

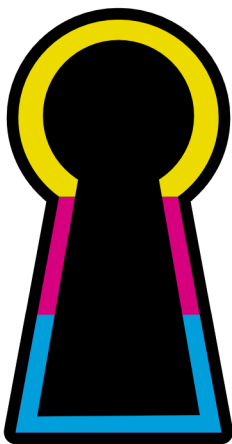


# The Sealed Library

**W**RETCHED  
&  
**A**LONE

“HOW DARE YOU AND THE REST OF YOUR BARBARIANS SET FIRE TO MY LIBRARY? PLAY CONQUEROR ALL YOU WANT, MIGHTY CAESAR! RAPE, MURDER, PILLAGE THOUSANDS, EVEN MILLIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS! BUT NEITHER YOU NOR ANY OTHER BARBARIAN HAS THE RIGHT TO DESTROY ONE HUMAN THOUGHT!”

— SIDNEY BUCHMAN



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# The Sealed Library

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&  
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# WHO AND WHAT?

You are the sole surviving librarian of the greatest library in history. It sits in the centre of culture for an ancient land, now fallen to invaders. They pillage and raze.

The library has been barricaded and you are under siege. What important texts can you move down into the vaults and seal away forever before the barricade breaks?

What will future generations discover inside the Sealed Library?

You are hungry, you are scared, you are desperate. The fate of the combined knowledge of generations is in your hands. You know the chances you will see the outside world again are slim, but the survival of such precious knowledge is bigger than you.

# How?

To play you'll need a standard deck of cards with no jokers, a single 6-sided die, a tumbling block tower, and ten tokens of some kind. You can play without the block tower if need be, though the game is better with it.

Finally, you will need some way to record your game. A leather journal, a piece of paper rolled up as a scroll or some other prop appropriate to your vision of the setting. This will act as your diary. If you can embellish or age your diary, all the better. Quills and wax seals are excellent ideas if you have the will and the means.

There are only two ways out of this situation alive, but both are unlikely.

First, you could save the most important works of your culture, seal them in the underground vaults and escape through the sewers.

Second, you could discover ancient spells to transport the Sealed Library and yourself to a pocket dimension, free from the terrors of this one.

# BEGIN

Set up the tumbling block tower as you normally would for games of that nature. Roll your die, and complete that many pulls from the tower. The tower represents the state of the barricade keeping the invaders out. If it falls, invaders enter the library and destroy all that remains, including you. The game is now over. If you do not have access to a tumbling block tower you do not need to use one and may ignore any instances where you are asked to pull from the tower. Your barricades will never fail, you are more likely to die of hunger, thirst, and isolation.

Shuffle the deck of cards and place them face down within easy reach. If you wish to play a shorter game, make sure the Ace of Hearts is the top card of the deck.

Make your first diary entry, using the script below.

*Day 1 after the barricade. The diary of Junior librarian, [your name]. The doors and windows remain secure though the ceaseless banging and distant screams still fill me with dread. I tell myself some of the others left outside might have survived. Today, I must begin choosing and moving the most important works, or what remains of them, down to the catacombs. I hope my food and water will last until my task is complete.*

All subsequent entries should begin with the statement “Day [x], the diary of Junior Librarian [your name]”, in order to assist with an accurate reconstruction of events should you escape with your diary or it is found in the future. The content of the rest of the log is up to you, but should at least summarize the events of the day.

Now you are ready to begin.

# THE DAY

The game is divided into days. Each day has two phases: the tasks, and the diary.

## PHASE ONE: THE TASKS

Roll your die and draw that number of cards from the deck, keeping them face down.

Turn over the first card you drew and look in the Reading Room. If the Reading Room asks you to do a specific thing, do it.

Continue turning over cards and consulting the Reading Room until your tasks are complete.





When you have completed all your tasks for the day, discard the cards you have used unless you are told otherwise.

## PHASE TWO: THE DIARY

Take a moment to consider the events of the day, keeping in mind what you have learned about the state of the library, the invaders, and how you are feeling. Then write your entry for the day.

# THE READING ROOM

Spend time in the Reading Room each time you draw a card and complete the task it assigns you. Sometimes these tasks will involve pulling blocks from the tower. Others will involve quiet reflection or answering questions. Some do other things entirely.

	
<p>Hearts represent your opportunity to save important works of literature. When you draw a heart, you are saving things for the benefit of future generations.</p>	<p>Diamonds represent unexpected discoveries. When you draw a diamond, you are reminded that a library like this holds many secrets and you as a junior librarian were party to few of them.</p>
	
<p>Clubs represent damage and breaches of the barricade. When you draw a club you must repair, defend or evade.</p>	<p>Spades represent the scarcity of resources. When you draw a spade you are depleting your food and water. With it fades your strength and will to continue.</p>



# SAVE

You have figured out the vault's locking mechanism! If only you can store the most important works from around the library and reseal them! Pull from the tower. Do not discard this card - instead, put it to one side and place 10 tokens on it.

**A** At the end of each day, after completing your diary, roll your die. On a result of 6, remove a token from the card. If you successfully remove all the tokens, you have filled the vaults and sealed them. The Sealed Library is safe. Make a final pull from the tower. If the tower stands, you are able to seal the vaults and escape with your life intact. Make a final diary entry to seal within the library before you escape to a new life. If the tower falls, you have sealed the library, but you are sealed inside and your legacy of knowledge means your death. Write a final note before you breathe your last. Then, the game is over.

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**2** You unearth the original works of the greatest poet your world has known. What was their name and what did they write about? How do you feel holding the original works of the Scribe in your hands?

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**3** While salvaging early works of philosophy you hear banging on the roof. It might be the invaders. It might be loose tiles, or bats. What do you choose to believe? What early philosophy do you choose to save? Pull from the tower.

---

**4** A 12 volume set of epic fiction penned by father and finished by son. These are the original manuscripts, handwritten with margin notes. What was their epic about? How is this version different to the published work?

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**5** Stone tablets detail the life and death of an early king. Moving them is arduous. Who was the king? What did they accomplish? How did they die? Pull from the tower.

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**6** The library's collection of medical texts, which spans historic notions of humours to new surgical and magical approaches. This section is as expansive as it is varied. What do you save, the historically important or the eminently practical?

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**7** Beautiful illustrated works detailing the flora and fauna of far-off lands. The colours still leap off the page, the drawings so lifelike you swear the figures move when you look away. What unbelievable creature haunts your dreams this night? Pull from the tower.

---

**8** A slim volume of chess strategies catches your eye. You set up a board. Before you sleep, you try some of the exercises. How experienced/gifted a player are you? Can you solve the puzzles?

---

**9** The religious section of the library is filled with esoteric viewpoints. You read a text written in hallucinogenic ink. You collapse, your body wracked with spasms, your mind filled with visions of the library's future. What do you see in your vision? Pull from the tower.

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**IO** Centuries old tomes on fighting technique and the etiquette of duels. What weapon do you stop and spend some time practicing the stances of?

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**J** Discreet volumes bound in velvet, authors, and titles absent from their spines. The oft-rumoured erotic illustrations of the Viscount of Stars. Are you tempted to stop and read them, or do you focus on your task of preservation? Pull from the tower.

---

**Q** A multi-volume tome that is a biography of the library itself, sixteen head librarians' writings lie within. Do you preserve what exists, or do you assume the role of biographer and add to its tale?

---

**K** Deep in the basement of the library, damp, and mold has claimed the legibility of many ancient maps and scrolls. Spores from purple mold fill your lungs. Hours later, you begin to cough up blood and hallucinate. What do you see? Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you succumb to the spores and suffocate in your sleep, lungs filled with blood.



# DISCOVER

**A** You find the keys that open the forbidden magicks section of the library. You are surprised to discover stocks of paraphernalia and even evidence of rituals being performed recently. What ritual do you suspect was performed? Who do you think might have been the culprit? If you have Ace of Hearts, the vaults are open and a roll of 5 or 6 is sufficient to remove a token from them.

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**2** The wood-panelled map room stretches before you. Scrolls, tomes and globes document perspectives on the world spanning centuries. Which map fills you with awe and wanderlust?

---

**3** A bone wand discarded on an empty shelf. A dried rat's foot dangles from the end, the bone shaft inscribed with runes. This might be useful, but it makes you feel uncomfortable just to look at it. Pull from the tower.

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**4** A book entitled Thaumaterge Tiraldo's guide to Teetotalism has had its pages cut out. A bottle of fine scotch is hidden inside. Which librarian's desk did you find this in? Do you drink it?

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**5** In the bookbinding room you find a number of lost works that were scheduled for repair. Sadly, you knock over a rack of inks, wrecking most of them. What texts has your clumsiness destroyed? Pull from the tower.

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**6** A magic circle, drawn in salt. You recognise these runes from a ritual on interdimensional transport you barely comprehended when you read about it. You make a sketch and feel a glimmer of hope you may be able to take the library into a pocket dimension.

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**7** Near volumes of gothic poetry, a human skull sits on the shelf. A label attached to it gives details of the original owner. Who was it? Why have they been shelved here? Pull from the tower.

---

**8** A map of the library, with a trail, amateurishly drawn. Where could it lead? If you follow it draw another card from the deck.

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**9** A librarian's enemy, the termite! You spend time exterminating them and sweeping up the books they destroyed. Pull from the tower.

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**IO** A stack of books far from their proper shelves, with a stash of food and water. What was this person researching? Do you eat and drink? Do you reshelve the books in their proper places?

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**J** Two corpses, a librarian and an invader. A sword sticks out from the librarian's guts. A letter opener in the invader's neck. The stench of rot is already strong. Do you move the corpses? Did you know the librarian? Pull from the tower.

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**Q** A workbook of sigils and symbols helps you understand the indecipherable magick texts you have read so far. What rituals have you learnt? What ingredient for the ritual eludes you?

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**K** A nest of enormous rats deep in a cellar. They swarm over you, biting with their foul yellow teeth. You throw them off and slam the door into this room shut. At night, fever grips your body, the wound turns infected. Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you succumb to the fever and die delirious and in pain during the night.



# INVADERS

- A** You find the handyman's nook with tools intended to repair and build shelves. You can reinforce the barricades with these. The next time you are told to pull from the tower you may choose not to.
- 
- 2** By the main doors, you relocate the shelves of late book records to help block the door. It's not like anyone will be needing them now. How do you feel knowing the library can never be the same again?
- 
- 3** A giant rock smashes through the roof and falls in a section of fiction no one will care to remember. Ravens come in through the whole and watch you greedily. How does their carrion stare make you feel? Pull from the tower.
- 
- 4** You find tunnels in the cellar that lead to the open sewers and the city beyond. To stop invaders entering, you flood these rooms and board them shut. What historical records were stored in here? Do they get destroyed by the flood?
- 
- 5** The invaders, toying with you, unleash snakes and scorpions under the door. How do you deal with this problem? Pull from the tower.
- 
- 6** You need wood to board up the last few windows. Long boards from shelves are needed. What section of books do you decide to sacrifice for this?
- 
- 7** At one end of the entrance hall there is a stained glass window twenty feet wide and sixty feet tall. The invaders launch stones at it, destroying it beyond repair. What historical scene did the window show? What famous artist created it? Pull from the tower.
- 
- 8** Fear of what the invaders will do fills your mind. You spend some time sharpening wooden stakes to defend yourself. What rumours of have you heard about their treatment of prisoners?
- 
- 9** You hear screaming from the cellars. On investigation, some invaders got in somehow, but were killed by something down there. You bar the door. What is reputed to live down in the cellars? Did you believe those tales before today? Pull from the tower.
- 
- 10** Much has been written about the invaders now at your doorstep. Who are they? A mighty empire, or an upstart kingdom? Are they trained soldiers or a vicious rabble?
- 
- J** Burning arrows break the windows above where you have been able to board them up. What sections of books burn? How burnt and tired are you? Pull from the tower.
- 
- Q** Stomping feet and banging shields make the ground tremor beneath you. A warriors' chant fills the air. The invaders sing of your defeat. What do they say they will do with you?
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- K** A wide-eyed, gaunt invader walks out in front of you, perhaps he was lost in the cellars. You struggle, he with sword and you your fists. You eventually win, but not without being wounded. Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, your wounds are too great and you died locked in struggle. The game is over.



# RESOURCES

**A** A section of wall on the river side of the library springs a leak and destroys priceless works of calligraphic art. On the upside, you have access to clean, cool water. If you have any Kings on display, you may choose one to remove. Place that king back in the deck, your ailment heals and fades.

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**2** Your only pair of robes are dusty and caked with sweat. Your hair has become lank and greasy, your skin crawls with lice. None of this matters anymore. What image of the future keeps you going?

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**3** Your meagre bread and cheese supply runs low. You begin to ration your food, just a pitiful amount for each day you believe you need to save the library. Pull from the tower.

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**4** Pesky research students were often caught sneaking food into the library. The confiscated food, though mostly inedible now, might just save your life. What do you find and what has perished?

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**5** Mice! Half a loaf of bread lost to their incessant nibbling. Do you eat the remaining half? Pull from the tower.

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**6** In another librarian's possessions, you find an unlikely treat. Smoked bacon! Tonight you will feast and think of better times. Who do you miss, and what do you know of their fate?

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**7** Your bread grows moldy, black and green patches all over. Do you cut these pieces off, or just eat them? Pull from the tower.

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**8** The cheese wheel you have has gone hard, the apples have wrinkled. Still edible, but eating becomes a chore. What food do you fantasise about as you work your way through this drudgery?

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**9** You give in to temptation and eat until you are full. That might have been rations for three days if you had shown restraint. You feel better, but you know what you just did was unwise. Pull from the tower.

---

**IO** You have run out of blank paper. Luckily, you are in an excellent place to produce a palimpsest. What book do you choose to defile to allow your diary to continue?

---

**J** Looking through the head librarian's study you find an expensive bottle of wine in a drawer. It's not like they'll miss it any more. What do you do while drunk? Pull from the tower.

---

**Q** Bright sun breaks through the smoke that has obscured the city for days. Outside is silent, no screams, no roars of battle. You take a moment to think of happier times. What pleasant sunny memory comes to mind?

---

**K** You know this meat has gone bad. You eat it anyway. It makes you sick, you can barely move, your body ruled by cramps and sweats. Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you have poisoned yourself beyond recovery. The game is over.

# DEBRIEF

Take a moment. Breathe.

What happened? Did you seal the vaults? Did you escape, knowing knowledge was preserved for future generations?

Or did you die alone and pathetic in the library, the enormity of the task you set out to achieve dwarfing your ability to achieve it?

You sought for the magical knowledge and the arcane tools to truly seal the library away safely. You hoped it could be done. You got glimpses of what you needed. You knew it was technically possible, you read the accounts of it being done.

You were never going to succeed.

You have been telling a story during this game, but the story began before you drew your first card. The rules in this book are a story, and they were told to you by an unreliable narrator - the human capacity for hope, and the desire to survive against all odds.

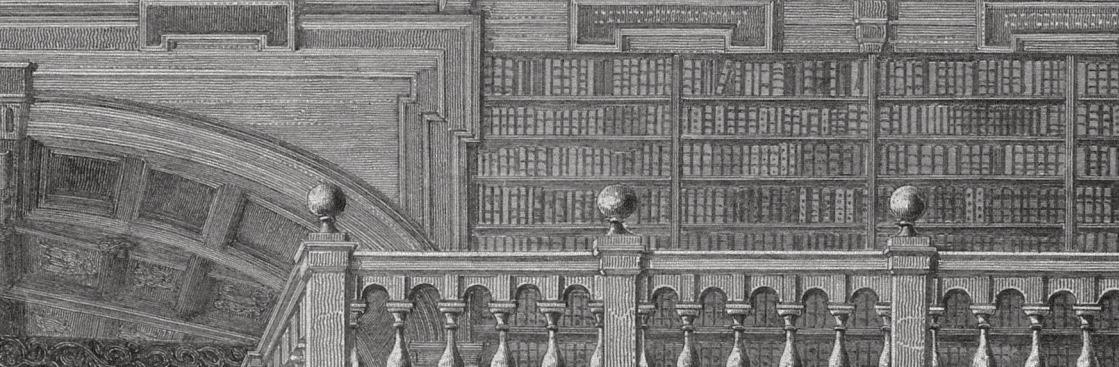
There was never any hope of you creating a pocket dimension. Elder magi devote their magically-extended lives to tasks like this and still many of them fail. You were nothing but a hopeless amateur. The best you could try for was to seal the vaults and hope history worked in your favour. Even that was unlikely.

You were doomed from the start. And somewhere inside you you knew this, even as you were desperately clinging on to hope.

You may not have survived, but the diary of your final days is there to be found. What becomes of it now? Will it survive the sacking of the great library? Will it burn alongside your corpse or will a future scholar learn about the ancient world from it?

When you close this book, put down this game, what will become of all you have done here?

*You are  
unlikely  
to be  
remembered*



*"It hardly matters why a library is destroyed: every banning, curtailment, shredding, plunder or loot gives rise (at least as a ghostly presence) to a louder, clearer, more durable library of the banned, looted, plundered, shredded or curtailed.*

*- Alberto Manguel*



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