

For Caleb of the Cenotaph, or their Worldly Heir

With your most generous and Prosperous backing, upon my return to the Sarcophan Delves I was immediately able to secure the services of a number of the most daring, skilled and Ambitious among the expatriate community here, and to outfit us frugally but effectively. Every ring you have entrusted me with has been stretched until it squeaks. And not fourteen days after my return did we begin our expedition in earnest.

Working on very poor-quality maps, and in an area known for its dangers, we were forced to move slowly and with extreme care. Knowing that the sleep of a long expedition is often assailed by the ghosts of the fallen, we armoured ourselves in Virtue using a portion of our carefully managed liao stocks - and this drove us forward and held us up even under the oppressive feeling of dread and danger and decay that hangs over the place like a cloak. The streets of Parralenth are largely at or below sea level - in some areas this means they are rivers, in others it means they are inundated bogs, and in the most lucrative areas they are dry - but the Wise are well aware that a heavy day's rainfall could bring a sudden and noisome flash-flood. Nevertheless, we persisted! It is a testament to the Wisdom of our endeavour that within two careful weeks we were able to reach an unsullied gate in a sodden street, great white granite doors sealed with molten lead in the manner one would seal a Tomb today. Two spears' length wide, they were, and the same tall - such ostentation! They would have shone in the sunlight, when this place was vital and pure. It was the work of a mere few days to assemble a levee against the waters and drain the inside of it, and all the while the locks and seals of the door were being assayed.

Upon the third day, the outside was dry enough to work easily and the place quickly yielded to our careful lock-picks and crowbars. The white granite door, the cunning locks, the still-deadly poisoned needles and spring-loaded blades, each obstacle raised our hearts - surely no mere commoner's Tomb this! Our progress at every step was painstaking and careful. The water inside and the mould of the walls were the very essence of filth - but the architecture of the place was fine and solid, and so we pressed onwards driven by our armour of Ambition. And finally we passed the second seal and into the great cavernous inside - high ceilings, mighty columns, a throne-room of a Tomb, and in the place of honour upon a dais stood the largest sarcophagus I have ever had the pleasure of seeing.

Far too large for any human, it was - some of the expedition placed wagers upon the contents, such were our high spirits - but Wisdom and the greater Ambition won out over the simple urge to crack that thing open that night. No: we established a base camp, and in the many days that followed we drained and secured the main chamber of the tomb, washing it with clean water and ringing bells after the fashion of your own people. Only when we were sure that the contents of the sarcophagus would not be destroyed by the environment into which we brought them, did we dare to break the lead seals upon it, did we dare to lift the ancient and smooth stone lid; and with Pride I may say that it was my own hand that bore the lightstone as we peered within.

And if we had not been armoured in Virtue as we were, then I swear that half of us would have fled in terror at the visage that awaited us. But no - the thing was dry and dead, and did not move - and after another few moments the shock passed, and it was quite clear what it was that we were looking at.

We had found nothing less than the final resting place of one of the mighty companions of ancient Humanity - the strong, powerful, great-hearted companions that came with your ancestors to the shores of Casinea all those many years ago - we had found the perfectly preserved mummy of a horse.

I invite you to take a moment to consider what would have happened next, had the expedition been made up of locals who had never heard of a horse. The curses that would have echoed through that great hall as their vaunted grave-goods turned out to be nothing more than a set of mouldered tack for a centuries-dead creature, not even worth breaking down for parts. They would have smashed the sarcophagus, they would have destroyed its contents, they would have turned the place inside-out looking for anything they could sell - when the true treasure of the place was literally staring them in the face!

My sister is a student of the natural world - I attach her drawing, not of the mummy of the horse as it rests now, for such relics I've heard of in the Necropolis, but of the animal as once it would have stood. And I must reiterate, it has to be seen to be believed. This creature would have stood as tall at the shoulder as I do, at least - a truly magnificent creature, it would have been - and near as broad and as deep in the chest as an ox. The sense of power, of might, of majesty cannot be understated.

As I write now, our plans are to make the place safe, that our congregation may visit it and be inspired thereby as my sister has been. There is some discussion among our group, though, as to our next course of action - and as I needed to make this report to you anyway, I would appreciate any Wisdom you felt appropriate to send me. Our choice is twofold:

It is the opinion of some of our congregation that we should push forward with Ambition and seek for another high-status tomb. We got into one: we can get into another. Our supplies will hold - our stocks of liao are well enough - our method is proven - the tomb of the horse is well-founded and stable enough to serve us as an excellent base-camp, and from here we can strike out to a great deal of previously untested territory. It is a good plan: it is Prosperous and it is Ambitious and it is Courageous, and it is workable.

But another plan is that of the opportunist. We have found a truly remarkable thing in this tomb. There may be other remarkable things yet to find - but another potential use for our resources would be to consolidate. The low-hanging fruit here are plucked, but there are antechambers we have not drained: it looks like this building served a purpose before it was a tomb, and we could explore what that was. We could discover who owned this place, and see if they are in any sense connected to any who yet live today. We could hire magicians of Day to investigate what can be seen here - though these do not come cheap. And not least, judging by the surge of enthusiasm among our congregation and the sense of awe that the horse itself engendered in me, this place would serve as an excellent adjunct to our congregation. A place to teach of history and of Virtue. A place that would quickly pay for itself in donations and perhaps even converts to the Faith. We could use our stocks of liao to consecrate the place - we have enough for years, if we are not burning through them anointing tomb raiders - use the resources we have to fully explore and renovate this place, make the temporary levee that defends the door into a permanent channel in mortared stone - effectively move a group out here semi-permanently - and then explore further in future.

Both things are possible, and something akin to both of them will happen eventually - but we simply can not do both things at once. It's not a matter of money - we have the funds and the liao for at least another season's work, and more if we are carry - but we can not make base camp in a building site, or send the most Virtuous tomb robbers in Sarcophan to two places at once. It is your Wisdom I ask for now, not your purse.

In Virtue, Klaus van Sarcophan