

Vetus Lapidibus

It has not been long since my relinquishment of the expedition for Vetus Lapidibus. Already my colleagues dispute my lack of finding. I find myself and my name bear insult upon insult and injury upon injury. However, now I see, or rather do not, how the words of my colleagues are naught but rubble, for he who finds himself unwilling to take heed of my foreboding will find himself no more than rubble henceforth. I know myself to have been spared solely for the reason that with my fables would ensure meek mortal curiosity. The cost of my sight and touch was great, but I weigh this against my life and find myself quite fortunate indeed. Any adventurer folly enough to follow my path will likely discover these old bodily possessions of mine, alongside the most unholy, abhorrent, malignant abomination ever to have trod upon our world. Though I abide with these fickle memories nightly, I impart them to you now that you may not trek my very tracks. If you should not heed these words, I fear I may never be given a chance to inform you of your folly.

I pushed my way through the wailing winds and pelting sands inch by inch. My guide and camel, along with most of my grain, had fled my person. The few supplies I still had with me at this point were nearly exhausted. To my abhorrence, the sands parted just so that I might behold a shadowed figure. The storm followed in my wake, and the way I had come was already lost to the world. It seemed this ... thing ... would be my only chance of salvation. “Hello” I called, to no reply. I realized then that this thing was no man, let alone one to aid me. However, that did not mean it was useless. I approached to see a statue of the most horrific creature I have glimpsed to this day. It stood atop an obsidian slab. What seemed to be hieroglyphs were etched along the slab. Could it be, I wondered, a trace of the lost city for which I searched? The creature glared down upon me, and I felt its ancient eyes pierce my being. The monstrosity appeared to be four beasts in one. It had the head of a tiger, but, upon noting the absence of fur, I recalled scales like that of an alligator, and its feet were talons of a raven. The eyes seemed sunken and downcast. The beast’s mouth turned downward, as if in grief. Its body was that of a man, and it was garbed in what seemed to be a robe. Both arms ended in tiger paws, the claws of

which seemed sharp enough still to take a life. With such a creation, thought I, the city must abide nearby. Spurred by my hope of discovery, I took to my heels once more through the storm. Perhaps I would even find my lost comrade, so then I thought.

First came the pillars. A row of obsidian obelisks paved a way through which I trekked. At the seventh pillar, I began to notice long-forgotten items lining the way; a pack and canteen, a conquistador helmet, a Knights Templar shield, a forgotten torch, maps etched upon ancient parchment. The further I went, the older these items became. A Persian ship oar, a Roman visor, a grekko scroll, all buried in the sand. This desert had been the doom of many a raiding party. At long last, I came to a great pyramid. The place seemed to emanate a forlorn evil, but with that feeling came one of yearning. I had to know what lay beneath this mound of stone.

Light shone from out the flickering sands and cast shadow about the rim of a shape within. A deep pit it was that filled the center of the room, the interior of which consisted of a more plutonian black than any night sky ever I had gazed at clasping the world. I stole a glance over the edge. Through the shadows I picked out forty-odd emaciated figures lying dead atop one another. Woe cast its maleficent shadow upon those stricken victims, deceased for perhaps millennia, judging by their primitive garb, but had been mummified by the howling desert. Gaping gashes were gouged into each victim, as if they had been torn to ribbons by a ferocious clawed monstrosity. Those tormented souls had experienced terrible horror before their demise. Encircling the pit was a ring of more hieroglyphics. I had no idea what they read, but now I had to know. If I was lucky, maybe one of the explorer's remains would have translations to a known language. I forged a path once more into the storm.

Back again, I hovered above the ancient greco scroll. My training in ancient languages enabled me to decipher that disparate writ, thus revealing the key to deciphering the still older figures I had discovered about this place. Scroll in hand, I returned to that pit from which so many lives had fled, forgotten and unbridled by their decaying physical forms. Upon translating the writ of the pit, I noted it not to be but a message, rather, a legend. Here I shall impart the legend to all: “Once there lived a criminal King. To all he crossed, death he would bring. He took all he could need, but his love’s heart, for him did not bleed. Her love though, she did try bring a fake, and her heart for its love he did take. His greed had caused untimely doom, and his grief for her, it did so loom. And so, to ail those that take, he did his anger, immortal make.” Upon conclusion of my task, I noted a single golden scarabaeus, entombed in the stone. Such fables as this drew my fascination but, to my dismay, neither itself nor the pyramid at large had withheld any secret as to where the city of Vetus Lapidibus had lain for so many years. It was after searching the pyramid that I recalled the statue, and its writ as well. For a final time, I ventured unto the raging sands, not again to see this dilapidated stone construct from whence I paced.

Having endured the storm for what seemed like hours, I once again stumbled upon the menacing stone figure. Upon its pedestal, so seeming to have changed, were several new phrases, which I shall inscribe herein just as I had deciphered these words.

“And so unflinching, do you stand, to find my single unknown brand. Encircling the slab, so conceived, are these forgotten memories: ‘I sought reprieve from flesh and bone. That I found in immortal stone.’ This moment, it is, the storm will subside. Your comrade’s body is strewn aside. His chest, great gashes do contain. Those marks from the pit you see again. And now, I

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wear no more the mask of strife and pain. Etched anew is one expression main. I see through you and glimpse your sin,” and in that moment, did the statue grin.