lilleth. Muzzie had resigned himself to dying when he thought of his Genova powers and decided there was nothing to lose. He aimed his right palm straight at the monster and concentrated on killing it.

“Wow this is different.” He muttered.

There wasn’t the feeling of being drained this time, he felt powerful, easily able to destroy the creature now bending over him and preparing to deliver a death blow. The fake finger felt warm in his left hand and his right hand began to glow, the way he’d been told his Genova ancestors had glowed. Words came unbidden into his mind and he saw a memory of a book in front of him, an ancient tome of power.

“Ceazen Entillen !” He shouted.

It took Muzzie a second or two to realise the face of the creature really was melting, it wasn’t an illusion brought on from the blow to his head. The huge and unstoppable creature was melting and screaming as it melted. First the face, then the upper arms and it started to back away, heading towards where the doors had been, heading for the surface. It got about halfway to the doors before its legs melted too and the watchman became just a pile of burnt and bubbling remains. Annun was getting to his feet but there was no sign of Lilleth. As Muzzie turned to look for her he noticed Sajaha walking towards him and looking very angry.

“You had it,” shouted Sajaha, “ you found it. Hand it over, it is mine not yours. Hand the item of power over or die !”

The sorcerer looked insane and he wasn’t giving Muzzie a chance to hand over the finger. Sajaha had him by the throat with one very strong hand, while in his other a fire spell started to glow and sparkle. Muzzie suddenly realised who had killed the waggon handlers, they’d been crazy to come into the vault with Sajaha after finding their bodies. The dancing fire in Sajaha’s hand grew and became hotter, Muzzie could smell his hair singeing.

“Now you die.” Said Sajaha.

Before he could release the spell Lilleth appeared with a broken sword and jammed it into Sajaha’s back. She only had the hilt and about a foot of blade, but Sajaha yelled as she stabbed it into his back another three times. Then she punched the blade into his neck, deep into his neck until only the hilt was left to see, the foot of blade buried in his chest. The spell in his hand faded and Sajaha fell to the floor, his lifeless body shrivelling to almost nothing as they watched. Muzzie had heard all converted chaos creatures became nothing but a dry husk after death.

“Thank you.” Said Muzzie.

Lilleth looked pale and there was a lot of her blood on the floor, but before Muzzie could examine her Annun was approaching them and changing as he walked. Gone was the mortal body, instead he was now a creature of flame and energy, an uncaged fire elemental. Muzzie felt fate was treating him very cruelly, a third unstoppable foe was a bit much, even for the rifts. But Annun didn't seem to want to fight, instead the creature of flame bowed to them.

“Thank you,” said Annun, “that foul creature had me bound in a mortal body for thousands of years, but now I am free.”

Muzzie didn't know how to reply and simply smiled at Annun as the creature faded, finding its way to whatever reality it called home. Lilleth was now moving in his arms, trying to walk towards the exit.

“Get me to the surface,” she said, “I don't want to die in this place.”

The only light was a dull glow from a lamp that had been dropped some distance away, but by some miracle hadn't broken. Muzzie carried Lilleth over to the lamp and made her lay on the ground.

“Not in here, please Muzzie I don't want the last thing my eyes ever see to be this awful place.”

Muzzie ignored her and pulled her blood soaked clothing to one side. It was bad, he'd never seen worse with someone actually still alive and talking. He could see bits of her internal organs through the claw marks and other parts of her insides never intended to be seen outside of her body. She was dying and would die soon, it was a miracle she'd been able to recover enough to kill Sajaha. Muzzie had seen other things in the book the finger had shown him, all vaguely familiar to him, all legendary Genova powers.

“Trust me.” He said to Lilleth.

He held the finger and touched her ruined body, finding just the right words in the book that hovered dreamlike in front of his eyes. He said the words he seemed to know, but did not understand. The wounds healed, the internal organs were once again tucked neatly away inside her body. Lilleth coughed and sat up a look of disbelief on her face.

“What did you do ?” She asked.

“I have no idea, but I'm glad it worked.”

There seemed to be no hurry now, so they waited until Lilleth felt completely well before looking at what had become of Sajaha.

“There's just dust left now.” Said Lilleth.

“He still owes us a bonus.” Said Muzzie.

He went through the sorcerers robes, removing a surprising number of purses. Some contained gold, others precious stones, one was full of the increasingly rare imperial credits. Muzzie finally felt that all the danger and hard work had been worth it.

“It's all ours,” he said, “we earned every penny of it.”

Muzzie roughly divided the purses up between them, deliberately giving Lilleth the larger share, she had after all saved his life.

“How did you kill the monster ?” Lilleth asked.

Muzzie brought the fake finger out of his pocket, it looked almost embarrassingly fake and strange in his hand.

“With this. The great Arcardis seemed to have had a finger removed, so he could replace it with this fake. It appears to amplify any powers you already have.”

Lilleth leaned against him, she still seemed very weak, but he knew with certainty that a decent night's rest and a proper meal were all she needed to be her old self again. Muzzie picked up their personal bags from the pile by the door, and put them over his shoulder.

"Do we take any of the jewels from the tombs, or leave them for the grave robbers?" Muzzie asked.

"Can you seal it up again? It doesn't seem right leaving it for the back stabbers and purse stealers."

They walked out of the vault and into the air of the rift and for once it felt fresh and clean. Even without the recent events, there was something unclean about the vault, something tainted. Muzzie held the finger and pointed at the passage into the vault. There was no explosion, no massive movement of tons of rocks. All that happened was that the entire roof of the passage collapsed and to any observer it was as if the way into the vault had ceased to exist.

"Good," said Lilleth, "everything in there should remain buried forever."

Lilleth looked worried and hung onto his arm.

"The finger Muzzie," she said, "it came from that place, it may harm you to use it."

"I don't think so, the powers it's amplifying are good ones, they're Genova powers. But the next time I hear Louelle is in the City, I will ask her about it."

It looked like the watchman had gone insane looking for them, stones in the famous Ring of Volkin had been knocked over, trees uprooted. The worst sight to greet them as they walked back to their old campsite was the half eaten bodies of the waggon handlers. Muzzie began lifting the bodies to put them down another grave robbers hole, but Lilleth pulled him away.

"They've already been half eaten," she said, "let the scavengers finish the job."

There were legends that the old building where the waggon was setup was in some way protected, maybe that was true, as it looked exactly as it had when they'd left it. There was enough food and clean water in the back of the waggon to last them for the journey back and plenty of clean bedding.

"If we start now, we could have a comfortable bed in Bredon's Edge tonight." Said Muzzie

Lilleth looked in the back of the waggon and began moving the bedding about.

"All those nosey villagers wanting to know our business," said Lilleth, "I'd rather stay here for the night and start heading cross country back to the City tomorrow."

There was even a pile of collected wood still there, so Muzzie started a fire and began cooking a quick meal while Lilleth made the waggon comfortable. Muzzie would admit to not being the world's best cook, but even he couldn't go wrong with dried meat and fried beans.

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"I'm not going mad Caspian, it started glowing again."

Everything from their visit to the upper dome was hidden away in the small number of secret rooms they could still enter, but Caspian had kept the plain metal crown in their bedroom. For some reason it pleased him to have it around, but Vella had claimed to see it glow and that unsettled her. An unsettled bed partner meant no sex, so Caspian climbed out of bed and picked up the crown.

"I'll put it in our old room." He said.

Vella was lying back on the sheets and laughing at him.

"But you're naked Casp!"

"Then I'll give anyone wandering the corridors a surprise."

He picked up his keys, they were now keeping every door locked, though they had started to feel safe again in their new bedroom. Naked and feeling a little uneasy Caspian left their bedroom and walked the short distance down the corridor to their old room. They rarely saw anyone in their part of the Dome and even the cleaners never visited at night. Knowing his luck he thought Adamaz would decide to inspect the hallways tonight and find him naked, his genitals swaying around for all

to see. Caspian unlocked the room and moved the tapestry to gain access to the old library behind it. They'd left the light globe slightly on and Caspian found the warm glow inviting.

"Where shall I put you." He muttered to the crown in his hand.

There were two old hooks on the wall, probably to hang outdoor clothing on. Caspian stretched and put the crown on one of the hooks, it looked like it belonged there. Although keen to get back to Vella and their nice warm bed, Caspian couldn't resist sitting at the small desk and opening the human spell scroll he'd been studying. He must have dropped off to sleep, because the next thing he knew about was a naked Vella sitting on his lap and nuzzling his neck.

"Have you tired of me already?" She chuckled.

"Just tired."

He kissed her, his hand going to her left breast his favourite. His sexual experience was quite limited, but he had realised breasts were unique. Size, firmness, texture, even left and right on the same girl could appear quite different once you became intimate with them. He loved both her breasts, but the left was definitely his favourite.

"Did you see that?" He asked.

She stopped nuzzling and looked past him at the crown on the hook.

"You see it too! It is glowing Casp."

Gently removing Vella from his lap, Caspian stood up and approached the crown. There was no mistaking the definite glow that it was giving out, not enough to cause a shadow, but easy to see in the dim glow of the light globe.

"Don't touch it Casp!"

"I just carried it in here Vella."

He had to really stretch to reach the crown and as his fingers took it off the hook he felt a slight shock. Caspian twisted as he fell sideways and Vella grabbed him, trying to stop him falling over. At some point they both touched the crown at the same time and they were in darkness. Caspian still felt Vella holding him and he hadn't fallen over, but he had no idea why they were suddenly in complete and total darkness.

"I think the light globe has turned off." He said.

It wasn't enough just to hold her hand, Caspian took a firm hold of Vella's upper arm before slowly walking towards where he knew the light globe to be.

"This isn't right," said Vella, "I can feel something hard with my left foot. I don't think we're in the Dome anymore Casp!"

They clung to each other, naked, scared to move, but gradually they began to make out a few shapes. It wasn't the stygian blackness they'd thought and as their eyes became accustomed to the very low light they began to see the desolation around them. High above them, very high indeed was a window and it allowed a dim blue light to enter and give them not quite enough light to move safely, but enough to make every shape look menacing.

"Where are we Casp?"

They were in a ruined hall. Once it had probably been a great hall, but now the tables were turned over, the wall drapes torn down. Everything seemed covered in an age of dirt and grit and it felt sticky and far too hot for comfort. Caspian found a chair that looked safe enough to sit on, once he'd shaken off the debris and used the edge of his hand to dust it. He sat Vella down and stood next to her, still unwilling to move any distance into the strange desolation they'd found themselves in.

"The crown is over there." Said Vella.

Less than two paces away was the crown, though it had stopped glowing. Caspian picked it up and pushed it up his arm like a huge loose bracelet.

“If it brought us here, maybe it can take us back.” He said.

They touched the crown together, individually, rubbed it, spat on their hands and rubbed it, nothing changed and they didn’t find themselves transported back to the Dome.

“I need to pee.” Said Vella.

Caspian looked at the desolation around them.

“Go where you want, I can’t see anyone complaining.”

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Part 14 will be posted at the end of November