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Dead City Memories, Vol. 1

A quarter-crawler sandbox for memorialists saving relics in the chaos of war.

Written for the Seacat rpg ecosystem, adaptable to most old-school rpgs.

Free Alpha Edition v0.3, July 2022

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To everyone facing aggression. May they find justice.

CONTENT WARNING

This module deals with war and all the horror that implies. I have avoided gratuitous graphic depictions, however readers and players are advised: not everything was sanitised and this module is not for everyone.

HISTORY OF THE MODULE

The original concept placed the players' heroes in the role of the conquerors plundering the palaces and tombs of the defeated. It was intended as a satire of war and propaganda, highlighting the shades of grey and moral squalor that every war inevitably brings. I wrote much of that structure in 2017. Since then, not only have my views become more nuanced, the criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has made it impossible for me to countenance completing a product that puts the players in the role of, essentially, murderous plundering philistines deploying propaganda and self-delusion to justify their actions.



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PUBL. ALPHA

A CITY SLAIN

“Ebét of the Hundred Gates, Mistress of the River of Life, City of the Living God, fallen to the hordes of Iks the Ninth, Ruler of the River of Death from Across the Poison Sea. Woe is become our fate!”

—scrawled on the Lime Wall of the Temple of the Everliving Cat.

The soldiers and mercenaries of Iks have accomplished the impossible. The conquest is done. The living god’s Ten Hundred Year Palace is gone from this world, trapped in the slow horizon of the Cloven Finality. Now it is open season in the millennial city. Gore runs through the archaic streets. Bones break beneath the stud wheels of the crystal-masked Twins. The Orb of the Moon and the Hand of the People shine in glow-worm silk upon the conquerors’ midnight banners.

“For Iks! For Iks!” cry the invaders. “For liberation!” they yell as they sack the towns of the megalopolis. Ash falls like snow and the great organs of war low in exultation. Levellers, legionnaires, auxiliaries, mercenaries, rebels, dogheads, and opportunists now turn their thoughts from terror to profit. The accountant divisions grind their mechanical calculators as the butcher bankers arrive for their pound of flesh. Soon the furnaces will sing and the treasures of Ebét will be ‘recycled’ to pay the reasonable Iksans.

The agents of the Memorium stir in the shadows. In the chaos, there is a sliver of time to save the treasures of another fresh-fallen culture.

Obvious Gimmick

The Memorium is a conceit to introduce the player characters into the setting as neutral outsiders with a relatively benign outlook compared to the two major factions: the victorious, imperialist Iksans and the defeated, slaveholding Ebéteen. The players may choose a different origin for their characters: rebels, wastelanders, travellers, third city statesfolk, or even ancestor skeletons awakened by the tumult of the Living God’s death (?).

MODULE OVERVIEW

This rpg module is a quarter-crawler sandbox of a vast city being despoiled by an invading army. The players take the role of agents of an alien godlike entity known as the Memorium, which tries to preserve the treasures and records of fallen cultures from oblivion.

Rules & Jargon

I wrote this module for the Seacat rules presented in *Uranium Butterflies* and used in the *Ultraviolet Grasslands*. I've tried to use a natural writing style, which should make it easy to adapt the module to any ruleset the players prefer. However, some assumptions and jargon were unavoidable:

- » **Top cat** • One player presents the game as a kind of 'game master'. The others play characters exploring the shared game world.
- » **Polyhedral dice** • XdY notation refers to different dice. A basic military weapon deals 1d8 damage. An asterisk* means the dice explode.
- » **Tests** • Dice rolled to see if a character succeeds or fails. Difficulties are described with words for easier adaptation. A bonus or advantage is noted with [+], a penalty or disadvantage with [-].
- » **Levels** • Characters can be more or less powerful. Level 1 is a baseline human, level 9 is like the greatest hero of human legend.
- » **Life** • Characters have a life score. This is a resource akin to narrative armour. When it is gone, the character may end up severely injured.
- » **Defences** • Go up to 19. Attack tests roll over this target to hit. There are three defences: ha, ka, and ba (physical, mental, and social).
- » **Xp** • Players gain experience points and invest them to increase the power of their characters.
- » **Cash** • Monetary value is abstracted as 'cash'. One cash represents the daily expenses of a normal working-class human in the setting.
- » **Size** • Unless otherwise written, 1 sack = 10 stones = 100 soaps = 2,500 cash (coins). One sack is roughly the size of a person.
- » **Megahumanity** • In this fantascience setting, 'human' is an all-purpose term for most sentients, regardless of original biology.
- » **Ideal value (° to °°°°°)** • Some items are marked with 1–5 degree glyphs. These represent the intrinsic, platonic value the Memorium places on those objects. Agents earn xp by retrieving valuable objects.

MEMORIALIST HEROES

Agents of the Memorium call one another ‘memorialists.’ They start at level 2, with 399 invested xp, 14 life, a pro score of 2, 2 hero dice, 4 skill ranks, 7 stat points to distribute, 2 trait ranks, and 10+10 stones of inventory. Most only vaguely remember their lives before they became a memorialist.

LVL	XP	LIFE	PRO	HERO DICE	SKILLS	STATS	TRAITS
2	399	14	2	2	4	7	2
3	999	20	2	3	5	7	3
4	1,999	26	2	4	5	8	4
5	4,999	32	3	5	6	8	5
6	9,999	38	3	6	6	9	6

THIS AGENT

1. Nauseated by [a food]. Triggers painful false memories?
2. Enjoys serving the Memorium. Twitch. Twitch.
3. Has dreams of other lives than their own.
4. Looks superficially human, but is wrong in one small way.
5. Owns a detachable third eye. It’s metal.
6. Suffers cryptic headaches when confronted with [redacted].

THIS AGENT ALSO

1. Hunts a half-remembered face.
2. Is covered in story tattoos.
3. Sleeps with a plush artefact.
4. Walks eerily without rhythm.
5. Weeps whenever they see a sunrise. They know not why.
6. Writes in a language they cannot read.

SKILLS

All agents start with at least one rank of memorialist. They can choose other skills from the agent list, from *Uranium Butterflies*, or invent their own.

MEMORIALIST

What was will always be.

Knows the rituals of appeasing the Memorium. Dedicated to the cause of knowledge. Skilled adventuring archaeologist and archive academic.

Unerring sense of memorio-historic importance. A dab hand with fisticuffs, walking stick, combat helmet, concealed pistol, and trowel.

Rank 1 • Always knows the ideal value (°) of any object.

Rank 2 • [+] to xp rolls for retrieved valuable objects.

Rank 3 • Repression breakdown. Other-life memories break through. Each session, agent is also treated as having rank 3 in a different skill.

MEMORIUM UNIVERSAL COMBAT TRAINING (M.U.C.T.)

Memory must be defended against the Nihilation.

The Memorium has carefully curated a selection of effective historical martial arts for its select agents; the twelve practices of bow, chain, great gun, energy, hammer, knife, body, pistol, pole, rifle, rod, and sword.

Rank 1 • The agent is skilled in three weapon practices of choice.

Rank 2 • Skilled in four more practices.

Rank 3 • Skilled in five more. That's all twelve.

MEMORIUM UNIVERSAL MAGITECHNIC OPERATION (M.U.M.O.)

The ancients have no secrets from the Memorium.

What the later people call technology is just advanced magic. Or was it the other way around? Doesn't really matter. Memorium U.M.O. training provides an oldtech skeleton key.

Rank 1 • The agent senses magical radiation and 'reads' magical instructions encrypted in the noöspheric aether surrounding such objects.

Rank 2 • The agent's magic cost is reduced by 1.

Rank 3 • Memory defragmentation. Each session, agent remembers a different spell they should not otherwise know. How is this happening?

TRAITS

All agents start with two trait ranks. They must choose at least one from the agent list. Others can be from *Uranium Butterflies*, or invented from scratch.

EIDETIC MEMORY UPGRADE

Nothing will be forgotten.

The Memorium's ill nano symbiotes remember everything wholesale.

Rank 1 • Never forgets a code, can always retrace their steps.

Rank 2 • Zoom-enhance postprocessor. After even a cursory glance, hero remembers enough to later mentally investigate a location.

FORGETTABLE EXISTENCE

Grey their face, their soul, their dreams.

The Memorium likes it this way. Do its agents?

Rank 1 • Eminently forgettable. [+] to stealth.

Rank 2 • Common face. [+] to impersonation and similar deceptions.

OCULAR SYMBIOTES

Your eyes are the eyes of the universe.

The Memorium's agents get better eyes.

Rank 1 • Low-light vision enhancement.

Rank 2 • Hyperchromatic vision, from ultraviolet to near infrared.

PROBABILITY TUNNEL

The demiurge plays quantum dice.

The Memorium cheats fortune for their favourites.

Rank 1 • Hero gains a lucky number between 1 and 20. Whenever they roll the number on a d20, they gain [+] on their next roll.

Rank 2 • Improbability subroutine. Whenever there is a chance of dice exploding, the hero's player rolls twice and picks the better result.

VALUE EXPERIENCE

Agents mainly earn experience by retrieving valuable artefacts for the Memorium to record and store in the Archival levels. The higher the ideal value of an object (°), the more xp it is worth.

Typical, well-preserved (°) • The object represents the culture the Memorium has chosen to preserve. Worth $1d6^* \times 10$ xp.

Masterful, insightful (°°) • Captures something essential of the culture and its works. Worth $2d6^* \times 10$ xp.

Precious, delightful (°°°) • A surprising and rare glimpse into a moment in time, now gone like tears in rain. Worth $4d6^* \times 10$ xp.

Rare, definitely not fungible (°°°°) • A creative pinnacle of a once-vibrant culture, now doomed. Worth $8d6^* \times xp$.

Unique treasure (°°°°°) • Truly what the Memorium lives for.

Expressions of sentience to delight creation. Worth $8d12^* \times xp$.

The xp dice listed above are annotated with asterisks. They explode when a player rolls their highest face. For example, each $d6^*$ that rolls a 6, adds another $d6^*$. Dice keep exploding until no new highest faces are rolled.

This Insertion's Target

Generate a random mission target by rolling a $d6^*$ for each column.

D6*	VALUE	SIZE	FORM	FUNCTION	QUIRK
1	°	10 sacks	statue	art	toxic
2	°°	1d6+1 sacks	depiction	history	unwieldy
3	°°°	1 sack	literature	technology	fragile
4	°°°	1d6+1 stones	tool	science	very obvious
5	°°°°	1 stone	magic	culture	consumable
6–9	°°°°	1d6+1 soaps	experience	sacred	seductive
10–11	°°°°°	1 soap	artefact	ineffable	uplifting
12+	°°°°°	intangible	life form	enlightening	corrupting

EXPLODING DICE REQUIRED FOR 7+

MEMORIALIST EQUIPMENT

“We agents are not drones enslaved and mind-washed by the Memorium,” said PiRA with a nervous chuckle, “Why would you think that? We must all have chosen this calling before agreeing to the memory streamlining.”

—Oral History of the Memorium’s First Visit, Printemps et co.

The Memorium sends its agents into dangerous environments to retrieve valuable objects of cultural significance. It does not send them unequipped. Every team always gets one free Alpha Engine. Teams can also sign out additional memorialist equipment equal in value to their combined level total. So, three third level agents can sign out 9 levels of equipment.

The size of equipment is noted in ‘stones’. Roughly, a human can carry 10 stones without penalty, and 10 more stones with disadvantage [-].

ALPHA ENGINE, LEVEL 5, 4 STONE

Every team’s way home. The standard-issue Memorium wormway access device (W.A.D.) is a reinforced alpha larva container with shoulder straps for ease of carriage. Activated with a directed psi spike, it tunnels a sub-reality tunnel back to its hive in the Memorium transporter level.

- » **Portal sense** • The larva tingles as it approaches a wormway portal.
- » **Standard protocol** • The agent spends an hour and 1 life point gently prodding the larva to open a portal near the alpha engine.
- » **Rush job** • The agent spends 1d6 life points to jab the larva and open a portal instantly. The portal is (1d6): (1) in another region, (2–3) 1d6 rooms or zones away, (4–6) 1d4 move actions away. The portal is accessible, not in solid rock or something daft like that, just not nearby.

MEMORIUM SHROUD, LEVEL 1, 1 STONE, +5 ALL DEFENCES

The agent’s basic cloak of many colours.

- » **Chameleon** • Shifts to fit local traditional garb by sampling the ambient cultural aura. Does not reproduce specific uniforms.
- » **Many pockets** • Space for up to 20 small, soap-sized objects. Almost extra-dimensional in how well it distributes their weight.

METAVERSARIAL RECORDER, LEVEL 3, 3 STONE

An assembly of tripods, sensors, and mechanical brains for creating digital reproductions of cultural artefacts too large to physically steal ... er ... save.

- » **Partial success** • [-] when rolling xp gained from recorded artefact.
- » **Platonic capture** • Requires fifteen minutes per point of ideal value (°).
- » **Prodigious memory** • Can store 10 full-fidelity reproductions.

POST-MATTER KNOCKER, LEVEL 2, 1 STONE

A set of higher-dimensional energy lockpicks. Opens 9-in-10 doors.

- » **Knock** • Held up against a door or lock, the P.M.K. emits a strange whining, buzzing sounds, and emits a glowing haze. The agent spends 1 life to make a relevant moderate test. Success: access is granted.
- » **Cooldown time** • Wait 1d6* minutes between tests.

RECHARGER, LEVEL 1, 1 STONE, CONSUMABLE

Condensate of higher-reality soul juice, recharges humans or batteries.

- » **Metrics** • Starts with 20 units of soul juice.
- » **Wiip** • Makes a 'wiip' sound. Restores 1 charge to an item.
- » **Zoop** • Makes a 'zoop' sound. Restores 1 life.

SPOMENIK SHROUD, LEVEL 2, 2 STONE, +9 ALL DEFENCES

A smart cloak that hardens like concrete to absorb blows.

- » **Character** • Offers a morose litany about standards slipping.

DREAM GUN, LEVEL 1, 1 STONE, 2D6 KA

A hand-held fully automatic dream gun developed by the Memorium to put humans to sleep.

- » **Charges** • Uses standard, rechargeable 20-unit omnibatteries.
- » **Morphic ray** • Attacks mental defences. Targets reduced to 0 life fall asleep and forget the events of the previous 5 minutes.
- » **Nightmare mode** • Spend whole charge in one blast: deals ×5 damage. Unfortunately, 1-in-6 chance a target put to sleep this way dies.
- » **Ranged** • [-] vs far away targets.

Other equipment also available on request by filling out form 274/d.

Sourcing rare or limited issue items takes longer. Please direct complaints to the Memorium hospitality and leisure department (reformed).

SANDBOX LOOP

Players may use the following play loop to explore this sandbox.

1. **Insertion** • The Memorium uses local psycho-historic potential to translate the heroes into the vicinity of a treasure it wants to preserve. Practically, the heroes, uh, ‘spawn’ near an atrocity, close to a time when the treasure will be destroyed. The clock starts ticking.
2. **Quarters** • They navigate to their target quarter. Unless otherwise specified, entering or crossing a quarter takes one hour.
3. **Encounter** • Every time the heroes enter a quarter, they encounter local denizens or a scene. They can [try to] avoid the encounter to save time.
4. **Preparation** • The heroes can [try to] acquire additional resources or experiences in a quarter. Unless otherwise specified, each experience takes one hour.
5. **Search** • If the heroes do not know exactly where their treasure is, they make a relevant test to find it. Each test takes one hour.
6. **Delve** • Once the heroes have located their target treasure, they delve inside to recover their treasure. Each delve is presented as a zone diagram. Each zone is not necessarily a single room. For example “the dormitories”, “the kitchens”, “the parking lot”, “the tangled air ducts”, “the overseer’s high tower” or “the plaza of the giant mural” may all be zones. Unless otherwise specified, entering or crossing a zone takes 10 minutes (also, apparently, called a ‘gross turn’ by the Grogard Tribe).
7. **Extraction** • Treasure in hand [or not] the heroes have two options. Return to their insertion point or open a return portal using an alpha engine (or some other miraculous device).

PROMOTIONS

Once the heroes are safely back in the Memorium, the players can invest earned experience in their heroes to upgrade them.

LOCAL ADVENTURING

In a more classic adventure, replace the Memorium with a local tavern, hospitaller enclave, observatus embassy, caravanserai, or other safe home base the heroes return to for rest, relaxation, and promotions.

INSERTION

Information is finite. Energy is information. The Memorium carefully trades its energy for creations of this cosmos it would preserve. That is why it does not insert its agents into mundane spacetime complete in body and ghost. Rather, it uses local materials and the psycho-historic flux generated by destructive maxima to clothe the agent's spirit-personality ghosts in replicated flesh-jobs to carry out their missions.

Local Psycho-Historic Maximum

What happened right before the agents arrived? Roll d6* for each column.

D6*	LOCATION	EVENT	SENTIENTS	ECHO
1	sewers	massacre	innocents	cursed ground
2	graves	shelling	Ebéteen slaves	haunting
3	alley	demolition	Ebéteen plebs	psychic pain
4	farm	firefight	Ebéteen	emotion waves
5	home	abduction	outlanders	monochrome
6-9	villa	mind theft	Iksans	ichor leak
10-11	temple	soul burn	outsiders	corruption aura
12+	golem	eater irruption	aliens	possession

Possible Flesh-Job Issues

Local source material can cause issues.

1. **Ancestor** • Recently dead. 1-in-6 chance to be recognised.
2. **Flesh-priest** • Prone to mutation. Vulnerable to corruption.
3. **Gore-body** • Recycled bio-matter. Vulnerable to rot and decay.
4. **Green** • Excess plant matter. Vulnerable to fire.
5. **Hollow-shell** • Golem parts. Vulnerable to command & control.
6. **Iksan Invader** • Machine wiring. Vulnerable to electricity.
7. **Pet** • Still a little fuzzy. Vulnerable to fear.
8. **Stone** • Heavy and blocky. Difficulty swimming or moving stealthily.
9. **Water** • Moist. Vulnerable to dehydration.
10. **Wind** • Too much gas. Vulnerable to being pushed around.

PORT OF LIFE & DEATH

The hundred-metre colossi of the Naga King and the Minotaur Queen stand tall, menacing, antediluvian. Guardians of the thick waters that lick the slick stone wharfs of the Diorite Port of the Disgruntled Scribe. A willow-strewn swamp shades south, beneath the King, a maze of reeds and mud-sunk ruins marches north, beyond the Queen.

It is hot. Squamous. The very stones ooze in the dank air. Great administrative temples and preservatoria rise from the muck like ships of stone, while tenements and hovels crowd below. Scum and vermin eked out their lives here, the refuse of the Flesh God's teeming cities. As those cities fell, the teeming multitudes flooded in: opium-peddling priests mingling with cowardly soldiers, refugees begging for salvation, former slaves plotting bloody vengeance. Striding after: Iksan soldiers with brazen helms and heat-rays to enforce their terrible Evolution.

CONDITIONS IN THE DIORITE PORT

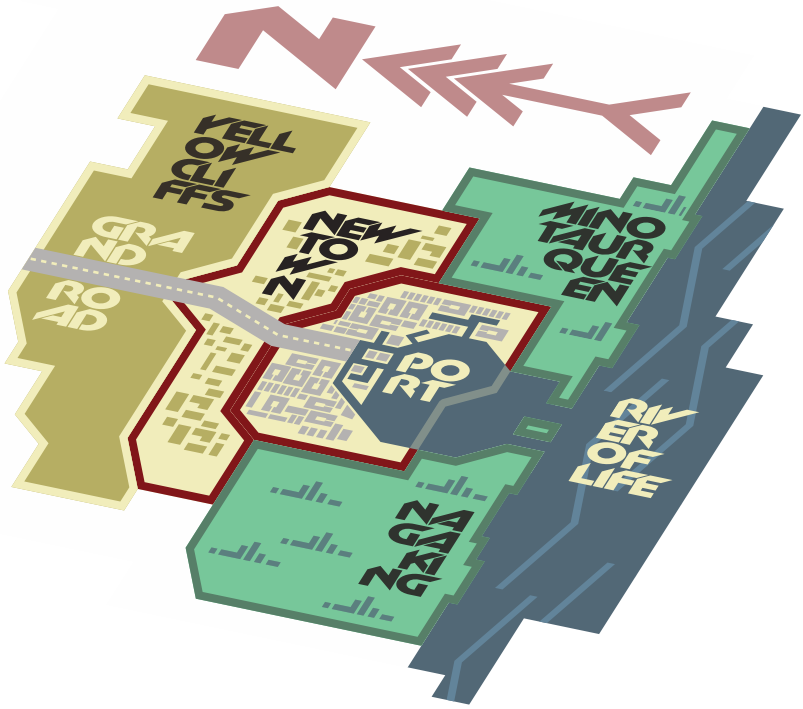
Colour • thick green water, mustard yellow rock, stark architecture.

Smell • river loam, night soil, mud, ash.

Life • palm trees, irrigated paddies, dangling vines, drooping willows, thick reeds, mosquitos, herons, crocodilians.

Aura • humid, sticky, teeming, terrified. An atmosphere of barely-subdued rage and resentment: hard to keep hot heads level.

SALVATION FT. DAMNED



ENCOUNTERS

1. Amphibious snakes, toads or other squamates (L4, swarming swarm).
2. Shackleminds (L1, mute) scratching for river clams.
3. Leprous grazing goats (L2, bored, infectious).
4. Ragged refugees (L0, betrayed by fate); 1-in-6 chance they are secretly resisters (L2, mutant soldiers).
5. Doghead scouts (L2, curious) shaking down Ebéteen refugees (L0).
6. Iksan legionnaires (L3, itching) in full battle order, annoyed they are not out beyond the cliffs getting rich.

DESIRABLES

common • 5d10 cash

uncommon • Fine leather and steel boots, now home to a few scorpions.

uncommon • Ceramic pots° of eerie turquoise herbs. Effects (d6): (1–3) analgesic, (4–5) waking dreams, (6) undead ancestor repellent.

rare • Silver skeleton°° of a small snake. An artful memento mori.

PORT QUARTERS

Port of the Disgruntled Scribe, “Ulkhēt”

(1 hour, urban core, 25xp)

The ancient port of many names rises like a pile of ill-assembled blocks. The conqueror’s flag, the Orb of the Moon and the Hand of the People, flies above it. Jaundiced Iksan legionnaires, hard-coded into their golem suits, clear out the Ebeteen, both living and undead, to make room for their radical rationalist Rebuilders.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Visit Waxen Crow plantation** • A delicately carved wooden pleasure house in the ancient polar style. Within: the wax-skinned, blood-addicted Olroc Dwei keeps dreamer cattle for the Ebéteen ancestors who have decided to collaborate with the Iksans. Relatively safe carousing, convert 2d4* x 100 cash into xp.
- » **Join a living skeleton hunt** • Iksan veterans organize supervised hunts in the old hoop-ball stadium. Entry fee, earn xp. Living skeleton hunt, 25 cash, 25 xp, easy test. Mummified scribe, 50 cash, 75 xp, moderate test. Half-ghoul, 75 cash, 150 xp, hard test. Fail: injury (d6): (1–3) cosmetic, (4–5) serious, (6) infected.

The Grand Road, “Nedj”

(1 hour, promenade, route to Dead City proper, 25 xp)

Carved by an ancient false deity, it blasts through the Yellow Cliffs. An avenue for two dozen to march abreast. Its retaining walls, carved by centuries of forgotten labourers, are filled with cyclopean statues of grim visage and decadent demeanour. Many are now much eroded.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Visit the statue graveyard** • Cyclopean statues of grim visage and decadent demeanour lean about in profusion. Moderate luck test. Succeed (d6): (1–5) record a valuable funerary poem°, (6) acquire a random spell or increase a funerary skill or trait by 1 rank.

New Town, “Fleahop”

(1 hour, shanty town, 25xp)

In the dirt and scrub between the port and the Yellow Cliffs spread hard-scrabble tents and shacks, crowded with the hungry and the desperate. Half-ghouls and even living skeletons are rife among them.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Drink like a scribe in Cake Town** • Like a pile of badly assembled child’s blocks, the quarter nestles behind several large temples and mortuaries. Once this outlander quarter catered to scribes and priests, now it spreads its musty arms for Iksans in need of relaxation. Moderately risky carousing, convert 1d4* x 50 cash into xp.

SECRET

- » **Bald Hound’s Mortuary (temple)** • Huddling against the Gokrumb, age-blackened cyclopean stones mark hidden hospital. Clattering Izvoren old believers preserve the dying with archaic implants. Very hard: win their trust & learn to make a wire ghoul.

Yellow Cliffs, “Gokrumb”

(1 hour, bracing walk, obstacle, 25 xp)

A sandstone wall pocked with prehistoric burial niches of a forgotten time divides the watered riverland from the Dead City proper.

PONDER

- » **Impassable** • Some passages are barred to all. Perhaps, there is wisdom to be found in humility. Spend 1d3 hours in contemplation, earn 25xp.

SCRAMBLE

- » **Climb across** • The rock is treacherous, scorpions and snakes are common. A very hard test, earn 25 xp. Fail (d6): (1) death, (2–3) serious injury, (4–6) just a scratch.

The Naga King

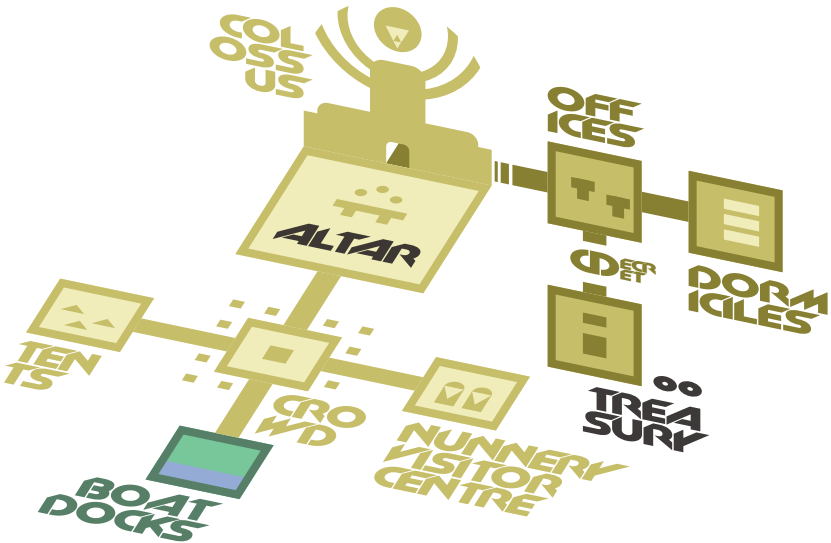
(2–3 hours, swamp skiff, 75 xp)

The slime-wreathed obsidian colossus dominates the promontory west of the Diorite Port, its sheen surface pocked by Iksan heat rays. Willow swamps full of deep pools, dappled shade, snakefish and long-necked crocodiles wreath its rocky base. Warm-bloods need take care.

Wretched refugees crowd about in over-burdened house boats, squatting in the nunnery visitor centre, wailing in fear of the Iksan demolition crews. They shelter a few **Ebeteen snake priests** (L3, shapeshifters).

EXPERIENCES

- » **Sacrifice** • The great thorn-and-bone altar accepts warm-blooded offerings. An easy ritual, chickens preferred. Success: easier social interactions with snakes for 1d4 days.





The Minotaur Queen

(2 hours, reed boat, 75 xp)

A labyrinth of dry islets and reed-choked waterways spreads east of the Diorite Port to the sculpted might of the queen colossus. An Ebeteen holiday house claims dominion of each islet, its ornate, carven bulk a testament to its administrator-priest master's status and wealth. Arrowroot vines now strangle the houses in green even as their shackle-minded slaves make them their own in a kind of paltry half-freedom.

The Minotaur Queen, sculpted in the Second Oppressor style, looms over the reeds. Scores of rafts and tents pile up at the queen's feet like driftwood; the homes of starving shackle-minded abandoned when their oppressor-priests fled into the Dead City. Between her legs is the cthonic entrance to the Temple of Her Mystery Cult.

WITHIN

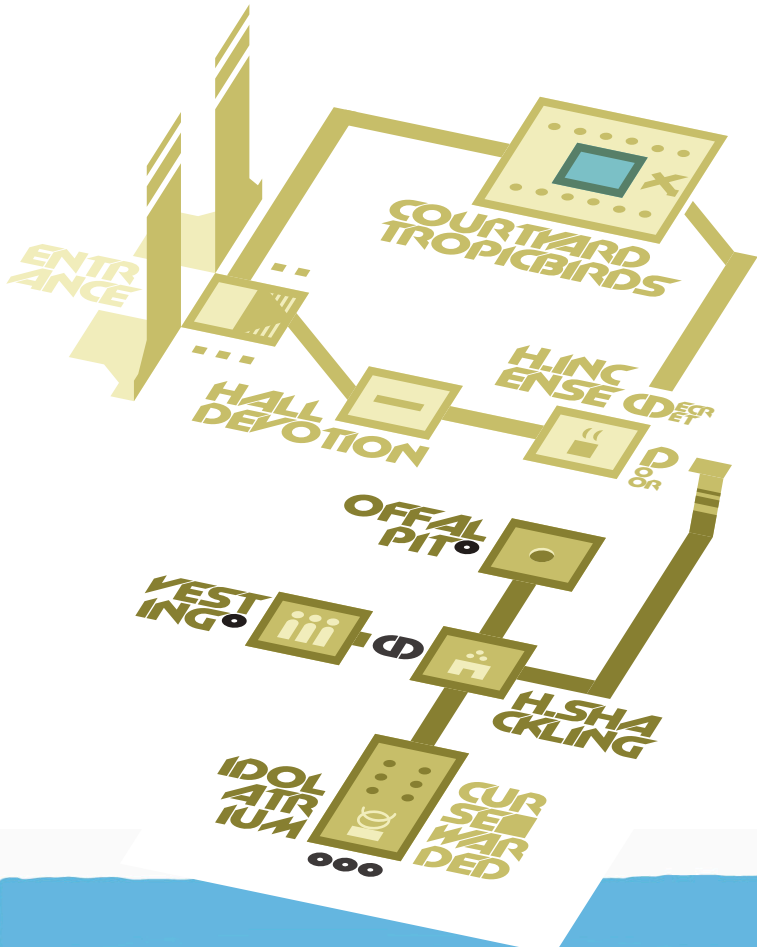
1. **Chamber of slow time** • A priest rots upon a music altar, an alabaster clavier^{oo}. Their silk robes puddled on the floor. Their skin missing.
2. **Hall of incenses** • A luminous crystal of oppression^{ooo} suspended on chains of brass and cords of human hair. It speaks to the shackle-minded, draws them to the queen. They do not know this.
3. **Courtyard of tropicbirds** • Delicate frescoes of slender white birds with long tails surround a pool of refreshing clear water. A self-liberated **clockwork archaic** (L4, obsessive) is working in the heat, preparing a human skin with ritual salts and golden needles. "I am Doom-of-the-Black-Blade and I must master the spell *Archaic Dons the Skin of Man*, that I may fly safe to freedom," it cries to itself.

EXPERIENCES

- » **Sacrifice** • Offerings of blood and vinegar, spiders and eggs. An easy ritual. Success: fertility and healthier flocks for a month.
- » **Vivisection** • Open up a shackle-minded to find out how the glyph-seals work. Extreme test. Success: gain a rank in biomancy or related magic.

DANGER

Charoni boat wanderers (L2, water-adapted, #2d6) dart about the maze in their long, sharp boats, like barracudas hunting slaves and easy plunder.



PORT LESSONS

The Shackleminded

Ebet knew no crime, for all crime was a sin against the Living Flesh God, and the living god suffered no sinners. Empathic informers found criminals before they could commit a crime and condemn their souls. The would-be criminal's brain was locked with glyph-nails so they would do the bidding of the living god, slaves to the greater good of the Ebeteen until they atoned for their sin-crimes.

In practice, being shackleminded was sometimes a hereditary status.

Shackleminding is currently outlawed by the Iksan conquerors under provision 23b of the Rational Legal Updates 1.3.

MAKING A SHACKLEMIND

The Ebeteen use a machine called a **shackle scarab**, grown from the tooth of a shackle-minder. It burrows into a subject's brain through their temple, dismantling part of their pre-frontal cortex and mentally shackling them. In the process much of the modified brain matter is transmuted into an electro-ceramic seal called a glyph-nail.

Ordered existence • Shackleminds are bound to obey their minders' orders.

Pain-free • Shackleminds gain an additional 3 life per level.

Post-social • Gain [+] [+] vs social attacks (they do not understand them), but suffer [-] vs mental attacks (they are weak of will).

Safe brain • All mental attributes are reduced to the lower functional range.

ALL HERE
WILL BE MEAT

Archaic Dons the Skin of Man

Synthetic endoskeleton clothed in living tissue.

The synth wizard clothes their own (or another machine's) skeletal structure with the muscle, skin, and other tissues of a biological organism.

- » **Imbued** • The wizard's will keeps the tissues alive.
- » **Hard-wire** • Double spell price: the tissues stay alive without the need for magical channels. Removing the tissues deals Pd6 damage.
- » **Skin** • Requires a human skin and musculature to work.
- » **Surgical ritual** • For best results, the spell requires a couple of hours and an operating theatre.
- P1** • Skin suit. From far away, in poor light, the synthetic looks human.
- P2** • Emotionless. While the skin fits, emotions do not come through.
- P3** • Passing ordinary. The archaic machine now looks quite human.
- P5** • Charming machine. With fine microsecond control of the musculature, the skin wearer gains [+] to social tests.
- P7** • Biorobot. Nano-ghosts interweave human and machine, creating a replicant medically indistinguishable from an ordinary human.

The Flesh Withers and the Face is Forgotten

A curse-ward for sweeter repose.

The ancestor priest paints a ward upon a door, portal, chest, or other item.

- » **Face** • The spell primarily affects the face. It will greatly impact how the accursed carries on their social interactions.
- » **Imbued** • The priest's will keeps the spell active.
- » **Permanent** • Double spell price and offer flesh, wine, bread, and prayers once a year. Spell doesn't have to be imbued.
- » **Trigger** • The curse-ward is usually triggered by touch, but the priest can specify other triggers.
- P1** • The skin of the accursed ages 3d10 years. Acquaintances no longer recognise them unless prompted.
- P2** • Skin and flesh age 9d10 years. Close friends no longer recognise them.
- P3** • Skin and flesh are mummified, the flesh is forgotten. The undead will of an ancestor now drives the accursed and they are half-undead.
- P5** • Skull, skull, skull face.

VALLEY BRUTALIST

The dusty bowl bakes in the relentless sun, tucked between the detritus moraine and the bone cliffs. Plantations give way to scrub, eroded walls, run-down house husks, and scoured grey rocks piercing the yellow sand like hunched old men. 1.

Maintainer town hunches at the narrowest, most shaded part; a regularity of minimalist forms of the second brutal cubism overlaid with Ebéteen high-reliefs of authority, malpractice, and salvation. Mud-brick shacks colonise the gloomy crannies between the ancient buildings.

Former slave engineers and flesh-sculptor masters alike resemble grey spectres in the dust. Glowering stares promise plots and vengeance. Pictographic graffiti praises the eye that judges and the rebuke of hubris.

CONDITIONS IN THE VALLEY OF MAINTENANCE

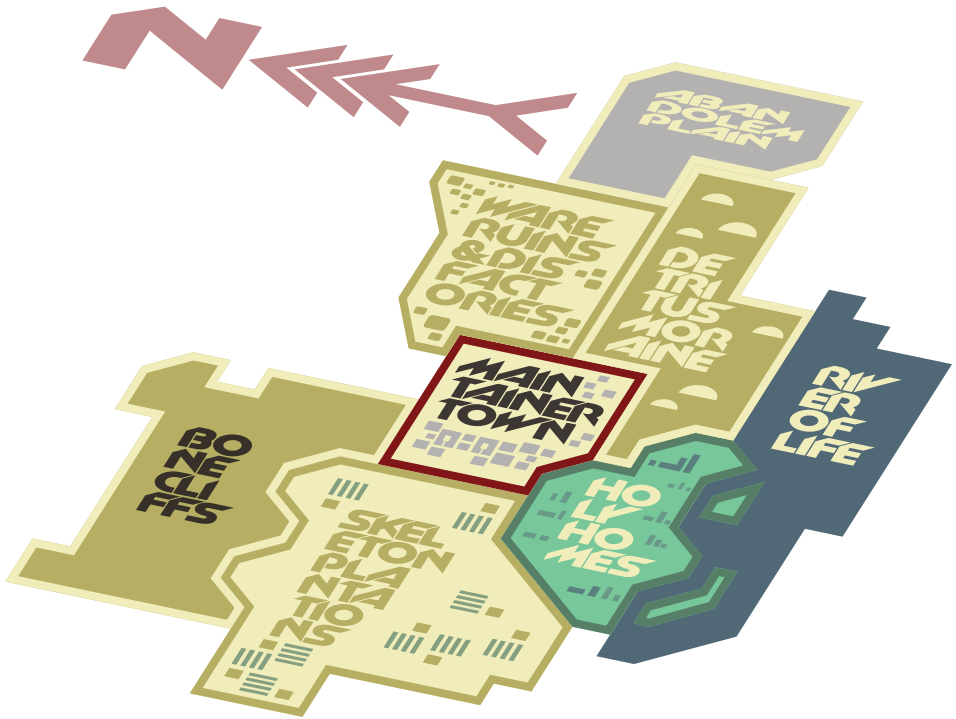
Colour • mustard yellow sand, grey synthetic rock, black tar pits.

Smell • flinty dust, acrid diesel, bitumen, and stagnant water.

Life • spiderwebs, beton trees, drip gardens.

Aura • itchy, vengeful, pitiless and cruel; like the sun above. Theft and intimidation come easily in such a place.

MOTHERCAN WEDREAM?



ENCOUNTERS

1. Swarm of prowling feral centipedes (L3, puce with venom)
2. Canny smugglers (L1, salty) pilfering for profit.
3. Dying, pustulent maintainers. Infection or curse? It's a curse.
4. Resolute legionnaires (L2, steely) on an "order and progress" patrol.
5. Large scavenging rats (L1, inquisitive) with emeralds for eyes.
6. Stooges of the verminmancer (L1, thugs) hunting for rats.

DESIRABLES

common • 3d10 cash

common • Ivory dog, cat, or camel figurine painted with ochre.

uncommon • Filigree aluminum cabinet full of small collectible dolls°.

uncommon • Charmed anklet of river pearls. Effects (d6): (1–3) better swimming, (4–5) UV protection, (6) swiftness.

rare • Clockwork dancing bear toy°° with pearl teeth and ebony eyes.

rare • Carved hippo's tusk° depicting obscene, mesmerising friendship.

VALLEY QUARTERS

Maintainer Town, Nazagraya (Izv.), Ketvorenkhét (Ebt.)

(1 hour, repurposed industrial area, small settlement, 25xp)

A crumbling yet cozy slum sprawls in the shade of several ancient beton trees, surrounded by imitation Great Symbolist work-labour towers.

EXPERIENCE

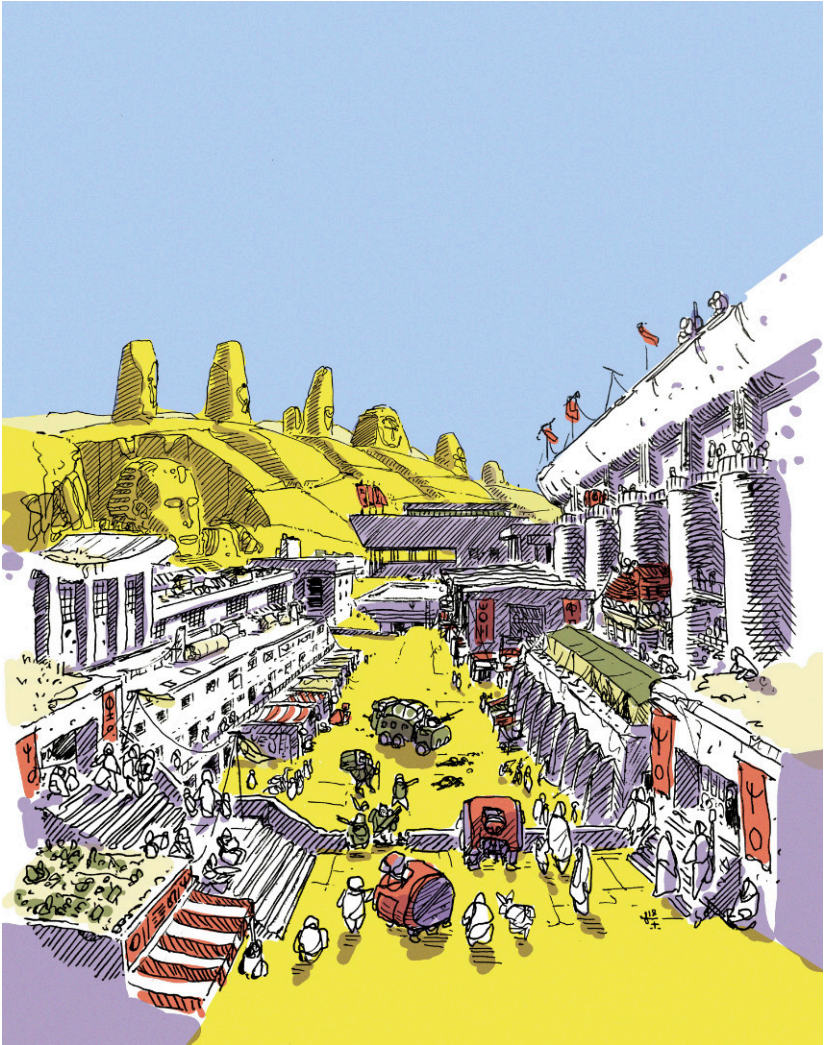
- » **Cool your head** • Dagrif of the Clockwork Hand's brick tap house offers respite from the heat. Sells iced water, poor alcohol and good rumours. The alcohol incapacitates foul-mouthed heroes and may cause physical injury. Safeish carousing, convert 1d4* x 25 cash into xp.
- » **Eat fast golem food** • A dingy food-and-beverage court occupies the drafty floor of a repurposed domestic artefact warehouse. Is-Nasty the F&B-golem is the Master of Viands: honest to a fault, makes no bones about this nasty fuel. The bread-and-lard has grit, the fizz-water smells of donkey, but it's cheap. Probably won't kill anybody. Gastronomic specialty, spend 10 cash to earn 1d100-35 xp. Be careful when chewing the gem-rat stew. Has bits in it. Easy endurance test. Fail (d6): (1) wasting gut-rot, (2-3) gem runs, lose 1d6 hours, (4-6) terrible burps.

RESOURCES

- » **Izvoreni Engineering** • Once-colourful artificial skin tarps cover the maintainer golem workshops where simian Izvoreni engineering clans repair these sturdy mementoes of pre-Ebéteen times. Yastref with the oily turban-cap and clay vaporiser has a wonky golem (L2, mulish) named Pig-Eats-Palm-Tree available for 350 cash. Other gear available.

SECRET

- » **Trancing Tony** • Acid mushroom den hidden behind a smelly machine-and-fish shop. Does high-quality acid mushrooms and comfort golems. Owner: Negresh, a hatchet-faced woman with archaic arm implants. Heavy trip costs 2d20 cash. Worth 50 xp. Dangerous aura test. Fail (d6): (1) beset by visions of terror daemons, (2-3) permanent mental stat loss, (4-6) permanent mental stat gain, (6) gain a halo.



DANGER

- » **Psyched-up auxiliaries** • Poorly-supplied Iksan guards (L1, nervous) man checkpoints. Repurposed shackleminds as beasts of burden & shock troops. Prone to looting and extortion.
- » **Amoks** • Both ancestors (L2, undead) and golems (L4, single-minded), deprived of the leaden hand of Ebéteen control may run wild. Locals flee like terrified bats at the breaking of the night.

Skeleton Plantations

(2 hours, irrigated fields and rural lanes, 20 xp)

Scrub and suburbs give way to food palms, irrigated fields, labour skeleton storage barracks, and planter houses. Many fields are going to weed now, the skeleton workers destroyed or stolen by Iks.

RESOURCE

- » **Plunder a planter house** • The fall of the necromantic Ebéteen state and the flight of its necromancer overseers has left many palatial houses guarded only by their armoured skeleton retainers (L1d4, free-willed). Moderate looting test. Fail (1d6): (1) 1d4 deaths, (2–3) 1d4 serious injuries, (4–6) chased away in humiliating fashion. Treasures (1d6): (1–3) 2d6* x 50 cash, (4–5) ornate metal bird skull° delicately incised with flowers and stars, (6) lapis-and-man-bone ancestor face mask°°.

DANGER

- » **Redistribution patrols** • Iksans (L2, administrators) surveying the lands to reward loyal troops may decide to exact a toll on interlopers.

Holy Homes

(2-4 hours by pleasure barc, canals and islets, 30 xp)

Islands and reedy waterways formerly administered by the Minotaur Queen Temple as places where the Ebéteen urban aristocracy could relax with their ancestors on holy days.

RESOURCE

- » **Get your own ancestor** • The docile undead servants (L1, finely dressed) are little threat unless provoked. Luck test. Success, find an ancestor awaiting a new master (d6): (1–3) ghoul (L1, paralyzing), mummy (L2, rot-touched), vampire (L3, medicinal).

DANGER

- » **Takeover** • The lovely homes are swiftly being taken over by Charoni scavengers (L2, venomous), Ebéteen plebeian squatters (L1, desperate), and long-necked crocodiles (L3, intelligent?).

Detritus Moraine

(2 hours, foot-cutting paths, 25 xp)

Dust, cinder, slag, petrified corpses, spark-lost archaics, and industrial refuse compacted into a dark conglomerate by the centuries.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Offered wisdom** • Buried to its chest, its limbs crushed centuries ago, a dormant archaic named Never-Rests-Until-the-Deed-is-Sung (L6, star-woven) has awakened. Its great granite face^{ooo} is still beautiful. Spend 1d4 hours to hear its tale, earn 2d20 xp. Thought test. Success (d6): (1-5) recover lost life, (6) increase one mental stat.

PONDER

- » **Cruelty of time** • Even as the Ebéteen have fallen, these golem-makers fell so many years before. Spend 1d3* hours, earn 50xp.

DANGER

- » **Risen oppressed** • Clockwork golems (L2, brazen) and their Izvoreni maintainers (L1, humble) patrol the moraine, hunting their lost heroes.



Wareruins & Disfactories

(1 hour, prehistoric refabricating warehouses, 25 xp)

Ebéteen refugees are reoccupying old warehouses and factories. Their remaining slaves and plebeians are building makeshift accommodations. Water, food, and tempers are short.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Sourcespider Warehouses** • The weed-encrusted spheres of old source tanks mark a zone of alienation. There spiders big as dogs (L1, spitting) drag soft, larval things with half-formed faces (L4, telepathic) around in the dark. Spend a few hours to visit this parody of some forgotten society and gain 50 xp. Stealth test. Fail (d6): (1) someone is sucked dry by the spiders, (2–3) spider radiation poisoning, (4–6) strange half-formed dreams disturb sleep for the next 2 weeks. Constantly tired.

DANGER

- » **Barricades** • Rubble and garbage flare. Smoke and alchemical fire bombs fly. This is no space for an Iksan. At least until a reasonable purification division arrives with their eraser rays.

SECRET

- » **Cells** • Scattered refugees are coalescing into resistance cells devoted to the biomancy and necromancy that made Ebét great. Hard test: convince to deal with the heroes for mutual benefit. Success (d6): (1–3) mutation of choice for a 50 cash fee, (4–5) undead key, (6) necro spell.

The logo features the word 'TOMBENCO' in a bold, blocky, yellow font. The 'T' is stylized with a right-pointing arrow. Below it, the word 'CONTINUED' is written in the same font, followed by a yellow infinity symbol.

Bone Cliffs

(2 hour, exhausting scramble, obstacle, 25 xp)

Bones of a hundred centuries of burials, so thick there is almost no sandstone left. The bones still creak, ancestors cling to resurrection dreams.

PONDER

- » **Doom** • Spend 1d3* hours. [+] to tests for 1 hour.

SCRAMBLE

- » **Climb up** • The bone seems easy to climb. Spend 1 hour, earn 25 xp. Fail (d6): (1-3) eaten by a wall of living bone, (4-5) impaled, (6) disease. The passage beyond, to the next quarter, is guarded by a reaper golem (L6, bone). It allows passage for a joke.

Abandolem Plains

(1 hour, footpaths among great dead machines, no water, 25 xp)

Mining, recycling, and erosion have left a plain dotted with the respectfully posed corpses of dead golems and even a few intact funeral warehouses.

EXPERIENCE

- » **Memorial to the great archaics** • An ancient monolithic warehouse, half-sunk in sand. Guarded by curse and custom (L3, obscure).
- » **Inside** • The mausoleum of the great archaic teaches how the Izvorení were created by the great Maker Machines to tend them as they built a Garden for the people of the clay / rabbit / egg / dandelion (unclear).
- » **Deeper** • Stone gates cover deep shafts trapped with noxious gases. Leading to the focus of the mausoleum: an uplifted machine heart^{ooo}.
- » **Learn** • 1d6 hours and 50 cash to gain machine conversation skill. Hard test. Fail (d6): (1) direct neuro-teacher destroys subject's brain, (2-3) lose mental stat point, (4-6) permanently acquire a metallic lustre.

SECRET

- » **Illegal jolt shop** • Under a decayed ceremonial arch, master maintainer Niguf runs a dusty club, selling oblivion in his oil-stained stalls. Purple-blotched addicts stumble about. Spend 10 cash, gain 100 xp, easy aura test. Fail (d6): (1-3) possessed, (4-5) addicted, (6) turn purple.



I hope you have enjoyed the free alpha of *Dead City Memories*, vol. 1.

It started as a layout test of the new standardcat 55x85 template I designed for use with DTRPG's print-on-demand service. I soon found that my layout had legs, but so did the *Dead City* sandbox I wrote some years ago. However, with *Uranium Butterflies* nearing completion and 320 pages, I have no desire to create another massive book any time soon. Or even start working on one, while that one is not yet printed and made physical.

So I will release *Dead City* as a series of booklets. I hope you will enjoy them. After all, I've already got enough manuscripts for 12 zines like this one!

