Scene 4: The Auction

This document includes information on all the rival bidders at the Auction, including what items they are interested in and the amount of money they have to spend on them. By buying items other than ITEM SIX the protagonists will reduce their liquid cash while leaving cash in the hands of their rivals. Thus they will need to cheat in order to win more than just ITEM SIX. They can win ITEM SIX without cheating, if they stay focused on just that one item.

Here is a list of the items that will be bid on, their opening prices, and their “estimated sale prices” if anyone theorizes.

1. ONE: A reliquary that is said to contain a nail from the true cross. $2M/$4M
   1. Elijah will bid to $3M honestly
   2. The Firm will bid up to $15M
   3. Mattias will bid up to $4M
   4. If Edwina is there, she will try to take the initial bid but can’t afford to go higher. This might be an opportune moment for her to act crazy: She might bid to $20M as a bluff only to get backstage and cause a scene. Afterward, the item will be re-auctioned.
2. TWO: A first printing of Malleus Maleficarum “with two extra chapters” $6M/$12M
   1. Elijah will bid to $12M
   2. The Firm will bid up to $8M (to keep people from getting off cheap)
   3. Xanderberg will bid up to $8M
   4. Mattias will bid up to $8M
3. THREE: A rough onyx pyramid, made of a single piece, unique as a geological sample, more valuable because it predates human writing. $2M/$4M
   1. Xanderberg’s eyes glaze over as soon as the pyramid is in sight. He will stand and bid from a standing position, rigid and arrow-straight, unlike his typical nerdy slouch. His voice will sound like he is in a dream. He will bid to $24M if need be.
   2. The Firm will bid to $3M
   3. Mattias will bid to $4M and then just watch Xanderberg with pity in his eyes
4. FOUR: The remains of a leather scabbard, preserved in clay, approximately 1500 years old, unearthed by archaeologists in Cornwall. (This is here to tempt the PCs into spending a little extra money, in case it’s Excalibur’s scabbard; the thing that made Arthur invincible in some stories.) $2M/$4M
   1. The firm will bid to $4M (to keep Elijah from getting off cheap)
   2. Elijah will bid to $4M
   3. Terrence MacGregor will wring his hands and bid to $3M if he has any hope of an alliance with the PCs
   4. Matthias will bid heavily on this if he has allied with Elijah, or otherwise go to $3M
5. FIVE: One of Hernando Cortez's pennants, the things that made the Aztecs think he was Quetzelcoatl. $0.5M/$1M
   1. Mattias will bid to $3M.
   2. Xanderberg will bid to $4M here, because of the symbol of conquest and strength
   3. The Firm will bid to $4M as well, and will probably win it.
6. SIX: An antique sword. $4M/$8M (possibly more)
   1. Terrence MacGregor will bid to his limit.
   2. Elijah will bid to his limit.
   3. The Firm will bid to their limit.
   4. Matthias will bid his remaining money if any.
   5. Xanderberg will bid up to $10M or $2M below his limit (he wants some beer money left over)

“Bidding Up” a Price

The PCs want ITEM SIX, and there are four players with deep pockets who will also be bidding tonight. They want more than ITEM SIX though, and that gives the PCs the ability to use the rules of the auction to bid up the prices for other items to reduce their opponents’ cash on hand. Even if they don’t know how much cash their opponents have, this is a good tactic.

We could rely on the players to just do this, but none of my players go to auctions, so they don’t know how to use this tactic. This is what we use social skills in RPGs for.

The goal is to read the other bidder(s) and predict when they’re approaching the limit that they’re willing to spend on an item, then stop just before that point and let them win it at a higher price than they would have otherwise paid.

The first danger is if you go too far and get stuck paying money you didn’t want to spend for an item you didn’t want to buy. If they notice you doing it, it’s not a problem. But it can be a problem if they notice you doing it to them *before* *you* *notice that* *they’re also doing it to you*. And worse, if nobody else wants the item, and you wind up bidding it up, you’re stuck with it.

# System

The Firm will be bidding up prices on a few items. The PCs will probably want to do it, too; just in case. When a PC tries to bid up a price, he makes a split-second decision and gambles that the other bidder will outbid his disingenuous bid. That character makes two skill checks: **Relate (DC 10)** and **Empathy (DC 8)**. The result of these checks determines what follows.

* Success on both represents a bid or series of bids that drives the price up by ¼ of the opening price or as high as the most eager bidder for that item is willing to go (see above), whichever is lower.
* If someone else is driving up the price as well, and the PC fails the **Relate** check, he simply fails to raise the bidding price and cannot attempt to do so again.
* If the PC fails the **Empathy** check, he raises the price by ¼ of the opening bid, but winds up the high bidder at that price. The auction continues from there. If nobody is willing to bid more, that PC is stuck purchasing the item.

# No Credit

The auction will not accept credit or promises of money, or “let me run to the ATM” or “let me make a phone call.” They will also not accept bank transfers, Swiss bank accounts, or other electronic or remote payments. Cash only. But they will accept cash in the form of bearer bonds, gemstones, precious metals, unsigned stock certificates, treasury notes, real estate property deeds, or other currency equivalents. The PCs may be able to hand over the title of the Maybach for its blue book value of $200,000, leaving them without a ride (they’ll just be PCs and steal a car; that’s how this works). Anyone who wins an item that they can’t afford is ejected from the auction.

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| PCs | Elijah  2,1,6,4 | The Firm  1,3,5,2,6,4 |  | MacGregor  6,4 | Matthias  1,2,3,4,5,6 | Xanderberg  5,3,2,6 |
| 15.00 Million | 20.00  Million | 20.00  Million | Starting  Cash | 8.00 Million | 8.00 Million | 24.00 Million  (-2 reserve) |
|  |  | -4.1 | Reliquary  Nail from True Cross |  |  |  |
|  | -8.1 |  | *Malleus Maleficarum*  Extra Pgs |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | Ancient  Onyx  Pyramid |  |  | -4.1 |
|  | -4.1 |  | Clay with  Leather  Scabbard |  |  |  |
|  |  | -4.1 | Hernando  Cortez’s  Pennant |  |  |  |
|  | ~8 | ~12 | Ancient  British  Sword | ~8 | ~8 | ~18 |