

To: Brett

Time period: 1800s

Items: A compass, notebook, and a dog

## THE CURSE OF THE BLEEDING SANDS

Long ago there was a kingdom built out of stone and sand; Its name long forgotten in the fleeting winds of time. Known only through legend as The Red City, for its buildings and monuments that shimmered with a scarlet glow from the stones pulled from deep within the mountain ridge.

As the legend says, this kingdom was one of the wealthiest known to man- Vast riches in gold, precious stones, and art filled every house in the kingdom. Its red palaces gleamed like the sunrise as they towered high above the sand. In the peak of the kingdom's glory, a king known as Rusbian The Great brought vast troves of wealth unseen by previous generations of kings.

Then one day, as the legend goes, the mountains trembled and the waters shook. The red blight had arrived. The crops withered and sunk to a red pulp within days. The citizens of the city fled but found no shelter as their skin blistered and melted as the red blight continued to spread. It is said that once King Rusbian had fallen ill with the crimson blight, he instructed a grand tomb to be built for him and his vast treasure was to be buried within.

The crimson blight continued to ravage the countryside. Even the buildings and palaces sunk deep into the infected sand. To this day, no one has been able to find the remains of the once beautiful city. And if anyone did, their likelihood of returning was slim to none. For the land around the city and even the treasure, was said to be cursed by the blight of the bleeding sands.

But those were all just myths and rumors. At least that is what Arthur Hartley believed. As a seasoned scientist and archaeologist, he could never believe in such fairy tales. But he knew the city was real, and knew the untold riches could be

his, so long as he could find the city. From his hot air balloon, he glanced out at the vast mountain ridge line beneath him as he recorded his journey in his notebook.

It was full of information and various historical documents on where the city could potentially be. He reached into his pocket and pulled out an ancient looking compass, blood red and bedazzled in rubies. An effigy of a phoenix pointed north, and from the looks of it, they were headed North east. Arthur glanced at a map bolted to the side of the basket. If he was right, the city should be just over the next mountainside.

"Sir! We should land!" Amarey cried out behind him, pointing to dark storm clouds on the horizon.

"Strange." Arthur thought, for in the many years of his days adventuring land and sea, he had never seen a storm form that fast. The horizon was fair only moments ago.

The winds howled in a rhythmic frenzy as the storm wall loomed closer towards the expedition's hot air balloons.

"Sir! I beg of you!" Amarey pleaded as the rest of the Balloon fleet began to lower altitude.

"Very well, Bring her down!" The team quickly set up camp safe from the storm's wind. As it got closer, Amarey noticed a red hue to the storm clouds. Arthur glanced at the sky and simply scoffed.

"I've had enough of your superstitions for one day! Now help me cook dinner, the crew is hungry."

There were seven members in total, including Arthur and Amarey. The other five were Helga, a Swedish Linguist and historian, Albert, an American prospector, Raoul, a French artist who had been illustrating the expedition in great detail, Chap, the brave and loyal German Shepherd who was the best sniffer around, and last and certainly most least, Dormley, the Englishman who funded the entire expedition. He saw the whole adventure as a

vacation and spent most of his waking hours day drinking and taking recreational drugs.

After dinner the storm grew in intensity. Rain poured and lightning struck closer and closer to the company's camp. Arthur always enjoyed a good storm, it brought him back to the times of his sailing days. Nothing could beat the rush of being at the helm during a good storm. He sat and watched the storm while smoking his pipe alongside Dormley, who was smoking something a bit more exotic than tobacco. Arthur didn't care much for Dormley, but in these cases, he enjoyed his company.

A bolt of lightning crackled overhead. Arthur did notice a glimmer of red in that last flash.

"That damned Amarey, getting into my head with all his childish stories." Arthur thought to himself as he took another drag from his pipe. Though Amarey hailed from a nearby village, Arthur took no notice of his knowledge of local folklore. His experience in the surrounding area was the only thing useful to him.

BANG! A bolt shot into the mountain nearby and sent several massive boulders flying outwards. Chap ran out of a nearby tent towards the lightning strike, barking uneasily. The rest of the crew followed in a confused frenzy.

"Get back here you crazy beast!" shouted Albert as he ran after Chap. Arthur followed out of mere curiosity, for when Chap was restless like this, his nose always found something.

The entire team caught up to Chap who was barking at the mouth of a newly exposed cave.

"By my Mother's stone heart!" Arthur yelled.

"This is it! This must be the entrance to the red city!" Albert pulled out a fragment of a carved red stone and held it up to the group as the rain poured around them, they studied the stone in amazement and agreed to enter the newly formed opening the

next day at first light. Arthur looked at the stone that was placed on the table by Albert as he laid in his sleeping bag, he could almost hear his name being called, beckoned by the mouth of the cave.

The next day the team awoke in a dreamy stupor. They all admitted to having bizarre dreams but none could seem to remember what they were. Amarey refused to go into the cave and said he would watch the camp with Chap, who was acting very strange after last night's storm as he barked at the mouth of the cave, refusing to get anywhere close to it.

"Fine by me! Your loss on witnessing a monumental moment in history!" Arthur cried out as he entered the mouth of the cave. The team journeyed for several hours as they passed several ruined walls with strange markings.

"I've never seen a language remotely like this!" Helga said in a thick Swedish accent. She felt the red walls and jotted down notes in her journal.

After journeying through the cavern for a few hours, the team stopped in their tracks in awe, as they came across a colossal shimmering red structure. Its walls and towers jutted out, almost like it was reaching out for help from the sunken sands that swallowed it up many eons ago. They entered through a massive window and roped down into the main hall. Once settling onto the stone floor, Arthur lit additional lanterns and torches which revealed ancient columns, balconies and archways.

They made their way to the main corridor, led by a constant crimson glow from their lantern light reflected from the various hues of the palace's red sculpted stone. Their footsteps echoed in the cavernous hallways in an otherwise eerie silence. Arthur took simple sketches of the hallways and corridors that split off in various directions, his torch light bleeding into the darkness of unknown passageways.

A particular angle of his newest edition to the sketch caught his eye, causing him to stop into his tracks. "Why did we stop?" Albert called out as he inspected a large red column next

to him. Arthur pulled out his ancient compass and cried out in excitement. "The compass maps out the entire palace! Look!" Arthur held out the bedazzled compass close to his torch light which revealed a thin geometrical maze-like pattern in the same sequence as Arthur's sketches. In the center of the geometrical pattern was an ornate red ruby. "If this is correct, Rusbian's tomb should be not far from here." He exclaimed with a point to the ruby.

Faint rippling echoed out in the darkness behind the group. "Arthur, that is excellent news, now let's keep moving!" Dormley said, glancing behind him where the noise rapidly grew closer and closer. Albert glanced back at the column and the sand started to shift on its own. "Everyone look-" Before Albert could finish his sentence, a burst of red sand plummeted from an adjacent hallway and knocked Helga off her feet. She screamed as she was quickly buried in the sand's undertow.

The rest of the group leaped into the sand after her. Albert called out for her name but was met with only the sounds of muffled screams and shifting sands. A hand reached out of the sand. Albert quickly grabbed Helga's hand and began to pull her out. Much to his horror, as he pulled her hand out of the sand, what was left of the arm and rest of the body was only bone. He screamed out and shook his legs off of the red sand that continued to pour into the hallway. "Get out of the sand!" He yelled out. Raoul took one look at the remains of Helga and ran down into the darkness. "Arthur, we have to turn back!" Albert shouted as he ran towards Arthur who was further down the hallway studying the compass. "I think I found another way that can lead us back to the opening!" He said pointing towards the darkness in front of him. "Did you see what happened to Helga?!" Dormley cried out with a fresh bottle of whiskey in his hand. "There's something in the sand!" he yelled in a panic before taking a massive swig of whiskey. Albert called out to Raoul but was met with only the sound of the shifting sand, lurking ever so closely in the darkness. "I'm sure he found his way back, we need to keep moving forward!" Arthur replied with a glance over his shoulder.

The group continued down the snaking chasms of hallways and mysterious rooms, their lanterns and torches now running low. Dormley began to stumble behind and stagger in pain. "Arthur, wait!" Albert called out. "We aren't headed towards the exit, are we?" Albert said in a whisper. "We've made this far, we can't leave empty handed! I'm sure there is another exit from inside the tomb!" "You bastard!" Albert hissed as he pushed Arthur down onto the ground. "Dormley! Get up! We have to keep moving!" Albert yelled out over his shoulder. Silence. "Dormley?" Albert yelled once again. No reply. Albert backtracked and held out his lantern and found Dormley's body laying on the stone. "Dormley come on!" Dormley slowly got up. Albert took a step back as Dormley glanced at him from the darkness of the hallway. "Albert" Dormley said in a faint whisper. "Arthur, we need to help him!" Albert said, spinning around to only find that Arthur was long gone. Albert glanced back in the direction of where Dormley was but found nothing in the darkness.

Faint shifting next to him caught his attention. He turned in horror to see Dormley face to face with him. Albert cried out as Dormley's eyelids leaked out red sand. Before he could react, Dormley's hands were on him.

Arthur turned a corner and waited for Albert. "Albert?! Don't tell me you've run off with the others!" he shouted as he glanced about in search of him.

"Cowards! All of you!" Arthur cried out as red sand filled the hallway behind him. Turning another corner, he approached a gigantic column in the center of the room. A circular hole gleamed in the center of it.

"Ah this must be it." He reached into his pocket and took out the red compass and placed it in the hole. The column moaned as it slid down into the ground. Arthur jumped down and found himself at the foot of a massive burial chamber. He held his lantern out to a seemingly endless treasure.

Arthur cried out in joy as he embraced the treasure before him. The sound of moving stone echoed throughout the quiet chamber as Arthur slowly turned around.

"Albert, you're not going to believe this!" Arthur shouted. Behind him, Arthur didn't find Albert, but instead the standing corpse of the great king Rusbian. Rusbian's mouth opened as wet red sand poured out from inside him, spilling onto the floor. The surrounding sand formed into one massive pile as Rusbian's empty shell dissolved behind it. "The bleeding sand isn't a curse! It's a living being!" Arthur yelled out in fear as the sands consumed him.

Amarey and Chap sat outside the camp as Raoul stumbled out of the mouth of the cave. "What's going on?! Where are the others!?" Amarey shouted as Raoul ran out of the cave. As Raoul got closer, he realized there was something off about him, something hollow. He grabbed Chap and any supplies he could and jumped into the nearest hot air balloon. He lifted off as Raoul's mouth opened, releasing bleeding sand out into the air. From above Amarey watched as the entire mountain oozed out red sand. "What have we done?!" He thought to himself in fear as the sunset cast a red shadow on the mountain side.