

THE CRYSTALS OF Z'LETH



Made for 5e

A survival solo adventure where you pick your path to explore a lost civilization and uncover ancient secrets



OBVIOUS
MIMIC

THE **CRYSTALS** OF
Z'LETH



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OBVIOUS MIMIC SOLO ADVENTURE RULES

Dear Player,

Thank you for picking up our second solo adventure. *The Crystals of Z'leth* has been another labor of love that resulted in our biggest gamebook so far.

The Crystals of Z'leth is a solo adventure designed to play as your own *Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition* character. It is an interactive story where you as the player make the choices that take your character through challenges with real consequences to the story.

This solo adventure was successfully crowdfunded on Kickstarter in 2023 by more than 3500 backers from all over the world. We are eternally grateful for the support the community has given us and for the funding that provided us with the resources to create this for you. The Obvious Mimic team was able to spend more time, write more content, and create more art for this book and we hope it shows.

We had a blast making the book and we think you will enjoy this book as much as we did creating it.

Daniel Howard was the game designer and lead writer for *The Crystals of Z'leth*. Besides being a co-founder of Obvious Mimic, Daniel is also a forever DM and author/editor who has been publishing fiction and non-fiction for almost 30 years.

Kai Wloka is the producer and editor for *The Crystals of Z'leth*. As the other co-founder of Obvious Mimic, Kai brought his love of all things gaming to guide the story, build a fun experience, and get it out the door.

We thank you for joining us for the love of play.

INTRODUCTION

The solo adventure you are about to enjoy is an interactive narrative where you get to be the hero of the story. Through your character's abilities and your choices as the player, you can make progress through the various challenges set before you.

This version is based on the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition*. If you're already familiar with the basic mechanics of this game system, most of the rules here in the following sections will be a review (though you may want to check out the **What's Different?** section before moving on).

If you're not familiar with the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition*, then we suggest you review them here: <https://www.dndbeyond.com/sources/basic-rules>

THE GOAL

Though the exact goal of each Obvious Mimic solo adventure will vary based on the story, your goal as the player will always be to reach the end of the adventure in one piece.

Know that there will be obstacles and hazards in your path that will challenge (or even kill) your character. You will have to use your character's abilities - and your own wits - to overcome them and reach the story's end.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

To play this solo adventure, you'll need the following:

- A 5e character of level 1 or 2
- A set of dice
- This book

We understand that digital piracy is a reality of the time and inevitable. Therefore, we are releasing this solo adventure without DRM knowing full well it's going to travel.

We just want to remind all players that we do this for a living and this adventure and others like it supports a whole team of writers, artists, editors, and more. So if you truly can't afford it, then we genuinely hope that you enjoy the experience.

But if you can, we'd appreciate your support on our website (www.obviousmimic.com) or via our Patreon page (www.patreon.com/obviousmimic).

Thank you and enjoy!

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER MATERIALS

This solo adventure is designed to work on its own, but we understand advanced players may want to run encounters more like a traditional tabletop experience. So we also provide self-DM materials as an optional PDF. **Again, this is not necessary to enjoy the solo adventure but it is an option for players to also enjoy.**

You can get the self-DM content for free here:
<https://obviousmimic.com/pages/self-dm-packs>

This solo adventure will work with the pencil-and-paper version and physical dice if that's how you roll (pun intended). Or you could use a digital solution like **D&D Beyond** where you can create your character, roll your dice, and look up rules all on your device (phone, tablet, or computer).

ABOUT YOU

You are the hero of this solo adventure. But who are you? We honestly don't know.

That's because Obvious Mimic solo adventures are written for you to play whatever character you want. There are no restrictions. That means you could play a new character just getting started, or you could use this adventure as a DM-approved downtime activity between sessions.

The story has been crafted in such a way that any character can succeed. Of course, some adventures will be easier or harder based on your character, but your choices as the player will help guide your character through their challenges.

The only real restriction we include is that our stories lean towards heroism. We don't even run evil campaigns at our real-world tables. Your choices within the story will generally be of good and neutral alignments.

The Crystals of Z'leth has been written for Tier 1 (levels 1 to 4) characters to play. This means that certain parts will be challenging for a level 1 character but most will be very easy for a level 4 character.

HOW TO PLAY

As you read, you will have to follow the prompts to progress through the story toward your goal. The adventure is broken down into numbered sections that have been randomized within chapters. On your journey, you'll face choices like this:

You can take either the corridor on the left (**go to 175**) or the corridor on the right (**go to 19**).

To move forward, you would either flip to the section you've chosen (your only option if you're reading the physical book) or click on the **go to #** link to jump straight to that section (available in the digital versions).

ROLLING DICE IN THE TEXT

Many sections don't give you the choice but instead require you to roll some kind of check (usually a skill check). It might look something like this:

Roll a Strength (Athletics) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 192**. If you get under 10, **go to 33**.

In this case, your choice is based on the results of a skill check. So in the example above, you would roll a 20-sided die (d20) and then add your Athletics skill bonus as it appears on your character sheet. If the result is 10 or more, you pass and go to section 192 to find out the results of your success. If you roll less than 10, you fail and go to section 33 to find out the results of the failure.

Other situations may call on you to roll dice for random effects like saving throws against negative effects, being damaged by your environment, or randomizing certain events in the story. These will be prompted as needed.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

Some effects apply Advantage or Disadvantage to your d20 dice rolls. In both, you roll the d20 two times. When you have Advantage, you choose the better result of the two. Conversely, Disadvantage forces you to choose the worse result of the two.

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

Like any good adventure, you can expect to engage in combat with monsters and villains.

BUTTERCUP

Medium Beast, Neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 5

Speed 40 ft.

Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Attack:* +3 to hit. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage. If you are hit, roll a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.



want to roll one d6 and add 1 for their attack instead of the usual 4, as seen in the example inside the brackets. That way, enemy attacks may be slightly different each turn.

- Repeat until either you or your opponent are reduced to 0 hp and then go to the given section.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

There are a number of things that are going to be a little different. This game is meant to capture the fun of a tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG), but it is still its own medium. Here are a few things that work differently.

MOVEMENT

If you're working with some of our self-DM resources like maps, etc. then you can run combat encounters and explore environments like a traditional tabletop game.

However, the game has been designed in such a way that movement is assumed throughout both the story and combat to simplify the game experience.

INSPIRATION

Because there's no DM to give personalized rewards for your actions, this adventure hands out Inspiration when you're on the right track. (In *Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition*, Inspiration is a single-use point that allows you to apply advantage to one d20 roll.)

Optional Rule: Since you are playing alone without the benefit of a party to support you in your adventure, you can help offset the challenge by saving multiple Inspiration for when you might need them.

TAKING ACTIONS OUTSIDE THE STORY

This solo adventure is a static work and it cannot truly replace the imaginative creativity of a group session run by a Game Master. So how do you resolve actions "off the page?"

Some examples - like buffs or debuffs and healing - are easy to resolve. Apply the bonus or the effect to events in the story. For example, you could cast the cantrip *guidance* before a skill check to increase your chance of passing that check. Or drink a healing potion

When you start a combat encounter you follow these steps:

- Read the block because some creatures will take special actions before attacking.
- Roll Initiative for you and your opponent (d20 plus Initiative modifier) to determine turn order. Higher goes first.
- Choose an action: attack or use an ability (class ability, spell, etc.).
- If you're attacking, roll attack rolls (d20 plus Attack Modifier) against AC. If the attack roll is equal to or higher than the defender's AC, then the attacker hits.
- Roll damage rolled on the dice given by the attack plus any damage modifiers. A creature's attack damage is equal to their Hit. If a creature has a Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1), that means it deals 4 damage to the player character whenever their attack successfully hits. Alternatively, you may

whenever it makes sense to recover hit points for your character.

But what about open-ended spells like illusions or enchantments? How do these resolve in the story?

And the answer is that it's up to you. Based on the open-ended effect you've applied, you can determine for yourself how it affects the story and your options.

So here are a few examples of what this could mean:

- Applying the charmed effect might let you automatically pass all skill checks when interacting with another character.
- Casting a distracting illusion on an opponent might mean they take no action for one turn.
- A special movement action in combat - like flying or teleporting - gives you an extra turn.
- Long-term effects (e.g. *barkskin* lasting 1 hour) last as long as you think is reasonable given the events of the story.

Note that **short rests**, **long rests**, and **gaining levels or XP** are part of the story and not "off the page" actions.

For more ideas or guidance, you can join our Discord server here: <https://discord.gg/cSv4q6PmdB>

AFTER THE ADVENTURE

Over the course of this adventure, your character will receive various rewards in terms of treasure, items, and experience. These rewards are designed in such a way that you can then take them on to another solo adventure or even join a tabletop session if your DM allows.

Your character's adventure doesn't have to end here, but instead treat this solo adventure as just one part of your epic journey.

Whichever direction you take when you're done, your character can keep whatever levels and treasure you've found along the way.

FOR THE DUNGEON MASTERS

We have created an info pack for DMs who haven't read *The Crystals of Z'leth* to integrate its results into their campaign. You can find all this content here: www.obviousmimic.com/pages/solo-adventure-references-for-dms

This includes a summary of the events of the story, the rewards a player character might have received, and some ideas on how to use this story as part of your campaign with adventure hooks, lore, and recurring NPCs. *The DM reference guide carries strong spoiler warnings.*

For more on the rules, including updates to the rules, an FAQ, and a community to ask questions you can visit www.obviousmimic.com/pages/solo-adventure-rules or join our Discord server here: <https://discord.gg/cSv4q6PmdB>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It's been most of a day's travel since the jungle rose up around you in a twist of green and brown filled with the sounds of strange beasts. The tangle of trees and vines acts like a living canyon on either side of the rough track that counts as a road. What little you can see of the sky overhead is a flat white overcast, a gentle promise of rain today.

The humid air is heavy with the smell of flowers and fruit, and the hum of insects hangs just on the edge of your hearing. The heat is nearly overwhelming and you are running low on water, but your contact assured you that your destination wasn't far. It's a relief knowing you'll not have to spend the night alone and in the open out here. As you force yourself through the air that seems to thicken with every step, you confirm once more that you have the map you've been hired to deliver, and that leads to the expedition you will join when you arrive. According to your contract, it's primarily a rescue mission following another team into the jungle. However, the understanding is that your group will also pick up where the last one failed in its search for a supposedly lost city of a powerful ancient civilization.

With a healthy advance and an equal share of the treasure, all this discomfort may just be worth it in the end.

Add 75 gp to your inventory.

An especially loud trill calls out from somewhere among the trees and vines. You stop a moment and look for its source, but it's hopeless in all the dense, dark plant growth to either side. It's hard to even tell what direction it came from. Then you round a bend and see a collection of wagons. You've reached the expedition camp at last, but it seems that things may already be getting complicated ([go to 74](#)).

1

You successfully grab hold of the lizardfolk who broke ranks to come up behind Rija and Gigar. He struggles for a moment with a snarl and his claws reach back for your eyes, but they stop just before they make contact.

Then he relaxes with a rumbling groan in the back of his throat. You realize that everyone is staring at you and Rija is stunned with her mouth agape. Gigar doesn't know what to do with himself, but Rija looks up to the chieftain who nods his head, clearly smiling.

"I appreciate the thought," she says. "But you can let him go. Now."

Seeing no other option, you comply (**go to 36**).

2

Almost as soon as the water hits your tongue, you are brought to your knees with a dizzying, feverish weakness. You double over on the soggy ground next to the stream and vomit up everything you've eaten in what seems like the last week.

With blurry eyes and buzzing ears, you drop to your side and shake violently for what feels like a very long time. Eventually, several pairs of hands help you get upright.

"Here, here," says a high-pitched voice. Your eyes flutter open to a female gnome holding a tin cup to your lips. You drink a gulp of clean water from the cup. "You gonna make it?"

Your body nearly rejects the water, but you manage to just barely hold it down. You sit up to find two of the wagon drivers holding you up.

With a nod, you tell them you'll live but feel terrible.

You are poisoned (even if you are normally immune to the poisoned condition) until your next long rest. After your long rest, roll a Constitution saving throw against DC 12. If you pass, you recover, but if you fail you are still poisoned until your following long rest, when you can roll to save again. Repeat the process until you recover.

The burly expedition wagon drivers help you up and back to camp.

"Yeah, you'll be fine," one of them says. "C'mon. You won't be doing that again, I bet. Let's get you some clean water."

By the time you reach camp, you're no longer being held up but still feel brutally sick. But at least there's water in the barrels (**go to 45**).

POISONED

Being poisoned gives you disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

3

Gain Inspiration.

You approach Rija who has set out a bedroll on the ground like the rest of the crew. She's kneeling beside it organizing a collection of odd-looking items. She appears to be cataloging them and re-packing them, moving with well-practiced precision.

Notable in the grid are two large glossy black crystals, a coiled rope of unusual quality, an impressive climbing axe, three stoppered vials, and at least a dozen small blue crystals faintly glowing against the fabric beneath them.

As you approach, she looks up and meets your eye as she immediately starts to collect her gear. "Looking for something?"

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 15 or more, (**go to 34**). If you get less than 15, (**go to 57**).

4

The scaly form that drops out of the canopy above narrowly misses you, but it doesn't stop there. A pair of snake heads dart out from the quickly-uncoiling mass. They hiss and snap at you with rows of sharp teeth.

You dance back just out of reach and ready yourself for a fight (**go to 66**).

5

You draw your weapon, drawing the attention of not just the lizardfolk but members of the expedition. The bookish orc's eyes widen behind the lenses of his spectacles. The woman beside him heaves a weary sigh, pinches the bridge of her nose, and shakes her head in exasperation.

"Well, this is erm..." the orc stammers. "This person is our—"

And he looks at you with open arms and a shrug. This overcooked noodle of an orc isn't scaring anyone, but you might be able to shake the lizardfolk's resolve.

Roll a Charisma (Intimidation) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 16**. If you get less than 15, **go to 43**.

6

Gigar hands you the map that you delivered. It's untidily sticking out of its case and it seems like there are some new creases in the document when you unfurl it. The map seems to have been passed through many hands, each person leaving a note or an addition.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 96**. If you get less than 10, **go to 60**.



7

After some pressing, the crew open up. They are fearful, but Gigar seems to have deep pockets. He at least has aristocratic airs about him. But his posturing and self-aggrandizing might just be to cover up that it's a certainty that not everyone will return from this expedition.

Besides the poisonous snakes and roaming tribes of lizardfolk, there is a creeping dread in the jungle. The crew complain in their own ways about a nagging malaise, like they're just about to get sick but haven't quite fallen ill yet.

"But that Rija knows what she's doing," says one wagon drivers.

"Aye," replies the cook. "Quiet lady for sure, but she's one to be reckoned with. And with you here too, adventurer, maybe we all have a chance."

A general murmur of assent passes around the crew. You make no promises as you finish your stew and then continue on with your evening.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija (**go to 3**), talk to Gigar (**go to 82**), or approach Z'ka (**go to 55**).

Or if you're feeling ready to turn in for the night, **go to 89**.

8

Though it's a challenge full of muttering—and a fair bit of cursing when you trip and fall into a patch of thorny plant growth—you manage to haul the snake back to camp.

When you arrive with it, Rija yells Gigar's name till he emerges from his wagon rubbing his eyes. You can't tell if he's been reading or napping, but when he sees the dead snake he grins like a schoolboy who's been told class is canceled.

"Wonderful, oh just wonderful," he says. "Come, come, come. Bring it into the wagon. I'll cut into it while it's fresh."

You and Rija drop the snake in loops over the worktable in his wagon. Gigar searches through a

chest and removes a case of ominous-looking surgical tools.

"This will take some doing, so if you'll excuse me," he says and you make your way out of the wagon. When Rija stays, the orc looks to her. "You too, Rija. I'll need to concentrate."

She hesitates for a moment, then follows you out the door, eager to learn about the scholar's findings when he's finished with the specimen (**go to 88**).

9

The effect you conjure makes combatants of both sides cry out in alarm. Several lizardfolk approach it to investigate, so it's only a matter of time before they realize that it isn't real.

Still, it gives you a distraction to help you sneak off into the jungle. Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check. If you get 10 or higher, **go to 28**. If you get less than 10, **go to 42**.

10

Gain the benefits of a long rest.

Rija does not wake you the following day and you are only roused by the clamor of the rest of the crew starting their day. After asking around, you discover that she and Z'ka went out just the two of them, scouting a route northeast.

"But the boss lady left you instructions," says one wagon driver as he salts leeches on a horse's legs. "You need to stay behind and help Gigar with the map. You've been out in the jungle now. Maybe you can help him."

You thank him and he turns back to his task, which he seems to be enjoying a little too much. You collect a couple of wrapped parcels of rations and make your way toward the scholar's wagon. You knock and he pokes his head out, brow furrowed in annoyance until he sees you.

"Ah, adventurer, such a lovely surprise. I take it Rija has assigned you to me today?"
You say that does seem to be the case.

"Wonderful, I could use your help," he says, turning

away to rummage through his desk. "Come in and take this, if you please."

He presents you with a carved obsidian amulet. It appears to depict some kind of dragon or serpent, but in its detail, you can see that it has no scales but feathers. Huge feathered wings round out the piece of jewelry. Despite it being carved out of black volcanic glass here, you wonder what this creature might look like in living color.

"Hold this please," Gigar says again. "And we'll begin."

You reach out and grasp the amulet (go to 47).

11

You describe a few obvious things, like a crowd of lizardfolk and a magical ritual of some kind. And the crystals, as they seem pretty obvious. Gigar takes some notes but he looks disappointed.

"Nothing else, then?" he asks. "You didn't see more of Z'leth?" he asks.

When you let him know that's it, he sighs. "Like the others, then. I was hoping for more details from one as, erm, distinguished as you."

He continues to probe and pester for a while longer, but you keep the specifics to yourself. The interview ends when you hear shouted greetings and increased movement outside (go to 75).

12

You turn to the lizardfolk as a group, but your eyes fall on the leader with the multicolored feathers around its neck. With a dramatic clearing of your throat, all eyes turn toward you with expressions ranging from curious to hostile.

You start with a greeting and introduce yourself as a member of the expedition. When no one contradicts you, though there are some confused glances, you continue by asking what seems to be the problem here. When no one answers, you decide to try something else.

Roll a Charisma (Persuasion) check. If you get 15 or more, go to 62. If you get less than 15, go to 43.

13

Rija has stopped to assess a section of the jungle that seems to have caught her eye.

"If you're done playing around, I could use another pair of eyes," she says. "Come look at this."

She waves you over and you join her, finding what appear to be small animal bones scattered across the jungle floor. It dawns on you that they could have fallen down from above, and you look up. Rija does the same, just as a heavy serpentine form drops toward you from above.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 12 or more, go to 4. If you get less than 12, go to 50.

14

Gain Inspiration.

You cry out to the rest of the expedition, and crewmembers leap from their bedrolls in various states of grogginess. The posted sentries draw their weapons, no longer caught unawares by the approaching threat.

With no more option for stealth, the lizardfolk stalking the jungle burst out of the trees and attack with nets and clubs.

You can stay and fight (go to 73), use the confusion to sneak out of camp (go to 90), or use a spell or ability to avoid detection (go to 104).

15

A lucky swing of the club catches the side of your head, and the world spins around you until you find yourself on the ground. Crackling flames and screamed curses fill the air, but the wet stinking ground suddenly seems inviting.

You're feeling so tired suddenly, and you close your eyes for a moment. Just a rest. Your last thought as you drift off is that you'll be on your feet again in a moment.

YOU DIED.

16

Your display of aggression actually makes the lizardfolk nearest to you jump slightly and several speartips waver in your direction. Even through their harsh reptilian features, you see flashes of fear and sideways glances at each other.

The feathered leader stamps his feet and hisses in a gesture that you guess is like him nervously clearing his throat. The woman speaking for the expedition stands up straighter and raises her voice.

“I see the muscle has arrived,” she says, gesturing toward you. The orc next to her leans in to whisper something in her ear, but she shushes him. “Now if you don’t mind, we’d like to make something very clear—”

She pauses and looks over the spears in front of her at the warriors holding them (**go to 85**).

17

You cast a spell over the water and look at the swirling liquid. Though the fetid murkiness recedes for a moment, it blooms in the clear water again almost immediately. It still has the same stink as when it came from the stream.

You can try the water anyway (**go to 79**) or discard the water and return to camp to get water from one of the barrels (**go to 45**).

18

As you are looking around you, you see a long, serpentine form in the branches overhead just before it drops toward you.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 8 or more, **go to 4**. If you get less than 8, **go to 50**.

19

You identify the garb and symbolism on the tablet as belonging to an ancient culture of lizardfolk said to inhabit the fabled city of Z’leth, a wealthy city said to wield powerful magic channeled through crystals.

These crystals were said to originate with this ancient Z’leth civilization, so there is likely some kind of underground complex somewhere in the vicinity.

However, there are few reports of metallurgy in the historical records, making you wonder if there isn’t some inconsistency in the lore.

Z’ka is pleased with your progress and bobs his head. “Know. You know. And now you know.”

He then settles into his patch of disturbed earth and starts tapping along the tablet. You take your cue and bid him goodnight. He doesn’t look up from his whispered recitation as you find your bedroll and settle in for the night (**go to 10**).

20

You wake with the sun and a nudge of Rija’s boot. It rained overnight, which has dried somewhat to leave just a slight dampness to your clothes and a near certainty of leeches in your boots. Still, you had a decent night’s rest.



Gain the benefits of a long rest.

“Let’s go,” she says and tosses you a packet of rations. “Eat on the trail.”

The two of you pass through the camp, which is just starting to rise and pack to move out for the day, and go on to scout the way ahead.

Engage Rija in conversation (**go to 56**), walk quietly together and observe your surroundings (**go to 95**), or split up to sneak through the jungle (**go to 67**).

21

Watching the cadence at which Z'ka taps a claw against the words in front of him, it dawns on you that he's not just reading. He's praying.

Every so often his head bobs as if in deference to some greater being. It's obvious that he is toting a religious text, made of stone to survive the permanent dampness of the jungle.

You realize suddenly that you've been staring, unconsciously starting to bob along with Z'ka's prayer rhythm. He has also seen you and has stopped.

"Only one way," he says finally. "Not wake up. Just sleep."

And he returns to his slow, wet chewing and tapping of the text. Despite the heat, a shiver runs down your spine.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija (**go to 3**), talk to Gigar (**go to 82**), or speak to the rest of the crew (**go to 68**).

Or if you're feeling ready to turn in for the night, **go to 89**.

22

You say that you want to dissect the snake and remove certain oddities for easy transport. Rija offers you an extremely sharp knife from a toolkit on her belt and you go to work.

Roll an Intelligence (Nature) or a Wisdom (Medicine or Survival) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 49**. If you get under 12, **go to 76**.

23

You and Rija haul the snake up onto your shoulders and start to trek back the way you came.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) check with advantage due to Rija's help. If you get 14 or more, **go to 8**. If you get under 14, **go to 35**.

24

You do nothing as the purposeful lizardfolk advances on Rija and Gigar.

The bookish orc sees the potential threat first and with a squeal he jumps behind his companion.

"Agh," he cries. "Rija! Do something!"

She spins, one hand going to the knife on her belt and the other coming up to ward off whatever threat is approaching from behind. In response, the lizardfolk coming up behind her stops where he is and plants the butt of his spear into the ground in front of him.

She looks at him and then you. The lizardfolk also glances at you to see if you're going to move.

"All right," she says. He nods, and you just look between them as they size each other up (**go to 36**).

25

Unfortunately, you can't read any of Gigar's notes either and tell him so.

"Ah, well," he says. "It was worth a try though, eh?"

You get up to leave, but Gigar stops you and flips through his notes with a stubby finger.

"Ah, ah, ah," he scolds. "You have not been dismissed. Look here. See these symbols? They mean 'Z'leth'. As in the ancient civilization. So while I don't yet understand these new symbols, we know that the answers will be in this book."

Looking at the symbols, you find it hard to see past his fingertip covering the word. Not that you could read it anyway.

"All right, now you are dismissed," Gigar says with a wide smile. "Ta-ta for now!"

He returns to trying to decipher the ancient writings in his book, and you continue on with the start of your evening.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija (**go to 3**), approach Z'ka (**go to 55**), or speak to the rest of the crew (**go to 68**).

Or if you're feeling ready to turn in for the night, **go to 89**.

26

From where you are hidden, you see Rija come into view. She pauses for a moment and looks from side to side for any threats.

So when it comes, she misses the danger from above. A twisted, scaly mass drops out of the tree above to land on your companion. She cries out and falls to the ground under what looks like a considerable weight.

You rush to her side just as she manages to free herself and you offer what help you can, so it's no surprise when two serpents' heads dart out of the writhing mass to snap at you (**go to 66**).

27

A whirling storm of sights and sounds and sensations overwhelms you and you feel severely unbalanced. You manage to push through a sense of vertigo, but it seems to tear at your consciousness as you do so.

You have disadvantage on Intelligence and Wisdom checks and saving throws until you next take a long rest.

With a final act of willpower, a scene resolves itself in front of you (**go to 65**).

28

The lizardfolk tear through the expedition crew, trapping them in nets and beating them with heavy clubs. Amid the screams and rushing shadows, no one notices as you dart soundlessly from shadow to shadow and out of camp.

From your position at the edge of the jungle, you can see that pockets of resistance have broken out among the expedition, though crewmembers are being

overwhelmed and subdued by the lizardfolk's superior numbers. Those crewmembers that make a break for it are knocked down by thrown clubs and also captured.

As you're considering your next move, two strong sets of hands grab you from behind: one set around your torso and the other over your mouth to prevent you from crying out.

You're jerked roughly back into the jungle and away from camp (**go to 29**).

29

You flail momentarily before Rija tells you to stop. Shocked into stillness, you look around to see that Z'ka has his hands clamped around your upper arms. He is standing between Rija and Gigar, and none of them seem injured, though Gigar is shifting nervously from foot to foot.

"Here," Rija says as she thrusts your gear into your hand. "You'll be needing this. Come on."

Gigar looks back to the camp. "But shouldn't we... erm?"

"If you want to return, be my guest," Rija says. "But I am continuing on. And you—the both of you—can still be of use. Just as I'm sure you'd also be put to good use by Z'ka's former companions."

Gigar looks to the lizardfolk and his face catches the flickering lamplight. Z'ka cocks his head at the orc, licks his lips, and sucks air through his teeth. Gigar's eyes widen in terror. "Go. Hungry them," says the lizardfolk.

Gigar looks between the three of you and, clearly not seeing what he wants on your face, resigns himself to staying. "Fine. Let's be off then."

Rija then turns to you. "Same offer," she says.

You point out that you're here for a reason, and that's this ancient city. You want to find Z'leth.

Z'ka releases you and gives you a firm nod. As the circulation returns to your arms, you take your gear

from Rija before following her into the darkened jungle away from the camp. Though it's hard for you to tell in the murk and tangle of the vegetation, you're quite sure you're traveling northeast (**go to 107**).

30

You point out to the lizardfolk that there is clearly an existing agreement between them and the expedition. There is no difference between this group and the group that passed before them.

It's clear now that at least some of these lizardfolk understand common well enough to communicate. A hissing conversation passes between them, too low to hear clearly though the tone is one of uncertainty.

The woman speaking for the expedition presses the advantage and looks around meaningfully.

"Our companion is right," she says. "You must honor our agreement and give us free passage."

The leader of the lizardfolk nods slowly and gestures for her to continue (**go to 85**).

31

You hear a slithering sound followed by a snap. Following the sound with your eyes, you see a collection of glowing pinpricks of light floating among the trees. Standing about the height of an adult human, but with eyes much larger, you have to guess it's lizardfolk again.

You subtly ready yourself for battle. Whether this is the same band you met earlier or another group, it doesn't matter. No one sneaks up on a sleeping camp with good intentions.

Knowing what's coming, you can sneak away from camp (**go to 63**) or raise the alarm (**go to 14**).

32

The jungle is thick and lush, but not in a way you'd consider healthy. The trees twist themselves into unnatural shapes and the vines cling parasitically tight to their hosts. The air smells of too-ripe fruit just starting to go bad. Even the birdsong is too sharp and disconcerting.

There's a palpable sense of sickness in the air, a corruption that radiates from all around you, like being just on the edge of nausea.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or higher, **go to 18**. If you get under 15, **go to 53**.

33

"Not sleep," Z'ka says, beckoning. "Come. See."

You follow him to what you can assume is where he sleeps. He doesn't have a bedroll—he's cold-blooded after all—but he's scratched a flat area of disturbed earth to lie down on. The stone tablet is propped up against a wagon wheel nearby.

"Show you," the lizardfolk says. "Great wisdom. Old things. Things in dark know us. We not know them. This is best."



Z'ka gestures you toward his tablet. He starts tapping and reciting what he taps. It's a complex text so foreign to you that you can't even tell where one word begins and another ends. However, it also includes carved images of lizardfolk in ceremonial dress and wielding crystals. But still there's little to indicate where the city might be.

"Warrior," Z'ka says, patting his chest. "Guide. Protector."

He then lightly passes a hand over the tiny figures.
“People. So many people before.”

You ask him where they are now, but Z’ka just looks up at you and stares.

Turning back to the tablet, you can either try to recall what you know about the history of the region ([go to 59](#)) or rely on intuitive insights ([go to 69](#)).

34

You say that the rope appears to be magical and the vials are some kind of potion. However, you don’t recognize the blue crystals.

“Impressive,” Rija says flatly. “Not that I asked, but impressive nonetheless. The rope is a relic of my climbing days. An insurance policy, really.”

You see that she’s smiling, so you ask what the blue crystals are. She looks down, weighing her response as she starts collecting them and placing them in a bandolier slung around her waist.

“They are something of... local origin,” she says. “And they will be very important in the days to come.”

You open your mouth to ask another question, but Rija slips the last of the blue crystals in place and stands.

“Thanks for stopping by, adventurer,” she says, though her tone leaves doubt as to her sincerity. “We’ll talk again in the morning.”

She walks away, and you get the impression this is Rija’s version of saying goodbye.

If you haven’t done so yet, you can speak to Gigar ([go to 82](#)), approach Z’ka ([go to 55](#)), or speak to the rest of the crew ([go to 68](#)).

Or if you’re feeling ready to turn in for the night, [go to 89](#).

35

You and Rija put your backs into transporting the dead serpent back to camp, but the jungle has other thoughts. From twisted roots tripping you at every step to thorned vines catching on the snake’s corpse, it’s hard going.

With several miles yet to go, you and Rija drop to your knees with the tattered remains of your opponent between you. You nod in unspoken agreement and leave it there in order to reach camp before dark ([go to 103](#)).

36

The lizardfolk warrior positions himself directly in front of Rija and pats a clawed hand on his chest.

“Z’ka,” he says. “Z’ka guide you.”

“Oh, how wonderful!” Gigar says, and he looks as if he would have clapped his hands if he hadn’t caught himself. “A local guide. That could make all the difference, eh, Rija?”

She purses her lips and nods, but her eyes remain on the guide.

Z’ka is sinewy and hunched over slightly. Few of the other lizardfolk stand straight, but your guide appears especially bent under the weight of a stone tablet on his back. It doesn’t seem to slow him down, however, as he seems light on his feet and handles his spear with an easy grace.

Gigar purses his lips around his tusks, looking back and forth between Rija and Z’ka. Finally, he leans in to whisper to her. She listens and nods without ever taking her eyes off the lizardfolk warrior.

“Welcome, Z’ka,” Rija says finally. “We’ve been expecting you.”

Z’ka’s jaws part in what you can only guess is a smile. He turns to his tribemates, speaking in a few sharp syllables.

Though there are some holdouts, a command from the feathered chieftain makes sure everyone lowers their spears and begins to relax. The leader of the group does not seem happy about it.

“Can’t be disturbed,” the chieftain says in parting. “No. Find people. Go home.”

Z’ka taps a claw on the stone tablet on his back. The lizardfolk’s leader backs up, even making some deferential gestures. Eventually, he turns and the other warriors fall into line behind him. The lizardfolk all blend into the jungle, leaving just Z’ka behind with you.

“So that’s it then,” Rija says as she turns to you. “And now we have you, too. And the map?”

You present her with the map you’d been assigned to deliver. Gigar scurries up to take it from you, rubbing his hands in glee.

“Ah, perfect,” Gigar says, collecting the roll of oiled leather from you. “This. This is the piece that was missing for the last team. We’ll find the city for sure.”

“The expedition,” Rija says. “We’ll find the expedition for sure.”

He looks up at her, blinking. “Yes, that’s what I meant of course.”

Rija glances after the lizardfolk, who have already disappeared into the jungle. She draws a sharp breath and lets it out with a sigh.

“You’d better come with me,” she says to you and beckons toward the camp ([go to 52](#)).

37

You give Gigar all the details, including the volume of lizardfolk participating in the ritual and the ‘ceiling’. He gets excited and starts talking about the city either being underground or in some huge structure.

“Interesting!” he says. “I saw something similar of course, but only once we arrived in the jungle. But the common crew members saw nothing. Most simply felt ill. One even vomited right where you’re standing! But you saw so much in such detail.”



Gigar proceeds to ask you question after question, often repeating himself, until you can't think of any other details. The interview goes on until midday when a commotion outside piques your curiosity ([go to 75](#)).

38

You try to grab hold of the lizardfolk advancing on Rija and Gigar, but he slips your hold and even manages to plant the haft of his spear behind your leg, tossing you over it to the ground. The world spins for a moment as you go down, and when you look up the spear is now pointed at your face.

Most of the expedition has some pained expression on their faces, but it feels like you were let off pretty gently.

"Are you all right, there?" Gigar asks.

"We don't care," Rija says to him. Then she turns to you. "I can see what you tried to do. And it was very, very stupid. Brave, but stupid."

She steps forward to help you up as the killing blow never actually falls ([go to 36](#)).

39

Your sip practically oozes into your stomach. Wave after wave of nausea wash over you, but you manage to hold your last meal down and keep your feet. Barely.

With a couple of deep breaths, you sink to your knees to steady yourself as your water dribbles out of its container. You let it leak away, grateful that this isn't worse.

When the wave of dizziness and nausea passes, you take a deep breath, collect yourself and then make your way back to camp for some safer water to drink ([go to 45](#)).

40

Your opponent falls struggling into the muck at your feet. He isn't dead, but nor is he able to rise again just yet.

Looking around, you realize that the battle is

hopelessly lost. Other caravan members are being beaten, tied, and captured in nets dragged through the sodden earth. Two of the wagons are on fire, and lizardfolk are lighting more torches from the blaze.

Before you can decide whether to stay and fight or make a hasty retreat, strong hands grab you from behind and you're dragged away ([go to 29](#)).

41

You have successfully subdued the advancing lizardfolk threat and look to your new companions.

Rija does not seem as pleased as you might have hoped. She scowls at you as she goes about releasing the lizardfolk from whatever effect you've placed on him. Once he's able to speak and move about freely, he assesses you with a blank stare before addressing Rija and Gigar ([go to 36](#)).

42

You try to stick to the shadows and slink away from camp, but a lizardfolk with a wicked-looking club spots you and snarls. It rushes at you, the club raised to strike.

You can draw a weapon and fight ([go to 73](#)) or turn and run ([go to 61](#)).

43

Your efforts are met with blank stares from both the expedition and the lizardfolk threatening them. An awkward silence stretches for a beat before the woman speaking on the explorers' behalf looks back to the lizardfolk's leader.

"We are losing time," she says. "And every minute we waste could be the difference between life and death for the first team."

She draws a deep breath, cutting another look at you before continuing ([go to 85](#)):

44

You leap forward past the shocked faces of both lizardfolk and humanoids. Gigar cries out in fright but Rija doesn't even flinch. A moment too late, some of the other lizardfolk try to cut you off.

You barrel past them all at the lizardfolk who broke rank and try to grab him. Roll a Strength (Athletics) check. If you get 14 or more, **go to 1**. If you get less than 14, **go to 38**.

45

You dip your waterskin into the barrel to fill it with fresh water. Taking a pull, you realize that, while the water is warmer than some baths you've had, at least it's clean and quenches your thirst.

As you drink your fill, Rija joins you with her own canteen.

"I see you've found the safe water," she says. "This jungle doesn't have a name, but it has more ways to kill you than you can count. But the water is the first."

She takes a drink and offers you a crooked smile.

"Tomorrow morning, I'm sure we'll find a few more," she continues with the same smile. "Good night! And don't let anything bite."

She turns toward one of the fires getting started, and you go find your own spot. Despite the noise of a few crew members enjoying a nightcap—and the equally active mosquitoes buzzing in your ears—your tiredness quickly overcome you (**go to 20**).

46

You try to make your way quietly through the undergrowth. The trees rise up around you, but they're oddly twisted and choked with cancerous-looking vines. The air is full of a sickly sweet smell of rot and ripe fruit. Everything looks toxic or dangerous, so you place your steps extra carefully.

Still, something unseen wraps around your foot and you topple into the vegetation with a little shout. Rija turns to you and hisses to be quiet (**go to 13**).

47

As soon as you grip the amulet, a force gathers in the artifact and rushes into your mind.

Roll a Wisdom saving throw. If you get 10 or more, **go to 81**. If you get less than 10, **go to 27**.

48

You are considering what Rija's said to you, as brief as it was, when something catches your eye in the jungle around you.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 18**. If you get less than 15, **go to 53**.

49

You slice away at the scaly skin and separate flesh from bone to find that the outward strangeness of the snake that attacked you hides even more corruption inside. There are extra bones that shouldn't be there, organs filled with noxious fluids, and hardened tumors in odd shapes.

There are spines protruding from the creature seemingly at random. Some parts of the body seem to indicate that this is a venomous snake, but there are no fangs. It has an odd, musky odor that you'd expect from a mammal's scent glands. And even what appears to be an unused gill slit behind its head.

Oddest of all, you find a faintly blue crystal in the creature's chest. It seems like an inert piece of stone except for the faintest glimmer of light inside it. Rija seems especially interested in this stone, and it is similar to those she wears in her bandolier, though this one's glow isn't as apparent.

After examining it, she hands it back to you. "This could be worth a little something when you get back to civilization."

Add 1 dull blue crystal to your inventory. It is worth 10 gp.

Together with Rija, you pack up the samples and head back to camp, leaving the rest of the bizarre animal for the jungle to consume.

When you arrive at the camp, you and Rija immediately head to Gigar's wagon. His bleary eyes grow excited when you show him what you've collected.

"Truly, you have many talents, adventurer," he says to you. "I must take these for study."

Gigar takes the gruesome samples from you and starts back toward his wagon. Rija moves to follow, but Gigar holds up an imperious hand.

“Alone if you please, Rija,” he says. “These deserve my full attention. But thank you so much.”

The steps going up to the wagon creak as he gets to work (**go to 88**).

50

A heavy, scaled weight slams into you, wrapping you in tight coils that immediately begin to squeeze. Rija leaps to your aid to prevent the snake from crushing you immediately.

“Not today, jungle,” she says through gritted teeth. “Not on my watch.”

You are grappled. Roll a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check with advantage thanks to Rija’s help. If you roll 12 or more, **go to 66**. If you roll under 12, take 1d4+1 bludgeoning damage and roll again to repeat the check until you pass or drop to 0 hit points.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 101**.

51

You finally put the enormous snake down. It spasms one last time, both heads flopping, and then lies still. You and Rija stand at either end of the defeated monster catching your breath.

“We need to bring this back to camp,” Rija says through gulps of air. “Maybe Gigar can make sense of it.”

You nod. There are a couple of ways that you can think of to deal with the surprisingly large creature.

Carry the whole snake (**go to 23**) or dissect certain parts of interest (**go to 22**).



52

Now that the lizardfolk are gone, the crew of the expedition breathe a collective sigh of relief. Though they continue to glance at the edges of the jungle, they continue about the tasks of setting up camp.

With a grin straining at the edges of his mouth, Gigar takes the map you’ve brought into a covered wagon. Rija oversees the crew’s efforts, tossing out casual orders, and even the occasional good-natured insult, as she shows you through camp.

“Thank you for delivering the map,” she says. She continues, though you can’t tell how sincere she is, “and for your help with the lizardfolk.”

She gestures at a patch of damp earth next to a fire pit that’s already been set up. “Here’s where you’ll be tonight. As we travel, find a spot near the fire. You won’t need it for the heat, but you’ll be thankful for the smoke when the mosquitoes come out.”

You thank her and she nods.

“You’ll get breakfast and supper with the expedition,” she says, pointing at a pot hanging over an unlit fire.

Then she hooks a thumb to a collection of crates and barrels. “We have enough food and fresh water to last us weeks in the jungle as long as we stick close to the roads. And the equipment for a base camp if we have to blaze our own trail from there.”

You let her know that you understand and she nods again, though possibly more curtly.

“Now this is where most people would ask if you have any questions, but I honestly can’t be bothered. We wake at dawn, and tomorrow you’ll be coming with me to scout ahead. If you need anything, ask someone else.”

Clearly, your orientation has come to an end. Rija turns and strides off into the camp leaving you to figure out what to do with yourself ([go to 91](#)).

53

Without any warning, a long, twisting shape drops out of the trees overhead.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 15 or more, [go to 4](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 50](#).

54

As the disgusting water settles, you feel something very unusual. You actually feel... sick.

Nausea sweeps over you in wave after wave as the world spins around you. You stagger two steps as the feeling eventually passes.

You dump the horrible liquid onto the ground in front of you and go back to camp to get something to drink ([go to 45](#)).

55

You approach Z’ka where he’s sitting alone. The lizardfolk warrior shows no interest in talking with you as he eats a large hunk of raw—and not very fresh—meat of unknown provenance. The tablet he was carrying on his back now rests on the ground beside him, and he is giving it his full attention.

As he tears and gnaws at his meal gripped in one hand, his other hand is tapping along lines of text in an alphabet you cannot read.

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 15 or more, [go to 21](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 80](#).

56

You try to make conversation with Rija, and she largely ignores you. But you think you can get her to open up.

Roll a Charisma (Persuasion) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 71](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 83](#).

57

You don’t recognize any of the objects on the bedroll, so you ask Rija what they might be.

“Just odds and ends for the journey ahead,” she says as she puts away the rope and the vials.

She then moves to pack the smaller blue crystals into a bandolier that seems made for that purpose. You also ask what they are.

“These are none of your concern,” she says. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m hungry.”

She throws her pack over her shoulder instead of leaving it by her bedroll and walks toward one of the lit campfires to join the crew members there.

If you haven’t done so yet, you can speak to Gigar ([go to 82](#)), approach Z’ka ([go to 55](#)), or speak to the rest of the crew ([go to 68](#)).

Or if you’re feeling ready to turn in for the night, [go to 89](#).

58

Rija returns with your lizardfolk guide, though neither appears to be in a hurry.

“Ah, thanks for coming... erm... lad?” Gigar says. “You could be of great service.”

Z’ka nods and looks at the map proffered to him. He cocks his head as he concentrates on it, but doesn’t touch it or make a sound.

“To the cold wind,” Z’ka says finally. “To the sun’s beginning.”

Gigar looks to you and then Rija. “What is he saying, my dear?”

Z’ka snarls another phrase in his own language, pointing at the sky.

“And you’re sure?” Rija asks.

Z’ka points at the sky again and then to the northeast. But then he points at Rija and growls something else. She nods.

“And?” Gigar says. “Any thoughts from our scaly friend here?”

“Northeast,” Rija says without breaking eye contact with Z’ka. “We should look to the northeast.”

“Brilliant!” Gigar grins at all of you. “We’re close! I can feel it! Let’s ready ourselves for adventure!”

Gigar retrieves the map from you and retires to his wagon for the night. And you’re about to go find another spot next to a smoky fire and get full night’s rest. Instead, you feel a strong, clawed hand on your shoulder (**go to 33**).

59

Though this is challenging, you seem to have been picking up some new facts from the area, the crew, and Gigar. You take a close look at the tablet to see what you might recognize about its deeper meaning.

Roll an Intelligence (History) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 19**. If you get less than 15, **go to 93**.

60

There are a number of scribbled notes on the map in a variety of languages. However, they all contradict one another and don’t seem to offer you any reliable information.

You can’t quite determine the meaning of the small dark shapes drawn all over the map. Their meaning is unclear, as is any pattern to their distribution.

“This is getting us nowhere,” Rija says. “I’m going to find the guide.”

Rija strides off into the camp to retrieve Z’ka (**go to 58**).

61

You manage to open up the space between you and the attacking lizardfolk and it is about to take up the chase when it is intercepted by a crewmember with a machete.

Taking advantage of the diversion, you dash away from the camp as quickly as you can manage. When you reach the treeline, the dark jungle cuts off much of the light and sound from the embattled camp beyond. With a glance over your shoulder to make sure you’re not being pursued, you continue to run into the night.

When you finally slow to catch your breath, you stand panting in the gloom. The sounds of the camp attack have receded into the distance and you can barely see the glow of the fires. But you still get the feeling you’re not alone.

You only just start to look around before you are grabbed from behind. You let out a breathless grunt, but that’s all you can manage before a hand claps over your mouth and you’re pulled deeper into the jungle (**go to 29**).



62

You make a strong argument for both sides to stand down to avoid any unpleasantness.

The lizardfolk glance towards their leader, some with a curious tilt of the head. However, you can't tell if they are liking what they hear or don't understand what you're saying. The lizardfolk with the feathered necklace looks at you thoughtfully. His speartip wavers downward slightly as he looks at you.

"Ah, the diplomat," says the woman leading the expedition. She smiles with what seems like genuine humor. "And the bearer of our map, if I'm not mistaken."

She nods to you with considerable gratitude then turns her attention to the group of lizardfolk surrounding her ([go to 85](#)).

63

You are the first in your group to know what's coming and decide to make a quiet exit without alerting anyone (especially not the attackers).

You have advantage on your rolls and the lizardfolk have disadvantage on saving throws and checks in the next action you take.

So you can try to simply sneak away ([go to 90](#)) or use a spell or ability to escape ([go to 104](#)).

64

You dig deep into your knowledge of the ancient world and successfully decode some of the glyphs. They seem to be notes or messages to indicate a "corruption" that has affected the "waters, fruits, and flesh of the land."

You tell your findings to Gigar and he slaps his forehead.

"Egad, you're right!" he says. "How could I not have seen this sooner? Thank you so much, adventurer."

You tell the orc that he's welcome, and he points out a note that appears to be much more recent.

"See these symbols?" he says, tapping a finger on a few of the characters. "This is the word 'Z'leth'. It tells us that this book will be a valuable resource to us. Very valuable."

Gigar turns his attention back to his book. An awkward silence stretches on unbroken, so you eventually just leave the scholar to his work and continue on with the beginning of your evening.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija ([go to 3](#)), approach Z'ka ([go to 55](#)), or speak to the rest of the crew ([go to 68](#)).

Or if you're feeling ready to turn in for the night, [go to 89](#).

65

You see the jungle and a mountain that juts up from among the trees, pushing the carpet of vegetation higher. The sun rises unnaturally fast to your right and in a flash the scene changes.

You get a bird's-eye view of a huge crowd of lizardfolk engaged in considerable pomp and pageantry around some ceremony being held among intricately-carved stonework.

You hear a reedy chorus of strange instruments and a growling, rumbling choir. A dais bears several stone thrones, each holding a wizened reptilian brandishing a glowing crystal aloft. Each is dressed in elaborate robes of colorful feathers and jeweled bands. The scene is well lit, but glowing crystals dot stone posts and cap pyramids so it's impossible to tell the time of day.

The sky seems too still. A ceiling maybe? Your view passes over the crowd of common people, also all lizardfolk decked out in colorful feathers, jade ornaments, and holding smaller crystals aloft in a sparkling sea of rapture.

The vision fades to darkness, the points of light being the last to disappear, and you become aware of your actual surroundings again. The inside of Gigar's wagon comes back into focus, the nervous academic wringing his hands.

"So what did you see?" he asks ([go to 92](#)).

66

The massive two-headed serpent's erratic weaving and coiling make it almost impossible to escape.

"Kill it!" Rija calls out, wrestling with the forked tail of the creature, leaving you free to deal with the business end.

For this fight, the constrictor cannot move to pursue you and it cannot constrict you. You have initiative and get to act first.

Though there is no sign of venomous fangs, its several rows of sharp teeth will do enough damage to put you down for a killing embrace.

The corrupted constrictor will fight you to the death.

If the snake drops to 0 HP, **go to 51**. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 101**.

CORRUPTED CONSTRICTOR SNAKE

Large Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 13 (2d10 +2)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Senses blindsight 10ft., passive Perception 10

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The Corrupted Constrictor Snake makes two bite attacks.

Bite. +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 +1) piercing damage.



67

You peel off from the main path and start moving quietly through the dense jungle environment.

Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check. If you roll 15 or higher, **go to 94**. If you roll less than 15, **go to 46**.



68

You seek out the rank and file of the expedition: laborers, porters, wagon drivers, and tradespeople. They have already started a fire with a stew bubbling away over it.

As you approach, they greet you warmly and one offers you a bowl to fill from the pot. Another person passes you a steel cup filled with warm, fresh water tasting mildly of tree sap. They banter among each other and with you, but there is a definite undercurrent of tension. Everyone occasionally glances at the edges of the jungle around camp, on the lookout for more dangers.

The conversation eventually turns to the expedition itself. Mixed in with the bravado, it seems that the crew have some reservations about their journey that they aren't sharing.

Roll a Charisma (Persuasion) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 7**. If you get under 10, **go to 72**.

69

Though you're not confident in your knowledge on the subject, there are clear indications of a civilized society here. There must be insights in this depiction that you can identify.

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 105**. If you get less than 15, **go to 93**.

70

As you approach, a gnome with a belt of carpentry tools is dipping a cup into the fresh water. She greets you warmly, making space for you beside her.

“You tried the other water yet?” she asks, nodding toward the stream. “Not exactly what I’d call fresh, right?”

You let her know that you haven’t yet, and she takes another slurp out of her cup.

“Good,” she says. “Don’t. Our medic—some tough old dwarf that survived the creation of the world it looked like—got so sick off just a sip we sent him back to the civilized world in a cart.”

She raises her cup to you and drains it.

“Enjoy!”

You watch her saunter off and then get water for yourself from the barrel ([go to 45](#)).

71

Rija sighs and takes a moment to glance at you.

“I’m not much of a talker,” she says finally. “But if it will shut you up so we can get back to the trail, let’s do this.”

You ready what you want to say, but she takes a deep breath and starts talking.

“As a child, I loved playing in the ruins just on the edge of town. So much so that I often camped out there. My parents hated it, wanting me to run the family vegetable stall.

“And they may still be running that vegetable stall. Or it’s burned to the ground. I have no idea. I left that sleepy little town as soon as I could find a peddler willing to take me away from the place. And I’ve been exploring the world ever since.”

She takes a beat to finally draw a breath, then looks straight at you.

“And now that you got what you were looking for, let’s go. This looks like a prime spot for an ambush, so let’s check the trees.”

And she continues her easy stride off what could be considered a road and into the jungle itself ([go to 48](#)).

72

You wonder aloud if there’s something not quite right with the expedition. You get a long second of silence, and a few crewmembers look at each other.

“Ach, it’s nothing,” says the cook. “Everyone’s just on edge after them scalyfolk showed up today, eh?”

A general murmur of agreement goes round, tinged with a little relief.

“But we’ve got you here now, adventurer,” says one of the porters. “You’ll keep us safe.”

You change the subject as you finish your stew, and the boisterous camaraderie returns to the workers around the fire.

Still, when you excuse yourself to continue on with your evening, no one stops you from leaving.

If you haven’t done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija ([go to 3](#)), talk to Gigar ([go to 82](#)), or approach Z’ka ([go to 55](#)).

Or if you’re feeling ready to turn in for the night, [go to 89](#).

73

The lizardfolk that approaches you readies a club reinforced with a twisted bone likely originating on a strange mutation of a local beast. Other lizardfolk are harassing the rest of the expedition members.

LIZARDFOLK WITH CLUB

Medium Humanoid (lizardfolk), neutral

Armor Class 15 (Natural Armor, shield)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 +2)

Speed 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

Initiative +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10(+0)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 13

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 +2) bludgeoning damage.

If you reduce the lizardfolk to 0 HP, **go to 40**. If the lizardfolk reduces you to 0 HP, **go to 15**.

Or at any time, you can run away into the jungle (**go to 78**).

74

A group of ragged and roguish explorers is ringed on all sides by a troop of lizardfolk with spears. The spears' obsidian tips glint in the late afternoon light as they are leveled at what you can only assume is the expedition you're supposed to meet.

A human woman is standing two paces in front of the rest of the expedition. Her hands are raised in surrender, but her voice is also raised in anger.

"Gods damn it," she shouts. "We have permission to be here. Do you understand me? We had a deal!"

One of the lizardfolk, wearing a ceremonial necklace of multicolored feathers, lowers its speartip slightly to address the woman in sibilant, labored common. "No deal. Go now. All go now."

"No, no, no." The woman shakes her head in exasperation. "We *need* to get in there. I need... We have people in there."

The lizardfolk makes some reptilian noises through gritted teeth and moves its speartip from the woman to point at the jungle instead. "Need nothing. More need. Not go in there."

The woman takes a step forward and opens her mouth again but the ring of spears tightens around her. She draws her mouth into a tight line, glancing in both directions. She notices you and cocks her head with curiosity for a moment.

In the moment it takes her to collect herself, a bearded orc in spectacles lays a thick-fingered hand on her shoulder.

"If I may," he says without waiting for the reply, "we are an academic expedition searching for the lost city of Z'leth."

There is a sharp intake of breath among the lizardfolk, along with what sounds like hissed oaths. The spears point at him and he gulps as he adjusts his collar.

"Well... erm... I suppose that..." he looks nervously around himself. His eyes settle on the woman. "So what do we do now?"

The tension ratchets up and seems to be reaching breaking point.

You can draw your weapon (**go to 5**), try to address the lizardfolk (**go to 12**), or try to get more information from the expedition (**go to 98**).

75

When you and Gigar emerge from the wagon, Z'ka and Rija are returning from the northeast. Z'ka looks to Rija briefly and then sidles away from the crowd. Rija, on the other hand, starts calling out orders.

"You and you, finish getting that fresh water in there. Those horses need to be harnessed. Bury that offal. We're heading out."

You find Rija as she moves through the camp, and she stops to speak to you. "We found wagon tracks leading to the northeast. But there are... other signs as well."

So the whole expedition packs up and moves out together. It's an uneventful but unpleasant slog

through the jungle. Scouting had its dangers, but they didn't include freeing wagon wheels from mud, coaxing panicked horses through tangling vines, or righting toppled supplies.

As you travel, the jungle shifts and warps around you. Every step you take toward your supposed destination, you see it in the trees around you that twist almost into themselves. The air stops smelling even of the too-ripe fruit you've come to expect and just smells of sickness and rot.

Every footstep in the wet ground leaves a sucking hole that fills with inky black water. For the first mile, the crew whine and complain about the conditions. During the second mile, there are harsh whispers of fear. The last mile before you pitch camp is spent in resigned silence, broken only by the occasional crew member unable to take the corruption seeping up from the earth and vomiting onto the ground.

At the end of the day's march, Rija moves through the camp trying to raise spirits, but almost no one even has the energy to unpack. You help pull down a barrel of water so that everyone can have a drink and then find a dryish place to rest for the night.

"You see what's happening out there in the jungle, don't you?" Rija asks as you are filling your waterskin.

You nod and gesture toward the corruption around you. Your exhaustion must show on your face because Rija nods knowingly.

"You should get some rest," Rija says, laying a hand on your shoulder. "We're just getting started."

You take the hint—and your water—and go find yourself somewhere to lie down for the night. You check for anything unusual on the ground and find no extraordinarily thorny vines, sharp-bladed grass, or poisonous vermin, so you settle in on your bedroll ([go to 97](#)).

76

You pick the snake apart with Rija's sharp knife, but the blade keeps slipping against the strange formations you find in the creature. There are odd bones, equally odd organs, and hardened growths of flesh.

But despite your best efforts, you can't get anything out of it that another might find recognizable.

"You tried at least," she says. "But it's best to get back now. We'll speak to Gigar about what we've seen. Maybe that will be enough."

You leave what scraps remain of the two-headed snake to be consumed by the jungle and return to camp ([go to 103](#)).

77

Your spell wounds the lizardfolk and he jumps back, clutching the wound as he drops his spear. He glares at you in anger and pain for a moment, but collects himself with impressive stoicism.

Rija whirls to face him then fires you a dirty look before addressing him first. "We'll get that looked at. Now, what is the meaning of this?"

Members of both groups glare at you but the wounded lizardfolk waves it off and speaks to Rija and Gigar ([go to 36](#)).



78

Not seeing anywhere else to go, you spin and dash for the relative safety of the treeline. A club-wielding lizardfolk sees you making a break for it. It cocks its hand back and hurls its club at you.

Roll an attack roll against your AC (+2 to hit). If it hits, take 1d4+2 damage.

If you survive the blow and escape, [go to 61](#). If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 87](#).

79

You take a sip of water and the vileness of it nearly overwhelms you. You struggle against it.

Roll a Constitution saving throw to resist disease. If you roll 12 or more, **go to 39**. If you fail, **go to 2**.

If you are immune to disease, **go to 54**.

80

The lizardfolk is about as expressive as the stone tablet he is tapping on. You have no idea what he's thinking or even doing other than slowly chomping away at a large, questionable piece of meat.

Your presence does not go unnoticed, however. Z'ka sees you and looks up from the stone tablet he's studying.

"It must not be disturbed," he says, and then taps at a particular word on his tablet.

And then he turns back to his reading and his meal, ignoring you again. You back away from him before going off in search of another way to spend your evening.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try to speak to Rija (**go to 3**), talk to Gigar (**go to 82**), or speak to the rest of the crew (**go to 68**).

Or if you're feeling ready to turn in for the night, **go to 89**.

81

The unexpected jolt hits you as soon as you grasp the artifact. However, you resist the powerful surge of energy that is accompanied by a rush of sights, sounds, and smells.

You're aware you're not present in the scene unfolding before you, but only barely (**go to 65**).

82

Gigar is one of the few people not in a bedroll on the ground. He seems to be living quite luxuriously in the back of one of the wagons. He even has a makeshift bookcase made out of stacked crates and a table bolted into the frame. He's reading as you approach, but he

sets aside the book when you draw near.

"Ah, adventurer," he says. "What a delight. Quite the to-do with the lizardfolk, eh? Well, never mind all that. Come take a look at this."

He waves you up into the wagon. There is even a little folding set of stairs leading up to his rolling office.

Once you climb up, he passes you the book he was perusing. You see that it's his own notebook, including scraps of paper from other documents. The scrap he's pointing to has lines of glyphs running down the paper alongside some sketches of odd-looking animals.

Roll an Intelligence (History) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 64**. If you roll under 15, **go to 25**.

83

Rija purses her lips and shakes her head.

"Boring childhood. Then a life of adventure," she says finally. "There's my backstory. Shall we?"

She sweeps a hand toward the jungle sarcastically.

"If I were to attack a slow-moving caravan, I'd use this bend in the road to clump them together," she says. "Let's make sure nothing is lying in wait. Quietly."

You stop talking and follow her off the road and into the edge of the trees (**go to 48**).

84

Your spell hides you from your attackers. Lizardfolk rush to where you were but you are already gone, sprinting for the relative safety of the treeline. You make it without being seen and continue as far away from the camp as you can manage before your spell fades.

Once you are visible again, you stop in the darkened jungle as the sounds of combat still echo through the trees. You take a minute to catch your breath as you take in your surroundings. The trees and vines are even more unsettling at night.

Too late, you hear the snap of a twig as someone approaches you from behind. Strong hands grab hold of you, pulling you further into the jungle and away from camp (**go to 29**).

85

“So let me be very clear,” the woman says firmly, and then points at the orc beside her. “This is Gigar Garantham, a professor of antiquity of some renown. And I am Rija, a person of no renown but leading this group to retrieve a missing expedition and complete their mission of discovery.”

The leader of the lizardfolk opens his mouth to reply, but he’s quickly cut off as Rija points at you.

“This is the last member of our team, arriving with critical information. We are now ready to depart. As per our agreement, you will be providing us with safe passage and a guide. Or will you refuse to honor that deal?”

“Oh, and quickly, please,” says the orc identified as Gigar. “We have much to do and little time in which to do it.”

Several of the lizardfolk bare their teeth at Rija’s brusqueness and the leader holds his silence as he stares down the haft of his spear at her.



One of the lizardfolk behind Rija and Gigar lifts his spear and strides directly at the two of them. His eyes burn with intensity as they lock onto the expedition leadership. The other crew of the expedition are so focused on the speartips in their own faces that they don’t notice the movement, but you have enough time to act.

Lethal force could hurt your new companions, so do you rush in to grapple the attacker (**go to 44**), use a spell or ability to subdue the attacker (**go to 102**), or wait and see what happens (**go to 24**)?

86

You think you see motion just past the nearby treeline, but then a hissing band of lizardfolk charge into camp from the other direction. They spread through the camp like wildfire, kicking people away and prodding with spears, but they don’t seem to have noticed you yet.

Use a spell or magical ability to avoid detection (**go to 104**), engage one of the lizardfolk in battle (**go to 73**), or stealthily try to escape the camp before you’re spotted (**go to 90**).

87

The spinning club connects with your skull and the night erupts into multicolored stars. The ground tilts up to meet you and you find yourself overcome with dizziness.

This suddenly seems like the perfect place to take a short rest, and no one would mind if you took a short nap here on the ground. You close your eyes, but do not open them again.

YOU DIED.

88

You’ve eaten and the sun has set by the time Gigar emerges from his wagon. He finds you with a sheepish smile, but he has little to add to your findings.

“Your work today was exemplary, adventurer,” he says. “Really couldn’t have done better myself and I have nothing to add. But look here.”

He produces the same rolled leather case containing the map you delivered to the expedition yesterday (**go to 6**).

89

The sky is beginning to darken and it's time to find a place for the night. But the hot weather has begun to take its toll.

You check your water supply and see that you've just got a couple of mouthfuls left. You'll need to refill soon, especially in this sweltering heat. Based on the humidity, you don't expect it to cool off much at night.

A small stream burbles along beside the clearing where your expedition made camp, and you've seen barrels of fresh water that have been unloaded from the wagons. You can try the stream (**go to 100**) or the barrels for a refill (**go to 70**).

90

You drop into a crouch and try to slink away from the erupting battle without being seen.

Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 28**. If you get less than 12, **go to 42**.



91

You make a quick circuit of the camp on your own. The expedition is well-equipped for the jungle, even if you're not. Everyone is bent to their own preparations for the night, leaving you time to meet your new comrades or explore.

You can try to speak to Rija again anyway (**go to 3**), speak to Gigar, who is flipping through some books (**go to 82**), greet the lizardfolk Z'ka (**go to 55**), or speak to the various laborers and porters that make up the bulk of the expedition (**go to 68**).

Or if you have nothing else you want to explore, you can get ready to turn in for the night (**go to 89**).

THE QUARTERMASTER

The expedition's quartermaster manages its resources, but also acts as a general store for its crew. Anytime you are in camp, you can purchase items and equipment by going to the **QUARTERMASTER** section at the end of the book. Just make note of which section you are currently on so that you don't lose your place in the adventure.

92

Gigar is looking at you like a little boy would look at a wrapped gift.

"So, what did you see?" he asks again. Then remembering himself, he takes up a notebook and inkpen. "Spare no details."

Tell him in detail what you saw (**go to 37**) or give him a rough description but keep the location to yourself (**go to 11**).

93

Despite your best efforts, you get no new insights from the tablet, though it's clear that it describes an advanced culture with access to a great magical power. Crystals seem to play a major part in that power.

Z'ka seems disappointed, but not overly so. In fact, he seems even a bit relieved that you weren't able to interpret too much from his holy script.

"Is hidden under the under," he says. "Few find."

He thanks you and bids you good night. He settles onto his patch of earth and begins re-reading the tablet with a rhythmic tapping as you find your bedroll and settle in for the night (**go to 10**).

94

You slip through the undergrowth like a shadow. You scan the area for anything out of place, and it seems like everything is just slightly... wrong.

The trees twist themselves into shapes that make them look like they're in pain. Vines have strangleholds on the trees they live on and there are just too many thorns everywhere. Wherever you look, the plant life at least hints that it's poisonous and the whole place smells like a fruit cart left in the sun too long: sweetness and rot mingled together.

The whole place reeks with corruption and illness, the ground itself seeming to suck at your feet as you try to move through the undergrowth. But you manage to stay undetected by anything, including your companion (**go to 26**).

95

You and Rija walk in silence, though she seems to prefer it that way. You both scan the trees on either side of the jungle's closest equivalent to a road. The wide path you're on is at least passable with the wagons.

But Rija catches your eye with a nod then hooks a thumb toward the trees. You nod back, and you push your way into the thick undergrowth with her.

Roll a Wisdom (Survival) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 106**. If you get less than 10, **go to 32**.

96

The notes scrawled across the map are worse than useless. They all contradict one another, all wrong paths to the supposed location of Z'leth.

However, there are a variety of shapes that represent what appear to be hazards. Looking closely, they appear to be abnormal animals of some kind. There's a bird with a lizard's tail, frogs covered in sharp spines, and, even more clearly, another two-headed snake. These seem to increase in density as they approach an empty space on the map.

"We're here," Rija says as she plants a finger on the map. The increasing density of the mutant encounters seem to be to the northeast of your position.

There are other notes to the south and the west that indicate questions, or places that other explorers might have tried. However, you are moving away from both of these. You ask Rija and Gigar why.

"Both are already thoroughly explored, I'm afraid," says Gigar with an exaggerated sigh.

"At great cost to the expeditions," Rija adds. "And no closer to Z'leth."

You point out the pattern and both Rija and Gigar lean in.

"Let's get our guide for this," Rija says and leaves to get Z'ka (**go to 58**).

97

Gain the benefits of a short rest.

You bolt upright in the strangely calm night. There's a snarl and a shriek somewhere past the black curtain of trees, but that has long ago become just part of the backdrop of this place.

Still, something is out of place or else you would not have woken up the way you did.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 31**. If you get less than 12, **go to 86**.

98

You look over the two groups. The lizardfolk are tense, but not jumpy. They hold their spears firmly and without wavering. The majority of the expedition appear terrified except for the human woman standing point and the bespectacled orc. The woman is standing

tall and defiant, while the orc seems mostly curious about what's going on around him.

For a fleeting moment, the woman's face seems to ask who in the hells you are, but she's sharp enough to pick up on the opportunity to de-escalate. She elbows the orc standing next to her and nods in your direction. Catching your eye, she then nods to you.

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 30**. If you get less than 12, **go to 43**.

99

The advancing lizardfolk shakes off your attempt, but he also pauses to look at you with a flat expression. You feel momentarily that you might be in danger and tense up, but he turns his attention quickly to Rija and Gigar.

Still, he spares you the occasional glance to make sure you're not going to try something else (**go to 36**).

100

From a distance, the stream seems to burble and slop merrily along the jungle floor. Up close, the smell hits you like a warhammer. The water is brownish green and stinks of rot or worse. It's definitely not drinkable, but something is sustaining the lushness around you. The wildlife nearby must drink it...

Fill your waterskin and drink it anyway (**go to 79**) or fill it and cast Purify Food and Drink on it (**go to 17**).

Alternatively, you can go to the barrels at camp (**go to 45**).

101

The huge two-headed snake loops its coils around you, squeezing tighter and tighter. Your vision starts to darken as you feel something crack and give way in your chest.

You think you hear Rija cry out, "No!"

But then it's just darkness.

YOU DIED.

102

The group is packed tightly together and you're reacting quickly to the lizardfolk's advance. There's a very good chance you'll hit the expedition with any area effects.

Roll your attack roll or a saving throw on behalf of the lizardfolk as required by the spell or ability.

If you successfully damage the advancing lizardfolk with the spell or ability, **go to 77**. Or if you successfully use a spell or ability that can subdue the target without harming it, **go to 41**. However, if your action fails, **go to 99**.

Or, if you find that you don't have any spells or abilities you can safely cast, you've missed your opportunity to take action (**go to 24**).



LIZARDFOLK WITH SPEAR

Medium Humanoid (lizardfolk, neutral)

Armor Class 14 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 26 (2d8 +2)

Speed 30 ft., Swim 30 ft.

Initiative +3

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6

Senses passive Perception 11

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

103

Back at camp, you and Rija track down Gigar. You tell him all about the two-headed snake and what little you were able to learn from it.

"And you were there too, my dear?" he asks Rija.

"I was," she replies. "The adventurer did everything that could've been done, but we didn't learn anything other than confirm the presence of this corruption."

"Ah, the corruption," Gigar says, scratching at his mutton chops. "That is what I called it, yes. Please wait here, both of you."

He scurries back to his wagon and retrieves a rolled leather case. You immediately recognize it as the map you delivered the previous day (**go to 6**).

104

As the lizardfolk spill out of the treeline, you consider your options from your magical repertoire.

If you can cast an illusion spell or create a magical distraction at least 30 feet away from yourself, **go to 9**. Alternatively, you could magically obscure yourself or become invisible to make a stealthy escape (**go to 84**).

However, if you don't have any spells or abilities for this situation you have no choice but to fight (**go to 73**) or run away (**go to 78**).

105

Though you don't recognize anything on the tablet, you are able to surmise that this is an advanced civilization with access to a great power. That power seems to be housed in crystals, which would likely grow underground more easily than aboveground.

Z'ka nods sagely. "Very big very under. Z'ka go. Take you."

You nod, and thank Z'ka for showing you his tablet. He bids you a polite—if strangely chilly—good night as he turns away from you to settle into his patch of softened earth to recite from his tablet.

Strangely soothing, the hissing mantra makes you drowsy as well. You return to your own bedroll by the smoking fire and hope for a good night's rest (**go to 10**).

106

Looking around, you see that this unnamed jungle is extraordinarily thick, but despite that fact it does not appear to be healthy growth. A palpable corruption hangs in the air, a heady mixture of sickly-sweet overabundance with a thick undertone of rot.

Tree trunks twist and bend as if avoiding the light. The vines that you'd normally expect to be hanging from the canopy loop around trees in a strangling grip. An unidentifiable mass of fur and rotting flesh is bound to the ground at one point, held in a mass of thorny growth you've never seen before that sprouts jagged flowers the color of blood.

Even the birds seem to be different. You hear no birdsong – none of the tweets or trills you'd expect in such dense vegetation. There are only sharp caws and almost-human shrieks of creatures somewhere up in the canopy.

Everything you see lives without thriving, but there seems to be a source to the corruption. Though it's as subtle as the direction of a twisted tree or a slight increase in the number of red flowers on their victim, everything points to the northeast.

It's unclear if Rija sees the same thing that you do, but she also seems to glance to the northeast at least once.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 8 or higher, **go to 18**. If you get under 8, **go to 53**.

CHAPTER 2

107

You, Rija, Gigar, and Z'ka stumble through the jungle, undergrowth clawing at your legs and hanging vines slapping you in the face. The night is overcast and moonless, but a sickly phosphorescent glow sheds a dim light in the deep jungle. It serves to confuse the senses more than illuminate them. The four of you move briskly but not at a dangerous pace.

After traveling for around an hour, you and your companions stop to take stock and decide what to do next. They all flop to the ground or onto logs, and you feel equally exhausted.

You have only what you carried into the jungle, and your teammates have equally limited resources. Rija is probably best outfitted with her numerous pieces of equipment and crystals. Gigar has a satchel with his notes, the obsidian amulet, and a few more arcane-looking items. Z'ka has his spear in his hand, the tablet on his back, and his natural advantages.

Rija holds up a hand for silence, and you all stand still. She then nods and drops her hand, addressing you all in a whisper.

"Sounds like we're alone for now," she says. "But when they realize we're gone, they may come after us."

Z'ka nods. "They protect. They stop. To protect."

Gigar seems on the verge of tears. "What do we do now? Rija? Z'ka?"

"We won't survive the night out here," Rija says. "We need shelter. Somewhere to regroup."

With the alternatives being back the way you came or spending the night alone in the jungle, you agree that sticking together is the best way to make it through the night, at least.

"All right," Rija says. "Z'ka, lead the way."

Without a word or gesture, the lizardfolk warrior turns into the gloom, not even checking whether the rest of you are following. In the distance, you can still hear noise from camp and you hope it's your imagination that the sound is getting closer (**go to 150**).

108

Quick on your feet, you dive out of the way of the tumbling stones and dust. They slam into the floor right where you had been just moments before.

As the dust settles, you see the shadowy forms of your companions searching through the debris and everyone seems relieved that you're still standing. You brush yourself off, noting Gigar's grin of approval and Rija's scowl. Z'ka appears unmoved by your near miss (**go to 142**).



109

The tunnel straight ahead twists and turns from side to side, but seems quite level throughout. Eventually, it leads to a partial cave-in, but there is still a sharp downward chute.

"So down," Rija says. Her tone is flat, but a little smile crinkles one corner of her mouth.

Z'ka just grunts and Gigar looks at you.

You can take the chute down to see where it leads (**go to 168**). Alternatively, you can go back to the fork and either take the tunnel up (**go to 143**) or down (**go to 164**).

110

You are able to descend the rope smoothly and disengage at the bottom without forcing Rija to wait on you. Z'ka is already waiting, taking the few minutes he had to re-read the tablet from his back.

Rija touches the bottom and disconnects herself from the rope as well. Her short nod carries more approval than you would have expected (**go to 173**).

111

As you lean back against the wall, you hear movement farther back in the cave. Turning to assess if it's a threat, you see Rija and Z'ka peeking around a bend in the passageway and speaking quietly to one another. It seems that they've found another way out.

You also see Rija hand a few of the Z'lethan crystals to Z'ka. He nods in thanks.

And it seems that you will need the second exit immediately, because you distinctly hear activity at the mouth of the cave. There are the rasping voices of lizardfolk and the clattering of weapons just on the other side of the spill of vines and moss that you passed through on your way inside. It's only a matter of minutes—if not seconds—before they find where you're hiding.

As if appearing from the shadows, Z'ka is suddenly behind you and hisses in your ear: "Come!"

Rija is rousing Gigar from his nap with similar urgency. You collect your gear and follow Z'ka as quietly as you can deeper into the cave (**go to 135**).

112

Not wanting to be left behind, you rush down the passageway after your companions. They've clearly turned a corner as you've lost sight of Rija and her belt of glowing stones (**go to 156**).

113

While similar, the two passages have distinct differences in their climates and appearances. You feel that you can get an idea of what to expect based on the clues you see here.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 120**. If you get less than 12, **go to 166**.

114

You decide to try disarming the trap. You ask everyone to give you some space, and they back up and out of danger.

Roll a Dexterity check, adding your proficiency bonus if you have thieves' tools and are proficient with them. If you get 12 or more, **go to 133**. If you get less than 12, **go to 171**.

115

The impact with the ground comes at you from the wrong angle. You smash your head into an outcropping on the way down and twist your neck till your spine snaps.

You have mere moments to lament how close you came to seeing the magnificence of Z'leth before the darkness swallows you whole.

YOU DIED.

116

You find a large cave mouth behind a curtain of moss and vines, and have time to explore, find markings on the wall, and even find what appear to be someone's skeletal remains. It's a medium-sized humanoid—probably a human or elf—but the flesh has long ago rotted away, though it still clutches a pack close to its side. However, given the fact that the skeleton is still intact, it means that either the animals left it alone or...

You approach the skeleton carefully, watching for movement. You even nudge it with your toe. It stays dead, though it's odd that the skeleton has remained intact. Something about these caves has kept the local wildlife at bay.

Checking the remains quickly, you find 3 glowing blue crystals, two in the pack and another under the body. They look like the same crystals that Rija wears around her belt right down to the glow.

“Ah, you’ve found the caves.” A voice behind you startles you. It’s Rija, outlined against the cave mouth, lit gently by the crystals at her waist. “What else have you found?”

You can hand over the crystals you found ([go to 134](#)) or keep them for yourself ([go to 162](#)).

117

You are overcome with the vileness coursing through your veins and double over in painful spasms.

Take 1d6 poison damage. You now have the poisoned effect until your next long rest.

(A poisoned creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.)

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 172](#). If you survive, [go to 159](#).

118

You make it part way down before losing a foothold and starting to spin. You can’t get yourself righted and in a mad scramble for some purchase against the rock wall, your grips and clamps on the rope also fail.

You start falling, grasping desperately at the rock wall or rope for some purchase to halt your descent.

Roll a Strength or Dexterity saving throw. If you get 12 or more, [go to 151](#). If you roll less than 12, [go to 160](#).

119

You and your companions arrive at a three-way fork. One passage angles up. Gigar suggests going that way because you’re looking for a city and it’s probably up on the surface. Z’ka wants to go straight ahead, like a spear thrust. Rija suggests going down. The lizardfolk behind you would be less likely to follow you there.

“What do you think, adventurer?” Gigar says. “Up towards the light?”

“Go,” Z’ka says. “Just go.”

Rija stays silent, but waits for you to break the tie. There is no discernible difference in the passages besides their direction, so you’ll just have to go with your gut.

Go up ([go to 143](#)), go straight ([go to 109](#)), or go down ([go to 164](#)).

120

The left-hand passage is bare stone and shows signs of the stone having been worked. The air there is dry and dusty, so it’s probably not very hospitable to cave life. You would guess that any hazards you might meet there would be mechanical.

The right-hand passage is noticeably damp and moist. There are audible dripping sounds echoing from the darkened foulness that smells faintly of mold. You expect that any dangers you might encounter down this path could be dangerous cave-dwellers.

You can suggest going either down the dry, worked tunnel on the left ([go to 170](#)) or the damp, moldy path on the right ([go to 137](#)).



121

You manage to scrape a sizable amount of the slime mold into a waiting container, causing some of the mold to fall away from the wall it was clinging to and revealing a hidden passage behind it in the process.

Add slime mold poison to your inventory.

SLIME MOLD POISON

You can dip a weapon into the toxic compound to add 1d4 poison damage to your next hit with that weapon. Any creature taking poison damage in this way must make a Constitution saving throw against DC 12 or become poisoned until their next long rest.

An appropriate merchant will pay 25 gp for this sample

You carefully seal away your sample and stow it.

You can go and explore the hidden passage (**go to 147**) or move on with your companions (**go to 119**).

122

Gain Inspiration.

You pay close attention to the cave, especially its mouth, but tiredness wears away at your focus.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 111**. If you get less than 10, **go to 158**.

123

You try to dodge out of the way, but your foot slips on a smooth stone and you are unable to clear the danger. Several heavy stones barrel into you.

Take 1d10 bludgeoning damage from falling stones.

If you are reduced to 0 HP, **go to 139**. If you survive, **go to 142**.

124

In the unfinished wall, you easily find a large section of stone blocks that have been designed to fall into the passage and crush whoever triggers the mechanism. The trigger is a series of pressure plates on the floor that run the full width of the tunnel. However, you're quite sure that you can jump over them and avoid triggering the trap.

Rija comes up to survey the mechanism with you, Gigar slinks back as far away from the danger as

possible, and Z'ka just takes a more relaxed stance as you and Rija decide what to do.

As you're assessing the situation, you think that you see some dark space behind the wall that houses the dead drop. Putting your hand close to the seam, you can definitely feel the flow of air.

You can try to disarm the trap (**go to 114**), go around the trap (**go to 131**), or trigger the trap on purpose (**go to 161**).

125

You step out onto a ledge overlooking a spectacular city of stone pyramids and towering statues. An immense cavern encapsulates this lost jewel of civilization, though there seems to be a cave mouth an indeterminate distance away.

The jungle's constricting embrace has nearly choked the life from this city that must have been majestic in its prime. Even with its overgrown cloak of tropical foliage, it's still a wonder to behold. And at this height, the corruption that has twisted the jungle above is less apparent. Almost like the city was merely sleeping, biding its time before rising again in splendor, if not for the slight smell of rot and the unease in the pit of your stomach.

Whole buildings seem to be capped with the brightly glowing blue Z'lethan crystal that you've so far only seen as tiny shards. The foliage seems to avoid the crystals as if the light repels it.

"Z'leth," Z'ka says, wonder and awe apparent even in his sibilant voice.

"We made it?" Gigar asks as he peeks around the rest of you. "We actually made it?"

"It seems that we did," Rija says with an odd half-smile. "We're here."

A distant cry draws your attention. Tiny figures below are running out of a large central pyramid. One stumbles and falls in its haste, only to be picked up by the others in a mad dash away from that structure.

"That must be them!" Rija says, pointing at the tiny figures. "The expedition! And they found it!"



The ant-like figures sprint down the steps in a panic, rushing through the overgrown streets away from the now-glowing main entrance of the pyramid. Their terrified cries reach you even on your high perch. They vanish into the city.

“We need to get down there,” Rija says. “We need to find what— find the explorers.”

You look around and don’t see any staircase or other easy way down.

If you have a climb speed from a spell or ability, **go to 163**. If you are able to float or fly down due to a spell or ability, **go to 146**.

Otherwise, you’ll have to climb down with the others (**go to 154**).

126

From the end of the passage there is a faint blue light shining. It almost looks like daylight, but something in the color is wrong and there’s no hint of fresh air. It’s just the same stale air hanging around you and if anything there’s even a hint of foulness coming from the direction of the light.

However, it’s the most likely way forward so together with your companions you step out into the light (**go to 125**).

127

Rija is putting a handful of glowing blue crystals from the body’s pack into one of the many pouches she has. They look remarkably similar to the ones she has on her belt, which are the source of the very faint glow you see.

Before you can say anything, Gigar huffs up the same slope behind you and Z’ka follows blithely behind.

“Is this it? Are we here?” Gigar says. At his voice, Rija turns away from the body she’d been pilfering and sees you first. Her eyes narrow momentarily before she stands with a smile.

“Yes, this is the best we’ll find tonight,” she says to Gigar. “Come in and we’ll regroup in the morning.”

You, Gigar, and Z’ka join Rija in the cave (**go to 153**).

128

You decide that it’s best to keep yourself rested and prepared for what may come up. The rest you get is fitful, but it’s better than nothing and you do feel somewhat recovered.

Gain the benefits of a short rest.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 111**. If you get less than 15, **go to 158**.

129

You smell it before you see it: a pulsating sheet of brightly colored mold drips down one wall of the cavern and across part of the floor. Its foul odor clearly indicates that it’s incredibly toxic and something best avoided.

However, after a moment you realize that the oozing fungus on the wall isn’t pulsating but moving in a slight breeze. Between the tendrils of vile mold, you can see what seems to be a passage leading off of the main tunnel.

“Bad,” Z’ka says, covering his snout with a clawed hand. “Go now. Too bad.”

“Quite noxious indeed,” Gigar says, also covering his nose but with a handkerchief. “Best be gone.”

You could try to clear the mold with fire before moving on (**go to 155**), try to collect a sample of the substance (**go to 136**), or simply avoid it and move on (**go to 169**).

130

As soon as you drop into the chute, you slip and start to slide out of control.

At the end of your uncontrolled descent, you drop gracelessly onto the hard stone floor below. As you’re lying momentarily stunned, a flailing and panicked Gigar drops out of the chute on top of you. Rija and Z’ka follow after him with enough control to avoid the two of you.

The fall and the crash deal 1d6 damage to you.

If you survive the fall, **go to 126**. If you are reduced to 0 hp, **go to 138**.

131

The pressure plates are wall-to-wall but easy to hop over. Gigar stumbles as he crosses—causing Rija to hold her breath and Z'ka to hiss from the back of his throat—but the orcish scholar narrowly avoids setting off the trap.

“I’m still here.” He grunts, almost surprised.

Rija mutters across the room. “Things will not get easier from here, Gigar. Focus!”

With the occasional look over your shoulder, you continue cautiously down the passage deeper into this mountain, knowing that if the lizardfolk do follow you down here, you’ve left them a surprise obstacle in their way ([go to 119](#))!

132

The walls are covered with strange, angular lines. At first, you mistake them for some kind of mural, but there are small recesses that appear periodically. Looking closer, they appear to be conduits or channels running along the walls. Rija, Gigar, and Z'ka hurry ahead, risking leaving you behind.

You can examine the conduits ([go to 148](#)) or hurry to catch up with the others ([go to 112](#)).

133

With a click and a whirl of hidden components under the floor, you manage to disable the mechanism that would have triggered the collapsing stones. You turn back to your companions and let them know it’s done.

Though Gigar and Rija let out sighs of relief, Z'ka seems unimpressed. It’s unclear if that’s actually the case or just his reptilian face. Regardless, you’re pleased with your work and you all continue safely down the corridor ([go to 119](#)).

134

Gain Inspiration.

You show Rija what you’ve just found. She approaches, her face in shadow until she’s close enough to be bathed in the light of the stones in your hand. She plucks the pile from your hand, examines it, and then gives you one back.

“You know what? Keep one.” She turns away. “There’s something to be said for honesty, and they come in handy.”

You can add 1 Z'lethan crystal to your inventory.

As you stow the crystal, Z'ka leads a complaining Gigar into the cave. Rija winks at you then beckons them inside ([go to 153](#)).

135

The inside of the cave was already dark, but apparently some light still filtered in from the cave mouth. Now the only light is the faintly glowing gems at Rija’s belt. The contrast makes the darkness around you deeper by comparison, though there’s an eerily similar blue light up ahead.

If you have darkvision or you want to use a light source, [go to 132](#). Or if you continue in the darkness until you reach the blue light, [go to 112](#).

136

This mold is such an unusual substance, you think that it may be of some use or at least be saved for posterity. You attempt to collect some into an empty container you have in your pack.

Roll a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 121](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 141](#).



137

The tunnel walls around you are slick with water and slime, and there's a pervasive stink of mildew or some other fungal growth.

As a natural cavern, the passage twists and turns from whatever primal forces carved it out of the rock. Water drips constantly from the ceiling, forming stalactites and stalagmites as it would in other caves. But the strange corruption of the jungle reaches below ground as well, so these stone formations bristle and whorl with strange patterns. Gigar prods at some with cautious curiosity but eventually leaves them to stick close behind you, Rija, and Z'ka.

As you proceed, multicolored fungi sprout from the stone itself and shed some dim phosphorescence throughout the environment. It's eerie and still, like being inside the body of some enormous dead beast. You do your best to keep your wits about you, making sure there is no subterranean predator lying in wait among the gloom.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 129**. If you get less than 15, **go to 140**.

138

You black out momentarily, but are jerked rudely back to consciousness by a powerful stench.

Z'ka is smearing your wounds with a foul-smelling—but apparently analgesic—salve and what probably passes as a comforting smile among his people.

You return to 1 HP.

You sit up and look for the best way forward (**go to 126**).

139

As a heavy chunk of rock bashes you in the head, the whole world lurches sickeningly on its axis and you find yourself tumbling to the ground. Suddenly, the hard stone floor seems soft and inviting so, though you can hear your companions calling out to you, they can wait a moment while you rest your eyes.

YOU DIED.

140

As you proceed through the glistening tunnel—avoiding contact with various rock and fungal formations—you nearly stumble into a particularly nasty looking patch of some slimy mold. You gag on the smell and step back.

“Oh gods,” Rija chokes. “What’s that?”

Z'ka just gags and covers his nostrils, and Gigar produces a handkerchief to breathe into. Muffled, he says, “It can’t be good. Can we just go around it?”

The smear of foul mold flows down the wall and across some of the floor, seeming to move slightly of its own accord, but you're quite sure that you can pass around the flow where it dribbles into a crack in the floor.

You could try to avoid the mold (**go to 169**), destroy the mold with fire (**go to 155**), or try to collect a sample of the substance in an empty container (**go to 136**).

141

Instead of scraping a sample into your container, it falls onto your skin. You immediately feel the toxic effects of the poisonous organism.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get less than 12, you are poisoned until your next long rest.

A poisoned creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Feeling ill with the effects of the organism, you gingerly follow your companions past the slime and continue onwards (**go to 119**).

142

Before you have a chance to mention your brush with death, you see the dust billowing in a breeze that probably shouldn't be there. Then you notice that the stones fell away from a deeper recess in the wall, possibly even a tight tunnel, leading off to the side of the passage you are in.

You can explore this new tunnel (**go to 165**) or not court fate again and continue along the main passage (**go to 119**).

143

You decide to take Gigar's suggestion and follow the upward slope. The grade of the floor actually gets uncomfortably steep during a few stretches, your feet occasionally struggling to find purchase, but the air does indeed grow fresher as you progress until around a final bend you see the soft glow of early morning light.

It's a dead end with just a crack where you can smell fresh air and see a sliver of dawn-gray sky above. Gigar is so flustered that his blush shows on his green-skinned face.

"Well, I... erm... We..." He fiddles with his spectacles for a moment before Z'ka simply turns around and goes back the way you all came. Rija at least spares Gigar a little pat on the shoulder as she passes. He gives you a pained look then follows them back down into the caves.

You'll need to go back and either take the straight path ([go to 109](#)) or go down ([go to 164](#)).

144

You move as carefully as you can through the craggy stones, but your passage releases a skittering cascade of scree and gravel.

Seeing no need for quiet now, you round a rock formation and come across Rija, who has gone into a small cave she's found.

She is startled by your sudden appearance, but it's unclear what has made her so jumpy. She stands over the skeletal remains of what appears to be an ancient explorer. The bony fingers clutch a disintegrating satchel whose flap hangs open. Rija clutches her climbing axe in one hand and is reaching into her satchel for something with the other.

"At least we won't lose you in the dark," she says. "Where are the others?"

Z'ka trudges into view with Gigar close on his heels. The academic is unleashing a steady stream of grumbled expletives, and you're sure many have been out of style for generations.

"Will we finally be able to cease this midnight march?" he asks as he approaches.

"Indeed," Rija says, sparing Z'ka a sympathetic glance. "We will stay here till morning, and then proceed."

Gigar continues muttering under his breath and you follow close behind him into the cave ([go to 153](#)).

145

You barely manage to overcome the waves of contamination, though you feel sickened by the effects of the corrupted fungus.

Careful not to touch your face or eyes, you look around you at how best to proceed now ([go to 159](#)).

146

You make a controlled descent through the air and arrive at the bottom first. You look up to see Z'ka flat against the wall like a gecko, Rija rappelling with grace so effortlessly she might as well be flying, and Gigar struggling with every part of the climb down.

You are able to enjoy a few minutes of rest before the others arrive ([go to 173](#)).

147

You let your companions know that you want to explore the new discovery, and you arrange to catch up with them further down the passage as they scout ahead.

The toxic mold does not seem to have spread to the hidden passage, though it is still a tight squeeze to get through. It darkens a little, but you can see a strange glow up ahead ([go to 157](#)).

148

You spot an unusual glow tucked away in one of the recesses on the wall. Upon closer examination, you see that the conduits look like they contained something flowing along the cavern wall. They are mostly dark and empty now, except for the source of the glow you spotted.

You find a small crystal glowing blue, just like those you've seen Rija carrying. Small, harmless sparks shoot out from where it is in contact with the wall, but it

comes away in your hand easily. It throbs slightly as you hold it, but it seems perfectly stable.

Add 1 Z'lethan crystal to your inventory.

Looking up ahead, you see that the rest of the group has moved on, so you pocket your find and hurry to catch up with your companions (**go to 156**).

149

You manage to half-climb, half-slide down the chute, landing in a tunnel.

As you make your way down, you note along the way that there's some evidence of what seem to be tool marks. This chute was constructed, likely as an access tunnel but possibly as a vent or even part of a trap. After a safe, controlled drop you drop out of the ceiling onto a flat stone surface in another tunnel. This one also shows clear signs of having been carved out of the natural bedrock.

Behind you, in a scrabbling bellowing mess Gigar comes tumbling out of the chute. He's followed by a no-nonsense Z'ka thudding solidly onto his strong legs and an agile Rija landing silently behind him.

Taking a quick look around you, the path forward is clear (**go to 126**).

150

As you scramble through the darkened rainforest, the ground begins to rise. Gigar starts panting from the exertion but Rija and Z'ka seem unbothered. It's a fairly gentle rise, only made challenging by the clinging undergrowth filled with strange, half-seen things skittering beneath. One of the insects stops, as if trying to take a look at you. You count an odd number of legs. It is either hurt or malformed.

"We should find shelter both from the lizardfolk and the night-time rain," Rija says. "And with all the strangeness around here, who knows what's going to crawl into our bedrolls."

When you look back, the insect is gone. "Caves," Z'ka says, pointing up the slope.

"Oh, anything to get out of these dreadful trees," Gigar says.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or a Wisdom (Survival) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 116**. If you get under 12, **go to 167**.



151

You manage to slow your tumble just before you slam into the ground below.

Take 1d6 falling damage.

If the falling damage reduces you to 0 HP, **go to 115**. If you survive the fall, **go to 173**.

152

You are looking around you for signs of danger, slowly moving forward, until Rija's arm shoots out and bars you from going further.

"Watch yourself," she says. She points out a few pressure plates on the ground and then leads your gaze to the wall hiding a dead drop trap filled with heavy stone blocks. "Keep back everyone!"

You express your gratitude to Rija and then together assess your options. You can try to disarm the trap (**go to 114**), try to circumvent it (**go to 131**), or spring it deliberately (**go to 161**).

153

"Could I get some light in here?" Gigar asks, producing the map from his pack.

"No fire," Rija says. "But this may help."

She passes Gigar some of the crystals, which he immediately places across the map. Though their glow is limited, he can squint well enough to make out the lines.

"If I can just pinpoint our location," he says "maybe there's something still to be gained from this debacle. But I don't see this mountain anywhere."

Z'ka sidles up beside Gigar and places his finger into a blank space on the map ringed with some of the dark shapes.

"But... where's the mountain?" Gigar says, squinting harder.

"No mountain," Z'ka says. "Not map. Protect the under below."

"So a fake map," Rija says. "Of course. Are we close at least, Z'ka?"

He nods. "Rest now. Daytime better."

"Are we sure this is safe?" Gigar asks, peering first at the skeleton and then deeper into the cave.

"No danger," Z'ka says, pointing into the cave. Then he points out of the cave mouth. "Danger there."

Gigar looks skeptical, but he holds his tongue. Instead he picks up one of the glowing crystals.

"These are very interesting, Rija," he says. "Never seen anything quite like them. What are they?"



Z'LETHAN CRYSTAL

You can draw on the magical energies within a Z'lethan crystal to restore your own strength.

By holding a crystal in your hand and using an action, you gain the benefits of a short rest. After you've used the crystal in this way, roll a Wisdom saving throw against DC 12 or also fall unconscious for one minute (even if you are normally immune to sleep).

Once used, the crystal loses its glow and becomes a dull blue crystal worth 10 gp.

“Best way to describe them is as an energy source,” Rija says. She collects the stones off the map and then weighs them in her hand. “They powered the whole Z’lethan civilization at one point.”

She stows her crystals back into their loops on her belt. “I’m sure we’ll come across more once we find the city. Keep as many as you can. They... they could make all the difference.”

She gives each one of you a long look, as if she has something else to say, then shakes her head.

“Let’s all rest while we can,” she says, settling onto a spot on the floor.

You can also settle in for a rest (**go to 128**) or stay alert to keep watch (**go to 122**).

154

Rija sets down her pack and pulls out some mountaineering equipment: a long, supple rope; pitons; a few carabiners from her belt; and her climbing axe.

“Looks like we’re climbing down,” Rija says. “Anyone that doesn’t have your own gear can follow me down on my rope.”

Rija speaks a command to the rope and it wraps around a nearby rock outcropping and she clips herself onto the rope as it uncoils over the edge.

Gigar accepts and sidles up to Rija for help getting prepared for the descent. She helps, but with frequent frustrated sighs. You get yourself ready.

“Real climb,” Z’ka says, tapping a palm to his chest. “Nature climb.”

And he smoothly crouches onto his belly and slithers over the edge to scabble down the wall with clawed feet and hands.

With one last check of everyone’s gear—yours included—Rija gets you to start, saying she will follow with Gigar taking up the rear.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 110**. If you get less than 10, **go to 118**.

155

Your flames lick at the slimy mold and it immediately catches fire. The flames spread across it like they would a puddle of oil. A shrieking sound that sounds eerily human escapes from the rapidly burning puddle of poisonous mold.



Along with the disconcerting sound, a hideous stench rises up from the burning mass and assaults your senses. The flame has released all the poison in the horrible substance, and it burns your eyes and throat. You hear your companions start to hack and cough behind you. When you turn, you see that they are backing away to clearer air.

The poisonous fumes wash over you and you struggle to resist them.

Roll a Constitution saving throw against the poison. If you get 15 or more, **go to 145**. If you get less than 15, **go to 117**.

156

You catch up to Rija, Gigar, and Z'ka in a surprisingly well-lit tunnel. What you see makes you pause in a moment of wonder.

Strange, manufactured conduits with complex patterns snake down the walls, unnaturally straight with corners at perfect right angles. Though you can't see what it might actually mean, there is a deep level of order behind these odd glowing channels. The patterns glow with the blue light you spotted earlier.

"I simply must take a closer look at these," Gigar says. He pulls a loupe out of his pack and leans into the wall. "There's nothing in there... Just light. Except maybe—" Gigar examines the conduits with interest and pries out a bluish crystal with a pair of tweezers. A section of the conduits goes dark. He is intrigued and shows it to you.

"Another crystal," Rija says, her expression flat. "I guess we'll be finding a lot more of them as we get closer."

"Why don't you keep it?" Gigar says, cutting a glance at Rija who nods in approval. "I wouldn't know what to do with such a thing."

Gigar drops the glowing crystal into your hand and watches you for adverse reactions. Satisfied that it seems safe, he offers a sheepish smile.

Add 1 Z'lethan crystal to your inventory.

Gigar moves to start examining more conduits, but Rija calls out to him.

"We should keep moving, Gigar," she says.

"Must go," Z'ka says. "Not talking."

"All right," Gigar says with a disappointed huff. "But which way?"

In the passage ahead, the lines of light fade out and the path forks to the left and right. After a short but spirited discussion, no one can make a decision which way to go. All eyes turn to you for your input.

You can go left (**go to 170**) or go right (**go to 137**). Alternatively, you could investigate a little way along both to make a better decision (**go to 113**).

157

You emerge into a natural chamber where the air is fresher than you've smelled since you entered the cave system.

Looking up, you see that there is what appears to be a vent eroded by rainwater all the way up to a sky lightening with the dawn. It lends the space a reverent stillness you haven't felt before in this corrupted jungle.

As your eyes adjust to the half-light of the chamber, you see that it is ringed with ancient lizardfolk skeletons. At a rough estimate, there are at least two dozen bodies slumped against the walls, their flesh long ago turned to dust. Beside one or two of the corpses, you see bags or packs that disintegrate as soon as you touch them. It looks like they had packed to travel but were forced to stop for a rest, only to die in their sleep.

One especially large skeleton has what appears to be a bone club inlaid with obsidian blades, the club splintering with age. No one else is armed.

Searching through the remains, you find that most are so old and brittle that the bones clatter into a pile at the slightest disturbance. One individual stands out from the others, however, and not because of the skeleton itself but because of what it clutches in its hands close to its chest.

It's an egg, as dry and dusty as any bone in the chamber. Its top is cracked open, and when you peek into it there is a tiny, reptilian skeleton curled around a blue Z'lethan crystal.

You can add a crystal-fused skeleton to your inventory.

Your search of the room reveals one Z'lethan crystal as well as several individuals carrying a total of 8 polished chips of jade (each worth 5 gp). One skeleton is also wearing a gold circlet (worth 15 gp).

You may add any of these items to your inventory.

Having examined everything in this hidden cavern, you leave its occupants to their final rest and leave the way you came to catch up to your party, just as they reach a new choice of direction (**go to 119**).

158

"Hey!" The whisper in your ear startles you. It's Rija, leaning on your shoulder with her mouth at your ear.

"Don't you hear that?" she asks, and you feel her nod toward the cave mouth. And now you do hear a hissed conversation and clatter of weapons outside. You can't believe you didn't hear it before.

"Move it!" she says with a slight push. You see that Z'ka is also getting Gigar moving. You hurriedly gather your gear and follow Rija toward the back of the cave (**go to 135**).

159

Rija and Gigar look at you with concern, making sure you haven't killed yourself with the dangerous organism. Z'ka regards you with his typically dispassionate stare. You signal to your companions that you are fine, and look through the remnants of the dangerous sludge.

Behind what is left of the sheet of mold, you see that there is a tunnel leading away from the main passage. It is not infected with the same nasty substance, but you cannot tell where it goes.

You can go and explore the hidden passage (**go to 147**) or move on with your companions (**go to 119**).

160

All attempts to slow your fall seem to only make it worse. You're in complete freefall now with no hope of recovery. The ground rushes up to meet you.

Take 3d6 falling damage.

If the falling damage reduces you to 0 HP, **go to 115**. If you survive the fall, **go to 173**.

161

Gain Inspiration.

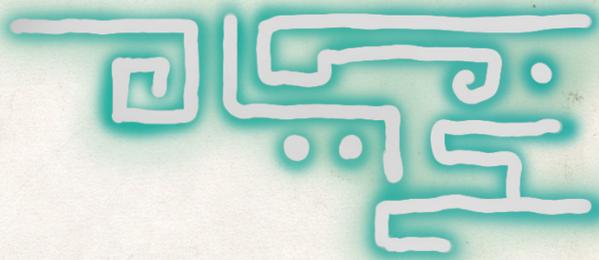
You announce to your team that you will deliberately trigger the trap, so back up. There is a momentary grumble of opposition, but Gigar speaks up.

"It's probably safer that we simply disable it for good, yes?" Both Rija and Z'ka look him over and clearly come to the same conclusion about the orc's overall coordination.

"Do it," Rija says.

You spring the trap, keeping an eye on the stones poised to drop on you. You press the plate ahead until you hear a click and the stones come tumbling out of their recess on the wall with a grating roar.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 10 or more, **go to 108**. If you roll less than 10, **go to 123**.



162

Add 2 Z'lethan crystals to your inventory.

You acknowledge Rija, keeping quiet about what you've found and instead vaguely referring to the crumbling corpse against the wall.

“Not the best sign,” Rija says. “But we’re in no position to be choosy about where we spend the night.”

“Not even a little bit?” Gigar says from the mouth of the cave. Z’ka’s stillness behind him indicates his exasperation as much as a mammal’s eye roll would.

“Stay?” the reptilian warrior asks, and Rija nods ([go to 153](#)).

163

The cliff is sheer with few handholds, so you wouldn’t recommend the unassisted descent for even the most skilled mountaineer. You manage it fine, however, and Z’ka follows close behind you, scrabbling at the wall to match your pace. It’s not too long before Rija joins you, having rappelled down easily ([go to 173](#)).

164

You follow Rija’s advice and take the path that slopes downward and further into the mountain. It’s an easy walk through a tunnel that has clearly been worked by skilled hands. As you proceed, the sophistication of the stonework increases but so does a sense of dread.

“Fascinating craftsmanship,” Gigar says. “But these walls are not lit up...”

He pulls out a notebook and frequently stops to hastily sketch some pattern or design before scuttling to catch up.

“Shouldn’t be too far now,” Rija says absently. When you ask her what she means, she looks startled that she said that out loud. “Um, I was just thinking that we couldn’t be too far from somewhere we can take a rest.”

Z’ka is silent except for the occasional tapping of his spear butt against the floor.

The walk is practically leisurely compared to the rest of your journey and you reach the end of this passage without any problems ([go to 126](#)).

165

Upon closer inspection, there is indeed a tunnel hidden behind the trap. It’s a tight squeeze to fit through, so your companions opt to clear a few stones

from the main passage and give you a chance to explore. After all, you discovered it.

“Just call out if you need us,” Rija says. You let her know that you will and squeeze down the passage to see what might be hidden down there ([go to 157](#)).

166

You can tell that the path on the left seems to have been constructed while the path on the right seems to be a natural formation, but you don’t get any other useful details from them.

You can suggest going either left ([go to 170](#)) or right ([go to 137](#)).

167

You crest a rise and see a cave hidden behind a cascade of vegetation. You might have missed it entirely if not for a soft blue glow coming from inside the cavern.

Approaching as quietly as you can, you see Rija examining a skeletal body that clutches a pack close to its chest.

Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 127](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 144](#).

168

Gain Inspiration.

With a smile, you suggest that you try the chute. With varying levels of enthusiasm, Rija, Z’ka and Gigar agree.

“But you go first,” Rija says with a playful shove. You briefly question the life choices that led you to this point, then you start sliding downwards.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to safely move down the chute. If you get 12 or more, [go to 149](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 130](#).

169

You suggest that you avoid the slimy mold and its dangers entirely, pointing out a path around it. It seems to respond sluggishly to you as you approach,

but you are able to sidle past it without making contact.

Rija does the same as you, and Z'ka leaps over one of the thinner sections of the viscous mass. Gigar nearly loses his balance by walking on tiptoes past the sludge, but Rija grabs his collar and pulls him to safety.

"Happy to have got past that," he says with a snort.

"Very bad," Z'ka says with an emphatic nod. Rija echoes his nod.

Relieved to put the hazard behind you, and between you and the following lizardfolk, you continue down the passage further away from the dangers of the surface (**go to 119**).

170

You lead the group down the tunnel on the left, passing through what appears to be an almost-finished gate. The walls are smooth and flat with some sections showing some carved lines reminiscent of the glowing conduits from earlier.

However, despite the fact that the stone here has clearly been worked on, nothing is entirely finished, as though this section was part of a new addition built after the chamber you've already passed through.

The passage is otherwise bare and stretches off to a hard corner. Not trusting the environment, you scan the area for traps and other hazards. Your companions do the same, Rija urging everyone into a more spread-out formation to avoid all being caught in some catastrophe.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 124**. If you get less than 15, **go to 152**.



171

As you work, you hear something click with sickening finality. You can feel the mechanisms below rumble to life and the stones they held in place start to tumble towards you. You attempt a mad scramble out of the way.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 15 or more, **go to 108**. If you get less than 15, **go to 123**.

172

Wave after wave of sickness drags you under. You cough and choke until you collapse. You're dimly aware of strong, clawed hands trying to prop you up. There are voices, but you can't quite understand what they are saying. You just know that they are worried for you and afraid for themselves.

Then nothing.

YOU DIED.

173

You, Rija, and Z'ka look up at Gigar from the bottom of the subterranean cliff. He seems to be gingerly letting himself down inch by inch.

"I should have followed him," Rija says to you. Then she yells up to Gigar. "Loosen the rope and hurry up!"

Gigar looks down at all of you and you can see his eyes widen with terror even from this distance. He's panting for breath, but he manages to nod.

And then the rope starts squealing through the clamps and burning his hands as Gigar basically starts falling unsupported.

"No! No! Not that loose!" But Rija is too late. Gigar bellows as he starts flailing.

He hits the ground with a snap and a crunch then just lies there still. Too still.

All three of you leap to his aid (**go to 174**).

CHAPTER 3

174

You and Rija rush to Gigar's side. You turn him over, and he groans with pain. A gash in his head is bleeding freely and his breathing seems shallow, but he's alive at least.

"We're going to need to split up," Rija says. "One of us will have to take care of Gigar and another should go find some shelter where we can regroup."

Without the height of the ledge, the city of Z'leth is less spectacular and is instead imposing. The thick, solid stone buildings being slowly overtaken by the creeping undergrowth form a greenish wall. From somewhere among the buildings, you hear odd trills and chitters. The place smells of damp with a faint miasma of illness.

Meanwhile, Gigar still hasn't moved and the occasional labored breath is followed by a soft whimper, though after a little while his eyes flutter open to you, silently asking for help from among his scrunched features.

You can examine Gigar's injuries ([go to 289](#)), offer Gigar magical healing ([go to 189](#)), or find shelter ([go to 182](#)).

175

You take a bite of the roasted lizard, and it seems to putrefy on your tongue. You gag and spit it out on the ground, where it splatters into black slime.

Your companions have similar reactions—even Z'ka—as they all violently spit out the horrible, tainted meat.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get 12 or more, [go to 301](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 223](#).

176

"Hm," Rija says, giving you a hard look. "Well, you look like you saw your own ghost."

You insist that it was nothing. While Gigar returns to his notes and Z'ka to his tablet, Rija seems unconvinced. But she keeps her thoughts to herself as well ([go to 211](#)).

177

You see a stone strongbox in a pile of rubble, surprisingly free of moss and plant roots. It must have only quite recently been revealed by some kind of collapse.

However, the body in front of the safe doesn't show any sign of blunt force trauma. Clearly a humanoid male, it could be a human or elf. However, its features are horribly disfigured and the body is twisted after being burned to death.



The dead body is clearly reaching for the safe and you can see tools in his hand. The safe shows a matrix of symbols that are faintly glowing in what you can only assume is a combination lock of some kind. The would-be thief has a set of thieves' tools on him.

You can add thieves' tools to your inventory.

Try a spell or ability to open the safe (**go to 190**), try to figure out the combination (**go to 202**), or just try to force the safe open (**go to 215**).

Otherwise, you could leave the office and go check out the classroom (**go to 205**), or return to the lobby to continue on (**go to 253**).

178

You take another step through the bright blue fire, and its flickering light obscures both your destination and your point of origin.

Take another 1d6 psychic damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 284**.

If you are still conscious, you can either press on (**go to 210**) or escape the flames to return to the main entry hall (**go to 216**).

179

Rija doesn't know what it was, but she seems rattled.

"It's just another mystery," she says. "Another question, but without answers. Nothing but questions out there."

You ask about the expedition, and Rija seems surprised by the question as if she hadn't even considered them. She shakes her head.

"No," she says. "No sign of them."

Though that seems odd, you can see that Gigar is stirring from his nap (**go to 288**).

180

The temple's height gives you a broad view across the lost city of Z'leth. In its overgrown state, it is impressive. At its height, it must have been spectacular.

You've had difficulty getting your bearings here underground, especially with the strange sense of sickness hanging in the air. But from here, you can see a variety of structures poking out of the twisted green.

Off to your left, you see a round building without a roof. From here it looks like an arena, and it is probably the closest of the major structures.

And to the right, you see another large structure whose tall, twisted spires are capped with elegant crystals shedding light over the entire city. The function of the building is a mystery, but it seems like an important place that might still be somewhat intact.

However, you see no sign of the other expedition. No sign of anything other than encroaching jungle and the potential for mutant animals.

Until something catches your eye at the bottom of the steps (**go to 219**).

181

Given her experience, you think Rija ought to have something to contribute. You call out to her and beckon her to the base of the door. As soon as you call Rija over, however, Gigar stows his notes and amulet.

"Making any progress?" She asks when she arrives. "Do you at least know where this leads?"

"Still no, Rija," Gigar says. "No idea at all really."

You can either demand that Gigar show Rija the amulet (**go to 268**) or play along (**go to 243**).

182

You point out that it's clear that your current position can't be defended from attack, and there's no way of knowing what's hiding out in the city.

Rija nods. "Agreed. There are no elements to protect ourselves from, obviously, but anything else that might make Z'leth their home could sneak up on us at any time. Those people we saw were running from something."

You all move out together to look for a place to establish a base camp from which you can explore the rest of the city. You and Rija take point while Z'ka hauls Gigar up to help the ailing scholar limp his way through the ruined city.

You make your way cautiously down an overgrown promenade. The buildings on either side rise up

around you. The crystals approximate a faded daylight, but the cries and chatters coming from the overhanging foliage sound like the jungle at night. Who knows how many centuries the local wildlife has had to adjust to the endless half-light?

Your exploration takes you from side to side, but the vines and undergrowth have choked many buildings to the point of making them uninhabitable, or even toppling the stones of the structures themselves.

“Up ahead,” Rija says, pointing at the pyramid structure you saw from above the city. “That’s where we saw other people before. That’s as good a place to start as any.”

Recognizing that isn’t a suggestion, and seeing even from here that the structure is one of the few defensible buildings in the city, with its clear doorway and its steps providing good visibility, you change tack with Rija, with Z’ka and Gigar taking up the rear.

You start towards the promising location down a slightly less overgrown street when you hear one of the hissing, chittering sounds getting closer. Uncomfortably close.

Suddenly, a warped and mutated lizard leaps out of the underbrush onto you ([go to 248](#)).



183

When you attempt to purify the meat you’re about to eat, the flesh blackens and liquefies. The putrefied goo sloughs off the bone and spatters on the stone at your feet.

You can eat another chunk of the lizard meat with your companions ([go to 175](#)), examine the remaining lizard meat ([go to 196](#)), or refuse and eat a ration ([go to 277](#)).



TRAINING CONSTRUCT

Medium Construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 +5)

Speed 20 ft.

Initiative -1

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	1 (-5)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Immutable Form. The construct is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., 4 (1d6 +1) piercing damage.

184

You press on the panel and the patterns of the obelisk flare to life with a bright blue light. Seams appear in the obelisk as it splits open to reveal a statue apparently depicting a Z’leth warrior.

It takes a step towards you and you hear doors slam shut around the arena, blocking any escape.

It fights you to the death. If it drops to 0 hp, [go to 214](#). If you drop to 0 hp, [go to 217](#).

The large crystal-topped structure looms ahead.

“Temple,” Z’ka breathes. He makes an arcane sign in the air in front of him. “Door to under the under.”

“And our home for the time being,” Rija says. “So let’s get settled.”

The stairs aren’t as high as you’d feared, but you could see it being a challenge for Gigar with his injuries so you provide him with as much support as you can going up. You are both relieved when you finally reach the platform in front of the main entrance.

Inside, you see a large gate leading to a room full of lizardfolk statues. They are lined up against the walls as if guarding another inner door that is smaller than the main entrance but sealed with a massive stone slab carved with Z’lethan symbols. The room is empty and there is no sign of the glow you saw earlier.

On the ground, you also see evidence of a camp. Clearly, the previous occupants left in a hurry. Packs and gear have all been taken, but messy bedrolls, battered cookware, and some of the detritus of a multi-night stay remain. The ceiling here is so high, it even allowed the previous inhabitants to start a small fire. Though with the never-ending dampness of this jungle, you’re not entirely sure what they would have burned.



A quick search does turn up a few things that may be of use to you—or your companions—in addition to the bedrolls and cookware. There is some gear left lying around in the chaotic mess, including a recently drawn map of the city and a sheaf of notes. Everyone divvies up the items of use, and Gigar takes the map and notes to examine.

You can add 3 rations and 1 Z'lethan crystal to your inventory.

You and your companions begin to tidy up the former camp that was deserted in a hurry (**go to 303**).

186

You approach the obvious weapon racks in the storage room, but no weapons remain. There are just traces of them. Any wood has long ago rotted away, though there are still some shards of sharp stone or crystal on the floor.

If you are proficient with martial weapons, **go to 192**.

Or roll an Intelligence (Smith's tools) check if you have them, adding your proficiency bonus if relevant. If you get 12 or more, **go to 246**. If you get less than 12, **go to 282**.

Otherwise, you can investigate the scraps of armor (**go to 218**), or the mural (**go to 201**), or return to the main hall to investigate elsewhere (**go to 216**).

187

Though you don't recognize the ancient spell directly, you recognize that it is from the transmutation school and therefore some form of transformative magic.

You can also tell that it's a very advanced spell, so either this is part of the instruction of very powerful spellcasters or Z'leth's entire culture was built on extremely potent magics. Based on the prevalence of magic crystals, you're inclined to think that the people of Z'leth were just that far advanced.

So if you had to guess, this ritual likely had something to do with binding magical power to the crystals.

If you haven't done so yet, you can examine the office (**go to 226**) or if there's nothing else of interest here you can return to the main lobby (**go to 253**).

188

You find yourself in a massive room occupied by what can only be a Z'lethan machine. It doesn't seem to be running and the room seems to have been scoured of all valuables.

There are additional dimensions to the silence here, as though this large room is insulated from the rest of the world with its thick walls but was at some time a bustling hub of activity.

On the wall is a large rectangular indent as if some massive slab of something had previously hung there.

There may still be some items of interest in the room, however, and there is at least a chance you can figure out what the machine does.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 264**. If you get under 15, **go to 233**.

189

Gain Inspiration.

Gigar's obvious wounds close, his breathing steadies, and he smiles with relief.

"So much better," he says. "So what's next?"

Recognizing it's probably not a good idea to be out in the open in Z'leth, you prepare to look for shelter (**go to 182**).

190

If you have access to the spell *Knock* or a similar ability that opens locks, you can attempt to use it on the safe to magically open it (**go to 294**). If you are using a damaging spell to try to open the safe, **go to 215**. To try and pick the lock using thieves' tools, **go to 202**.

191

You attack the ancient lizardfolk, but he seems unsurprised. If anything, he only seems disappointed as he passes a languid hand through the air in front of him.

A spray of multi-colored light erupts in an arc from his hand, forcing you to shield your eyes and step back.

When the spots clear from your eyes, the lizardfolk is gone. In his stead, a brightly colored parrot is flying away into one of the holes left in the crumbling roof.

Alone and confused, you realize that there is nothing to do here except be the target of some hungry beast. You return to camp ([go to 299](#)).

192

You know weapons, so you're able to determine that the weapon racks—or what little of them remains—indicate a favor for spears and knives. This storeroom has been ransacked many times over the centuries and there's very little left but debris. There may still be something of interest elsewhere in the room, but there's nothing here.

The only obvious remains of any equipment is a broken crystal spearhead. It's split in half with a clean break, rendering it unusable.

You may add a broken crystal spearhead to your inventory. It will sell for 5 gp or you can repair it magically for a spearhead that is treated as magical for the purpose of overcoming immunities and resistances.

If you haven't done so, you can examine the armor scraps ([go to 218](#)) or take a look at the mural ([go to 201](#)).

If there's nothing else to look at in the storage room, you can go back to the main entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

193

You feel that Rija is leaving something out, but what that could be is not immediately obvious. What is clear is that everyone's on edge, and the oppressive sense of wrongness in the air is making it worse ([go to 207](#)).

194

Gigar gives you directions to the arena from his map and you are able to find the massive structure without incident, though you keep a careful eye on the buildings and foliage.

You enter through a large arch into an expansive entry hall strewn with debris. A massive stone door hangs askew to your left, but you can squeeze past it if

needed. Another doorway glows with a strange light. A third clearly leads out into an open sandy area ([go to 216](#)).

195

You press a crystal into the appropriate indent, and magical energies coalesce in the mold in front of you. They solidify into a bluish spearhead that produces a sturdy wooden shaft as soon as you lift it from the forge.

You can add a Z'lethan crystal spear to your inventory.

The forge goes dark and the illusory flames go out. There is nothing else here, so you return to the arena's entry hall ([go to 216](#)).



CRYSTAL SPEAR OF Z'LETH

This magical spear +1 grants the bearer a swim speed equal to their normal walking speed (or gives +10ft to an existing swim speed).

Once per day, the wielder can cast the spell Jump (targeting self only). Casting Jump in this way also allows the wielder to jump from swimming into the air as if from land.

196

Before biting into the meat, you decide to check it for safety. You know it's fresh at least, but one can never be too careful.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 213**. If you get less than 10, **go to 256**.

197

The cat notices you and dashes away, disappearing into what looks like an impossibly tight thicket of undergrowth.

With the strange beast gone you're not sure if you have anything else to worry about, but there's nothing more you can do except return to camp (**go to 212**).

198

This new vision must come from proximity to the source of the amulet's power. It almost certainly has some connection to that ritual you saw, so if it is a key then it must lock and unlock whatever spell was being woven.

However, there is no indication that the amulet is actually a key to anything. It's simply playing back the ritual for you, so if it does anything at all then it's probably a component to the ritual you saw in the latest vision.

You tell Gigar your insights and he nods in thought, his eyes glazing over with a faraway look.

Armed with additional information, you beckon to Rija to come and look at the door with you and Gigar. Though Gigar scowls briefly, he doesn't complain (**go to 220**).

199

If you are using your own supply of water instead of a spell or ability, cross off one ration.

The water has no effect. It doesn't even sizzle. It just vanishes into the flame.

If you haven't done so yet, you can try a spell or ability to control or reduce the flame (**go to 224**), try

to traverse the flame (**go to 255**), or turn around and leave (**go to 216**).

200

"Well, we were all on the run for the night," Rija replies archly, "so I thought I'd take some shut eye while I could. If that's ok with you, of course."

Gigar purses his lips as he looks between the two of you. Z'ka doesn't seem to be listening at all, though it's impossible to tell for sure.

"I'm sorry," she says finally, pinching the bridge of her nose. "This place has me on edge. It's feeling just... wrong."

Z'ka just nods and pulls out his heavy stone tablet.

"There is something in the air," Gigar says. "And it's putting us all on edge. Maybe it's best we all take a rest before we continue, wouldn't you say?"

You rejoin your companions around the fire (**go to 211**).

201

The mural is faded with age, but you can still make most of it out.

It depicts lizardfolk warriors lined up in ranks wielding spears, javelins, or axes with crystal daggers at their hips in bright blue. The mural looks complete, but you see no adversary on the wall, just the advancing army.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 231**. If you get less than 10, **go to 298**.

202

You realize what the dead thief did not: there is no external lock to pick. And though there are glowing symbols on the face that indicate some kind of combination, there's clearly no way that you'll be able to guess it.

There are still other ways you can potentially open the safe. You could use thieves' tools to try to open the safe indirectly.

Roll a Dexterity check (plus your proficiency bonus if you're proficient with thieves' tools). If you roll 15 or more, **go to 294**. If you roll less than 15, **go to 273**.

203

It's not much longer before Rija returns from her mission and immediately tells you about what she saw.

"A strange creature, not mutated but colorful. And curious. An enormous bird of prey—strange to see underground—covered in brightly colored feathers and watching my every step."

Ask her what threat she thinks it poses (**go to 179**), tell her that it's important that everyone get out of Z'leth safely (**go to 251**), or arrange a hunt for the strange creature (**go to 269**).

204

Though battered and bloody, Gigar seems to be fine. The ribs aren't as bad as you'd originally thought—probably just bruised—and the head wound is mostly superficial.

Under your ministrations, Gigar's eyes open but he immediately closes them again with a groan.

"Am I dead?" he asks. You let him know that he is very much alive, but this is going to hurt.

He whimpers and complains as you bind his wounds. You even help him sit up.

"Anything else that might help?" Gigar asks.

You can offer Gigar magical healing (**go to 189**) or suggest you find shelter (**go to 182**).

205

You enter the classroom cautiously, sure that this was once a safe place but not knowing what might have moved in since its students departed, so you take every possible precaution.

Despite your best efforts, however, you accidentally brush up against a carved stone object on a tabletop. A light springs from a dark aperture in the front of the object. An illusion springs to life at the front of the room accompanied by the crackle of a complex auditory illusion.

You see a translucent lizardfolk in ceremonial garb going through what are obviously the somatic components of a spell, hissing and snarling the verbal components.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 187**. If you get less than 10, **go to 287**.

206

The armor is made of some kind of hide but you can't tell much more about it except that it's lasted here for centuries when it should have rotted away long ago. It's a strange multi-colored hide, however, so there may be more you can learn from examining it more closely.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check against DC 18. If you pass, **go to 278**. If you fail you can either explore the weapon racks (**go to 186**), look at the mural (**go to 201**), or return to the main entry hall (**go to 216**).

207

"Now that you're here, I think it's about time you helped Gigar," Rija says. "He's already banished us from his presence, but he seems to like you. Maybe you can help open this door."

When you ask how the door might help locate the other expedition, Rija nods absently.

"We watched survivors run from this place," she says. "I need to know what they were running from. And I have a feeling it has something to do with that thing."

She motions for you to go talk to Gigar. You stand and approach the flustered academic fidgeting with his obsidian amulet.

Gigar is frantically scribbling notes about the artifact. He examines its face, presses and twists at it, even breathes on it to rub it with a sleeve.

When he notices his companions' attention, he sets it aside and pinches the bridge of his nose. He lets out a sharp snort and gnashes his teeth a moment before taking a deep breath.

"It's a key," he says. "I know it is, but I can't get it to work. Nothing here makes sense."

Ask him what it might be a key to (**go to 254**), ask to

take another look for yourself ([go to 242](#)), or ask Rija what she thinks ([go to 181](#)).

208

The body is a burly female dwarf with a steel hammer. She seems to have been beaten to death, and there are clear signs of a struggle in the sand around her. However, her body is also showing the effects of hunger so she likely wasn't at her best.

She has on her a steel warhammer, 2 hand axes, a 50-ft length of rope, 3 rations, 8 gp, and 1 Z'lethan crystal.

Add any items you take to your inventory.

You can now investigate the obelisk if you've not already done so ([go to 300](#)) or go back and explore the rest of the arena ([go to 216](#)).

209

The history of Z'leth is obscure, but you may be able to recall some useful tidbit from your study of bygone eras.

Roll an Intelligence (History) check. If you get 15 or more, [go to 285](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 228](#).

210

You finally pass through the flames and they vanish from around you. All that remains is the faint echo of the pain you went through getting here.

Roll a Wisdom saving throw. If you get 10 or more, recover 1d6 HP up to the amount of damage you received from the illusion.

What you thought was the hearth turns out to be the entrance to an incredible forge unlike anything you've ever seen ([go to 272](#)).

211

"So it's getting to that time," Rija says. "We have an expedition to save, a lost city to explore, and a life to live afterward. It's time to move on."

"I've looked through the map and compared notes," Gigar says. "The logical first stop is what the map refers to as the arena. In these notes, it seems that it may have been a place for sporting events. Or a military barracks. Possibly both."

Rija looks at him sideways.

"It's a little unclear," Gigar says, holding up the notes. "And written in a shorthand I don't entirely understand."

"For warriors," Z'ka says, glancing at the sketches. "Protect city over the under."

"I think you should visit the arena, adventurer," Rija says. Then she nods towards the large stone door. "Gigar, I want you to look into that thing. Specifically, whether anything will come out of it and kill us while we sleep. Z'ka, if you would please make sure Gigar is safe, I will also be searching the city."

The lizardfolk warrior nods once, and that's apparently enough for Rija. Gigar looks between her and the door and gives a shakier nod.

"So that's it," Rija says. "Everyone rest up and then let's get moving."

If you have the resources, you can take either a long rest or a short rest. Otherwise, you can begin exploring Z'leth by visiting the arena ([go to 194](#)).



212

When you return to your temporary camp, Z'ka is sitting beside the burnt-out firepit, tapping at his tablet and hissing rhythmically to himself. Rija hasn't returned yet and Gigar seems to have fallen asleep on his bedroll, though he's surrounded by a messy pile of notes and sketches.

You can try to speak with Z'ka ([go to 240](#)) or sit in companionable silence with the warrior ([go to 286](#)).

213

Though not rotten necessarily, there is definitely something off about the meat. Despite its obvious freshness, there's also an undercurrent of sickness or rot. It's like the vague feeling of unease in this place

has been distilled into an odor.

You set aside the meat and your companions take notice ([go to 277](#)).

214

The construct shatters under your final blow, its pieces falling into the sand at your feet. At the same time, you hear the doors around the arena opening again.

Among the shards of stone and clay are 4 Z'lethan crystals powering the construct and what appears to be a stone feather that might make a good trophy of your battle. It must have been hidden inside the stone body.

As you watch, the remains of the construct disintegrate and merge with the sand of the floor, leaving behind only the crystals and the feather-shaped token.

You can add 2 Z'lethan crystals and a stone feather to your inventory.

You can either examine the dwarven body ([go to 208](#)), or return to the entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

215

You strike the safe with an attack to try to break it open and reveal its contents to you. Your blow automatically hits, but roll an attack to determine if it's a powerful enough hit.

If you deal 20 damage or more, [go to 294](#). If you deal less than 20 damage, [go to 273](#).

216

From the main entry hall of the arena, you can explore.

If you haven't done so yet, you can go past the broken door ([go to 232](#)), go into the glowing room ([go to 258](#)), or go into the open sandy area ([go to 270](#)).

If you're finished exploring the arena, you can return to camp ([go to 247](#)).

217

The construct batters you into the ground. You land in the soft sand of the arena floor, marveling at how comfortable it is. The world is already going dark when the animated statue lands its final blow.

You hardly even feel it.

YOU DIED.

218

There is no armor remaining. Almost no organic material remains thanks to the stagnant humidity of the underground city, and you see no metal anywhere. There are some odd scales and even stranger scraps of preserved hide piled around reptilian mannequins also made of stone.

If you are proficient with medium armor, [go to 310](#).

Or roll an Intelligence (Leatherworker's tools) check if you have them, adding your proficiency bonus if relevant. If you get 12 or more, [go to 259](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 206](#).

Otherwise, you can investigate the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)), or the mural ([go to 201](#)), or return to the main hall to investigate elsewhere ([go to 216](#)).

219

Somehow, Rija got past you while you were engrossed in the view. While it may be odd that she didn't join you, she seems to be examining the hedge-like growth around the base of the temple.

When she sees you, Rija beckons you to come join her. She jogs up the steps to meet you part way.

"Incredible city," she says. "But why are you here?"

You can tell Rija that you're here for the thrill of discovery ([go to 229](#)), that you're here for the treasure ([go to 241](#)), or that you wish to keep your reasons to yourself ([go to 267](#)).

220

You, Rija, and Gigar stand together looking at the massive circular door in front of you, and you understand Gigar's frustration. It is very clearly an entrance of some kind, but there are none of the mechanisms you'd normally associate with a door. There are no hinges, no handles, and nothing even remotely resembling a lock.

It's carved with the same geometric patterns you've seen elsewhere in Z'leth, but you haven't the context to determine whether they are functional or decorative. Two massive statues of Z'lethan warriors stand on either side of the sealed entrance and it is ringed with pictographs and sigils.

Much of the rest of the temple has fallen into some degree of ruin, so any murals and friezes that may have adorned the walls are now long gone to rot and ruin. No hint of growth shows on the door, however, and it remains pristine.

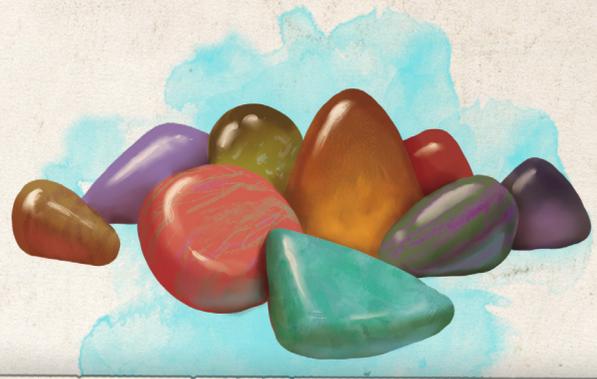
As you consider the challenge before you, you see a few different angles from which you could approach it. You might be able to dig deep into your arcane knowledge (**go to 237**), consider the historical significance of what you see (**go to 209**), or simply use your senses to draw some conclusion (**go to 262**).

221

Pulling out the stones and examining them, you find that their purpose leaps into your mind as you scan the arcane symbols on the surface. These are spells stored by the mages of Z'leth centuries ago. There is a *spellstone of Enhance Ability*, and a *spellstone of Heroism*.

You can add any of these spellstones to your inventory.

You're quite sure there's nothing else to find here, so you move on to the next part of this complex (**go to 188**).



SPELLSTONE

Spellstones are polished semi-precious stones ranging in size from 1 to 3 inches and come in a variety of shapes. They act as magical repositories for spells that operate in a similar manner to scrolls. When the spell stored on the spellstone is cast, it is destroyed.

Any class can cast spells from spellstones, even those who do not have the scroll spells on their spell list. However, any character casting a spell that is not on their spell list suffers 1d6 damage per level of the spell as the spellstone explodes in their hands in an uncontrolled discharge of magical energy. If the spell is in the character's spell list, the spellstone disintegrates harmlessly.

Also, unlike scrolls, wizards cannot transcribe spells from spellstones into their spellbooks.

222

You're overcome by the unexpected viciousness of the mutant lizard's attack. Rija cries out as you tumble to the ground.

You fall to the lizard's sharp teeth and sharp claws, knowing that your remains will feed the hidden city for at least another day.

YOU DIED.

223

Though you've already expelled the disgusting morsel, you can't help as a surge of illness rises up in you. You vomit violently onto the temple floor.

You are poisoned until you take a long rest.

(A poisoned creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.)

The dizziness eventually subsides, and it seems you're not alone. Gigar is violently retching on his side, clutching his bruised ribs. Rija is wiping something from her mouth with the back of a hand. Even the supremely stoic Z'ka turns over his shoulder and coughs up something that splatters on the ground next to him.

As you all sit around the fire recovering, Rija stares daggers at the pieces of meat still roasting over the flames ([go to 271](#)).

224

Your spell or ability has no effect on the flame. It does not grow, shrink, or in any way change shape or intensity. It simply doesn't respond.

If you haven't done so yet, you can throw water on the flame ([go to 199](#)), traverse the flame ([go to 255](#)), or turn around and leave ([go to 216](#)).

225

"But... I wasn't just outside. I haven't left the temple since we got here." Rija looks at Gigar and Z'ka, and they nod in confirmation.

So you ask who you've just been talking to, but everyone shrugs.

"Are you feeling alright?" Gigar asks. "Are you maybe suffering from some tropical disease? Hallucinating?"

You feel fine and say so, though you do feel the overwhelming weight of the corrupted air. But besides the uneasy feeling in the pit of your stomach, you feel otherwise normal. There must be some other explanation besides a fevered hallucination.

"There is something about this place, something deeply wrong," Rija says as her eyes stray towards the looming vault door.

You have nothing more to say, so you rejoin your companions around the fire ([go to 211](#)).

226

You enter a space that has all the trappings of an office: the remains of a large stone table or desk, ornamental stonework on the walls, and some windows letting in the bluish light from outdoors.

A section of the wall seems to have collapsed. In the rubble is a strongbox made of metal.

A dead body is in front of the safe, scorched and smelling of roasted meat. A broken crowbar sits on the floor between the body and the safe.

You can examine the safe and its surrounding area ([go to 177](#)).

Alternatively, you can leave it alone and either visit the classrooms if you haven't already ([go to 205](#)) or return to the entry hall ([go to 253](#)).

227

You ask to know when the lizardfolk arrived in Z'leth.

"They did not arrive, they built it," he says. "They are the people of Z'leth and its first inhabitants. As you have no doubt discovered for yourself, however, they are not the last inhabitants of this city. Mutants and ghosts rule the city now, with other yet darker beings lurking in its hidden places."

He gives you a kind smile despite his predator's face, and his voice is sad as he continues.

"I miss them," he says. "Every day since they left. I miss the markets full of livestock and the hatchlings running through the streets. The colors and sounds and smells of living. And they gave it all up for the greater good. They sacrificed everything."

You press for more information, but he waves you off.

"No more," he says. "It's time for you to return to your companions. Go, the way is safe."

His is a voice used to command and you turn away to leave, then glance at where the kindly old lizardfolk was standing. He is gone and the room is empty except for the brightly colored tail of a snake disappearing through a crack in the wall.

You continue back to camp ([go to 299](#)).

228

Despite your best efforts, you can't determine anything else about the door. Rija and Gigar make their disappointment obvious, but Z'ka remains as impassive as ever.

Just as you are about to ask what to do next, Z'ka strides between the rest of you and approaches the door ([go to 311](#)).

229

Rija nods and gives a strange, knowing smile.

"A lot of heroes start out with a thirst for glory," she says. "If that's true, then you'll find very little glory in Z'leth. And what you do find, you'll likely take to the afterlife with you."

She sees you looking at her strangely. "Ah, no need to fear. There are rewards here for someone seeking adventure. And few have seen the city and lived to tell the tale, so just making it out alive ought to be thrilling enough."

She offers up another strange smile and seems to want to say something else, but keeps it to herself ([go to 295](#)).

230

You are clearly missing something, and it seems to be something that is shared between Rija and Z'ka. They keep looking between each other and Gigar working at the large door in the back of the temple.

They know something about Z'leth that they aren't sharing, and it has something to do with whatever is behind that door ([go to 207](#)).

231

You notice that the dagger of the first soldier in the ranks is differently shaped than those of the other soldiers.

Press the knife ([go to 250](#)) or leave it be and explore more of the storeroom by examining the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)) or the armor scraps ([go to 218](#)) if you haven't done so already.

Or if there's nothing else to explore in the storeroom you can go back to the entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

232

Entering the room, you see that there are the remains of stone shelving units and ceramic vases that likely once contained food and water, long since rotted away or evaporated to dust.

There are also weapon racks, a few scraps of ancient armor, and a faded mural on the wall.

You can look at the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)), the scraps of armor ([go to 218](#)), or the mural ([go to 201](#)).

233

This room has been ransacked so many times over the centuries that it's been picked clean. There's nothing here except the machine in the center of the room, which you examine next ([go to 293](#)).

234

You make another attempt to open the lock with your tools. You think that you're getting a better understanding of the mechanism you're working with and are more confident you can unlock the safe with thieves' tools.

Roll a Dexterity check (plus your proficiency bonus if you're proficient with thieves' tools). If you get 12 or more, [go to 294](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 305](#).

235

You knock the lizard from your body with one final blow. It twitches momentarily before falling still, granting you a distinct sense of relief.

Rija approaches the dead lizard at your feet, as do Z'ka and Gigar. Rija has her nose turned up in disgust, Gigar has naked fear on his face, while Z'ka remains unreadable as ever.

"These strange beasts live down here as well," Rija says. "If anything, they're larger and more corrupted than what we faced above ground."

Gigar regards the beast with apprehension, but Z'ka just looks hungry.

"Food," he says. "We take."

“Good idea,” Rija says, pulling out a knife. She and Z’ka set about the bloody business of butchering the large reptile.

Gigar clears his throat and addresses Z’ka. “Isn’t that... you know... eating your own?”

“Yes,” Z’ka says. “Meat is meat.”

“Does that mean...?” The scholar pales.

“That his people eat their own?” Rija wipes her forehead with a sleeve to cover her crooked smile. Z’ka doesn’t bother to hide his. Gigar looks like he’s about to be sick and leans on you for support.

When Rija and Z’ka are done, they each shoulder a heavy pack of bloody meat. You take over assisting Gigar on his slow plod towards this supposedly safe camping spot ([go to 185](#)).

236

As soon as you insert a crystal into the axe head indent, it’s consumed in a blue glow that fills the rest of the forge with magical energy. This energy pools in the mold to solidify into a crystal axe head as hard as any steel. A haft forms below it as soon as you raise it from the mold.



CRYSTAL AXE OF Z’LETH

A battleaxe +1 that can be activated once per day to create a blinding flash. Anyone within 30 ft who can see the flash must roll a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the wielder’s next turn.

You can add a crystal axe of Z’leth to your inventory.

The forge goes dark and the illusory flames go out. There is nothing else here, so you return to the arena’s entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

237

Clearly magical in nature, you plumb the depths of arcana to figure out how to open this door and discover what’s on the other side.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 15 or more, [go to 302](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 228](#).

238

Z’ka is clearly keeping something from you, but you have not idea what. His stoic face is entirely unreadable.

The silence stretches awkwardly as Z’ka returns to the top of his tablet and starts his recitation again ([go to 203](#)).

239

You see nothing outside except a brightly colored bird flying away.

When you come back inside, Rija is sitting up and looks at you with some concern.

“What was that all about?” she asks. At her tone, both Gigar and Z’ka turn to you.

Tell her what you saw ([go to 225](#)), ask her what she’s been doing ([go to 200](#)), or tell her it’s nothing ([go to 176](#)).

240

You greet Z’ka and he nods in acknowledgement without stopping his sibilant chant. You think that he will continue indefinitely, but when his tapping claw reaches the bottom of the tablet, the lizardfolk turns to you.

“Gigar draw door,” Z’ka says. “No thing find.”

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 304](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 238](#).

241

Rija looks out over the city with you. “Well, you certainly won’t be the first to come to Z’leth for its famed riches. And probably not the last. But there are still a few trinkets of value waiting to be found.”

A silence opens up between you, but before you say anything she starts speaking again. “This was once a proud people with unimaginable wealth. But now look at their legacy. Stones piled on top of each other, and not a hint of true actual greatness.”

You ask her what she means by that.

“It probably just means there will be enough loot to satisfy you out there in the city somewhere,” she says.

She’s clearly not saying everything, but she turns away with an enigmatic smile ([go to 295](#)).

242

When you pick up the obsidian amulet, you’re transported to ancient Z’leth again. But the vision that slams into you is different this time.

You see the same chamber that you are currently in, but it is spectacularly beautiful. Ranks of Z’lethan warriors in colorful ceremonial armor are led by figures in multicolored robes holding feathered staffs and baubles.

They all face the massive door ahead beside which waits a powerful-looking Z’lethan in ceremonial robes entirely composed of brilliantly colored feathers. The powerful figure raises a clawed hand and the ranks of Z’lethans drop to their knees, with the exception of a small handful. These few stride forward towards the massive sealed door.

The feathered Z’lethan calls out a growled blessing over the selected champions and the door seems to come to life with a web of bluish patterns.

But with that, the vision ends and you’re left standing in the ruined chamber holding Gigar’s amulet again.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 20 or more, [go to 198](#). If you get less than 20, [go to 245](#).

243

“So what do you need?” Rija asks the both of you.

When Gigar looks to you for answers, you mention that you have reached an impasse on the door and you could use her help.

“Not sure what I can do as this is Gigar’s area of expertise,” she says, “but it doesn’t hurt to put our heads together. You all right with this?”

Gigar takes a moment to realize she’s addressing him, and then he nods. As Rija turns to analyze the architecture, the orcish scholar mouths a silent thank you to you ([go to 220](#)).

244

At your first clumsy probing, Gigar’s eyes fly open and he cries out in pain. He rumbles a curse in Orcish from the pit of his stomach.

“Would you mind terribly,” he finally says through gritted teeth, “not doing that again.”

He gingerly probes his ribs himself, wincing and whimpering.

“Anything you could do about this would be greatly appreciated,” Gigar says, more gently.

You can offer Gigar magical healing ([go to 189](#)) or suggest you find shelter ([go to 182](#)).

245

Besides the vision itself—and some connection between that ritual and this amulet—you can’t determine anything else about it.

Handing the obsidian artifact back to Gigar, you call Rija over to see if she can help with unlocking this great door for all of you ([go to 220](#)).

246

You use your expertise to analyze the weapon racks—mostly designed for spears and daggers—but there’s little evidence of metal.

It’s likely most metals would corrode quickly in the humidity of this jungle, so it seems that stone, crystal,

and wood were favored materials. So while there's very little left thanks to looters or the elements, you do see some odd shards of volcanic glass on the ground and what seems to be a crystal spearhead uselessly split in half.

You may add a broken crystal spearhead to your inventory. It will sell for 5 gp or you can repair it magically for a spearhead that is treated as magical for the purpose of overcoming immunities and resistances.

There isn't anything else near the weapon racks, but you can examine the mural ([go to 201](#)) or armor scraps ([go to 218](#)) if you haven't done so yet.

Or if there's nothing else of interest in the storage room, you can return to the main entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

247

As you emerge from the arena, you see a strange-looking beast watching you: a large spotted cat whose fur and spots seem to shift and change with all the colors of the rainbow. It does not appear to be corrupted or mutated, other than its unique coloration.

When it sees you, it regards you for a few minutes before turning to slink away into the overgrown city.

You can attempt to follow the cat ([go to 275](#)) or play it safe and return to your camp ([go to 292](#)).



248

A scaly creature about the size of a housecat but with too many legs and eyes, the perverse reptile climbs your body, ripping at your face and chest with a ferocity beyond hunger. It seems driven by an unnatural rage that can only be soothed with violence.

The lizard will fight to the death. It attacks you with its jaws agape and claws scrabbling at whatever part of you they can find. Rija and Z'ka draw their weapons but don't attack as they may hit you in the process.

As you fight the lizard, you can only use weapons with a range of 5 ft or less and spells or abilities with a range of touch.

If you reduce the lizard to 0 HP, [go to 235](#). If you are reduced to 0 HP, [go to 222](#).

CORRUPTED LIZARD

Tiny Beast, unaligned

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20ft.

Initiative +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 9

ACTIONS

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage.



249

The electrical discharge from the safe's defenses slams into you. The world washes out in a blaze of white-hot pain and you jerk to the ground next to the other unsuccessful looter.

It's only a moment before the bright flash of the electrical discharge fades, but it keeps fading into darkness.

YOU DIED.

250

You find a small secret compartment containing a couple of glowing Z'lethan crystals and three bars of jade.

You can add 1 Z'lethan crystal and 3 jade bars each worth 25 gp each to your inventory.

If you haven't done so yet, you can take a closer look at the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)) or the armor scraps ([go to 218](#)).

Or if there isn't anything else of interest in the storage room, you can return to the entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

251

"We're not leaving until we complete our mission," Rija says quietly. She glances at Z'ka. "The expedition is still out there somewhere. And we need.. we need to find them."

"Much to do," Z'ka says. "Very much."

"Let's get Gigar going then," Rija says. Then louder, she continues, "If that's not too much trouble?"

Gigar twitches and snorts awake as Rija and Z'ka share a smile ([go to 288](#)).

252

You tell the ancient reptilian that you are here to protect your traveling companions.

"You are a good friend and a stout protector," the old lizardfolk says with a bow of his feathered head. "However, they are in more danger here than they would be even in the jungle. If safety truly is your

concern, then leave this place immediately. If the hazards left behind by the people of the city and the beasts that roam its streets don't kill you, the corruption in the air will destroy your mind."

Ask how the lizardfolk got here ([go to 227](#)), ask what's going on in Z'leth ([go to 266](#)), or attack the stranger anyways ([go to 191](#)).

253

Due to collapse or time, there's nothing left to explore in what you've started to think of as the cultural ministry. Despite the disrepair, you can easily imagine the grandeur that this space once exuded, especially after exploring its contents.

After taking one last look around, you realize suddenly that you're not alone.

Standing in the lobby with you is an elderly lizardfolk in full Z'lethan regalia. His scaled skin hangs in folds around him and he is deeply hunched with advanced years. Despite the newcomer's apparent age, his clothing seems brand new. His tunic and kilt are made of sharp-edged scales of clay and crystal joined with links of precious metals. Long vibrant plumes from tropical birds flare out from his headdress and cascade down his back as a cloak.

"No," he says in perfect Common. "I am not an illusion. Nor a delusion or any other figment."

You can try to talk to him ([go to 291](#)) or attack ([go to 191](#)).

254

"To be perfectly frank, I have no idea," Gigar says. "There is nothing here that matches it. No keyhole the same shape. No matching inscription. There's just... nothing."

He huffs and works his tusks around in his mouth and otherwise worries at the problem, but there's something else bothering him besides just this puzzle. When you ask what you could do to help, he seems genuinely surprised.

"Nothing, I'm afraid. This is the whole reason I'm here, adventurer. I should be able to solve this simple problem without assistance."

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 290**. If you get less than 12, **go to 276**.

255

You step into the fire. The pain is excruciating.

You take 1d6 psychic damage.

If the damage reduces you to 0 HP, **go to 284**.

If you are still conscious, you can continue (**go to 178**), get out of the fire to either throw water on the flame (**go to 199**), use a spell or ability to control the flame (**go to 224**), or simply leave and go back to the entry hall to explore more (**go to 216**).

256

You see nothing wrong with the lizard meat, and it's nice to get a fresh-cooked meal (**go to 175**).

257

You take another shot at cracking the safe with brute force. You automatically hit the safe, but roll an attack to see if you can deal enough damage.

Roll damage and add to it all damage rolled in previous attempts to crack the safe. If you have dealt a total of 20 damage to the safe, **go to 294**. If you've still done less than 20 damage total, **go to 305**.

258

The glow that you saw from outside is a massive forge somehow still lit with a bright, blue flickering flame.

The hearth is large enough to be a second small room, and you see some strange machine behind the fire with the same blue glowing lines that you saw in the passages above. It seems as though that machine could be the source of the flame.

Throw water on the flame (**go to 199**), use a spell or ability to control or reduce the flame (**go to 224**), or try to simply cross the flame (**go to 255**).

Or you can continue exploring the rest of the arena (**go to 216**).

259

You're able to identify that what few scraps remain are hide, but the hide of some enormous smooth-skinned creature. It's discolored with age, but you can see traces of dyes used to color the skin. It's also a complete mystery how it has lasted as long as it has. It could be some property of the beast's skin that has contributed to its longevity or some treatment applied in Z'leth, but either way it's impressive.

Near the scraps, you also find what appear to have been crystal armor scales. They are surprisingly robust and made of an unusual material that could get you a few coins back in civilization.

You may add 14 jade coins to your inventory. Each is worth 1 gp.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check against DC 18. If you pass, **go to 278**. If you fail you can either explore the weapon racks (**go to 186**), look at the mural (**go to 201**), or return to the main entry hall (**go to 216**).

260

You press the crystal into its indent and it's consumed to create a bluish crystal dagger in the mold out of light and power that flow from the crucible.

*You can add a Z'lethan sacrificial dagger to your inventory (**go to 303** for item abilities).*

The forge goes dark and the illusory flames go out. There is nothing else here, so you return to the arena's entry hall (**go to 216**).



261

Rija opens her eyes and sits up. “What are you talking about?”

Neither Gigar nor Z’ka bother to hide their curiosity.

Tell her what you saw ([go to 225](#)), ask her what she’s been doing in camp ([go to 200](#)), or tell her it’s nothing ([go to 176](#)).

262

You allow your eyes to roam over the door, searching for clues as to how to open it and continue your search for the other expedition—or at least a clue as to where they went.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 15 or more, [go to 279](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 228](#).

263

You summon the magical berries as you normally would. However, as soon as your wholesome magic conjures them, they shimmer with purple energy and collapse into piles of dust. The dust runs between your fingers to scatter into the still air of the abandoned temple.

You can eat roasted lizard with your companions ([go to 175](#)), examine the lizard meat ([go to 196](#)), or refuse and eat a ration ([go to 277](#)).

264

Your search is about to come up empty when you brush up against a stone panel that rattles in its fixture. At first, this panel seems to be part of the large machine in the center of the room, but it reveals itself to be a storage locker. The loosened panel opens easily to reveal its contents: several of the blue glowing crystals that are so ubiquitous here.

You can add 1 Z’lethan crystal to your inventory.

All that’s left is to examine the machine itself ([go to 293](#)).

265

The first place you examine is a long hall filled with shelving units and tables, so it appears to be a library of some kind. At first glance, you don’t see any obvious documents, but there could be something that has survived the centuries of rot and the looters who managed to find the city.

And despite all the time that’s passed, light fixtures still shine overhead. Huge crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling.

Searching for documents, you have to sift through the dust of long-decayed paper or papyrus along with shards of pictographic tablets that remind you of Z’ka’s holy text.

Time is short and the library is considerable, so you will only have time to make a brief search. Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 283](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 297](#).

Alternatively, if you can detect magic with a spell or ability, you could try sweeping the library for magical texts ([go to 308](#)).

266

“The city of Z’leth was once a shining jewel of culture and wealth,” the old lizardfolk says. “It was even above ground at one point. Oh, how I miss how the sun sparkled off the crystals.”

He looks wistfully around him as if he can actually still see it.

“But that was all before the corruption,” he says. “That darkness that seeped up from underground like contaminated groundwater. The mutations started, first in the beasts and then in the people. We all knew it was only a matter of time, but for the people who left it came far too quickly.”

The old reptilian head shakes sadly from side to side.

“They left their homes behind to survive the danger of the city. But at least they got to return to the surface.” Something must have shown on your face, because

he looks at you slyly. "Yes, that's right. The tribes of primitives scraping out a living in the jungles overhead are the descendants of the people of Z'leth. So is your companion. They are the ones who chose life."

You look around you at the crumbling remains of the city, trying to imagine what this old lizardfolk is telling you. When your gaze returns to him, however, he is gone and you are alone in the ruins of the city once more.

With nothing left for you here, you return to camp ([go to 299](#)).

267

Rija looks at you with sudden intensity as if some of your real intentions might appear on your face.

"Well, it seems you don't want to share much with your companions," she says. "But that's no surprise, I suppose. So you have your reasons for being here.

They could be glory or riches or anything else your heart desires."

Rija steps closer to you, still looking you in the eyes.

"I just hope it is worth the risk," she says. "Because it could very easily cost you your life."

She steps back and the tension drops out of the conversation. She offers you a mysterious smile as she turns to leave ([go to 295](#)).

268

Gigar reluctantly shows the obsidian artifact, but Rija expresses little interest. As she turns away, he is visibly relieved as he puts it away again.

Rija instead turns to examine the door, searching for some meaning in the symbols and carvings around it. Behind her back, you shoot Gigar a questioning look. He just shakes his head and steps up to examine the door with her ([go to 220](#)).

269

"No, that creature is gone," Rija says, but she shoots a look at Z'ka. "And we could still have survivors out there. We need to stay focused."

"Must find," Z'ka says. "Very important."

"You're right," Rija says. "Maybe Gigar has found something. If he'd only wake up and tell us!"

She punctuates the last statement by nudging Gigar with the toe of her boot ([go to 288](#)).

270

The sandy expanse you see appears to be an arena. Galleries and seating ring multiple stories around a wide open space. There is another entrance to the combat floor, but it seems to have collapsed a long time ago.

In the center of the arena, there's a glowing obelisk.

On the sandy floor to one side you see a dead dwarven body—fresh and only just starting to smell.

You can approach the obelisk ([go to 300](#)) or examine the body ([go to 208](#)).

271

"So we can't eat anything we find here," Rija says.

"Clearly," Gigar says, dabbing at his mouth with a handkerchief.

"Jungle meat good," Z'ka say. "Now too under. All things bad."

"We need to take stock," Rija says. "We still need to find the others. And we still need to complete the rest of our mission."

"Cataloging?" Gigar asks. "Are we going to risk starvation to catalog artifacts?"

"Yes," Z'ka says. "For people to know."

Gigar clutches at the pack where he keeps his notes. "I see," he whispers, sadly.

The group of you go through your packs and supplies.

Take note of your rations. This will include both food and water.

“Well, that’s not much at all,” Rija says. “We have no time to waste. Z’ka, stay here. Gigar, see if there’s anything useful in that map. Adventurer, would you go out and get the lay of the land? I’ll go over the map here with Gigar.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND WATER

Food and water will play a major role in surviving your journey. Due to the pervasive corruption and the harshness of the environment, you find it especially hard to recover your strength.

To gain the benefits of a short rest, you must use 2 rations.

To gain the benefits of a long rest, you must use 3 rations.

The platform just outside the temple’s main entrance is high enough to offer a vantage point, so you make your way out there ([go to 180](#)).

272

Though the forge is an unusual machine unlike anything you’ve ever seen, it nonetheless makes its function clear: it is a forge that made weapons for Z’leth.

A large, cracked blue crystal glows and flickers in the center of the apparatus. Glowing lines of power flicker in time with the broken crystal.

Three molds to make weapons each have a crucible above and an indent below, around the same size and shape as the Z’lethan crystals you’ve previously found. You can place a crystal in the relevant indent alongside a dagger ([go to 260](#)), a spearhead ([go to 195](#)), or an axehead ([go to 236](#)).

If you decide not to use a crystal, however, you can return to the main entry hall without the illusory flames affecting you ([go to 216](#)).

273

You make progress on the safe, but not enough to get it open. It is enough to trigger the same defenses that

killed the other would-be safecracker, however. An arc of magical energy shoots out of the glowing panel to strike you for 1d6 electricity damage. Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 12 for half damage.

If you survive, you can try to force the safe open with an attack or damaging spell ([go to 257](#)) or try to open it with the combination lock ([go to 234](#)).

Alternatively, you could leave the safe where you found it and either explore the classroom if you haven’t done so yet ([go to 205](#)) or return to the lobby and move on ([go to 253](#)).

274

You say that treasure and riches are your priority.

“Not especially noble, but fair,” the wizened lizardfolk says. “It seems you have much in common with the last group that left in quite a hurry. They said they were on a mission of exploration, but they seemed much more interested in pillaging. Unfortunately for them—and you—over the years, others have stripped Z’leth of all but a few hidden trinkets.”

Ask how the lizardfolk got here ([go to 227](#)), ask what’s going on in Z’leth ([go to 266](#)), or attack the stranger anyways ([go to 191](#)).

275

With your curiosity piqued, you attempt to follow the multi-colored cat without it knowing.

Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check. If you get 15 or more, [go to 306](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 197](#).

276

You can tell something is off with Gigar, but it’s unclear what exactly. There’s an undercurrent of fear, but that could just as easily be a fear of failure at his assigned task or a more generalized anxiety about the dangers of Z’leth.

Gigar clearly puts a lot of stock in his own intelligence, so it’s understandable that he wouldn’t want to admit to Rija he doesn’t actually understand the purpose of his amulet or how it is connected to the doorway ([go to 181](#)).

277

You refuse to eat the roasted meat, and both Rija and Z'ka also hesitate before taking their first bites. Gigar is oblivious, however, and takes an ungentlemanly mouthful.

"Pah!" he cries and spits out the meat. It hits the ground with a wet slap, suddenly reduced to blackened slime. A shiny roundworm slithers its way out of the putrid mess.

"It didn't look like that before, did it?" Gigar looks from face to face. "Did it?"

The rest of you set aside your meals as Gigar slurps water from a canteen and spits the taste from his mouth ([go to 271](#)).

278

The armor seems to be made from the skin of a celestial being: a couatl. However, there's a coarseness to it that suggests that the hide wasn't skinned but shed. You've never seen anything like it, indicating that the Z'lethans had developed completely unique armor materials.

It also meant that they had some connection to the celestial planes to have access to such an unusual material in the first place.

If you haven't done so yet, you can take a closer look at the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)) or the mural ([go to 201](#)).

Or you can return to the entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

279

As you examine the door, you ignore the obvious like the patterns carved into it and the statues flanking it. Everything looks like it's been put in place by ancient hands with some hidden purpose.

Instead, you look for what might be out of place, some line or crevice that shouldn't be there. And you find it towards the lowermost section of the wall, around head height for a human or shoulder height for a Z'lethan lizardfolk.

It's a clawed handprint.

And it's not painted on, but a subtle indentation. Anything other than a close examination and you never would have found it. You step back for a moment to see it from another angle when Z'ka pushes past you ([go to 311](#)).



280

The spired building is easy to locate while traversing the city. Like your trip to the arena, you arrive unscathed as the elegant towers loom overhead.

Despite its state of ruin, the spired building is as impressive on the outside as it is on the inside. Wherever bare walls show between the creeping tendrils of greenery, you see elaborate carvings and even the remains of vibrant paint.

On one wall, you find the remains of a mural depicting a lizardfolk in ceremonial regalia presenting a glowing crystal to some unknown entity.

Though some of the passages leading away from the main entry chamber have long since collapsed and become impassable, there are several areas still open to exploration. Without knowing which door leads to what, you choose a passage at random ([go to 265](#)).

281

You step into a room that could only be used for addressing large groups, though it's unclear if it's a theater, a lecture hall, or a public forum. It is made up of a series of concentric half-circles rising up in tiers around a central presentation space. There are stone benches on each tier, but nothing else in the way of furniture or decoration except wall carvings and a mural faded beyond recognition.

There are two exits leading off from the auditorium. One seems to be an office and the other a classroom or laboratory:

You can either explore the office ([go to 226](#)) or take a look at the classroom ([go to 205](#)).

282

You find debris made of ancient wood, stone, and crystal. One of the broken crystals is in the rough shape of a spearhead, so clearly they used the material for weapons, but that's all you can tell.

If you haven't done so yet, you can examine the mural ([go to 201](#)) or the armor scraps ([go to 218](#)).

Alternatively, if there's nothing else of interest in the storage room, you can go back to the entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

283

Sifting through what you can only imagine is an untold loss of knowledge, you're beginning to worry that there is nothing to be found in this decaying library.

But just before you're about to quit and move on, you find something solid and intact among the dusty debris. When you pull the items out of the pile you see that they are three small polished stones carved with Z'lethan pictograms ([go to 221](#)).

284

The pain of the flames overwhelms you and you topple into their flickering light. From within, you see the skeletal remains of others who have also fallen to the strange fire within the forge.

Even as the pain wracks your body and your vision fades, the fire still doesn't burn though it consumes your mind.

YOU DIED.

285

Nothing on the door itself gives you any clues about it, but something about the statues flanking it jogs a memory for you.

Z'leth isn't unique as a reptilian civilization, and you are aware of others that have cropped up. What many have in common—along with any society made up of those with impressive natural weapons—is that guard statues often go unarmed or armed with close-quarters weapons to highlight their natural combat superiority.

These are armed with spears and upon closer inspection each of their kilts is hung with a battleaxe and dagger. Comparatively, these stone guards are armed to their own razor-sharp teeth. Meaning that whatever they're guarding against is even more ferocious than Z'leth's mightiest warriors. There was—or still is—real danger here in this temple.

Just as you're about to share your insights with Gigar and Rija, Z'ka brushes past you all and approaches the base of the door ([go to 311](#)).

286

Gain Inspiration.

You sit quietly with the taciturn lizardfolk. Though he doesn't stop tapping and hissing down the tablet, there's a palpable shift in the space between you. He relaxes into what he's doing, and you sit quietly to take a few minutes' rest (**go to 203**).

287

Though there is clearly some magic being performed in this illusion, you can't quite understand what the lizardfolk is doing. You can tell it's very complex, however, so it is likely part of some form of advanced magic ritual.

You can now examine the office if you haven't done so yet (**go to 226**) or return to the main lobby (**go to 253**).

288

Gigar jolts awake and reflexively tries to collect the notes strewn around him. Seeing Rija, the scholar gives a sheepish grin.

"Ah, you're back," he says to the both of you. "Excellent. Well, I examined the portal there quite thoroughly. It is definitely of Z'lethan make and appears to be locked with an arcane lock of incredible potency."

"Any luck opening it? Or knowing what's on the other side?" Rija asks.

"Well... Hah, some limited idea," Gigar shuffles through some of the notes he's made and comes up with a single page. "I keep seeing the word for 'under' repeated."

"Under the under," Z'ka says, nodding at Rija. He taps his tablet.

"Indeed," Gigar says. "Thank you for that, Z'ka. As for the rest, I'm still working it out. There are references to trials and heroes, and some creatures made of color itself. If I'm being honest, it's frankly all a little confusing."

"Of course, I understand," Rija says, though her tone seems to indicate otherwise. "Adventurer, did you find anything?"

You describe what happened in the arena, including the dead body.

"Ah, Gertha," Rija says. "She was a hothead, but a good friend to have at your back in a bar fight. Shame."

Z'ka looks at her and then points at the bedrolls. "Sleep."

Rija nods, her eyelids heavy. "Let's all get some rest. And then we can continue exploring Z'leth."

You may take a short rest or a long rest if you have the resources (i.e. rations and water).

When you're ready to continue, **go to 309**.

289

You examine Gigar's injuries. He has a nasty head wound and his breathing seems labored. Even at a glance, there are almost certainly several broken ribs. Still, there might be a less obvious—but equally serious—injury posing additional dangers.

Expend one use of your healer's kit, if you have one (**go to 204**). Alternatively, roll a Wisdom (Medicine) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 204**. If you get less than 10, **go to 244**.

290

Gigar seems to have a very good idea what the key might open, and it's not this door at all, but he clearly doesn't want to say. You have no idea what he is actually thinking about what the obsidian carving might be.

What is much clearer is Gigar's eyes keep darting worriedly to Rija and Z'ka. While you might at first think it's fear of failure, there's something else there. There's a clear mistrust in his glance.

Looking for yourself, you see no change in Rija or Z'ka's demeanors, so you watch Gigar all the more carefully (**go to 181**).

291

You greet the mysterious lizardfolk in the elaborate vestments.

“Already more polite than the last group that passed through,” he says with a warm smile. “If you would be so kind, what is your purpose here in Z’leth?”

You can answer that you’re here to rescue a group of researchers ([go to 307](#)), to find treasure ([go to 274](#)), or to protect your companions ([go to 252](#)).

292

The rainbow-furred cat pokes its head out of the underbrush to watch you with curious eyes once more before vanishing into Z’leth. You carefully make your way back to camp ([go to 212](#)).

293

You find a Z’lethan crystal crookedly fixed to a similarly sized depression on the machine. As you examine the glowing stone, your hands brush against it and it clicks into place. The stone machine rumbles to life, its edges glowing the same blue as the Z’lethan crystals.

After a moment, the Z’lethan crystal disappears into the machine entirely and there’s a faint clink in a slot just below the depression. A perfectly rectangular sliver of jade about the size of a playing card and about a finger-width thick has appeared in the slot. It seems to be some kind of currency, which would make this machine Z’leth’s mint.

You can add one jade tablet (worth 50 gp) to your inventory.

You can add more crystals to the depression in the machine to create as many jade tablets as you wish.

When you are finished with the mint, you can explore the next area off the lobby ([go to 281](#)).

294

Whatever you did worked to open the safe. Its door swings open with a hiss and a shower of sparks. You step back to see if some trap is triggered from inside the strongbox, but nothing happens.

The safe contains 3 Z’lethan crystals and a stack of 11 jade tablets worth 25 gp each. There is also a *Bag of Holding* embossed with Z’lethan patterns.

From here you can explore the classroom if you haven’t already ([go to 205](#)) or return to the entry hall ([go to 253](#)).



295

“I enjoyed our talk, adventurer,” Rija says. “I will see you out there.”

She descends the steps towards the city with a small wave.

You bid Rija goodbye and return to the camp inside to tell your companions about the buildings you’ve seen. You find Z’ka gnawing on a flap of suspicious dried meat and Gigar is still reviewing the map you all found.

Rija is dozing next to the smoky fire.

You can ask Rija how she got inside so quickly ([go to 261](#)) or sprint outside ([go to 239](#)).

296

Rija thanks you for the offer, but she begs you to search the building instead.

“These survivors were my friends,” she says. “I’m not going to let someone else look for them on my behalf.”

When you protest again, she smiles.

“Truly kind of you, but I’m still the leader of our expedition.” Her smile doesn’t soften her tone. “And I’m telling you that you’re better suited to exploring that building there, while I’m best suited to finding survivors—and threats—on the ground. That’s it.”

With your only options being between somehow surviving the trip back to the surface alone or following orders, you opt to follow orders (**go to 280**).

297

You aren’t able to find anything except dust, debris, and shards of tablets carved with Z’lethan pictographs.

With little else of interest, you can move on to continue your exploration (**go to 188**).

298

Something seems off but you can’t quite place what it is and no amount of looking reveals it to you.

If you want to explore the storeroom more, you can examine the weapon racks (**go to 186**) or the armor scraps (**go to 218**) if you haven’t done so already. Or you can return to the entry hall (**go to 216**).

299

You navigate the city without incident and climb the steps to where your companions have camped.

Rija and Z’ka are eating a light meal beside the burnt-out firepit. Though you’re not sure how it could be, you feel you’ve interrupted a conversation. Gigar is studying the door on the other side of the chamber, his whole body tense and his frustration palpable even from this distance.

“Welcome back,” Rija says when you approach. “Anything interesting in that building?”

You tell your companions about your strange encounter.

“Can’t say that I’m surprised,” Rija says. “I’ve seen something like that as well. Not a Z’lethan, for sure, but other figures. Once or twice even members of the other expedition. They always vanish by the time I reach them, though.”

“Z’leth strangeness,” Z’ka says. “Poisoned. Wrong.”

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 230**. If you get less than 10, **go to 193**.

300

The carved obelisk is made of the same stone as the rest of the structure and it juts out of the sand floor like a monument to the warriors who would have been found here.

Its surface is scribed with the same patterns and glyphs you’ve seen through the rest of the city, and there’s a raised panel on the front of the obelisk that looks like a button or switch of some kind.

You can either press the panel (**go to 184**), examine the body on the ground (**go to 208**), or return to the entry hall (**go to 216**).

301

You barely stave off violent illness. Rija also has a pained look on her face and even Z’ka seems to be tighter-lipped than usual. Gigar isn’t as fortunate and he rolls painfully onto his side, violently retching onto the stone floor next to his seat.

Shaking and with tears streaming down his face, the injured academic is helped to a new seat by Z’ka.

Meanwhile, you wipe the last of the taste from your mouth and throw away the roasted meat (**go to 271**).

302

The fact that magic is at work is obvious, but what magic is less obvious. However, as you consider the geometric patterns on the door, a deeper meaning emerges. Though the symbols themselves are entirely foreign to you, the way they are arranged indicates clearly that these are wards.

However, you’re not surprised that you didn’t recognize them immediately, because all of them are reversed. Essentially, you’re seeing them from behind, which means that the wards are facing inwards.

So you’re not looking at a vault. It’s a prison.

Just then, Z’ka pushes his way past you to start walking towards the door (**go to 311**).

303

Throwing aside a bedroll, you find a brightly sparkling crystal dagger. Pulling it out, it catches the light with a glow like the other Z'lethan crystals. Noticing, Gigar lets out a low whistle and Rija steps up to examine the weapon.

"Quite the find," Rija says. "Congratulations! Keep it. There's no shortage of threats down here. You will need it."

You can see Gigar and Z'ka nodding, though Gigar's eyes are fixed on the knife itself.

"That's a Z'lethan sacrificial dagger," Gigar says. "For preparing one's own blood sacrifices and then healing oneself immediately. Fascinating. I've never seen one up close."

You can add the Z'lethan sacrificial dagger to your inventory.

Returning to exploring the abandoned camp, Rija finds some fuel—a bundle of dry wood—with an exclamation of joy. She starts a fire with tinder and flint and enjoys the flickering light for a moment before stringing up the lizard meat to cook over the smoky fire.

When the meat is cooked, Rija distributes the meal. Z'ka prefers his raw so he roots around in his bag for a sizable chunk.

You can eat with your companions ([go to 175](#)), examine the lizard meat ([go to 196](#)), or refuse and eat a ration ([go to 277](#)).

Alternatively, you could cast Purify Food and Drink on the meat before eating it ([go to 183](#)) or cast Goodberry ([go to 263](#)).



SACRIFICIAL DAGGER OF Z'LETH

A magic dagger +1 made of the glowing blue crystal common in Z'leth. Once per day when wielding this dagger, as an action you heal 1d8+1 HP as if you cast Cure Wounds on yourself. Doing so makes the dagger non-magical until after you take a long rest

304

Though Z'ka's reptilian features are hard to read, you get the impression he's hiding something from you. So you ask him where the door leads.

Z'ka's eyes narrow as he regards you. "Door," he says finally. "Door to under."

And you ask him how to open it.

"Wait," Z'ka says. "Wait snake."

As he trails off, he spreads his hands in an arc over his head and hisses something in his own language.

"Wait for rain color snake," he says. Then he shrugs and goes back to his tablet with a certain finality.

Sure you're not getting anything else out of him, you settle in for a bit of a rest ([go to 203](#)).

305

Again, you trigger the same defenses that led to the demise of your silent neighbor, but this time the shock is more powerful.

An arc of magical energy shoots out of the glowing panel to strike you for 2d6 electricity damage. Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 12 for half damage.

If you drop to 0 hp, [go to 249](#).

If you survive, you can try force ([go to 257](#)), or the combination lock ([go to 234](#)).

Or if you want to give up on the safe, you can either explore the classroom if you haven't already ([go to 205](#)) or return to the main lobby ([go to 253](#)).

306

Slinking through the trees, you manage to follow the multicolored cat through the tangled underbrush without alerting it to your presence. You close in on the feline as it glides through its habitat.

Just as you approach close enough to decide what to do next, the predator stops and takes a deep breath. Then with a ripple of color, the beast turns into a large bird of prey with spectacular plumage that soars away between the looming pyramids dripping with plant growth.

Unable to follow—or even effectively speed up in the thick foliage—you have no other choice but to return to camp ([go to 212](#)).

307

You let the lizardfolk know that you're looking for an expedition to Z'leth from the surface.

"Ah, I see," says the lizardfolk sage. "Well, I'm afraid that some met an early demise as they rummaged around the city. The rest escaped not that long ago before they did anything too dangerous."

Ask how the lizardfolk got here ([go to 227](#)), ask what's going on in Z'leth ([go to 266](#)), or attack the stranger anyways ([go to 191](#)).

308

You sweep the room with your magic detection, and many parts of the room register a faint aura of various types of magic. It's quite prevalent, in fact, with even the air having a faint magical shimmer to it, ebbing and flowing with influences from the various schools of magic.

Towards the end of your search, the back on one particular dusty alcove shows a stronger magical aura. You carefully clear the debris to reveal three polished stones emanating mystic energies ([go to 221](#)).

309

As you and Rija are leaving camp again, she points at the twisted spires toward the center of the city.

"That looks important, adventurer," she says. "If you would please check that out, I'm going to do a ground-level search for expedition survivors."

If you take the assignment, [go to 280](#). If you disagree and instead want to search for survivors, [go to 296](#).

310

Given your knowledge of armors, you identify the scraps as the ancient remains of some kind of hide backing and hard, crystalline scales.

The backing is not any hide you can recognize, which may be due to age. However, it's surprising that the backing survived this long, so it must either be a very special creature or treated for durability. What's even more interesting about the skin is that it seems to be multi-colored.

The crystal scales likely aren't a good addition to your armor, but the crystal they're made of should fetch a few coins.

You may add 11 crystal scales to your inventory. Each is worth 1 gp.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check against DC 15. If you pass, [go to 278](#). If you fail you can either explore the weapon racks ([go to 186](#)), look at the mural ([go to 201](#)), or return to the main entry hall ([go to 216](#)).

Z'ka approaches the doorway and with hardly a glance, he presses a palm into the bottom of the door.

There's a rumbling, grating sound from behind the door. Vibrations run through the walls and floor, dislodging plumes of dust and debris to cascade gently downward on the party.

"Waiting done," Z'ka says as he turns toward you all. Behind him, his handprint continues to glow. "Must go under."

You, Rija, and Gigar find yourselves standing and staring with bated breath at the door as you feel something shudder to life in the temple.

But then it stops as suddenly as it started.

Z'ka spins on the glowing handprint to see it also fade away to inert stone again.

He hisses and screeches in what are clearly curses, and he does so with enough rage that you're grateful you don't understand what he is saying.

"No," he says finally to his companions. "Must go. Under the under. *We* must go."

"I'm sorry, Z'ka," Rija says finally. "I really am. Let's all get some rest. Give this some more thought. I'm sure we can figure this out."

"Just need to put our heads together, lad," Gigar says. He reaches out to pat Z'ka's shoulder, but then clearly thinks better of it.

The dejected warrior slinks back to his spot beside the firepit. Rija distributes food and water from her own pack: dried meats, cheeses, even some hard bread that hasn't quite started to grow mold. She even pulls out a half-full wineskin of brandy.

"I was saving these to celebrate finding the others," she says, though she's looking at the door the whole time. "But I think it's a good idea to enjoy them now."

The group of you sit down to quietly eat what feels like a gourmet meal on the floor of the temple, the massive stone face of your collective failure looming over all of you. Eventually, you manage to get some much-needed rest.

Gain the benefits of a long rest.

(go to 312).

CHAPTER 4

312

Feeling rejuvenated, you're ready to continue your exploration of Z'leth and the search for the expedition.

As you're preparing to step out in what you can only guess is the morning, Rija comes up and gently holds you back.

"Listen," she says. "Between you, me, and Z'ka we haven't found anything except bodies. Maybe it's time to see if that has any more clues to offer."

She nods toward the door where Z'ka and Gigar are already examining the location where the glowing handprint had been.

"Please, help us understand what's behind this door. I'm sure it has something to do with my colleagues."

You agree to come and lend what assistance you can, and Rija accompanies you to the base of the huge door.

Gigar is keeping his distance from the surface of the door while Z'ka is running his claws reverently along

the stones. Rija also reaches out to brush a hand against the stone, but she pulls hers back quickly before making contact. However, no one seems to know what to do next.

Get Z'ka to try again (**go to 323**), ask Rija to try the handprint (**go to 337**), request Gigar try (**go to 357**), or try for yourself (**go to 349**).

313

You barely have time to snatch your hand away from the stone surface as the handprint crackles with purplish energies. They seem to reach for you momentarily until you step out of range and the aggressive energies subside.

You can still ask Rija (**go to 337**), Gigar (**go to 357**) or Z'ka (**go to 323**) to try unlocking the door if they haven't done so yet.

Alternatively, you could call a team meeting and try to think of some other way through (**go to 329**).

314

You pull out a crystal weapon of Z'lethan design, and the couatl immediately nods in approval.



"I've not seen a Z'lethan weapon such as this in so long," the couatl says. *"This is the weapon of a hero. You have chosen wisely."*

Both Rija and Gigar nod with impressed looks on their face, and even Z'ka seems to appreciate your choice.

You put the crystal weapon away to prepare for the next stage of the trial ([go to 344](#)).

315

You produce the shard from the construct you defeated in the arena. You hold it out to the couatl, and the serpent smiles.

"You have passed the same test that the warriors of Z'leth had to pass," the couatl says. *"No one could be more worthy."*

Rija gives you a small, tight smile and a nod as you put the shard away again ([go to 356](#)).

316

The broken mural in the cultural institute seemed to be some kind of payment or appeasement, so you say that is what leads you to believe the people have simply left.

"That is quite a leap," the couatl says. *"But knowing the mural you are referring to, I can see how you might have reached that conclusion. So while you are correct that the people of Z'leth have left, your leader is also partially correct in that many Z'lethans also remained behind to safeguard their fellow citizens' escape."*

"So where did the people of Z'leth go?" Rija asks. Her tone suggests she already knows the answer, but needs to hear someone say it.

The couatl looks to Z'ka, who steps forward to explain ([go to 338](#)).

317

You stride ahead of your companions out into the gloomy light of the underground city. On the expanse of stone at the grand entrance to the temple, an impressive sight greets you, causing you all to come to a sudden, cautious stop ([go to 333](#)).

318

You may show whatever weapon you want. If you show a magic weapon, [go to 324](#). If you show a mundane weapon, [go to 335](#).

However, if you show a weapon made of Z'lethan crystal, go to [314](#).

319

You refuse to enter the temple. The previous expedition is safe, and it sounds like there is little to gain by exploring further into a dangerous underground temple to some lost Z'lethan god.

"This saddens me," the couatl says. *"But I understand. Follow the light at the far end of the city, and you shall find your way to the surface. Though you will have to survive the jungle, you have made it this far so it's unlikely you will find any real danger."*

Rija looks at you, her expression conflicted. "Are you sure that this is what you want?"

Change your mind and accept after all ([go to 360](#)) or leave your companions and Z'leth ([go to 321](#)).

320

You formally greet the couatl, and it bows its head to you in response.

"Such pomp and circumstance," says the amused celestial. *"It has been a long time since I was honored so. Thank you very much."*

Trading glances with one another, it's clear that the couatl is broadcasting its thoughts to your companions as well.

Looking somewhat chastised, Z'ka drops to one knee and speaks in his own language. For the first time, you hear his words ring in your head, a translation provided by the couatl.

"Lord of Rainbows, please forgive my dereliction of duty," Z'ka's voice says clearly in your head. "I am so glad to have finally found you. As your servant, I humbly beg your assistance in fulfilling my life's purpose."

“Of course, Z’ka,” the couatl says, still to all of you. “Your service is noted with gratitude, Knight of Z’leth.”

Though Z’ka is physically incapable of blushing, you can see in his body language that he would be doing so if he could. Rija hides a smile but Gigar seems riveted on the couatl itself.

Rija gives you a gentle punch on the shoulder to congratulate you on a job well done.

You can ask the couatl what it’s doing in Z’leth ([go to 343](#)), or demand to know what happened to the previous expedition ([go to 326](#)).

321

“We understand then,” Rija says to you. “We wish you the best. We have nothing to pay for your services, so I hope you’ve made the trip worth your while.”

“Best of luck, adventurer,” the couatl says. “Safe travels.”

“It was a pleasure,” Gigar says. “Perhaps our paths will cross again someday.”

Z’ka does not pretend to be anything other than disappointed in you. He says nothing.

As you descend the stairs, the couatl turns to your former companions in eerie silence. It is no longer sharing its thoughts with you. Rija, Gigar, and Z’ka come to some agreement with whatever the couatl has asked and they stride into the gloom of the temple as you leave Z’leth behind forever.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS.

322

Gain Inspiration.

You show the couatl the tiny skeleton fused to a glowing blue crystal and explain where you found it.

“Such a tragedy,” the couatl says, its voice echoing sadly in your mind. “So many did not make it to the surface. Their deaths still served the purpose of the city, but they were supposed to live. They were supposed to continue on. But in death, this young soul may yet benefit the living.”

The couatl focuses on the crystal attached to the baby Z’lethan and its color changes from blue to an iridescent swirl of color matching the celestial’s wings.

“It’s a great loss that they did not make it to the surface,” Rija says. “Now no descendents survive.”

“Oh no,” the couatl says to her gently. “This hatchling did not make it, but many others did.”

Z’ka rises to address the group ([go to 338](#)).



COUATL STONE

A glowing crystal that swirls with all the colors of the rainbow, this stone is made of Z’lethan crystal and is empowered by the sacrifice of one of the lost city’s inhabitants.

Once per day, you can replenish the use of a class or racial ability that recovers its uses on a short rest.

This use of your ability does not count toward your usual limit.

323

You ask Z’ka if he’s willing to try again. He nods and without hesitation plants his hand on the palmprint. The door gives a less pronounced response than the previous try, with only a faint rumble and a glowing handprint that quickly fades.

If you haven’t already, you could still get Rija ([go to 337](#)) or Gigar ([go to 357](#)) to try. Alternatively, you could try it yourself ([go to 349](#)).

If you'd rather not take any more chances, however, you could call it quits and discuss a different solution ([go to 329](#)).

324

The couatl examines your weapon. *"While not ideal, your weapon is that of a hero. It may be sufficient."*

You stow your weapon again to prepare for the next line of questioning ([go to 344](#)).

325

As it listens to your claim, the couatl doesn't even bother to hide its amusement.

"Sadly, a sharp wit and a sense of humor will do little for you below the temple," it says. *"You are not the weapon you claim to be, and I hope for your sake that you do not go below so unarmed."*

Before you can think of a comeback, the couatl continues with its questions ([go to 344](#)).

326

You demand to know what happened to the previous expedition.

"I can only assume you mean the last group of surface dwellers that passed through Z'leth," the couatl says, and the voice in your mind feels more guarded. *"They were little more than grave robbers. I tested their virtue, and every last one came up short."*

"Did you kill them?" Rija asks.

"They were allowed to escape when they couldn't successfully open the temple gate," the couatl replies. *"And thanks to the corruption that has seeped into them from this place, they will be lucky to remember Z'leth at all, much less the way here. It used to be that they would be found on the road outside the jungle, but I haven't left Z'leth in over 150 years. That may not be the case any longer."*

"They will be found by my people," Z'ka says, his voice clear in your mind even as he hisses and snarls in his own tongue. "We care for the people who escape from Z'leth. We excise any evil that may grow in them and repair what is broken."

"Is everyone else hearing Z'ka speak?" Gigar asks with awe.

But no one answers him. Instead, the couatl rears up in the sky and demands attention by its demeanor ([go to 353](#)).

327

"There was no cataclysm at the end of Z'leth's time," the couatl says to you and Gigar. *"One might argue the city began with a cataclysm, but that was before my time. I was not present for the city's birth, and for very little of its life. I am custodian of Z'leth's death and decay."*

"Then what happened?" Gigar asks.

"Your leader is partly correct," the couatl says, nodding toward Rija. *"Many of the people of Z'leth opted to remain behind and sacrifice themselves. But others opted to leave, to keep the memory and purpose of the city alive."*

"Where did they go?" Rija asks, though the way she looks at Z'ka makes it look like she already has an idea ([go to 338](#)).

328

"The absence of crystals is indeed a result of the Z'lethans having left, but it is as much a result of looters as the Z'lethans themselves. In fact, the blue crystals were in abundance when the city fell. They have all just been consumed or stolen."

The couatl pulls back from you. *"But you are mostly correct. Many of the people of Z'leth escaped, though some remained behind to die as your leader has suggested. Though the city was lost, at least some of the people could live and continue their mission. But from the lands above."*

"Z'ka, what is he talking about?" Rija asks, looking to your warrior companion for answers ([go to 338](#)).

329

You and your companions reconvene around the firepit. This place is no longer your camp or even the temple, but simply the location of your latest challenge to overcome.

The team sits dejectedly in tense silence, everyone knowing that the next step is clearly getting the door to open but no one offering up any ideas on how to do that.

Without warning, Z'ka leaps to his feet, brandishing his spear in all directions as if searching for a threat. Rija opens her mouth to say something, but then her eyes go wide and she also jumps up. Gigar lets out a little snort followed by a whine as he tries to curl into himself.

The dread rises up in you seconds before you also hear it. A voice rings in your head, resonant and powerful as if composed of many different voices.

"It is time we met properly," it says. *"Please, come outside so that we can get acquainted."*

You can step outside immediately ([go to 317](#)) or hold back ([go to 351](#)).

330

"Indeed, it is a prison," the couatl says, with an air of sadness.

"What were they imprisoning?" Gigar asks. *"What could such a great people fear?"*

"You may see for yourself before long," the couatl says to all of you. *"Should your little band prove worthy."*

"We hope that we prove to be," Rija says. Z'ka bows his head to her.

"At first the people were the jailers. When they also became prisoners, however, they left."

The couatl begins its next question ([go to 334](#)).

331

You present the dull blue crystal you removed from the mutant constrictor snake. The couatl considers for a moment and then nods.

"You have shown that you can survive at least the perils of the world above," it says. *"You are deemed worthy."*

You put the dull blue crystal away again to continue with your trial ([go to 356](#)).

332

You bluntly ask what you can hope to gain from this adventure. The couatl bristles and is obviously indignant at the answer. It appears Rija and Z'ka at

least share his disdain for your response.

"Besides being one of the privileged few to enter the passages below a hidden city?" the couatl says, its emotions now under control. *"There is the fact that you are doing the world a service and making it safe for another generation. And earning my gratitude in the process of doing that which I cannot."*

If you accept, [go to 360](#). If you refuse, [go to 319](#).

333

You stand with your companions in stunned silence, despite your best efforts to maintain your composure.

Before you is a magnificent serpent hovering in place on enormous feathered wings. Its scales and feathers are every imaginable color, resplendent even in the strange glow of the underground city. Despite its reptilian features, the colorful newcomer radiates a gentle kindness.

Z'ka croaks something in his native language, and the great beast dips its head in acknowledgement.

"The Wing Snake," Z'ka says to the rest of you. *"King of the Rain Light."*

The creature smiles and rumbles a chuckle. *"Normally translated to 'Feathered Serpent' and 'Lord of Rainbows,' but that is a fine version, child of Z'leth. Perhaps your scholar knows some of my other names?"*

Under the smiling serpent's gaze, Gigar works his mouth around his tusks and adjusts his lapels self-consciously. *"Ahem. Well, I should say that you are a couatl."*

"Well spotted," the couatl says, but in Gigar's voice. Then continuing in its own voice, it turns to Rija. *"Anything to add?"*

"The Guardian Spirit of Z'leth," she says, eyes still wide and lips trembling.

"I suppose there are those who call me that," the couatl says. *"And though true, I feel it's a little grandiose."*

Then it turns to you to say: *"You are still a mystery to me. Do you know what I am?"*



Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 359**. If you get less than 15, **go to 345**.

334

“You have explored the city,” the couatl says, unfurling its wings and floating upward. *“You have seen there is nothing left but creeping rot and mutated beasts. So where did the people go?”*

“It seems some great cataclysm befell the people of this grand nation,” Gigar says.

“They— The people sacrificed themselves for the betterment of Z’leth,” Rija says. “And the realm.”

“What do you think, adventurer?” asks the couatl.

You can say that it was a cataclysm that killed everyone (**go to 327**), that the people sacrificed themselves for the greater good (**go to 342**), or that they simply left and little is known about what happened next (**go to 352**).

335

The couatl’s feathered reptilian face shows clear disappointment at your choice of weapon.

“Indeed? You have made it this far armed with that? Then you are either extremely skilled or extremely lucky. However, I worry it will not serve you in the dangers ahead. You must proceed at your own peril.”

“If you want to turn back, now is the time,” Rija whispers to you. “But I will do whatever I can to keep you safe if you continue.”

You stow your weapon and wait for the next line of questioning (**go to 344**).

336

The couatl looks dubious, and all eyes turn toward you.

If your unarmed strikes deal improved damage from a class or racial ability, **go to 358**. If your unarmed attacks do not deal any additional damage from your class or race, **go to 325**.

337

You suggest Rija try and she agrees. Though she seems slightly fearful, she doesn’t hesitate long before placing her hand firmly into the slight imprint of a clawed hand.

Purplish energy arcs out of the wall and up her arm. She cries out in pain and jerks her hand away. Though she doesn’t seem badly hurt, she cradles her arm as little wisps of smoke waft off it for a moment.

“And I won’t be trying that again,” she says, flexing her injured hand with a grim smile. “Anyone else want to try?”

If they haven’t tried yet, you could ask Gigar (**go to 357**) or Z’ka (**go to 323**). You could also try yourself (**go to 349**).

Or if you would rather try a different course of action, you can speak to your companions to make another plan (**go to 329**).

338

Again, Z’ka addresses you all in his native language. But his words are translated though the mental link the couatl has established among you, and his snarling hissing tongue becomes clear to you.

“As you may have already guessed, I am descended from the ancients of Z’leth,” Z’ka says. “All my people look back to our distant ancestors who settled the jungle above. Our history tells of a time when we maintained our dignity, even our strength.

“But it wasn’t to last. The corruption seeping out of Z’leth poisoned us too, but it went to work on our minds, not our bodies.

“Political factions became warring tribes. Despite our best efforts, we forgot the old ways. Few among us could even be trusted with the ability to read, much less with a tablet.”

The warrior reaches back and pats the stone slung on his back.

“But those of us who could still be entrusted with the knowledge of Z’leth became teachers and guides.”

“But why guides?” Gigar asks. “Why not keep Z’leth a secret?”

“Because, scholar,” the couatl answers. “Z’leth did not die. It merely operates at a diminished capacity. It could not sustain its people as well as its mission, for which I must now enlist all of your aid.”

You can ask what assistance the couatl may require ([go to 348](#)) or ask what’s in it for you ([go to 332](#)).

339

“While it is true that Z’lethan crystals are unique to the city, that is not its purpose,” the couatl says. “It is more of a byproduct of the unique magical energies here. And there are layers upon layers of magical energies here. Those crystals are a complex part of life here in this city. As you may soon discover first hand.”

“Did they truly power the city?” Gigar asks. “You were here, erm, Glorious Serpent. What did they use the crystals for really?”

“Everything, dear scholar. The crystals powered machines that performed functions from healing the sick to drawing water up wells. But they were also necessary to power the machines that operate below the temple. And their function was even more important to the existence of Z’leth.”

You catch Rija and Z’ka exchanging a glance, but you prepare for any additional questions ([go to 334](#)).

340

“Are you coming or not?” Rija’s voice calls out. “You’re definitely going to want to see this.”

“I’ve been waiting centuries,” the voice in your head says. “I can wait as long as needed for you to join us. But your companions seem to be losing patience.”

Seeing nothing else that you can do in the temple, especially alone, you finally follow the others outside ([go to 333](#)).

341

You aren’t fast enough to jerk your hand away and a violent purple energy crackles into your palm and up your arm.

Take 1d6 necrotic damage.

If you drop to 0 hp, [go to 355](#).

If you survive, you could still ask Rija ([go to 337](#)), Gigar ([go to 357](#)) or Z’ka ([go to 323](#)) to try if they haven’t already.

Or you could step away from the locked door to regroup and plan a next step ([go to 329](#)).



342

“You are partially correct,” the couatl tells you and Rija. “Indeed, many of the former inhabitants decided to remain behind and, in their sacrifice, fulfilled the purpose of the city. But others opted to leave.”

“But the Z’lethans were a proud people,” Gigar says, his incorrect answer forgotten. “Why would they run away?”

“Because the city is more than just a place,” the couatl replies. “It is a prison whose scale matches the threat it contains. And given its resources from within have dwindled, it must now look outward to maintain its power.”

“So does that mean—?” Rija looks to Z’ka, who nods as he stands to address you all ([go to 338](#)).

343

You ask what the couatl is doing here in Z'leth.

"Ah, well that is a complicated question with a very long answer," the couatl says. *"And it is not for all to know. First, you must prove yourselves. It will be revealed. Or you will follow on the heels of the last group of surface dwellers who failed to prove their purity."*

"The last expedition passed through here?" Rija asked. "Are they all right?"

"They are," the couatl responds. *"Though there are still the hazards of the jungle above."*

"My people care for all survivors of Z'leth," Z'ka says, his voice ringing clear in your mind. "If they have left the city, they will be cleansed and healed of all but their memories of this place."

"Excuse me, but is that you, dear chap?" Gigar says to the warrior. "Is everyone else hearing him?"

"A product of the link I've established with your minds," the couatl says. *"But now it is time for us to proceed with the next step of your journey, whatever that may be."*

The couatl draws itself up on its iridescent wings and fixes you all with its powerful gaze ([go to 353](#)).

344

"And now that we've established the warriors among you, I'd like to know your knowledge of the city itself," the couatl says in your minds. *"Why does Z'leth stand?"*

Gigar speaks up first. "The city of Z'leth is a shining pinnacle of culture and wealth. It is here as a treasure to be enjoyed by the generations, the height of an empire's power."

The couatl nods but without commitment. Rija offers her answer.

"Z'leth is an ideal," she says, though her eyes cut toward you as she continues. "And a wall."

Again, the couatl nods and then looks to you.

You can respond that Z'leth was the crown jewel of a mighty empire ([go to 354](#)), that the city grew around the crystals as a unique resource ([go to 339](#)), or that the city is itself a prison ([go to 330](#)).

345

You seem to remember that the couatl is from another plane of existence and is usually found guarding something of value, but you remember nothing else about the beast and say so.

"Then perhaps we may have a chance to get to know one another," it says.

As it speaks, you do feel the color pattern of its plumage is familiar from your time here in Z'leth. Its rainbow sheen is distinctive, but strangely familiar.

You can politely greet the couatl ([go to 320](#)), ask the couatl what it's doing in Z'leth ([go to 343](#)), or demand to know what happened to the previous expedition ([go to 326](#)).

346

When you present your spellcasting focus, the couatl shakes its head slowly.

"On the path ahead, there are powers greater than you or I at work," it says. *"If that is all you have in your arsenal, you will be outmatched, adventurer."*

"There is also cleverness," Gigar says, though when the couatl looks at him he seems to immediately regret speaking up. "It's— It's not all raw power."

"Well said," the couatl says. *"You may yet get the chance to see for yourself."*

Not really sure if that played out in your favor, you nonetheless prepare yourself to continue with the trial ([go to 344](#)).

347

You show only your open hands. The couatl is unreadable, but you think Rija rolls her eyes. Even Gigar seems to avoid looking at you.

The couatl looks to the group of you to continue the trial ([go to 356](#)).

348

When you ask what the couatl needs, it smiles and bows its head to you.

"I have realized I have certain limitations," it says.

"Though the mind—and even the world of dreams—is accessible to me, there are parts of this city that are not. One of them is that temple and the passages below it. To call it desecrated land is an understatement, and a celestial being such as myself cannot enter. It would be certain death. I will need you to enter for me."

"What happens if we succeed?" Gigar asks.

The couatl and Z'ka share a glance before the celestial replies. *"I will be here to meet you. And you will join a select group of heroes to have survived the dangers below."*

If you accept, **go to 360**. If you refuse, **go to 319**.

349

Gain Inspiration.

As you approach the heavy door, you can see that the faint outline of a handprint has five digits but they are unusually long. There are even small indents for claws. This is clearly meant for a lizardfolk, but it's worth a try at least.

When you press your hand into the space, it doesn't quite fit and you feel like the door knows that. You feel a buildup of magical energies in the stone.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 12 or more, **go to 313**. If you get less than 12, **go to 341**.

350

"The path ahead is dangerous," the couatl's voice rings in your mind. *"You must be sufficiently prepared to defend yourselves. And each other. What do you have that shows a warrior's spirit? What trophies do you possess of your valor?"*

Rija pulls out a white stone. There appears to be nothing special about it.

"This is a stone from the highest peak of the Cloudfang Mountains," she says. "I was the sole survivor, though I wasn't supposed to be."

It turns to Gigar, who freezes and then pats at his various pockets ineffectually before coming up empty.

"I'm afraid I don't have anything on me," Gigar says. "What kind of proof do you require?"

The couatl doesn't answer but turns to you.

As a trophy, you can show the stone feather (**go to 315**), present the dull blue crystal (**go to 331**), or admit you have nothing (**go to 347**).

351

Gain Inspiration.

You hang back, but your companions waste no time in stepping outside. Rija leaves first, then Z'ka, and Gigar is last with a look over his shoulder at you, but he seems to prefer the safety he feels in numbers.

"We are waiting for you, adventurer," the voice says again in your head. It sounds both amused and slightly familiar.

Follow the others outside (**go to 333**) or continue to wait (**go to 340**).

352

The couatl looks between you and your companions, though its gaze rests on you as it searches your face for some clue of your true meaning. You even feel a tug around the edges of your thoughts as it tries to assess you for what you might already know.

"What makes you say the people have left?" the couatl asks as it leans toward you.

You can cite the absence of crystals remaining in the city (**go to 328**), refer to the broken mural you found in the cultural institute (**go to 316**), or present the tiny skeleton with a crystal if it is in your inventory (**go to 322**).

353

"You are not the first to visit Z'leth since it was abandoned here," the couatl says to all of you, its voice booming in your mind. *"And I pray that you are not the last. Like others of my kind, I am a guardian of this place. But I do not guard riches. Instead, I protect the way to a great evil."*

“What evil is that, Great Serpent?” Gigar asks, his eyes shining with zeal and curiosity. “Is that what is causing the strangeness in the air here?”

“All will be made clear if you pass the test,” the couatl says. *“Let us begin.”*

“Nothing could give me greater joy, Lord of Rainbows,” says Z’ka.

“Your worthiness is assured, warrior.” The couatl bows to Z’ka, and the lizardfolk prostrates himself. Gigar’s confusion is palpable, but Rija just smiles.

“And I presume that this is your actual purpose here?” The couatl asks as it looks directly at Rija. *“Now that you know your colleagues are safe, will you continue?”*

Rija cuts a sideways glance at you and her other companions then nods.

“I will,” she says.

“And you?” The couatl fixes his coolly benevolent gaze on Gigar. *“Has your thirst for knowledge been quenched?”*

“It has not,” Gigar says, puffing up his chest. “If it’s not too much trouble, I shall also continue.”

“And you?” It turns to you, and you’re dazzled by the creature for a moment. *“Are you ready for the adventure to end?”*

You answer that you want to see this adventure to its conclusion ([go to 350](#)).

354

“You have completely misunderstood the purpose of Z’leth,” the couatl says to you, though its gaze also sweeps over Gigar. *“Greatness was just a byproduct of Z’leth’s purpose. And of the crystals that grow here.”*

“So that is the purpose of the great door in the temple,” Rija says. “Z’ka tried to tell me. That it’s not a temple, not even a vault. It’s a cell. But for what?”

“That will be for you to discover for yourself,” the couatl says, *“if you go below.”*

Though you didn’t get this response correct, it’s a relief to know that your journey doesn’t end here and you may yet explore further ([go to 334](#)).

355

The world is washed out in purple light and you drop to the ground, grateful that you’ve lost consciousness so that you no longer have to feel the pain.

Then the world comes crashing back into view. A very worried Gigar hovers over you with a small vial.

“Ah, excellent,” he says with a tusk grin. “Thought we had lost you for a minute there. Glad you’re back with us.”

You now have 1 HP.

“We should move on,” Rija says, though you see she shared Gigar’s concern for you. “Let’s rethink the best way forward here.”

Z’ka helps you to your feet so that you and your companions can move back from the door and plan out your next steps ([go to 329](#)).

356

“Your warrior spirits have been reviewed,” the couatl says. *“But a warrior needs a weapon to wield in battle. What is your weapon of choice?”*

“I have these,” Rija says, holding one of the blue Z’lethan crystals in one hand. “And I also have this.”



Rija holds out her other hand, and a small mote of shining red light twists into life over her palm. It's not even a spell, possibly just a cantrip to display her power, but the control is impressive.

The couatl ignores the display of magical prowess in favor of the crystal and Z'ka shows no emotion at all, but Gigar's jaw drops open on learning of Rija's command of the mystic arts. It takes him a moment to realize that the couatl is waiting for him to speak.

"I'm afraid I am unarmed," Gigar says. "Does a keen mind count?"

"It can," the couatl says to him, but quickly turns its attention to you. "And you, adventurer? How have you armed yourself against the hazards ahead?"

If you present a weapon, **go to 318**. If you present a spellcasting focus, **go to 346**. If you present yourself as a weapon, **go to 336**.

357

Though it takes a fair amount of convincing, you get Gigar to step up and try his hand on the wall. He reaches out and nearly presses his palm into the magical seal, but he jerks it away at the last moment.

"I'm sorry," he says, stepping back. "Terribly sorry. But I can't. This just isn't what I signed up for."

Whatever you say won't convince him, and it doesn't seem worth it to force him.

If they haven't tried yet, you can still ask Rija (**go to 337**) or Z'ka (**go to 323**) to try unlocking the door. You could also try (**go to 349**).

Or if you'd prefer, you could call a team meeting and try to think of some other way through (**go to 329**).

358

After looking you up and down, the couatl nods in approval.

"You have indeed honed your body into a weapon," it says. "We can only pray to the old gods that it will be powerful enough to overcome the dangers ahead."

You thank the celestial beast for its confidence in you

and prepare for the next stage of the trial (**go to 344**).

359

You are also familiar with couatls. They are celestials summoned as guardians. And while they can be formidable opponents when attacked, they prefer communication and displays of their power to frighten away interlopers. As it has already demonstrated, the multicolored winged serpent has access to the minds of other beings. Some stories even say that it can inhabit the dreams of others.

As a celestial being, you can also expect the couatl to act in a kind and virtuous manner, though this individual seems to be either extremely old or showing some negative effects from the pervading sense of corruption in Z'leth. Its feathers lack the luster you would have expected from accounts you've read of their singular beauty.

You also recall that couatls are shapeshifters, able to adopt the form of creatures around them. There are even skilled individuals that mimic another creature—or person—in exact detail.

You summarize what you know of the beast to it and your companions, and it nods its head in agreement.

"You are intelligent," it says. "But what of wisdom? What would you say to me?"

You can politely greet the couatl (**go to 320**), ask the couatl what it's doing in Z'leth (**go to 343**), or demand to know what happened to the previous expedition (**go to 326**).

360

The couatl is pleased that you and your companions will take the mission.

"And with your acceptance, you have passed my trial," the couatl says. "Though I cannot tell you what you find below, I do know that all will become clear. You are not the first to return to the depths of the temple, and I pray you will not be the last. A great evil is contained below, one that I only know from the corruption it emanates.

"You must renew the power of its bonds. This will require strength, bravery, and power. But it seems you have all those things."

Rija's hand brushes the Z'lethan crystals in her belt and Z'ka tightens his grip on his spear. Gigar looks between the three of you, smiling nervously through his tusks.

"When you are ready, you may enter the temple. The door will now open for you and will remain open until you return. Or until your deaths. Best of luck."

You bid the couatl farewell, as do your companions, and together you enter the gloom of the massive temple and approach the sealed door. Z'ka steps forward and lays his hand on the handprint.

The purple glow of the handprint spreads through the jagged lines of the Z'lethan patterns adorning the door. A line around the frame appears and the whole room trembles with the great weight of the door as it begins to move.

It finally slides downward into the floor, revealing a massive stone chamber beyond, lit by the blue glow of Z'lethan crystals and smelling of the rot of corruption you are now so familiar with.

(go to 361)



CHAPTER 5

361

You enter the large chamber leading down into the underground temple. A wide staircase extends from the entrance down into a thick gloom.

The atmosphere here is unnaturally oppressive, as if the light from the open doorway behind you is afraid to enter the passageways below. Fortunately, it is not pitch black and is lit by rows of massive Z'lethan crystals. And though their blue light is more than enough to light your way, it is somehow muted, like sunlight through an overcast sky.

The stairs lead down to another carved doorway framed with blackened tendrils pulsing with energy, a physical manifestation of the vileness you feel heavy in the air around you. Large Z'lethan crystals are mounted along the walls shedding their bluish light.

The wall in front of you is dominated by a large mural depicting what you can only guess is the couatl from the city at battle—real or metaphorical—with some strange beast. Below the mural, however, you can see the unworked stone of some natural cave structure.

To get your bearings, you can examine your surroundings ([go to 417](#)), or use a spell or ability to learn more about the environment ([go to 478](#)).

362

Gain Inspiration.

When you ask Gigar what he thinks, he fumbles his answer a moment as everyone's attention turns to him.

"Well, it seems the crystals in Z'leth help to manage the corruption somehow," he says.

"That's... That's actually brilliant, Gigar." Rija claps him on the shoulder. She pulls out a crystal from her belt and looks to you. "What do you say?"

"Also magic," Z'ka says, gesturing to the tablet on his back.

"Another good point," Rija says, and Gigar nods.

You can try a crystal ([go to 390](#)) or try Z'ka's tablet ([go to 397](#)).

363

Though Gigar seems to be getting antsy, you shush him and stay where you are. You carefully watch the inside of the chamber for any threats.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 422**. If you get less than 12, **go to 449**.

364

The ooze seems to shake off most of the damage from your attack, and you back away from it as far as you can.

Any attack from acid, cold, or fire does half damage.

Return to 382 finish the fight.

365

This must be a dust mephit. It attacks with glee and fights until one of you is dead. Gigar backs off and stays at a safe distance, choking on the thick cloud of dust.

If you reduce the mephit to 0 HP, **go to 445**. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 481**.



DUST MEPHIT

Small Elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 17 (5d6)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

ACTIONS

Trident. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, Hit: 4 (1d4 +2) piercing damage.



366

When you grasp the amulet, you receive a new vision. This one is tinted with red or purple, as if the corruption affecting the temple is also affecting the magic of the relic.

You are transported to a flat platform of sand-colored stone surrounded by a curtain of light. Z'lethans in colorful ceremonial garb guide the light with luminous tendrils connected to their clawed hands. Warriors stand at the ready in a ring around the robed figures manipulating the light that seems to rise up out of the platform.

Beyond the light something stirs in the darkness. You can't even really see what it is. Instead, it's just a feeling of size and malevolence out in the darkness. You think you glimpse glowing eyes just as the vision recedes into memory.

"It has changed again, hasn't it?" Gigar says, taking the amulet back from you. "Truly a marvel created by a superior people. They have harnessed such immense power here. So, what next?"

You can suggest that you proceed after Rija and Z'ka to get to the bottom of this mystery ([go to 387](#)) or propose cutting your losses and leaving Z'leth ([go to 414](#)).

367

With considerable effort, and quite a lot of time, you manage to fray the rope enough that you can break it. You're breathing heavily and the exertion has exhausted you.

Take a short rest (consuming 1 ration). If you don't want to use or don't have a ration, however, you suffer 1d4 damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, take note of this section and [go to 405](#).

If you are still alright, you get your gear and go to free Gigar ([go to 477](#)).

368

Gain Inspiration.

You and Gigar both drop into a crouch and proceed forward at the ready against any surprises. The passage continues its downward slope and continues to tighten as a spiral. The sound of combat has long ago faded away, so it's unclear if Rija and Z'ka have even survived.

But then the rumbling, grating sound intensifies as if some giant stone machine has suddenly stirred to life. It changes in timbre half-way through, suggesting a change in direction.

And then there is silence.

You and Gigar exchange a glance before picking up the pace. Finally, you emerge together into a large chamber once again dominated by a huge stone door ([go to 401](#)).

369

Based on his mannerisms and expression, Gigar is obviously not feeling the same effects as you did from the pool. He actually seems to have received no benefits whatsoever, though you can only guess at the reasons why.

The ghostly Z'lethan still does not acknowledge him or you, though it seems that Gigar doesn't know what to do with the ghost. Even more unusually, Gigar hasn't produced his notebook to record any of what he's seeing. And now he's wearing the obsidian amulet instead of keeping it tucked away in his pack, though you're also not sure what to make of that.

It all adds up to Gigar revealing a different side of himself. He still seems nervous, but now there's an excitement about him as well.

He notices you scrutinizing him and gives you an uncertain smile. "Shall we go, adventurer? We still have to catch up to Rija and Z'ka. I have a feeling that we shouldn't let them beat us to the bottom."

Having nothing else to do here in the holy chamber, you agree that it's now time to leave ([go to 419](#)).

370

The pile of ice and snow that was your opponent is rapidly melting onto two stone cubes that have come to rest on the ground. One shows an air symbol while the other shows a water symbol.

You can add an air cube and a water cube to your inventory.

If you have a ration, you can consume it to gain the benefits of a short rest.

When you are ready to continue, **go to 392**.

371

You take Rija's suggestion and just try to ignore the injury. You and your companions prepare to continue down the corridor, but your wounds start to itch, then sting, then burn. Rija also grunts through gritted teeth as she's racked by a similar pain.

Take 1d6 necrotic damage.

If you survive, **go to 447**. If the necrotic damage reduces you to 0 HP, **go to 377**.

372

You cast your mind into the space around you seeking the thoughts of hidden threats. You sense no thoughts in range except those of your companions. This place could as easily be a tomb as it is a temple.

But before you end the effect, you do sense a mind of sorts. The fact that you can feel it at all makes no sense as it's clearly coming from a great distance below you. You strain to make out any actual thoughts, but it's just raw primal emotions: rage, hunger, and hate.

The force of it breaks the effect and you're left reeling, and it's Gigar who catches you to keep you from falling.

"I've been feeling much the same way," he says. "Get your legs under yourself, as it seems we're on our way."

"Must admit I'm feeling it as well," Rija says. "So let's figure out what needs to be done here and get out as quickly as possible."

Z'ka silently leads the rest of you through the door at the base of the chamber (**go to 389**).

373

You release Gigar from his restraints and he starts massaging his wrists and ankles.

"Ah, thank you so much," he says. "I have dreadful circulation, you see. My hands and feet have been pins and needles for ages!"

As he's rubbing the blood back into his hands and feet, you can ask him more about what just happened.

"Rija and Z'ka," he says with uncharacteristic venom. "They turned on us. As soon as you were out cold, they overpowered me. Too many hours in the library, not enough in the yard or so my parents loved to say. Rija tied both of us up with some of those fancy knots and left us here."

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 406**. If you get less than 15, **go to 431**.

374

What's obvious is that the dark liquid is dangerous and it does not belong in this place. However, you cannot tell what threat it may yet represent.

Roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 421**. If you get less than 12, **go to 452**.

375

The orcish scholar watches you leave with unmasked disappointment. You can feel him silently judging you as you leave back the way you came out of the temple. You exit the temple without incident, and then proceed out of Z'leth. You encounter no monsters below, no mutated beasts above. Even the couatl does not make an appearance.

When, after a long trudge upwards, you finally see the overcast sky you know that at least you're still alive. You'll never know if the same can be said for your former companions below.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE.

376

You've heard of these extraplanar creatures mixing fire and earth. It is a magma mephit.

The impish figure made of dripping lava attacks you with a gurgling snarl. It will fight you to the death.

If you reduce the mephit to 0 HP, **go to 427**. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 481**.



MAGMA MEPHIT

Small Elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 22 (5d6 + 5)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

Initiative +1

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Vulnerabilities cold

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

ACTIONS

Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, Hit: 3 (1d4 +1) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) fire damage.

changes in his demeanor, you can't quite place what he's doing differently or why he might be behaving oddly.

Though it does suddenly jump out at you that Gigar is now wearing the obsidian amulet he values so much instead of keeping it in his pack. You can't guess what that might mean, but that fact is interesting in itself.

"I think we've seen all there is to see here," Gigar says. "It may be time to move on."

Not seeing anything else to do in this chamber, you leave the ghost to its ritual and exit through the other doorway (**go to 419**).

379

As you continue along at a fairly brisk pace, you can see Gigar starting to visibly struggle.

"Do you think we might stop and rest a moment?" he asks finally. "I— I'm really not made for this, you know."

You realize that this may be a good opportunity for a short rest, but Rija and Z'ka will increase their lead toward whatever goal they have deeper in the temple.

You can stop for a short rest (**go to 429**) or continue on (**go to 465**).

380

As you defeat the mephit, it wails out a laugh like winter wind in the trees. It explodes into shards of ice.

If you are attacking with a ranged weapon or a weapon with reach greater than 5 feet, you avoid the mephit's death burst.

If you are adjacent to the mephit, roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, you take 1D8 slashing damage. If you succeed, take half damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 481**. If you survive the death burst, two stone objects fall out of the air previously occupied by the ice mephit (**go to 370**).

377

The incredible, toxic pain is more than you can bear and it overwhelms you. You can feel the corruption in your heart, almost in your soul, as it consumes your body.

The shock of it slams into you, and you feel your heart lurch and flutter to a stop. The darkness of death descends quickly, like a door slamming shut.

YOU DIED.

378

Gigar is certainly acting strangely, but that seems to be his version of normal. Though you're sensing some

381

Your body just can't take it anymore. You collapse from the combined thirst, hunger, and exhaustion of your journey. At least now, you will finally be able to find some rest.

YOU DIED.

382

Part of the dark fluid rises up and flows toward you. Other masses rise up to engage Rija and Z'ka. Gigar stays in the center of the combatants, rooted to the spot with fear. Your adversary appears to be a gray ooze, common in underground areas like this but not without its danger.



The first time you strike the ooze with a weapon, **go to 428**.

If you deal acid, cold, or fire damage, **go to 364**.

The first time the ooze strikes you, **go to 402**.

If you reduce the ooze to 0 hp, **go to 388**. If you drop to 0 hp, **go to 441**.



GRAY OOZE

Small Ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

Initiative -2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	2 (-4)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, Hit: 4 (1d6 +1) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage.

383

There is clearly some magical force at work here, and it seems to be spreading. The dark forces flickering at the edges of the wounds are painful, but also weirdly fascinating.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 472**. If you get less than 12, **go to 411**.

384

You cautiously touch the stone cubes, but they are perfectly cool to the touch despite having come from the magma mephit. One stone is carved with the earth symbol while the other has the fire symbol.

You can add an earth cube and a fire cube to your inventory.

If you have a ration and 3 drinks of water, you can consume them while you tend to your wounds to gain the benefits of a short rest.

When you are ready to continue, **go to 392**.

385

"Is that... Is that what I think it is?" Gigar gasps. "An actual spirit of a Z'lethan priest?"

You both watch as the form seems to speak and makes a series of ritual gestures in the air in front of it. However, there is nothing but eerie silence.

The ghost then appears to be cupping its hands and pouring water over its head, but reaching into the light caught in the pool.

If you haven't done so yet, you can copy the ghost's actions ([go to 482](#)), attack the ghost ([go to 413](#)), or leave the room undisturbed ([go to 396](#)).

386

With a mighty jerk, you snap the ropes. Gigar's eyes go wide as you disentangle yourself and look around. Rija and Z'ka are indeed gone, and you can see that your gear has been placed on a ledge out of reach until you are standing.

You retrieve your gear and go to help Gigar ([go to 477](#)).

387

You and Gigar gather your things and continue onward.

"It took me so much by surprise," Gigar says out of nowhere. "Rija and Z'ka seemed like the most trustworthy sort."

He continues to prattle on in a nervous commentary of your surroundings, waxing on about the architecture, wondering out loud about the meaning of the patterns on the walls, sharing the feelings of illness he's enduring as a result of the corruption in the air, even complaining about the blisters that have developed on his feet.

"So..." He draws you back into the conversation with a change in cadence. "What are you going to do when we catch up to... the other two?"

Say that you will make them pay for leaving you to die ([go to 410](#)), suggest there may be a good reason so you'll ask ([go to 434](#)), or say nothing at all ([go to 461](#)).

388

Rather than falling down dead, the ooze escapes through the fissure, but not before spraying you with one last barrage of acid.

Take 1d4 acid damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 458](#). If you survive, [go to 468](#).

389

The passage that leads from the entry chamber is long and thin, wide enough for two of you to walk side by side or three to squeeze together. It features the same glowing patterns on the walls that you saw much higher in the Z'leth cavern complex, but now the blue light is pulsing and fading erratically.

There is no unworked or natural stone anywhere, but nor is there any sign of ruin or even dust. This corridor seems untouched by the passage of time, and it fades off into the distance.

As you walk downward, you realize that the passage curves very slightly along with its subtle downward angle. You walk for what seems like miles in what you realize with increasing certainty is an enormous spiral deep into the earth below Z'leth. It's impossible to tell how long you've been down here, or how far you've traveled, as the seemingly random patterns on the wall give no indication of time or distance.

In the overwhelming sense of corruption and wrongness, no one speaks. You all just keep trudging toward the goal set for you by the couatl, each of your companions likely wondering what the point of this is.

Then around the bend, you see something that breaks the monotony but does not bode well ([go to 416](#)).

390

Rija hands you one of the crystals from her belt and takes one into her fist.

"I hope this works," she says. "The wounds are starting to burn."

You also feel a pain building in the corrupted acid burn, and you'd rather not experience it full force. Immediately activate the Z'lethan crystal to recover ([go to 403](#)) or wait and see what happens to Rija first ([go to 453](#)).

391

The darkness of the thought seems to congeal out of the air, thick with corruption. It occurs to you that you could end this pathetic creature with a single blow while he's bound and helpless. It would be so easy.

Gigar looks up at you, still pleading with his eyes that you release him. He has no idea what you're considering.

But even as you think it, you are keenly aware that this would be a step too far. It's like the evil in the air is hanging in wait, and if you do this then you will simply cease to be yourself in any meaningful sense.

Kill Gigar anyway ([go to 420](#)) or change your mind and cut him free ([go to 373](#)).

392

You examine the lock in front of you, Gigar leaning in close to see what you do next.

If you have a *fire cube*, *water cube*, *air cube*, and *earth cube*, [go to 460](#).

If you are missing any of these items, you can try to insert something else ([go to 469](#)). Or you can push the dust symbol ([go to 412](#)), the ice symbol ([go to 440](#)), the magma symbol ([go to 436](#)), or the steam symbol ([go to 394](#)).

393

You approach the dark fluid at what you feel is a safe distance and begin what examination you can. It's clearly some kind of magical substance.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 421](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 452](#).

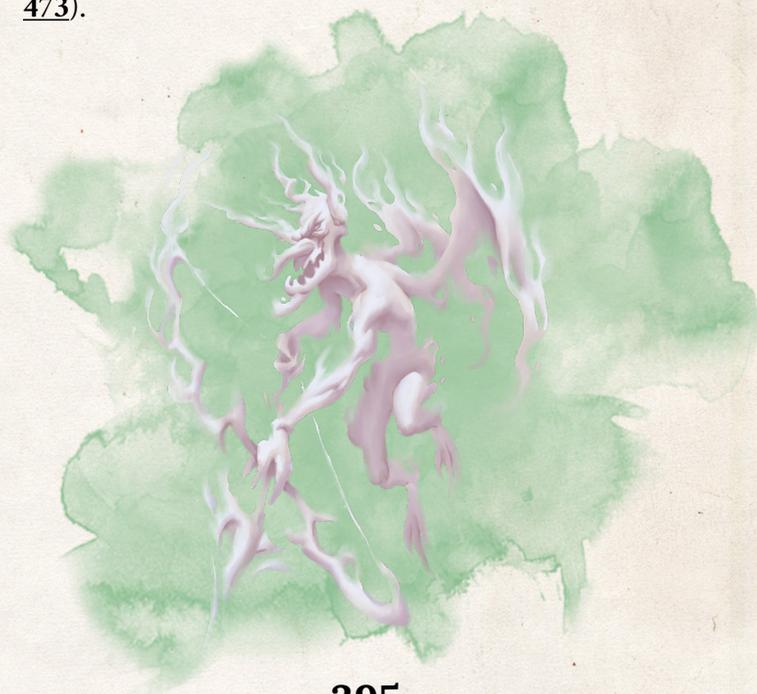
394

You press the symbol for steam and it clicks into place. The center of the door turns into a round portal blasting scalding air out of it. Steam curls out of the opening to another plane and coalesces into a steaming, leering shape.

It looks you right in the eye before opening its mouth to release a roiling cone of superheated steam.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, take 1D8 fire damage. Take half damage if you succeed.

If the fiery breath drops you to 0 HP, [go to 481](#). Otherwise, the steaming little beast attacks you ([go to 473](#)).



395

The temple erupts in intense, overlapping auras of magic. Like the rest of the city, magical energies are both omnipresent and incredibly potent. There are powerful abjuration, conjuration, and transmutation elements wherever you look.

But now there's something else permeating the air around you. It reminds you of necromantic energy, but it's not that exactly. If anything, it looks older and more primal. Like necromancy is the domesticated dog, and this is a feral wolf. You realize you're looking at the raw energy of the corruption you've felt as you approached the temple, and this is just the distilled version of it.

The power of it is like a punch in your gut, and nausea overwhelms you. Your concentration breaks and the magical energies around you fade away. You fall to your knees.

“All right, you’re all right,” Rija says, suddenly at your side. “I know that look. I tried it myself as soon as the door opened. It’ll pass. Can you continue?”

You let her know that you can and she helps you up. Gigar is visibly concerned as well, but he seems locked by his fear.

“Come,” Z’ka says. “Down. To under the under.”

The illness fades quickly and you follow your companions though the door at the foot of the stairs (**go to 389**).

396

You say to Gigar that the ghost is making you uneasy and it might be best to just leave.

“I trust your judgment to keep us safe,” Gigar says. “And the sooner we reach the bottom of the temple, the better, I think.”

You both leave the ghost to its strange ritual over the shimmering pool and exit the chamber through the opposite end than you entered (**go to 419**).

397

You decide to try Z’ka’s tablet, hoping that its holy writings will purge the corruption from your body.

He unslings the heavy stone document and holds it out for you, an impressive feat of strength in its own right. You and Rija both reach out and touch the carved stone and wait. You look at each other in confusion.

“Do you feel... anything?” she asks you.

Before you can answer, however, a roiling pain blooms in your wounds from the ooze. You can actually feel it consuming your body, the injury flickering with the same purple energy. Rija jerks her hand away and grunts in pain.

Take 1d6 necrotic damage.

If you survive the expanding wounds, **go to 459**. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 377**.

398

The steam mephit has left behind two stone cubes. One bears the mark of fire while the other shows a water symbol.

You can add a fire cube and a water cube to your inventory.

If you have a ration, you can consume it to gain the benefits of a short rest.

When you are ready to continue, **go to 392**.

399

Without any other viable options, you are forced to look around you. There isn’t anything obvious like blades or sharp stones, but there is a corner of the wall within reach that you could use to wear down the rope, given enough time and friction.

Roll a Constitution saving throw against DC 10. If you pass, **go to 367**. If you fail, **go to 438**.

400

This could only be an ice mephit. The small, devilish creature circles you before deciding it’s found a weakness. It attacks, its breath steaming as it shrieks.

ICE MEPHIT

Small Elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 21 (6d6)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

Initiative +1

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning, fire

Damage Immunities cold, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, Hit: 3 (1d4 +1) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) cold damage.



The ice mephit fights to the death.

If you reduce the mephit to 0 HP, **go to 380**. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 481**.

401

The chamber you are in is large enough to accommodate maybe a hundred people. Its walls are the same worked stone you've seen everywhere else in the temple, but it seems that the rot that permeates the air is affecting the stonework here as well. There are small piles of rubble strewn about the floor.

Dominating the wall facing you, there is another large stone door. On it are concentric rings of stone and bronze decorated with symbols. The outer ring has four symbols carved onto protruding square stones. The inner ring has symbols carved into indents. Scattered around the floor near the door are several piles of fine dust shimmering with faint magical energies.

The door is clearly equipped with a complex lock that you will have to open before you can proceed. And it's clearly solvable since Rija and Z'ka were able to manage it in quite short order.

Investigate the area around the door (**go to 457**), examine the door itself (**go to 474**), or try to operate the mechanism (**go to 432**).

402

Your clothing sizzles at the touch of the strange creature. You smell the acrid odor of the creature's acid as it dissolves a bit of what you're wearing.

If your armor is made of non-magical metal, reduce its AC bonus by 1 until you can get it fixed. Repairs can be done with smith's tools, the Mending spell, or by an expert smith.

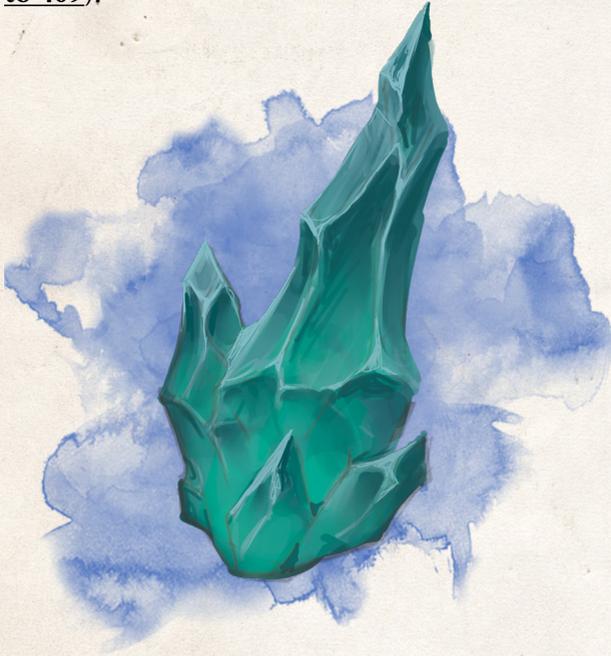
Return to 382 to finish the fight.



403

You thank Rija for the crystal and hold it in your hand. You feel its energies wash over you, cleansing your wound with a bubbling coolness. You try to resist the soothing waves, but you find that you just can't keep yourself upright. You take a seat by the wall and start to sag with exhaustion.

Eventually, your hand goes slack as the sudden influx of vital energy takes its toll on your body and you fall into an intense state of rest deeper than any sleep (**go to 409**).



404

The moment you use your divine senses, you are assaulted with the vileness of this place.

Take 1D8 necrotic damage. Roll a Wisdom saving throw against DC 15 for half damage.

There have been many times throughout the journey that the corruption of the environment has weighed on you, but here it is a toxin hanging in the air and polluting everything it touches.

You feel violently ill and waver on your feet, fluttering at the edge of consciousness for a moment as you stumble. But strong, clawed hands grip your arms and keep you upright.

“Bad place,” Z’ka says. “First down. Then up. Yes?”

You nod as Z’ka helps you right yourself. Though there is some concern on Rija and Gigar’s faces, Rija is

showing at least as much impatience.

“This place is affecting all of us,” she says. “Let’s fix what needs fixing, and maybe it will be more tolerable.”

You and your companions finish the descent down the stairs and through the doorway (**go to 389**).

405

Your adventure is taking a toll on your body and you don’t know if you can keep going.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get 10 or more, return to the last section with 1 HP. If you get less than 10, **go to 381**.

406

There is something Gigar isn’t telling you about what happened with the other two while you were unconscious.

The last part of the statement rings hollow, as if Gigar is reaching for something or twisting words. He doesn’t specify “sharing” what and the statement about “it being easier” seems odd. If Rija and Z’ka really wanted you both out of the way, why not just kill the two of you?

But at least you know now that Gigar is not entirely honest about the situation either, so you can keep an eye on him. Still, he is your companion on this adventure and he hasn’t given up yet (**go to 448**).

407

You land a final blow and the spirit blinks out of existence. With its disappearance, the bright light of the pool fades into a dim glow like an overcast sky about to rain.

When the ghost vanishes, a single Z’lethan crystal drops out of the space it had been occupying.

You can add 1 Z’lethan crystal to your inventory.

“That was remarkable!” Gigar exclaims. “Truly! That should not have even been possible! You must be blessed by the gods! I thought that you would have had to turn and run for sure.”

You think you may detect some sarcasm in Gigar's praise, but you can't be entirely sure given the context.

Floating on the afterglow of your victory, you look around and note that there is nothing else of interest in this room and it is a good time to move on ([go to 419](#)).

408

On your final blow, the steam mephit explodes in a blast of steam. You shield yourself from the clinging heat as you dance out of range as quickly as you can.

If you are attacking with a ranged weapon or a weapon with reach greater than 5 feet, you avoid the mephit's death burst.

If you are adjacent to the mephit, roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, you take 1D8 fire damage. If you succeed, take half damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 481](#). If you survive the death burst, steaming on the ground where the mephit was a moment ago, there are now two stone cubes ([go to 398](#)).

409

You find yourself drifting back to consciousness feeling rested and at peace. You take a deep breath and stretch, only to find that your limbs will not move.

Reality slams into you as you strain to move, wondering for a moment if you died while incapacitated by the crystal. Your eyes snap open, and you are clearly still alive. That's not the end of your troubles, however.

Your hands and feet are tightly bound with expert knots. They are connected with a short hobble pulling you into the fetal position. A strip of cloth gags your mouth, making speech and verbal spellcasting impossible. You are lying on your side looking at a similarly trussed up Gigar. His eyes are wide and he's shaking with fear, or possibly anger.

Rija and Z'ka are nowhere to be seen.

Break the ropes with brute strength ([go to 424](#)), try to wriggle out of the ropes ([go to 455](#)), or you could look around your environment for something to help you get loose ([go to 399](#)).

410

You tell Gigar that they will pay for this betrayal, you will be sure of that. No one does this to you without severe consequences.

"Is that so?" Gigar says. "Well then, I can't say I blame you. And I honestly share your indignation. I shall help you get justice for this offense, and others."

Gigar seems to be genuinely angry, possibly for the first time that you've seen. It makes sense, however, given that he was restrained easily despite being awake, but there's something more to his now being so bold with his feelings on the matter.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 475](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 446](#).

411

The wounds are behaving oddly, but you have no idea why. Yours are unusually painful and seem to be growing, but that's all you can tell.

Try healing Rija with a spell or magic item first ([go to 435](#)) or if you're injured you could magically heal yourself first ([go to 479](#)), or you can open the floor to other ideas ([go to 418](#)).

412

When you press the dust symbol, the space in the middle of the door dissolves into a swirling cloud of dust and debris. Two small, sharp-clawed hands emerge from the cloud followed by an elongated angular-featured face.

With a shifting, gritty chuckle the odd little beast opens its mouth to emit a blast of grit that stings your eyes.



Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, you are blinded. You may make another saving throw at the beginning of each of your turns to end the effect.

The small, gritty creature attacks you ([go to 365](#)).

BLINDED

A blinded creature can't see and automatically fails any ability check that requires sight. Attack rolls against the creature have advantage, and the creature's attack rolls have disadvantage.

413

You ready an attack against the spirit. It does not acknowledge your presence.

"No!" Gigar cries. "Are you mad?"

Decide that caution is for the meek and follow through with your attack ([go to 471](#)) or if you haven't done so already, reconsider and watch the ghost instead ([go to 385](#)). Alternatively, you could leave the room without interacting with the apparition ([go to 396](#)).

414

You tell Gigar that you are finished and that this is no longer worth the danger.

"I had thought more of you," Gigar says. "Frankly, I'm shocked. That you would come this far just to turn

back. Don't you want to continue until we have at least seen what is at the bottom of these ruins? I will not be turning back."

You can see that Gigar's mind is made up and he will not be leaving with you.

You can change your mind and continue on with Gigar ([go to 387](#)) or you can quit the adventure and live to fight another day ([go to 375](#)).

415

You find a few piles of unusual dust emanating different sensations: one hot, one cold, and one oddly dry. You aren't quite sure of the significance of the piles just yet, but they seem fresh so they might be linked to Rija and Z'ka's passage.

If you haven't done so yet, you can examine the door itself ([go to 474](#)). Or you can try to operate the mechanism ([go to 432](#)).

416

Ahead, you finally see an imperfection in the wall of the passage. Looking like it has buckled under some extreme pressure, a section of the wall has bowed out into some kind of fissure in the stone. And a dark gray-black liquid is seeping from the crack to slick the walls and puddle on the ground in a large, still pool. It smells foul—another sense experiencing the overbearing corruption of this space—and has a stomach-churning consistency to it, so it's certainly not water or anything else you might want to touch.

You can watch the unusual fluid from a distance ([go to 393](#)) or examine it up close ([go to 374](#)).

417

As you enter, you pay special attention to the construction of the space you're in. The stone is the same light-colored stone you've seen throughout Z'leth, only here it isn't being consumed by twisting plant growth. The carvings are still clear, the mural's colors still vibrant, and the whole space would be an architectural marvel if not for the miasma of corruption hanging in the air.

Roll an Intelligence (History) check. Roll with advantage if you have proficiency with mason's tools, and any bonuses from stonecunning also apply. If you

get 15 or more, **go to 467**. If you get less than 15, **go to 426**.

418

Looking at your companions, you ask what they think might be the best way forward.

“Well,” Gigar says, uncertainly. “The crystals can heal, right? Maybe try those?”

“Perhaps,” Rija says. “But we may need them later. I’d suggest that we simply endure. It can’t be that bad.”

“Holy writing,” Z’ka says, gesturing at the tablet he’s carrying. “Will clean.”

Whose idea will you try? Rija suggests enduring (**go to 371**), Gigar suggests using the power of Z’leth’s magic (**go to 390**), and Z’ka wants to try the tablet on his back (**go to 397**).

419

Despite being so old and sealed for so long, it is not even dusty down here. The passage twists and turns and angles downward slightly. You continue walking for what has to be hours, though the turns of the tunnel are getting tighter so it’s harder to see much farther ahead.

You hear some unusual sounds up ahead, including the sound of combat and then a heavy piece of stone grating and then slamming. Through the bottoms of your feet, you feel the vibrations of some huge mechanism rumbling to life and it can only be coming from up ahead.

You can proceed slowly and carefully (**go to 368**) or rush ahead (**go to 456**).

420

You prepare the killing blow, and only now does Gigar realize what you intend to do. He screams and darkness rushes into you from the temple air’s dark miasma.

Whether the killing blow lands, you’ll never know. A purple-white light and sensation of pure malevolence blast through you, leaving you twisting in blazing rage

and hate for what seems like an eternity, which may very well be your fate. You never return.

YOU DIED.

421

You see that the fluid is moving both up and down the wall, as if alive. In fact, it’s moving as a single large mass, just spread out over a considerable area.

It’s most likely a gray ooze, a common but dangerous denizen of dark places. But now it has sensed your presence, and it launches an attack on you (**go to 382**)!

422

As you wait and watch, you see nothing. There is no movement besides a slow shimmer of the white light. There aren’t even any structures where something could be hiding.

You’re as sure as you can be that there is nothing in the chamber except what you can see right now. Given it’s the only way forward, you lead Gigar inside (**go to 451**).

423

The wound is a medical anomaly for sure. What’s immediately obvious is that the flickering energy around your wounds is behaving like an infection, and it’s blackening the edges of your injuries at an alarming rate.

Roll a Wisdom (Medicine) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 483**. If you get less than 12, **go to 411**.

424

You strain against the ropes with all your might.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) check. If you get 17 or more, **go to 386**. If you get less than 17, **go to 442**.

425

You place a Z’lethan crystal into a depression of your choice: air, earth, fire, or water. Once set, the magical stone flares brightly with blue energy, blinding you momentarily.

Remove a Z’lethan crystal from your inventory.

When your vision clears, you see that the crystal has transmuted into the correct shape.

You can add one of the following to your inventory: air cube, earth cube, fire cube, or water cube.

You can repeat the process with more crystals as you wish. When you are finished using Z'lethan crystals, or you wish to try other methods of getting the keys, **go to 392**.

426

Looking around, something in the architecture seems to echo in other things you've seen or read, but you can't quite draw the connection.

"Do you see anything interesting?" Gigar says. He doesn't wait for a response before continuing, scribbling notes the whole time. "The architecture here is spectacular, and it seems to be of the same vein as other cultures in the region. Hard to say exactly which came first, however."

"If you two are finished," Rija says sharply. "I don't want to spend any longer down here than necessary."

You agree to move on, and follow your companions through the door below (**go to 389**).

427

You strike the magma mephit one last time. It drops to the ground and begins to swell. As its grinning face stretches, it bursts into a ball of fire and superheated stone.

If you are attacking with a ranged weapon or a weapon with reach greater than 5 feet, you avoid the mephit's death burst.

If you are adjacent to the mephit, roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 11. If you fail, you take 2D6 fire damage. If you succeed, take half damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 481**. If you survive the death burst, where the dangerous little creature was previously standing, there are now two stone cubes (**go to 384**).

428

Your weapon hisses as it strikes the ooze. You pull the weapon back as it drips black acid and releases a plume of sharp-smelling white smoke.

If your weapon is made of non-magical metal, reduce its damage by 1 until you can get it fixed. Repairs can be done with smith's tools, the Mending spell, or by an expert smith.

Return 382 to finish the fight.

429

You agree to stop for a short rest and let Gigar catch his breath.

If you have a ration and a drink of water, you can remove them from your inventory and gain the benefits of a short rest.

Gigar also pulls something to eat and drink from his pack and eventually nods off for a short sleep. He is clearly plagued by bad dreams, however, and wakes up terrified.

You don't fall asleep yourself as the oppressive corruption surrounding you seems to be almost waiting for the opportunity to sow terror in your dreams.

"Thank you," Gigar says finally, standing shakily. "Let's proceed."

You both gather your things and continue deeper into the temple, towards either your former companions or some unknown danger. The passage continues its gradual downward route until you reach a doorway leading to another kind of space (**go to 444**).

430

At the ghost's touch, you feel the last of your essence drain away. With it, your strength and your will to live.

You slump to the ground, your heartbeat slowing and breath becoming harder to draw. A deep, dark cold is leeching the warmth from your bones.

YOU DIED.

431

Gigar isn't telling you everything, but you don't have any idea what he is leaving out. It could even be that he has misunderstood the situation entirely.

While you don't have clarity yet on what happened while you were incapacitated, Gigar isn't letting that slow him down (**go to 448**).

432

You reach toward the lock and hear Gigar clear his throat behind you.

"Do be careful," he says. But that's it.

If you have an earth cube in your inventory, you can try to place that in the space marked with the same symbol (**go to 433**). Otherwise, you'll have to figure out how the lock works (**go to 392**).

433

The cube fits perfectly into its depression with a satisfying click. You jerk your hand back just to be safe, but the cube only lights up with an orange light. It pulses a few moments, as do the other depressions in their own colored glows. After about a dozen flashes of light, however, the earth cube clicks again and tumbles to the ground below the door.

It's unharmed, but the glow also fades from the door. You will need to find another way to unlock the door (**go to 392**).

434

You say that neither Rija nor Z'ka have done anything thus far to harm you all. If anything, they have always acted in the group's better interests. You want to give them the benefit of the doubt.

"You were unconscious," Gigar says, his lips twisting around his tusks in obvious scorn. "They were so casual about it. Like they weren't doing anything wrong. They just trussed us up like livestock for the slaughter and left us there."

Gigar's raw anger surprises you. You don't think you've seen him get anything other than annoyed before. So while you could understand him being

angry, it seems a little odd that this is what sets him off.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 475**. If you get less than 15, **go to 446**.

435

Gain Inspiration.

You give Rija some magical healing, and she looks expectantly at the wound. Instead of closing—or at least shrinking—the purplish energies flicker at its edges and it actually grows. Rija hisses at the pain of it.

"That... did not work," she says with a grimace.

So with no obvious options, you ask your companions for their thoughts (**go to 418**).

436

When you push the lava symbol, a portal opens in the center of the door. Hot air stinking of sulfur blasts your face and drives you back a step.

A long-nosed, pointed-eared head made of magma oozes out of the portal and the small elemental steps onto the stone floor. Bits of molten stone drip off it to hiss on the floor around it as it exhales a gout of flame directly at you.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 11. If you fail, take 2d6 fire damage. Take half damage if you succeed.



If the fiery breath drops you to 0 HP, **go to 481**.
Otherwise, the burning hot beast attacks you (go to **376**).

437

Gain Inspiration.

Gigar sees you approach the spirit and he reaches for you.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” he says. “We haven’t exactly had the best of luck with chance encounters.”

But you ignore him and try to touch the apparition, though your hand simply passes through it. However, the figure turns to you and gazes into your face. You see that this is an aged Z’lethan with a deep sadness to its expression. Whoever this was knows death.

“In the name of all that’s good,” Gigar says. “Step away! Let’s be gone from here!”

If you haven’t done so yet, you can observe the ghost’s actions (**go to 385**), attack it (**go to 413**), or leave the room undisturbed (**go to 396**).

438

It’s an exhausting ordeal, but you finally wear down the rope to the point that you can free yourself. You’re panting and your throat is parched.

Suffer 1d4 exhaustion damage. If you have a ration, you can take a short rest. If you opt not to spend the ration, or don’t have one, take another 1d4 exhaustion damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, take note of this section and **go to 405**.

If you manage your dehydration, you can go release Gigar as well (**go to 477**).

439

“Please, no! I can’t endure it any longer!” Gigar cries out. His face twists up into a grimace of pain.

He seems beyond speaking at the moment, though you can’t see anything that might be wrong with him.

You can cut him loose now (**go to 373**) or kill him while he’s helpless (**go to 391**).

440

When you press the stone with the ice symbol, the center of the door opens into a round portal from which blasts a gust of frigid air and whirling snowflakes. Coalescing out of the swirling cold, a sharp-featured face with glowing eyes emerges from the chaos.

As it climbs into the room with you, it lets out a low, threatening whistle that carries with it brutally cold air laden with shards of ice.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, take 2d4 cold damage. Take half damage if you succeed.

If the blast of cold air drops you to 0 HP, **go to 481**. Otherwise, the icy beast attacks you (**go to 400**).



441

You’re slammed to the ground with the force of the ooze’s pseudopod, feeling the acid start to burn. You’re almost relieved when you black out. At least your last experience won’t be being slowly digested alive.

YOU DIED.

442

You strain at the rope but the tight knots have no give in them at all. You push and strain until you feel something pop in a couple of your joints.

You have -1 on Dexterity saving throws until you take a short rest, due to your injuries.

You can now try to slip free of your restraints ([go to 455](#)) or look around your environment for other ways to set yourself free ([go to 399](#)).

443

The symbols in the depressions are quite clearly the four classic elements: air, earth, fire, and water. That wouldn't be helpful if you didn't suddenly see that the four outer symbols are mixtures of the classic elements into new composite elements.

So it's easy enough to see now that these symbols are steam, magma, dust, and ice. It's unclear what will happen if you press one of these buttons, but it can't be a coincidence that they are here.

Upon a closer look you see that the ring is engraved with patterns that differ from the otherwise angular decorative art you've seen elsewhere in the city. Instead, it includes soft flowing lines ending in sharp corners. Taken all together, these patterns seem to suggest devilish forms with sharp teeth grinning at you in a sly warning.

If you haven't done so yet, you can investigate the area around the door ([go to 457](#)). Or you can try to operate the mechanism ([go to 432](#)).

444

The doorway is framed with heavy stones carved with the now-familiar Z'lethan pattern of lines. These stones seem somehow brighter than the stones around them, as if bathed in some unseen light. The air inside smells clean and unspoiled in a way that you haven't experienced since before reaching the jungle above.

A quick glance of the room reveals that it is empty and instead of being lit by the walls themselves, a bright white light emanates from somewhere in the center of the room near what appears to be an altar of some

kind, but you can't see the source from where you're standing.

Seeing no threats, you could enter the chamber immediately ([go to 451](#)). Or you can hang back and observe a little longer ([go to 363](#)).

445

Upon your final blow, the dust mephit explodes into a driving cloud of gritty particles.

If you are attacking with a ranged weapon or a weapon with reach greater than 5 feet, you avoid the mephit's death burst.

If you are adjacent to the mephit, roll a Constitution saving throw against DC 10. If you fail, you are blinded for the next minute. You may make another saving throw at the beginning of each one of your turns to end the effect.

Out of the swirling dust, two hard objects clack onto the ground ([go to 476](#)).

BLINDED

A blinded creature can't see and automatically fails any ability check that requires sight. Attack rolls against the creature have advantage, and the creature's attack rolls have disadvantage.

446

It's unclear exactly why Gigar is so uncharacteristically angry, though you think you sense an undertone of embarrassment.

You leave your line of questioning at that as Gigar huffs and readjusts his pack with just a little too much vigor. He gives you a surly nod, and keeps walking ([go to 379](#)).

447

"These wounds will kill us if we don't heal them," Rija says. "We need to try something else."

If you haven't done so yet, you can either try Z'ka's tablet ([go to 397](#)) or one of the Z'lethan crystals ([go to 390](#)).

448

With a sudden realization, Gigar leaps to his feet looking around.

"My pack!" he cries. "I couldn't see them leave. Did they take my pack?"

You shake your head and point it out to him. You'd found it with your own gear.

"Oh, please no," he says. He snatches it up and rummages through its contents before producing the obsidian amulet. "Thank the old gods! They didn't find it!"

It's now clear that the winged serpentine figure carved into the amulet is meant to be the couatl, which ties the artifact not just to Z'leth but to this temple structure. Gigar snatches it up into his fist and closes his eyes.

He trembles for a moment, clearly experiencing the visions the item produces. With a series of rapid blinks, he opens his eyes and fixes his gaze on you.

"Remarkable," he says. "Yet more is revealed. Won't you try for yourself?"

You can also grasp the amulet ([go to 366](#)) or ask Gigar to describe it himself ([go to 463](#)).

449

You don't see anything of note inside, and as far as you can tell the chamber is empty. Without any other options left, you and Gigar go inside ([go to 451](#)).

450

Gain Inspiration.

You press the coin into a depression at random hoping for the best. Nothing happens but you feel a thrum of magical energy vibrating the coin.

It was a chance to think outside the box, but this time it didn't pan out. Luckily, it didn't backfire either.

You will have to try something else to open the door ([go to 392](#)).

451

You enter the room, and immediately the crushing sense of wrongness that hangs in Z'leth is gone. Without a doubt, this is hallowed ground and an oasis of calm in a dark place.

Enjoying the feeling of lightness that comes from being free of the corruption, you amble around the room. As you approach the central structure, you see that it looks at first like a circular altar, but is actually an elevated pool.

The pool shines as if in full daylight, even though there's none present. When you approach, you discover it's not water at all but a shimmering surface made entirely of shifting light. The light beckons you.

As you near the pool, a translucent form flickers into existence in front of you. It startles you, and Gigar cries out.



“Ah! What is it?” His surprisingly high-pitched yell echoes in the stone chamber.

It appears to be the ghost of a Z’lethan priest. It does not seem to notice you, or if it is aware of your presence it doesn’t seem to care. The form is lined with the same blue light you’ve seen countless times in the crystals of the city, but its form is insubstantial and whatever attention it has is focused on the scintillating lights in the pool.

You can observe the ghost (**go to 385**), try to interact with the ghost (**go to 437**) or try to attack it (**go to 413**).

452

You don’t recognize the fluid. It could be part of the strange Z’lethan architecture or some physical manifestation of the Z’lethan corruption.

Or it could be a monster, which seems the most likely explanation when it lashes a foul-smelling pseudopod at you (**go to 382**)!

453

You coax Rija to go first, saying you’ll wait and stand guard.

“That really isn’t necessary,” she says. “Z’ka and Gigar are here. But if you insist.”

She holds the crystal tightly in her fist, and its blue light intensifies to emanate from between her fingers, spreading up her arm and into the rest of her body. She sighs in relief as the wounds’ purple energies are overcome by the blue light.

As her eyelids flutter, she sags to the ground in a deep state of rest. Your own wounds start to throb, then sting, and eventually you feel them expand in increasing agony. You drop to your knees just as Rija is rousing herself.

Take 1d6 necrotic damage. If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 377**.

If you survive, you take your turn to use a crystal (**go to 409**).

454

You remove the gag from Gigar’s mouth and demand to know what happened.

“Please, cut me loose!” he says. “Of course, I’ll tell you but please! This is agony!”

You express that you’re not sure if that’s a good idea, and his eyes plead with you.

“I beg of you, adventurer. Don’t leave me like this.”

You can cut Gigar free (**go to 373**), leave him tied up (**go to 439**), or kill him and move on (**go to 391**).

455

You wriggle and writhe trying to free yourself from your restraints.

Roll a Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. If you get 17 or higher, **go to 462**. If you get less than 17, **go to 470**.



456

You dash forward without much regard for Gigar. Sprinting down the tightening spiral of the tunnel, between the speed and the increasing sense of vileness you even feel a tinge of nausea.

You know that the path has ended when you stumble into another large chamber with a huge doorway gaping open. Rija and Z’ka are striding into the door, but you can only see darkness beyond.

Despite being out of breath from the last run, you try to make it to the next door before it shuts but you just fall short as the massive stone door slams back closed.

A complex mechanism—clearly a lock of some kind—spins back into place as Gigar comes jogging and puffing up to you.

“Was it— Was... it them?” he says between breaths.

You say that it was and that you’re now a lock away from both of them ([go to 401](#)).

457

You turn your attention to the area around the door, with Gigar helping. His curiosity seems rekindled now that you are nearing your destination.

Roll an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check with advantage thanks to Gigar’s assistance. If you get 10 or more, [go to 480](#). If you get less than 10, [go to 415](#).

458

Gigar is applying some kind of astringent salve to your latest wound, and its sting has roused you, but only barely.

You now have 1 HP. If you want to drink a healing potion, you may do so now.

He helps you to your feet and you work to get your bearings ([go to 468](#)).

459

“Well, that didn’t work,” Rija manages after catching her breath. “And I’d rather not try that again. Any other ideas?”

If you haven’t done so yet, you can try a Z’lethan crystal as Gigar suggested ([go to 390](#)) or simply endure as Rija suggested ([go to 371](#)).

460

You now have all the cubes that match the door’s symbols, but with the lock in place this could be one of the last safe places to rest and recover from your ordeals for a bit before continuing on in pursuit of Rija, Z’ka, and whatever secrets they keep below.

“I don’t know about you,” Gigar says. “But this has been quite the ordeal. I could do with a meal, a sip of water, and a bit of rest. I’m... I’m not sure how much longer I can stay on my feet.”

If you have a ration, you can take a short rest.

Gigar sits for a moment, staring off into space. He’s toying with the obsidian amulet around his neck, and he’s twitching as if he’s carrying on a conversation in his head. But he remains quiet. You both sit in the dim silence for a bit, thinking back on the path you’ve taken to get here.

Whenever you’re ready, you can open the lock and proceed ([go to 484](#)).

461

You don’t reply to Gigar and just keep going. He picks up on the hint and also falls silent, but you get the impression that he is quietly seething in what’s likely the first display of genuine anger you’ve seen. His footsteps are just a little too heavy, and you hear the odd emotional snort from him.

You don’t let it slow you down, however, and continue on your way deeper into the temple behind Rija and Z’ka ([go to 379](#)).

462

You manage to slip your bonds and stand up, stretching your sore limbs. You see that your gear is still here, just set atop a high ledge you would not have been able to reach while tied up. At least you’re not defenseless.

Gigar looks up at you and holds out his bound hands as well as he can. You collect your belongings then go to free him ([go to 477](#)).

463

“Ah, well,” Gigar says, at least a little offended. “Your loss. It was quite the impressive ceremony. Presumably below the temple where some great power is at work. The Z’lethans were masters at bending powerful forces to their will.”

Gigar takes a moment to look around him at the blue-glowing patterns on the walls and then deeper down the tunnel.

“I so want to continue,” he says. “Just to see it with my own eyes.”

You can continue on with Gigar ([go to 387](#)) or decide that it’s time to cut your losses and finish your adventure ([go to 414](#)).

464

As soon as you back away from the pool of light, the ghost stops fighting and watches you retreat. Once you've put some distance between yourself and the focus of its attention, the spirit vanishes and the light from the pool dims to a white-gray glow.

"That was very fortunate," Gigar says. "I thought you would be killed for sure. Maybe it's best we leave before the ghost returns?"

Gigar practically drags you from the chamber onward toward the bottom of the dungeon ([go to 419](#)).

465

Gain Inspiration.

You refuse to let Gigar rest. He complains for a time, even affecting a limp for a stretch, but eventually falls quiet.

The silence stretches between you as you both march onward and down through a uniform tunnel until you reach a doorway leading to a large chamber ([go to 444](#)).

466

You are able to ascertain that the symbols along the inner ring are the elements air, earth, fire, and water. You can also deduce that the buttons around the outside ring of the door are mixtures of these elements to form dust, ice, magma, and steam.

How those things are connected, and any role they may play in opening the door is still a mystery, however.

If you haven't done so yet, you can investigate the area around the door ([go to 457](#)). Or you can try to operate the mechanism ([go to 432](#)).

467

Looking around, what you're seeing suddenly clicks as the influence of other ancient cultures. This architectural style has come up in other ancient ruins, especially in reptilian cultures.

You've seen diagrams of temples in the north dedicated to a serpent cult that incorporate many of the ceiling

elements. The patterns in the corners are straight off the altar to a powerful cult that believes in an ancient precursor to hydras that live deep in the lower planes of existence. Your eyes are drawn to the strange creature you see in the mural.

It's clear that the ancient influence of Z'leth has spread further than you'd have originally thought, and it's only become clear in the face of this pristine version of the local architecture. What is worrying, however, is the fact that these details are typically associated with death cults and devil worshippers.

You realize suddenly that you're gawking. Your companions are all looking at you gazing around with wonder and, while Gigar seems to share your interest, Rija has her hands on her hips and seems to be preventing herself from tapping a foot impatiently. Z'ka remains unreadable, however.

"Are you done playing tourist?" she says. "You can stick around once we're done here, but I don't want to spend another minute in these tunnels than I have to."

When you nod, she leads the group to the next doorway ([go to 389](#)).

468

Z'ka dispatches the ooze he's fighting at spear length, his bone weapon unaffected by the creature's acid. He is uninjured and is careful to avoid any splashes of acidic remains as his opponent loses all structural integrity and deflates against the floor.

Rija drives back the ooze she's fighting by swinging her climbing axe in front of her. Once she has the room, she unleashes a volley of magic missiles into the mindless creature. It is blown apart, but its remains spatter Rija and she cries out in pain.

In the aftermath, you check your wounds. The ragged edges of burnt flesh are flickering with the same purplish energy you saw at the door.

You point it out to Rija.

"Damn it, mine too," she says. "Gigar or Z'ka, any ideas what this is?"

“Never see above,” Z’ka says, shaking his head. “New problem.”

“It’s clearly an effect of the corruption here, given the color of the flickering light,” Gigar says. “But there could be more to it than that.”

You proceed a safe distance down the passage away from the dripping fissure and examine the oddly painful wound.

Use your medical knowledge ([go to 423](#)) or your expertise in the arcane ([go to 383](#)). Alternatively, you can ask what Gigar thinks about the wounds ([go to 362](#)).

469

It seems that the depressions are designed for very specific objects that act like keys in the massive locking mechanism. However, that doesn’t mean another ordinary object won’t work.

You can maybe jam a gold coin in there ([go to 450](#)) or insert a Z’lethan crystal into the depression ([go to 425](#)).

Or if you change your mind, you can go back to try some other way to open the door ([go to 392](#)).

470

You twist and turn but to no avail, you just wind up wrenching your joints painfully. Taking a moment to collect your thoughts, the fear on Gigar’s face seems to be growing.

If you haven’t tried it yet, you can still try to break the rope with brute strength ([go to 424](#)) or look around your environment for other ways to set yourself free ([go to 399](#)).

471

You ready an attack, and the apparition in front of you turns slowly but deliberately. It clenches translucent claws and prepares to defend itself. Gigar screams and cowers behind you.



GHOST

Medium Undead, any alignment

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 45 (10d8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

Initiative +1

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities Charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 11

Incorporeal Movement. The ghost can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

ACTIONS

Withering Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 17 (4d6 +3) necrotic damage.

At any time, you can try to escape from the ghost ([go to 464](#)).

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 430](#). If you defeat the ghost, [go to 407](#).

A NOTE ON DAMAGE IMMUNITIES

As this creature has a large number of damage resistances and immunities, please make note on the stat block how much damage your attacks will do and whether your spells and abilities will be effective.

472

The energies pulsing at the edge of the wounds are clearly necrotic, and they are inducing some kind of pestilence with each flicker. It's progressing quickly, and each pulse of purple light is accompanied by a sickening ache. The wounds are spreading, and you feel sure that it will kill you if not cured.

Some necromantic power is at work here, and you are quite certain that these wounds will not only continue to fester but will resist magical healing.

Try healing Rija with a spell or magic item first ([go to 435](#)) or if you're injured you could magically heal yourself first ([go to 479](#)), or you can open the floor to other ideas ([go to 418](#)).

473

With its sharp features and opposing forces of fire and water, this is clearly a steam mephit. Heat radiates off of the little extraplanar threat as it flits back and forth looking for an opening.

When it attacks you, it screams like a boiling kettle. It fights to the death.

If you reduce the mephit to 0 HP, [go to 408](#). If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 481](#).

STEAM MEPHIT

Small Elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 21 (6d6)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

Initiative +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 2 (1d4) slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) fire damage.



474

The door appears to be a complex mixture of moving parts and magical energies. The four depressions on the inner ring seem deep enough to each hold a similarly shaped object, while the symbols around the outer ring seem to be buttons or switches.

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Perception) check with advantage due to Gigar's help. If you get 10 or more, [go to 443](#). If you get less than 10, [go to 466](#).

475

Putting together the pieces, you realize that while Gigar is angry, he is also embarrassed. You can't tell why exactly, but you can see very clearly that he won't be forthcoming about it.

So instead of calling out his embarrassment, you instead ask him how he was overwhelmed.

"Well, it wasn't hard, now was it?" he snorts. "Those two were able to physically overpower me like I was a child. And when we're so close to my—I mean our goal."

Through his tone, it's clear that he is also jealous for some reason. His face is still reddened with the heavy mix of emotions he's dealing with, so you let it go before moving on ([go to 379](#)).

476

"Look!" Gigar cries.

Amidst the settling pile of dust, there are two stone cubes. One bears the air symbol from the door and the other, the earth symbol.

You can add an air cube and an earth cube to your inventory.

If you have a ration and 3 drinks of water, you can consume them to gain the benefits of a short rest.

When you are ready to continue, go to [392](#).

477

You approach Gigar where he is trussed up similarly to how you were. As you approach, he nods with his eyes wide in desperation. He holds his tied hands out to you as best he can, given his position.

You can cut Gigar free immediately ([go to 373](#)) or remove the gag so that you can talk to him first ([go to 454](#)).

478

The magical energies of this place are palpable. There are a number of ways in which you can use your own abilities to learn more about the environment.

You can use detect magic ([go to 395](#)), detect thoughts ([go to 372](#)), or divine sense ([go to 404](#)).

If you cannot use any of these abilities, you can still examine your surroundings ([go to 417](#)).

479

You attempt magical healing to reverse the spreading wounds, and the wounds' edges flare purple but do not get any smaller.

Your injuries do not heal at all, and you feel certain that further attempts at healing will just fuel the spread of the corrupted wounds.

At a loss, you open up the floor to other ideas ([go to 418](#)).

480

The thing that stands out about the area around the door is several piles of shimmering dust. Something about them seems fresh, though you don't suppose there's much of a breeze this deep underground that might scatter the piles over time.

Each pile feels unique as you approach, with one being cold, another warm, and the third unusually dry. Also, the first pile smells of the sharp ozone scent you associate with extreme cold, the second has the sulfurous stink of a volcano, while the final one smells of an abandoned home.

Poking around in the piles, you find a stone cube that is perfectly square on all sides and bears a symbol from the door that you associate with a rock or the element of earth.

You can add an earth cube to your inventory.

It's quite clear that these piles of dust were produced by the door somehow, maybe providing some way to open the lock.

If you haven't done so yet, you can either examine the door itself ([go to 474](#)), or you can try to operate the mechanism ([go to 432](#)).

481

You fall to the snickering mephit looking down at you from a slow hover. You try to rise, redoubling your efforts when you hear Gigar scream for your help, but you don't have it in you.

You cast your gaze to the locked door, and your last thought is of what might be on the other side. Now it seems neither you nor Gigar will ever find out.

YOU DIED.

482

There is a deliberation to what the ghost is doing in the glowing pool, especially the washing action in the pool of light.

You scoop the light into your hands, watching it flow like liquid. You perform the same ritual action as you see and feel a surge of strength and calm.

Gain the benefits of the Bless spell until you take a long rest.

Gigar looks confused. "What is it? What happened?"

You find you're unable to put it into words, but he also jerkily copies your movements, even "splashing" himself in the face from the shimmering light. He keeps a wary eye on the ghost, awkwardly sidling to the opposite side of the pool.

"I don't feel any different," he says. "But this has been... quite the experience."

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 369**. If you roll less than 10, **go to 378**.

BLESSED

Whenever a blessed character makes an attack roll or saving throw, they can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the attack roll or saving throw.

483

There is clearly some magic at work here, but what's more the wound appears to be decaying at an accelerated rate. It smells of rotting flesh and it seeps with pus already. You are certain that if it is not halted or reversed immediately, it will be lethal in a matter of hours. Or less.

Try healing Rija with a spell or magic item first (**go to 435**) or if you're injured you could magically heal yourself first (**go to 479**), or you can open the floor to other ideas (**go to 418**).

484

You set the four stone cubes into the matching indentations on the door and step back. Each stone's symbol glows as some hidden machine rumbles and grates to life. Air shines white, earth a warm orange, fire is a fierce red, while water is a gentle blue.

"Incredible," Gigar breathes. "It's truly incredible."

You step back, grabbing Gigar by a handful of clothing and pulling him away from the door as well. Who knows what new danger could be released by the huge obstacle. After a few seconds, the four cubes crumble to a fine dust that falls gently to the floor in small piles.

Then, with a rumble verging on a roar, the massive slab rolls off to one side to reveal stairs leading down into darkness tinted with blue light.

"Down there," Gigar says. "It must be down there. It has to be."

The orcish scholar takes the lead down the stairs. One step at a time.

Go to 485

CHAPTER 6

485

As you pass the threshold of the unsealed door, it rolls back into place, and it takes your eyes a moment to adjust to the change in illumination. The walls still glow with the same faint blue light as elsewhere around Z'leth, though here it seems to be struggling to remain lit.

The air is heavy and damp. It carries a nauseating stench that surpasses odor and makes you feel sullied to the core of your being. It reminds you of slimy things and childhood nightmares made real. And though you're vaguely aware the thought isn't really your own, you still wonder if you will ever be able to feel clean again.

Beside you, Gigar gags an oath before retching onto the stairs below him. When he rises, he spits from under the handkerchief he's holding up to his mouth and nose.

"It's dreadful," he wheezes. "Makes you wonder if this is all worth it."

There is only one way to go, and that is down into the dimly lit depths ([go to 501](#)).

486

"We haven't the time to waste on idle chit-chat," Gigar says. But he still points to a couple of objects in the room. "That's an altar. That's a larger-than-average Z'lethan crystal. What else do you want to know?"

He looks at you and, in the moment it takes you to formulate an answer, he nods as if you just confirmed something for him.

"As I thought," he says. "We really must catch up to Rija and Z'ka. Who knows what they're making a mess of down there. That is unless it's inconvenient to you."

If you haven't done so yet, you can examine your surroundings more closely ([go to 517](#)) or search for signs of Rija and Z'ka ([go to 535](#)).

Or if you're finished here, you can move on ([go to 511](#)).

487

You realize with crushing finality that you will die a hero. Despite your best efforts, you cannot rise. Instead, you sink lower into the ground to eventually come to rest.

You're aware of someone else near you, and you manage to open your eyes to see Rija kneeling over you and feel something hard pressed into your hand. It's a Z'lethan crystal, its glow still bright and strong.

"Well, that was something," she says. "The world will know what you did here."

And that is indeed something.

YOU DIED.



“There,” Z’ka says finally, pointing out of the wall of light. Straining to see, your eyes finally adjust enough to the shimmering barrier that you can see beyond it.

Gigar is standing on the precipice facing the beast. He’s using one hand to hold his handkerchief over his mouth against the smell. On the other hand, he has the cord of the obsidian medallion wrapped tightly around his fist. His eyes are fixed on the towering monstrosity before him.

The beast is still scanning the room but has not yet looked down to see the miniscule figure set on a fragment of rock.

“No!” shouts Rija. “Gigar, no! Come back! Do not let that thing see you.”

If he can hear her, he gives no sign.

“Great prisoner of Z’leth!” Gigar yells. “Hear my call!”

The huge heads tilt slightly and they scan back and forth slowly, but it’s unclear if the creature even hears Gigar.

“No!” Gigar screams, a shrill ragged edge starting to creep into his voice. “I will not be ignored! This is my moment! The name Gigar Garantham will live in the history books as the man who tamed the beast of Z’leth.”

Gigar raises the obsidian amulet above his head, and it flickers with violet light.

“And I will not be ignored by a mindless beast! You will do my bidding! I command you! Bend to my will.”

The shimmer of energy seems to catch the undead head’s attention. It turns toward Gigar, slowly followed by the others.

“Gigar, for once don’t be an idiot!” Rija yells. “Come back! Leave that thing alone!”

Gigar’s grin widens and hysteria sparkles in his eyes. He says, “Of course you would say that. You want this power for yourself! You and your lizardfolk servant

came here for the same thing I did. But you lack the will... And this!”

The scholar holds the obsidian amulet aloft again. The heads lean in to examine the tiny being that is making such a noise in its lair.

“No power,” Z’ka roars at Gigar. He turns to Rija and lets loose a sharp string of panicked sounds in his own language. More quietly he tells her, “No power. Teacher.”

Gigar holds the amulet up in a shaking fist. The obsidian talisman shines with the same purple light that you saw on the temple door. The shine expands into a halo of power around the lone figure on the stone platform. All three of the beast’s heads turn toward Gigar, leaning in with bellowing sniffs testing the air for his scent.

“Back! Obey your master!” he cries. The beast rears back and Gigar turns to you, Rija, and Z’ka with a smug grin. “You see?”

But Rija is already on the move ([go to 521](#)).

489

The beast roars and a beam of energy streams through the air toward you. You are fortunate that the beast fired impulsively and a stalactite blocks part of the blast, but a potentially lethal beam is hurtling toward you.

You dive out of the way, using whatever other obstacles you can around you to further deflect the blast.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 10 or more, suffer 1 necrotic damage. If you get less than 10, suffer 1d6 necrotic damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 503](#).

If you survive, Rija calls out to you. “Get back inside the shield! I need your help here!”

You return to the safety of the shield, another blast slicing the air behind you as you dive through the field of light. You can now try to hold the crystals in place ([go to 508](#)) or try to drive the magical energies from the panel ([go to 504](#)).

490

You are overwhelmed by the raw power of the panel. You manage to redistribute most of it into the system, but it violently pushes you out of its flow. You have a sudden splitting headache and stars dance before your eyes momentarily.

Roll an Intelligence saving throw. If you get less than 12, suffer 1d6 psychic damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 524**.

“Let’s change,” Rija says. “Share the burden in the home stretch.”

Too dazed to put up much resistance, you agree. You can either physically hold the broken crystal together (**go to 502**) or try to distract the beast from outside the shield (**go to 532**).

491

As the energies released by the broken crystal slam into you, your fingers slip from its surface. Your vision swims and the ground rushes up to meet you.

“You all right?” you hear Rija call, but her voice is suddenly coming from a long way away. “Hey. Hey! Get up!”

And in the far distance, you hear the reverberating and triumphant roar of the beast beneath Z’leth. It is the last thing you hear.

YOU DIED.

492

You confront your former companions with their betrayal of tying you up and leaving you for dead in the halls above.

Rija looks genuinely confused, passing a look over you, Gigar, and Z’ka before saying, “But, didn’t Gigar tell you? Of course he didn’t.”

You realize that Gigar is standing directly behind you, putting you between him and Rija.

“You deserve the truth then,” Rija says. “The whole truth.”

Though Z’ka narrows his eyes at the orc trying to disappear behind you, Rija looks you in the eye as she offers an explanation (**go to 499**).

493

Each movement the beast makes is slower than the last, but its aggression has increased. It is now slamming its heads against the shield, screaming its rage in bellowing, gurgling cries.

You grasp the two halves of the crystal and press together. It resists, so you grit your teeth and set your shoulders.

“Ready?” Rija calls. You let her know that you are, and then she goes into a trance state at the panel. As she does so, you feel power slam into the crystal and it tries to jerk apart. Its glow intensifies, a blinding line of light emanating from the crack between the two sections. It pushes painfully against your straining hands.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) or Constitution check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 500**. If you get under 15, **go to 534**.

494

Rija works with the panel at the center of the platform, taking command of its magical energies. She is obviously in pain but does not let go.

“There’s not enough power,” she says in a faraway voice that is momentarily drowned out in another outburst of rage from the beast. As it quiets, she continues. “But I’ve added the crystals. There’s no more power. The enchantment is failing.”

“I make power,” Z’ka says. “The plan. Always the plan.”

Z’ka bobs his head at you, performs a deeper bow to Rija, and returns down the staircase below.

“Let him go,” Rija says. “He knows what he’s doing and I need you here.”

She starts speaking but the beast shrieks and a beam passes over the shield leaving a ringing in your ears and a purple after-image burned into your eyes. Rija flinches as sparks jump from the panel, but she collects herself quickly when she is unhurt.

“This is a two-person job,” she says. “One of us needs to operate the panel. It was designed to be intuitive over great expanses of time, but it still requires a guide for the magical energies being channeled. By all accounts it will become clear when you grip the panel, but that you’ll have to see for yourself.”

She then points at a pair of crystals seemingly made from a single stone but now split down the middle. They are set into the side of the machine. “At some time in the machine’s millenia of use, this crystal cracked. Now whenever the panel powers up, they repel each other and it takes a feat of strength to keep them whole until the charge is sufficient. Z’ka was to hold these, but now we need to do it.”

Then Rija points up at the wildly crisscrossing beams overhead. The beast obliges her with another roar as it splashes in its festering pool below.

“And I can do both of course,” she says. “But not with the beast flailing around like that. And certainly not if it overloads the panel again with a direct hit to the shield. But if you could distract it just for a few minutes, I could get the panel charged and the beast should go back to sleep. Of course that would require stepping out of the shield, but you can pass through it safely.”

You’re both distracted by another outburst from the beast, and another beam rakes the shield. But it’s smaller and weaker than previous blasts, so it seems that the beast doesn’t have infinite power.

“So what’s it going to be, adventurer?”

REMINDER FOR OFF-THE-PAGE ACTIONS

As you move into what appears to be an enormous challenge, remember that you have many resources available to you.

In other words, don’t forget about off-the-page actions to use inspiration, potions, crystals, heal, use spells (like Guidance) and abilities on yourself, or otherwise affect your chances of success in the on-page action.

Hold the crystal halves together with brute force until the magic can take effect (**go to 508**), distract the beast with your agility until the machine can take effect (**go to 496**), or assist the magical energies within the machine using the force of your will (**go to 504**).

495

You ask Gigar what he makes of the chamber.

“It seems to me a waste of time,” Gigar says. “It would be much better to simply move on.”

You’ll have to coax information out of him.

Roll a Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 513**. If you get less than 12, **go to 486**.

496

With a deep breath to steady your nerves, you step out of the protective embrace of the shield. It tingles slightly, but leaves you otherwise unaffected.

You can still see Rija within, gripping the broken crystal with one hand, the panel with the other and gritting her teeth with the pain of her burns, but she still spares you a nod.

Out of the corner of your eye, you see the heads slowly turn toward you. One of the heads that still has skin opens its mouth.

Make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If you get 10 or more, **go to 515**. If you get less than 10, **go to 489**.

497

You handily avoid the beast as its massive head grates and crunches against the stone. It snaps at you clumsily, but it’s so ponderous and bulky that it isn’t too difficult to avoid. One massive glowing eye catches your gaze. It burns with rage that is either completely mindless or transcends your idea of thought.

As it retracts slowly toward the main bulk of the creature, you dash through the space it has flattened to make for the safety of the shield before the beast readies another blow.

“That was closer than I would have liked,” Rija says. “But you’re keeping the thing off of me. Keep it up just a little while longer!”

You can see the three heads of the beast staring balefully down at the shield protecting you. You stretch and limber up for one more attempt at keeping the beast occupied while Rija finishes activating the panel ([go to 526](#)).

498

The power within the panel surges just as the beast strikes the shield with another energy blast. You feel your control slip for a moment and you forget yourself.

Roll a Wisdom saving throw. If you get 10 or more, take 1 psychic damage. If you get less than 10, suffer 1d6 psychic damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 524](#).

If you survive, your awareness returns with Rija’s voice echoing in your head. “Get off the panel! Let me take it!”

You release the Z’lethan machine and drop out of the flow of energy. You can now either hold the crystal in place ([go to 508](#)) or leave the protection of the shield to distract the beast ([go to 496](#)).

499

Rija explains to you that she was recruited by an ancient order that goes by many names. The Knights of Z’leth. The Feathered Shield. The Scaled Cult. Operating in secret, they are tasked with maintaining the prison for the beast trapped here in the cavern.

“We collect Z’lethan crystals that make it out of the city,” Rija says as she pats her belt, “so that we may return every hundred years to maintain the enchantment and keep an ageless evil entombed. We return the crystals, empower enchantments, and make sure that Z’leth continues to fulfil its purpose.”

The beast’s name is lost to the passage of time, if it even had a name to begin with. According to the legends passed down to Rija, it is older than even the

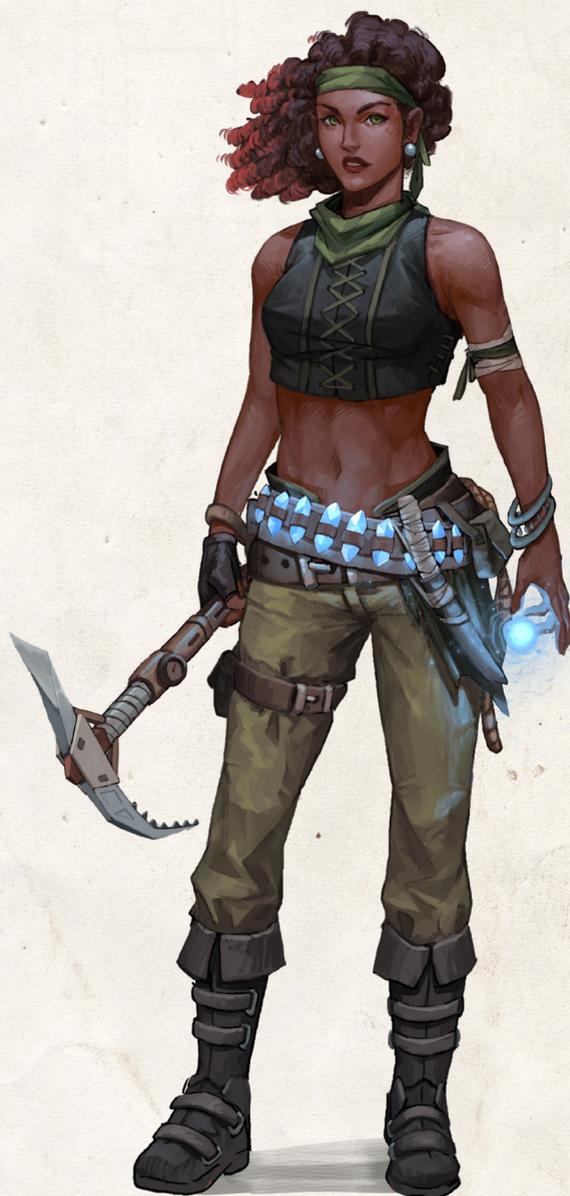
greatest dragons and possibly as old as the world itself. It is a force of pure destruction, mindless in its aim.

“Such power,” Gigar breathes. “And Z’lethans have shown they had even greater power than anyone had imagined to harness such a primal force.”

The room trembles and rumbles, cascades of loose dust falling from the ceiling and stinging your eyes.

“And I Z’leth,” Z’ka says, laying a clawed hand on his chest then making an expansive gesture to the walls around him. “This my people.”

Between Z’ka’s fractured common and Rija’s knowledge, you’re able to piece together that the lizardfolk still living in the jungles above, the descendants of those Z’lethans that escaped the city’s downfall, now act as caretakers of the city, driving off explorers and treasure hunters.



“There wasn’t enough power to sustain the city and the prison,” Rija says. “And the corruption continued to contaminate the city above. So the people left their home to protect the world.”

“Z’ka lucky one,” the warrior says. “Z’ka come home.”

“So I hope you can understand,” Rija says. “We left you above because this is our mission. It’s not yours, though we could never have made it without you. So we really did leave you above for your own protection, to spare you from the most dangerous leg of the journey, and to release you on our way back.”

You notice Rija and Z’ka’s preparations. Rija’s belt loops each have a crystal in them. Any loose crystals are neatly laid out, and other equipment is stacked and ready for use.

“A plan,” Z’ka says. “We know.”

Rija nods. “Those that came before us provided us with a detailed list of what needs to be done to maintain the integrity of this place and place the beast back into its slumber for another hundred years. There is little margin for error.”

Z’ka hisses suddenly and another tremor rumbles through the room. He looks around and says, “Gigar.”

Rija looks around, eyes widening in fear. Your own scan of the room tells you the same thing. Gigar is gone.

“We need to get up there,” Rija says. She hastily gathers up her crystals and gear, all semblance of organization gone. Z’ka simply hefts his spear and follows after her.

Rija and Z’ka look at each other and in some unspoken agreement sprint for the stairs. You follow after them. The stairs aren’t nearly as high as you’d expected, and you see light up above. Just before you crest the staircase, Rija turns back to you.

“Remember: follow the plan and it will all be ok. We’ve got this.” She gives you a nod and a crooked half smile before pushing you up the last few steps (**go to 533**).

500

The Z’lethan writing on the panel flares to bright life and the light of the shield brightens to an almost painful level. You approach Rija at the panel, shielding your eyes against the blinding light around you.

And then you see something shining in the near distance. In a patch of soot or dust that may once have been an ill-fated orcish scholar, you see the obsidian amulet sparkling against the ground. It feels like you have to wade through the light to reach it, but you get there.

You can add Z’lethan ritual amulet to your inventory.

And as your eyes begin to adjust to the light, you look out on the cavern and the beast it contains (**go to 542**).



Z’LETHAN RITUAL AMULET

Once per day, you can ask the amulet for guidance as if casting the spell Augury. The amulet can also cast Dominate Monster, but only a single use is left. If you cast Dominate Monster with this amulet, it becomes a non-magical obsidian amulet worth 40 gp.

501

At the base of the stairs, you and Gigar emerge into a round chamber with four large Z’lethan crystals evenly spaced throughout the room. Their glow is muted, even flickering between a faint shimmer and darkness, casting strange patterns on the smooth stone walls.

Here the lines that normally decorate the walls are instead set into the floor and all of them radiate out from a large, circular altar in a sunken area in the

center of the room. Deep grooves adorn the altar itself in the same angular line motif you've seen throughout the city.

A single exit is on the opposite side of the chamber from you.

Gigar shows little interest in the surroundings, though he does seem to be looking to the exit with what could be either anxiety or excitement.

You can examine the chamber (**go to 517**), check for signs of passage (**go to 535**), or confer with Gigar on next steps (**go to 495**).

502

Though you can't sense any difference in the air itself, you can see that the tempo of the beast's attacks has slowed. You take a steady grip of the broken crystal and nod to Rija. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes.

Power fills the crystal in your hands and it's pressing outwards. You squeeze tighter, ignoring your tired muscles.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) or a Constitution check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 522**. If you get under 12, **go to 518**.

503

Though just a glancing blow, the force of the beast's energy slams you into the ground. You're sure you're fine, but when you try to stand the world slips out from under you. Your face connects with the cool, smooth stone beneath you in a flare of pain.

But the throbbing pain soon begins to recede into the distance, and a velvety smooth darkness engulfs you. You sigh but find you no longer have the strength to draw breath back in. A pinprick of fear blooms in your mind before it is overwhelmed by the darkness. In the nearly forgotten distance, a trapped beast roars.

YOU DIED.

504

You reach out and gingerly grip the panel. As soon as you touch it, you feel its arcane power engulf you, but you're also gripped with an instinctive knowledge of

what to do. It's like Gigar's amulet, but deeper. You don't just see but know what to do next.

With your newfound skill, you cast your mind out to wrestle with the complex arcane energies swirling around you as Rija grips the crystal and indicates her readiness with a nod.

Make an ability check using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

If you get 10 or more, **go to 509**. If you get less than 10, **go to 498**.

505

You rush to Rija's side along with Z'ka. You examine her wounds quickly, and you can see that she has been badly burned all over her body. Her clothing and gear are all intact, however, so it almost looks like she burned from the inside out.

At your touch, however, she groans and tries to sit up. Realizing she can't, she reaches out a hand each to you and Z'ka.

"This is embarrassing," she growls through her teeth. "Bring me back over to the panel."

You and Z'ka help her over together and she grips the edges of the device to steady herself. She takes a deep breath and seems about to say something when the beast lets out a shrieking, gurgling roar.

As you watch, the creature's three heads flail around the cavern, raking it with more of the purple-white energy blasts.

"We need to put a stop to this," Rija says. She pulls a vial from her pouch, pulls the cork out with her teeth, and swallows the contents of a healing potion (**go to 494**).

506

Your sprint away from the head results in just a glancing blow instead of instant death under tons of slimy flesh, but that's enough to send you sprawling with considerable force.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 12 or more, take 1 bludgeoning damage. If you get less than 12, suffer 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, [go to 512](#).

As the beast's head retracts, you use the space to sprint back towards the shield where you dive in to avoid any follow-up attack. None comes, but you still slam into the stone.

"Oh good, you're back," Rija says. "I could use some help with this." Her half smile shows that she also realizes that this may not be the time for sarcasm. You can take over at the panel for Rija ([go to 538](#)) or hold the broken crystal in place ([go to 502](#)).

507

Your investigation reveals more about the chamber.

The altar has all the hallmarks of a sacrificial altar, so the grooves are most likely there to drain blood away from a ritual sacrifice. There are no obvious drains below the altar, however, so it's unclear where any liquids would go.

The crystals in the corners of the room are arranged in such a way to suggest the cardinal directions of the compass, and each is inscribed with a unique symbol. You think you identify north, but given how much you've been turned around since beginning your underground journey, there is no way to be certain.

Upon inspecting the crystals, you see that their light is failing and there are what appear to be dark voids floating through them. The blue glow flickers and stutters, though at its brightest you can see the familiar Z'lethan line patterns flare to life on the floor.

The corruption here is palpable, a dark weight that permeates the air around you ebbing and flowing. And though the crystals are flickering constantly, there is a deeper rhythm to their dimming and brightening, almost like the long breath of some huge beast.

"Are you quite finished?" Gigar asks, sidling towards the exit. "Or is there somewhere else you'd like to dawdle?"

If you haven't done so yet, you could still search for signs of Rija and Z'ka ([go to 535](#)) or ask Gigar about what he thinks ([go to 495](#)).

Or if you're ready to move on, you can leave the altar chamber ([go to 511](#)).

508

Rija nods to you and she grips the panel in front of her. She is immediately outlined with blue light similar to the shield protecting you. You grip the broken crystal and squeeze as tightly as you can. The beast is raging, and every time it roars or stamps a massive foot, the crystals in your hands jump.

It isn't long before they start to vibrate with the power that Rija is directing into the machine.

Roll a Strength (Athletics) check. If you get 10 or more, [go to 540](#). If you get under 10, [go to 523](#).



509

You feel the power being channeled in the Z'lethan machine respond to your will. You successfully divert power into unseen devices scattered through the cavern. You feel them buzz to life with a deep satisfaction, as if the energies here are alive.

"The crystal is charging!" Rija says while she's holding the split together. "Keep going!"

You release the panel for a moment to take a deep breath and clear your mind before you proceed ([go to 538](#)).

510

You feel a deep terror rising up in you, but you manage to choke it off before it overwhelms your reason. The fear settles into the back of your mind,

though, constantly reminding you of your own insignificance in the face of the beast's power.

You strain to see through the shimmering light where Gigar may be ([go to 488](#)).

511

You and Gigar step through the exit deeper into the tunnel. The air is thick with corruption, leaving you on the edge of gagging the entire time.

As you step over the threshold into the next passage, the floor rumbles and shakes. Moments later, a deep bellowing roar rushes down the passage with enough force that you feel your clothes ripple and see Gigar's facial hair dance in the breeze. The air carries a fetid stink of things that long ago rotted away, decomposing into something far less wholesome.

"Was— Was that it?" Gigar asks from under a hand covering his mouth and nose.

The trembling caused by the reverberating roar continues long after it's gone silent, its rage and malevolence lingering in your mind. You have no answer to give Gigar.

Instead, you simply continue on with him following uncomfortably close on your heels. The way ahead leads down a long corridor dimly lit with flickering and fading Z'lethan patterns ([go to 525](#)).

512

As you tumble to the ground under the beast's great weight, your head smacks into the unyielding stone under you. Everything lurches nauseatingly to one side, which is not helped by the wretched stink of the nearby creature.

The massive glowing eye of the beast sees your prone form and you see a semblance of joy spark in the malevolent orb. The head rears back, inhales like a bellows, and opens its mouth to emit a beam of purple-white light.

When you're engulfed by the beam, it doesn't even hurt. You simply float away into bright nothingness, as if you never were.

YOU DIED.

513

Gigar sighs and looks to the exit, before turning his attention to his surroundings.

"If you truly feel this is necessary," Gigar says as he looks around. Finally, he gestures at the altar. "Well, that's clearly a sacrificial altar. Given this is a temple for the ancient Z'lethans—a carnivorous and aggressive people—I'd have to guess blood sacrifice."

Then he gestures at the surrounding crystals that are flickering. "These are clearly placed in positions of power, though why or what they do I have no idea. And it does not seem especially important right now."

He turns to you and adjusts his spectacles. "I trust that is sufficient to move on? We really should be going."

If you haven't done so yet, you can examine your surroundings more closely ([go to 517](#)) or search for signs of Rija and Z'ka ([go to 535](#)).

Or if you're finished here, you can move on ([go to 511](#)).

514

You feel the machine drawing more power from the crystals Rija added, and it flows smoothly through the cracked apparatus that she is holding together for you. There is an awakening in the cavern around you, a network of devices that are playing a song that you can only hear while awash in the power around you.

It is soft and sweet, clearly a lullaby, and the beast hates it. It redoubles its rage, beams flashing around it and several slamming into the shield. Your protection holds, but your concentration is broken momentarily.

"Once more should do it!" Rija says. You look at her and see that the hands gripping the crystal are blistered and blackened. She shakes her head. "It's nothing I can't handle. Do it!"

You recenter yourself to dive back into the magic energies of the cavern one last time ([go to 520](#)).

515

You dive out of the way of several beams slicing through the air. The sensation around them isn't hot

or cold, but an emptiness that hungers for light or warmth. You don't want to find out what it feels like to be caught in one's path.

You jump into the protective embrace of the shield to catch your breath for a moment. Though Rija is still straining between the broken crystal and the panel, she looks up and meets your eyes.

"Keep it up," she says. "We're not quite there yet."

You loosen up and get ready to emerge again into the open (**go to 532**).

516

You struggle to stay at least on your knees even if you can't get to your feet. But the ground keeps trying to slip away from you and send you tumbling down. You think this is the end.

But then Rija is there, pressing something small and hard into your hand. Darkness rushes in from the edges of your vision.

Suddenly, you are awake and in your hand you see the dull blue stone of a spent Z'lethan crystal.

Gain the benefits of a short rest.

"That's better, right?" Rija says and you agree.

And she helps you to your feet to witness what you have accomplished (**go to 500**).

517

You examine your surroundings for any clue as to the chamber's role in the temple complex and how it might function. You start with the altar and move outwards.

"Explore if you must," Gigar says, "but be quick about it. We have more important things to do."

Roll an Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Investigation) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 507**. If you get less than 12, **go to 527**.

518

The crystals you're trying to hold together vibrate as the two halves fill with power. Little wisps of blue

energy leak out from the crack and your hands start to tremble more than can be blamed on the device's vibrations.

The beast lashes out physically against your shield, and the loud boom startles you. Your hands slip and the crystal separates by a fraction of an inch. Before you can clamp it shut, magical force snaps out with a fiery heat.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get 12 or more, you take 1 fire damage. If you get less than 12, suffer 1d6 fire damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 491**.

"Give yourself a break," Rija says. "Let's switch it up."

She motions you away from the broken crystal, and your hands at least are grateful. You can now take Rija's place at the panel (**go to 538**) or step out into the open to distract the beast while Rija handles both the panel and the broken crystal (**go to 532**).

519

Though faint, you do find some signs that Rija and Z'ka passed through the chamber. You find areas where dust or debris was disturbed on the floor and there are scratches in the wall where one of them bumped into the stonework with a weapon or item, probably drawn and at the ready.

Interestingly, one of the places where the dust is disturbed is the top of the altar. It's as if someone had cleared the dust to read some meaning in the patterns there. Or a hand was reverently passed over the surface of the ritual object.

Based on the signs, the other two passed this way a matter of hours ahead of you, so they have a head start, but not as much as you would have expected.

"Did you learn anything?" Gigar asks, but he doesn't wait for a reply. "Because we really must continue onward."

If you haven't done so yet, you can investigate the rest of the chamber to figure out its purpose (**go to 517**) or speak to Gigar to get his insights (**go to 495**).

Or if you're ready to move on, you can continue forward after Rija and Z'ka ([go to 511](#)).

520

You reach out to the panel for what you hope will be the last time you or Rija will need to do so.

As soon as you grip it, you feel the white-hot energies of the room slam into you while at the same time a choir of soothing melodies hums in the air around you. An urge rises up from the depths of the machine itself to conduct these melodies in an orchestra, and you follow the ancient enchantment's guidance.

You are dimly aware that the beast out in the cavern is bellowing wet gurgling roars into the air, but even the echoes of the beast's frustration seem lethargic and slow.

Make an ability check using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

If you get 15 or more, [go to 500](#). If you get less than 15, [go to 531](#).

521

The beast hasn't moved from its risen position, not even in its facial expression, but the air is suddenly charged with menace.

Rija darts for the panel of glowing runes and gazes at it in frustration. "Z'ka! Can you read this? We need to push the shield out to cover Gigar."

Z'ka bounds over, staring at the panel but shakes his head.

"I have to try," Rija says through gritted teeth. Then she addresses you. "Keep an eye on Gigar! Make sure he doesn't do anything else stupid."

Rija drops to her knees beside the panel and starts slotting the crystals from her belt into depressions on the base. She's shaking her head and muttering about needing more power. Z'ka is pacing the perimeter of the shield near Gigar, cutting glances between the scholar and the now eerily still monster.

However, Gigar seems oblivious to the urgency around him. He has started to laugh. "You are mine! You will be my vengeance against a cruel world that

denied me the respect I am due."

Gigar points at you all and the beast starts to move. The skeletal head rears back and fixes the orbs of light in its eye sockets on the platform. Gigar looks up at it in a state of rapture.

The head's jaw swings open and a soundless purple-white beam of light engulfs Gigar. His form is briefly outlined as a shadow, then a stunned skeleton, and then in the afterimage of the light.

The stone is left smooth and clear as if never touched. Gigar is obliterated without a trace.

Rija pauses her work for a moment and Z'ka ceases his pacing. A horrifying stillness hangs in the air for a moment.

"That was not part of the plan," Rija says.

Then all three heads unleash their beams across the cavern. Though the beams themselves are silent, they crackle and roar where they meet the walls and the shield protecting you. Z'ka jumps back from the barrier as it flickers, and arcs of energy rush up and down the wall. But it holds.

However, the feedback proves too much for the panel. The crystals Rija has placed flare to violent life, and she is caught in a whirl of blue energy blasts. She is blown free from the panel, sliding up to the edge of the shield where she lies still and smoking.

Z'ka is stunned into immobility. He looks to you for guidance. You can tell Z'ka to rush to Rija while you work on the panel ([go to 528](#)) or you can go check on her yourself ([go to 505](#)).

522

Though the crystal tries again to jerk out of your hands and separate, you manage to keep it together. You feel a little heat starting to scorch your palms, but it's nothing that you can't handle and it hardly even registers.

"You may have to dig deep on this last one," Rija says. "The entire system will start back up, and there may be some blowback energies hitting the panel. Are you ready?"

You rub your hands together and let Rija know you're ready ([go to 493](#)).

523

You aren't able to hold the crystals in place and they split apart. A discharge of magical energy leaps from the space between them and slams into you.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get more than 10, suffer 1 force damage. If you get less than 10, suffer 1d6 force damage.

If the damage reduces you to 0 HP, [go to 491](#).

Otherwise, Rija turns to you and yells, "It's not working! Try something else! I'll take over here!"

You can take over from Rija at the panel ([go to 504](#)) or step outside the shield and try to distract the beast ([go to 496](#)).

524

The melody of the magical energies around you distort with a wail that you quickly realize is you. Your mind crackles with the terrible, rushing power that you tried and failed to control.

As your mind scatters into the dissonant waves of power, you realize suddenly that you are not alone. A multi-headed shadow of silence looms out of the noise, growing larger and larger until it consumes you in its darkness. It's possible that you scream, but you'll never know.

YOU DIED.

525

You and Gigar proceed down the corridor as carefully and quietly as you both can, allowing you to hear voices up ahead. You signal to Gigar to keep quiet as you both continue to creep forward.

This corridor eventually opens up into a square chamber. Its walls bear the glowing Z'lethan motifs you've seen everywhere else, but here they are denser

and more elaborate. Though not very large, this space resonates with a sense of finality. At the opposite end of the room, a staircase leads up, though you can't see where it goes.

Rija and Z'ka are speaking at the base of the stairs, tension obvious in their stances and voices.

"So the wall panels here and here need to be primed," Rija says, and Z'ka nods as she continues. "And that should be the last of it here before going up into the cavern and placing the crystals in the panel there."

"Yes," Z'ka says. "Power here for shield. Power there for sleep. Then I—"

Rija holds up a hand for quiet. She closes her eyes and whispers an incantation, and you feel a probing sensation brush against your mind.

"You can come out," she calls down the hall to you. "You're not supposed to be here, but that can't be helped now."

Gigar steps out first, his face darkened with anger, and you follow close behind.

You can confront them about leaving you behind ([go to 492](#)), or demand to know what is happening ([go to 539](#)).

526

You emerge into view of the beast, and all three heads spot you immediately. The huge creature is moving sluggishly, and you hear a low, melodic hum hanging in the air. The skeletal head is beginning to droop and the others are blinking milky membranes over their eyes.

But all three heads are focused just on you. With monumental effort, all three open their mouths and release ragged but whip-fast energy blasts at you. The beams crisscross their way toward you.

Make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 500**. If you get less than 15, **go to 536**.

527

You don't get any meaningful insight from the chamber except that the crystals around the room are definitely failing. They flicker between brightness and dimness at regular intervals of nearly a minute.

The altar is clearly important to whatever happens in this room, but it's not clear exactly what it does. It likely has some ritual significance, possibly for sacrifices or some other form of offering, but you can't figure it out.

"I hope that was worth the wait," Gigar says. "If there's nothing else too pressing, can we continue?"

If you haven't done so yet, you could still search for signs of Rija and Z'ka (**go to 535**) or ask Gigar about what he thinks (**go to 495**).

Or if you're ready to move on, you can leave the altar chamber (**go to 511**).

528

Gain Inspiration.

Z'ka darts to where Rija is lying smoking on the ground. He gingerly turns her over, and she groans. They confer quietly while you look over the panel. It's still throbbing with the overload that hurt Rija, but it seems to be working correctly now. However, you can't make any sense of it. Gigar's amulet may have contained a vision explaining the controls, but the codex is now vaporized along with him.

"Step aside," Rija says weakly as she approaches. Z'ka is propping her up as she limps toward the mechanism. She's covered with burns and trembling with the pain, but she manages to disengage from Z'ka and hold herself up at the panel.

She seems to be about to speak when an energy beam sweeps across the shield with another crackle of energy. Rija flinches and the beast roars out in the cavern.

"This will not do," she says (**go to 494**).

529

The panel begins emanating bright blue light from its intricate Z'lethan writing as the shield around you brightens to a blinding intensity.

Hurt and exhausted, you stumble and nearly fall. Luckily, Rija slips next to you and supports you enough to keep you on your feet. Unsteadily, you thank her and let your eyes adjust to the light so that you can watch the scene in the cavern unfold (**go to 542**).

530

You drop to your knees, the weight of the world on your shoulders. Everything slows down and grows quiet. The beast's roars elongate into a long, low groan that shakes you to your core.

Then, as if from deep underwater, you hear Rija's voice crying out to you.

"Get up!" she yells. "You're not done yet! Get up, damn it!"

Roll a death save. If you get 10 or more, **go to 516**. If you get less than 10, **go to 487**.

531

The melody layers and aligns into a siren's song that tries to draw you into its depths with the promise of rest and safety from all harm. Part of your psyche is being shredded into ragged strips by the power of the magic you are directing.

But with a final wrench, you tear your mind out of the seductive trap.

Roll a Charisma saving throw. If you get 15 or more, take 1d6 psychic damage. If you get less than 15, suffer 2d6 psychic damage.



If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 530**. If you survive, **go to 529**.

532

You step out into the open again. The beast is starting to slow, but at least one of its heads seems to be watching you. It's one of the ones that still has its flesh, but that doesn't make you feel any better.

As soon as you're clear of the shield, the head that's aware of your presence stretches forward in a lumbering strike. It's not especially fast, but it covers so much ground that you need to move quickly to get out of the way.

Make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check. If you get 12 or more, **go to 497**. If you get less than 12, **go to 506**.

533

You emerge onto a worked stone platform in an enormous natural cavern that stretches off so far into the distance that you can't be sure where it actually ends.

Rija and Z'ka are standing on the platform side by side, gazing out through a glowing blue field of energy. Rising up out of the ground in front of them is a plinth of stone criss-crossed with the Z'lethan symbols you've seen throughout your journey. Tense and obviously afraid, they are captivated by the cavern and its inhabitant.

Looming out of the darkness is a massive, multi-headed beast taller than most towers. It gives off a pestilent stench that roils your stomach and actually feels heavy on your shoulders. Its skin is slick, a rancid purplish gray, and dripping with slime as it moves its three heads back and forth searching for something. Anything. Maybe you.

But as you collect yourself enough to take in the entirety of the creature, you note that it is not entirely covered with skin and slime. Bare bones glisten with water and other fluids in a leg and in patches across the building-sized body. Even an entire head and neck is rising up in a hideous place between life and death, its little remaining flesh dripping off it in putrid streamers that you can smell in your imagination.

As your own gaze rises up the beast, you feel you meet its ancient eyes for a moment as they continue their slow scan of the cavern. You're nearly overcome by the level of hatred and rage contained in those eyes. The core of your being vibrates with the knowledge this is a force of destruction as old as creation itself.

The cruelty of the beast worms its way into your mind despite it not even knowing you are there. The weight of its malevolence feels like it is pushing you to the brink of madness.

Roll a Wisdom saving throw. If you get 20 or more, **go to 510**. If you get less than 20, **go to 541**.

534

The monster in the cavern lets out a long, rumbling wail as the crystal you're holding shrieks like a boiling kettle. You manage to hold onto it, but only barely. A plume of pure energy bursts from the crack just as it snaps into place.

Roll a Constitution saving throw. If you get 15 or more, suffer 1d6 lightning damage. If you get less than 15, suffer 2d6 lightning damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 530**. If you survive, **go to 529**.

535

Though you know you're unlikely to find any sort of trail in the stone tunnels of the underground temple, you still look for signs of Rija and Z'ka. Any hint of what they're planning could be helpful.

"They're clearly just up ahead," Gigar says as you start looking around the room. "But if you feel it's a good use of your time, go ahead."

Roll a Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check. If you get 15 or more, **go to 519**. If you get less than 15, **go to 537**.

536

You avoid most of the beams, though you stumble at the end. One of the beams catches you across the body, and you do your best to twist away from the sharp, sucking pain it causes.

Roll a Dexterity saving throw. If you get 15 or more, take 1d6 necrotic damage. If you get less than 15, suffer 2d6 necrotic damage.

If you drop to 0 HP, **go to 530**. If you survive, **go to 529**.

537

Among the worked stone of the underground temple, you can't find any evidence of Rija and Z'ka's passage. You know that they must have come this way as there's no other way through, but they left no signs that you can see.

"We have no time to waste," Gigar says. "Can we proceed?"

If you haven't done so yet, you can investigate the rest of the chamber to figure out its purpose (**go to 517**) or speak to Gigar to get his insights (**go to 495**).

Or if you're ready to move on, you can continue forward after Rija and Z'ka (**go to 511**).

538

You grasp the panel rising up out of the floor. Your grip on the machine feels strong. There is some semblance of order to the magical energies flowing through it, but they still need guidance. Luckily, the font of knowledge already installed in the panel shows you the way.

In a wash of power, you see without seeing and reach into the matrix of arcane energies to bring the enchantment to life. You are only distantly aware of the thrashing of the beast beyond the shield, despite the fact that its snarls and roars make the ground tremble.

Make an ability check using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

If you get 12 or more, **go to 514**. If you get less than 12, **go to 490**.

539

You demand to know what is happening. This is related to the couatl's mission, but how?

"Up those stairs is the reason we came," Rija says. "The real reason. It's why I'm here in the first place, and

why Z'ka left his home above. We were on this path long before we ever came to Z'leth."

Z'ka nods and gestures at the tablet on his back. Then he points at the stairs.

"It is the under the under," he says. "It must sleep."

"I know it's a lot, but we need to explain," Rija says (**go to 499**).

540

The broken crystal pushes back against you, but you manage to keep it together as Rija channels power through the machine. Both halves glow as it's infused with energy, with a hard bright line along the perfectly straight crack.

You release the crystal for a moment to shake the tension out of your arms before indicating to Rija that she can continue (**go to 502**).

541

Terror overwhelms your senses and you're rooted to the spot, staring up at the towering creature that could end you without a thought.

You are now frightened (you have disadvantage on ability checks and attacks). You will continue to be frightened until you roll a successful saving throw. Whenever you go to a new section, you can roll a Wisdom saving throw against DC 15 to overcome your fear and remove the frightened condition.

Despite your terror, however, you stay the course alongside Rija and Z'ka (**go to 488**).

542

Either the light of the shield is beginning to fade or your eyes are adjusting to the glare, but you can clearly see what's happening in the rest of the cavern.

The beast in the pool is straining against some unseen force. The waters around its body and legs are roiling, and at first they look as if they are boiling but they are actually coming alive to restrain the beast and pull it down.

As the glow of the shield subsides, the water takes on its own blue light. Then you hear a hum in the air that

resolves into low, dulcet tones echoing through the chamber like a heavenly choir. As the tempo speeds up, the beast's thrashing becomes increasingly sluggish and labored.

As you watch, what you had thought were stalactites hanging from the cavern ceiling also begin to glow with the same blue as any other Z'lethan crystal. These are just of a size you haven't seen since the roofs of the city above. The blue glow fills the cavern with calm, muted light. The beast hisses at them, but cannot help but lie down in the roiling waters.

The three heads eventually fall one by one with huge splashes that spray your face with the disgusting water. The skeletal head is the last to succumb, as it fights the urge to sleep for perhaps another hundred years.

Rija is standing next to you, watching alongside as the beast finally stills, the music of the crystals fades, and the light eventually returns to normal. In the gloom,

you could mistake the beast for just another mound of glistening stone, its deep and guttural snore the sound of waves breaking on some unseen shore.

Rija sits down on the ground with a sigh, gazing out at the cavern. She stays long enough that you eventually join her, sitting in silence for what seems like an eternity as your heartbeat slows back to normal and your adrenaline stops pumping. With the lapping of the pool far below and the blue gleam of the crystals, the space has become peaceful despite the guttural snore of the beast in the distance.

"All according to plan," Rija says, dusting off her hands and standing up. "Now where's Z'ka?"

Go to 543

EPILOGUE

543

Though the corruption has lessened to the point that it's bearable, you still feel it weighs heavy on your mind. Descending the stairs to where Rija and Z'ka stowed their gear, it's obvious that you still have a journey ahead to reach home. Rija seems more able to shrug it off, however.

"He really missed the big moment," Rija says, clearly talking to herself as much as to you. Or maybe to Z'ka. Then louder, she says, "Well, I hope you have an explanation for this. We could have used you."

She packs her things with a seasoned explorer's economy of motion and then collects Z'ka's as well. Once everything is to her satisfaction, she finds you looking at her.

You gather your own gear and follow her into the passage leading back to the previous chamber. On the way, you ask her what she plans to do next.

Rija shrugs. "Honestly, I wasn't even sure I'd survive Z'leth. Haven't thought much about it. May head north to cool off. May head south to dry out. Maybe even head home. Place like this makes you think about where you came from, and it's been a while. I haven't had my mom's vegetable stew in forever."

She stops, considering her own words for a moment.

"And there's always another mountain to climb, another cave to explore, more ruins to discover," she says before she makes a sweeping gesture at your surroundings. "But seriously, what will ever compare to this?"

You are about to respond with your next step when Rija stops walking. She holds out her hand for you to stop as well.

"We need to hurry," she says quietly, all lightness gone from her voice.

She picks up the pace and you match it. Ahead, the doorway to your destination is glowing bright blue ([go to 552](#)).

544

The lizardfolk shaman begins inspecting you, pressing on one of the spots where you were injured below ground. To your surprise, you find that there's a sore lump there

"Ah, there's one," she says. She goes into a snakeskin pouch at her hip and pulls out a small chip of razor-sharp obsidian. "Hold still."

She swipes at the lump and the stone is so sharp you don't even feel it. However, you do feel when the shaman plunges her clawed fingers into the wound. Instinctively, you try to pull away but her other hand holds you firmly in place with astonishing strength.

"Got it," she says and pulls a hard object from the incision. You feel immediate relief as she presents what she has found.

It's a Z'lethan crystal. Its distinctive blue glow shines through the light coating of your blood.

As you sit staring at the stone pulled out of you, the shaman whispers a sibilant incantation onto the wound. It heals without a trace.

"It is just the first one," she says. "Please bear with me."

Recognizing that this was not a request, you sit still while the shaman works. The old lizardfolk removes more crystals from places around your body where you were hurt on your journey below ground. But she whispers each wound closed as soon as she's done.

"These came from your body," she says, holding them out to you. "What will you do with them?"

Offer the crystals to the shaman ([go to 564](#)) or decide to keep them ([go to 548](#)).

545

You move to attack the couatl and defend Rija. She curses and starts to cast a spell. While sidestepping the couatl's flying lunge, she traces a mesmerizing sigil in the air before casting an arm out.

But she points at you.

A powerful enchantment slams into your mind and you feel your thoughts being affected by a simple but incredibly forceful charm.

Roll a Wisdom saving throw with disadvantage (or normally if you usually have advantage against charm effects).

If you get 15 or more, **go to 572**. If you get less than 15, **go to 549**.

546

"Now let's get out of here," Rija says, though at the door she spares a glance for Z'ka over her shoulder. You say your own goodbyes to the brave warrior who probably saved countless lives with his sacrifice.

You turn and leave him in a tomb fit for such a hero.

The beginning of your trek back up is silent, even as you reach the mephit door. Fortunately, it is not locked from the inside. Rija pulls a simple lever beside the massive gate and it swings smoothly open for you both. Its slamming back into place as you leave is the only sound in the chamber besides your and Rija's footsteps.

The piles of dust remain on the ground throughout the chamber. They will likely remain undisturbed for many years to come.

You can't help feeling a bit nervous about the door, and turn around to make sure it doesn't spit out one more ferocious little elemental. It stays still, however, and you're able to continue safely (**go to 554**).

547

Up ahead you hear the grating sound of the temple door slowly opening. You immediately sense a change to the quality of air and light, even before you can see the exit itself.



“Finally,” Rija says as she picks up her pace. “It’s not sunlight and fresh air, but it’s a step in the right direction.”

When you and Rija step into the temple, the camp in the abandoned temple is exactly as you left it, though its emptiness is jarring. Z’ka and Gigar’s presence lingers in the space, and you’re clearly not the only one who feels it. Rija stands amid the discarded gear and takes a quiet moment.

When you emerge from the temple, the couatl is there waiting for you. It unfurls its enormous wings.

“You were successful,” it says in your mind.
“Congratulations to you both. But the orc called Gigar is no longer with you. Z’ka was expected to remain below, but not the orc. I hope he did not suffer.”

The couatl looks between the two of you ([go to 555](#)).

548

“That is a shame,” the shaman says, though she hands them over. “But they are yours to do with as you wish. While I hope they will someday return to Z’leth, may you use their power wisely.”

Add 1d4+1 Z’lethan crystals to your inventory.

“Now, I believe that there are many others outside eagerly waiting to see you. I’m sure you have much to share.”

You bid the shaman goodbye and thank her for her help before stepping back out of the tent ([go to 575](#)).

549

You feel an overwhelming sense of loyalty to Rija and a compulsion to do as she has asked. The city around you swims momentarily and you focus on Rija’s face.

There is no fear there, just determination. She manages to lock eyes with you for a moment before growling at you, “Go home. Run.”

You feel yourself turn and start sprinting for the sole source of light that doesn’t belong to a crystal.

You return to your senses at the bottom of the tunnel leading to the light above. You have no recollection of

how you got here, and looking around you don’t see how you could return to where Rija and the couatl are fighting.

There is nowhere left to go but up and out. Rija saw to that ([go to 571](#)).

550

You and Rija continue in silence, the return journey being considerably more tiring given the fact that you’re heading back uphill and given you’ve taken very little rest since fighting the beast below.

In fact, you might have suggested stopping for a short rest if you hadn’t come around a bend in the passage to the place where Rija and Z’ka had left you tied up. Scraps of rope are still scattered on the ground, and the signs of their scuffle with Gigar are still apparent on the floor.

Rija stops short and looks to you to see how you’re going to react.

You can remind her how wrong she was to leave you behind ([go to 566](#)) or say nothing at all ([go to 558](#)).

551

“We don’t have long,” Rija says, picking up the tablet and thrusting it into your arms. “Here, I need to keep my hands free.”

Add Z’ka’s tablet to your inventory.

“Let’s move! Head for the light.” Rija points at the wide tunnel leading upward at the far end of the cavern that appears to contain some daylight. It seems as good a guess as any and will save you from having to scale the cliffs again on your way out.

Rija sprints down the steps toward the city. With one last look at the entranced couatl, you follow behind her at a full run.

If you have a speed of 30 feet or more, [go to 557](#). If you have a speed of less than 30 feet, [go to 561](#).

552

When you emerge into the next chamber, Rija curses under her breath.



Z'ka's body is impaled by his own spear and he is draped over the round altar in the center of the room. The crystal amulet on his chest that has always shone with an inner light is now dull and gray. His arms sprawl in a way that says he held onto his spear until the last of his strength left them.

There is no blood, but the Z'lethan patterns beneath him blaze with the familiar blue light, only stronger than you've seen elsewhere down here. The lines of power stretch down the altar, across the floor and up the wall into the ceiling. It doesn't take much to guess where they lead: the platform overhead and the magic subduing the beast.

Crystals sprout from his body, bursting from his torso and limbs but leaving his face mostly free. Though it's always been hard to read his expression, his eyes are closed and he seems strangely at peace. Against the doorway leading back up, Z'ka had carefully placed his beloved tablet of scripture in a clear invitation.

Without hesitation, Rija steps up and takes the tablet. She seems momentarily surprised by its weight, but doesn't struggle with it too much.

Without looking up, she says, "There are few historical records among Z'ka's people. When I was introduced to them, it took me a while to see beyond the primitive life they've adopted. But some relics remain, like this tablet Z'ka carries. Carried. It's holy scripture, and we should return it to them."

You suggest Rija take it, and she nods agreement. She finds Z'ka's straps and puts it on her own back, though it looks comically large on her compared to the bulky lizardfolk warrior ([go to 546](#)).

553

Rija grits her teeth with some strong emotion and looks away, but you can't tell what part of today's ordeal has upset her.

"Can we just get moving?" she asks after a moment, but she doesn't wait for an answer before she continues back up the passage ([go to 563](#)).

554

You and Rija reach the hallowed room where the ghost appeared. It retains its air of quiet sanctuary,

but it isn't as jarring. The corruption in the air outside the chamber has lessened to the point that there is now only a sense of unease rather than the bone-deep wrongness of before. The beast's influence has lessened now that it sleeps.

As you enter, the spirit appears once more. It again pays you no heed and goes about its ritual washing in the shimmering pool of light.

"Give me a moment." Rija approaches the ghost and performs a series of ritual gestures. The spirit nods and Rija approaches the pool to lift water from it and pour it over her head. The light cascades over her like water at first just to dissipate into a faint glow toward her feet.

She then leans in to whisper something to the spirit, who appears to listen for a moment. She speaks in the snarling, snapping language of Z'ka's people so you don't understand anything except Z'ka's name. The spirit touches where its heart once was with a translucent hand.

"All right, let's go," Rija says to you and heads toward the exit.

You can also go pour the light over your head ([go to 565](#)) or abstain and leave immediately with Rija ([go to 573](#)).

555

"Many have carried that tablet below as Z'ka did," the couatl says. "Others have carried it back to be read again until it is necessary to return to the beast. The cycle has gone on like this for more years than even I can count. You are a worthy addition to that collection of heroes."

The couatl's tone in your mind is strange, almost as if it is talking to itself. It's clearly communicating its thoughts to Rija as well because she fires you a concerned glance.

"But all things must one day change. The previous hero who emerged from the temple plundered and stole. He took our crystals, took items of power, and he brought knowledge of Z'leth to the surface. His irresponsible actions led to many unnecessary deaths of would-be treasure hunters. And he gave the power-hungry a myth of a great beast to be harnessed to do their bidding."

With a flap of its wings, the couatl rises off the ground and its long neck rears back.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot allow that to happen again. I cannot allow either of you to return. But I promise to make this as quick as possible."

Rija drops the tablet and goes for the weapons and pouches at her belt. You also prepare to defend yourself ([go to 560](#)).

556

Gain Inspiration.

You offer your silent gratitude to Rija as she battles the couatl. And while she struggles to keep its snapping jaws and crushing coils at bay, she still manages to nod in acknowledgement.

"Good luck," she says.

You leave them locked in combat and make a break for freedom, veering away from the main street into the tangled vegetation overgrowing Z'leth.

Thorny vines and claw-like branches drag at you as the sounds of battle fade behind you. Crackles and booms continue to echo around you and even the occasional shout or shriek. Whenever you get a view of the edge of the city, you realign with the one source of natural light.

Eventually, you no longer hear the battle at all. However, there's no way of knowing if it is over or is simply out of earshot. But by the time the city has gone completely silent, you have reached your destination at the base of the tunnel leading out ([go to 571](#)).

557

You and Rija dash down the wide promenade as opposed to picking your way through the tangled undergrowth. You wind up overtaking Rija as she keeps looking over her shoulder for the return of the couatl.

Legs burning and panting from the exertion, you turn to face the rapidly approaching edge of the city. Then you hear Rija cry out behind you.

You skid to a stop and turn ([go to 567](#)).

558

Gain Inspiration.

You look around and then at Rija watching you expectantly. Without a word, you simply keep walking. You hear Rija follow behind you, and her relief is palpable despite not being able to see her.

You just play it cool as you continue back up the temple ([go to 563](#)).

559

You demand payment for the tablet's return.

"Ah, of course," the shaman says. She holds out some small rectangles of jade with obviously Z'lethan patterns carved on the faces. "We have coin of a sort and we offer aid."

You can add 2 carved jade (worth 75 gp each) to your inventory.

She waits quietly until you hold the stone tablet out to her.

Taking the tablet and placing it on the floor beside her, the shaman chuckles and you get the impression she's laughing at you. But you don't get time to dwell on it because she reaches out to grab your arm and pulls herself up to a standing position while also pushing you down into her seat.

"All right, let's see what we have here," she says, rubbing her hands together ([go to 544](#)).



560

The couatl lashes out at you with a mouthful of teeth dripping venom.

Rija steps between you and the couatl, a shimmering plane of force jumping up between her and the winged serpent. Between her magical shield and your own defenses, the feathered serpent misses.

The celestial's brightly colored feathers bristle as it prepares another attack. But Rija is faster.

She reaches into a pouch on her belt and produces a vial filled with some kind of glowing powder. With a momentary series of words and gestures of power, she then smashes the vial on the ground just as the couatl attacks again.

The glowing powder leaps into the air in a series of dancing symbols, and the couatl immediately stops to settle into a coiled position on the ground. It folds its wings and starts swaying to a beat only it can hear ([go to 551](#)).

561

Despite your best efforts, you can't keep up with Rija. She keeps casting glances back to make sure you're keeping up and she seems to be holding back considerably. Whenever she checks on you, she also glances upward to see if you're being pursued.

Huffing with your legs churning, you put your head down and push yourself as fast as you can.

"Look out!" Rija cries just as she slams into you.

The couatl attacks you from behind and Rija leaps to your defense. She slams into you with surprising force, and with all the running you lose your balance. You sprawl to the ground but jump to your feet as quickly as you can ([go to 567](#)).

562

"Don't be a hero, you idiot!" Rija yells.

Rija electrifies the couatl again with a powerful blast of lightning, this time delivered as a punch with a clenched fist.

"*Stay where you are!*" the couatl booms in your mind. "*You must not leave this place! I will make sure of it when I'm done with this one.*"

Rija shakes her head and shouts a sharp command. She vanishes from the couatl's grasp and appears next to you.

"Anytime now," she almost whispers. "Run."

The couatl unfurls its wings and leaps at her. Rija raises a hand and unleashes a volley of magic missiles at the winged serpent as it arcs through the air at her, but they are absorbed harmlessly by a shimmering magical shield like the one she employed earlier.

"Why are you still here?" she shouts.

Engage the couatl anyway ([go to 545](#)) or back off and make your escape ([go to 556](#)).

563

Just past where you had been tied up, you reach the point where you'd been attacked by the ooze. However, the fissure no longer drips and it seems the dark puddle has drained away. Grayish stains still blemish the stonework of the wall and around its base, but there is no sign of the ooze.

"All right, I need a rest," Rija says. She drops her things gently but with a certain finality. "Let's take a break. You must be hungry and thirsty, too. Here."

She pulls out some rations and hands them to you. You eat together without speaking, Rija even directly shutting down any attempts to talk to her.

When she's finished wolfing down her meal, Rija finds a place to lean up against the wall and shuts her eyes. She's snoring lightly in minutes.

Gain the benefits of a short rest.

When Rija awakes, you're also feeling much better rested. Despite the lingering corruption, you are beginning to feel some relief.

"Much better," she says. "We're almost out of here. Let's not waste any more time laying about."

She takes off at a jog, and you hustle to catch up ([go to 547](#)).

564

You offer to let the lizardfolk keep the crystals. She gives you a wide, very toothy smile as she places them in a small clay jar.

“We are so very grateful,” she says. “But we would like to offer you something. A memento that will bless you when you need it most.”

She presents you with an intricately woven bracelet featuring stone beads and brightly colored feathers.

You can add a blood blessing bracelet to your inventory.

“May it keep you safe on your travels,” she says. She bows her head to you, and you know the audience is over ([go to 575](#)).



BLOOD BLESSING BRACELET

Once per day as a reaction to taking damage from an enemy, you can cast Bless on yourself. The effects of this bracelet cannot negate the damage that triggered it. This item requires attunement.

565

You ask Rija to wait a moment, then perform the same bathing gesture as she did. The ghost turns to you. At first it's not clear if it can even sense you, but then it nods sagely. Though its expression does not change, you feel a sense of approval.

You gain the benefits of the Bless spell if you don't already have them. Its effects last until you next take a long rest.

The ghost then slowly fades away as you watch it, and the glow coming from the pool of light dims.

“Come on,” Rija says. “Time to go.”

You hitch up your gear and continue back toward the surface with Rija ([go to 550](#)).

566

You call Rija out on what happened. You even point out which rope was yours and which one was Gigar's. She purses her lips but doesn't say anything right away.

Roll a Wisdom (Insight) check. If you get 12 or more, [go to 570](#). If you get less than 12, [go to 553](#).

567

You see Rija half-pinned by the couatl that's snapping at her with a dripping maw.

“This did not need to be so difficult,” its voice rings in your head, oddly calm compared to the ferocity of its attacks. “There was no need to suffer.”

The couatl's tail whips around Rija's legs and starts constricting her up to her waist. She has one hand up fending off the creature's bites while the other fumbles for something at her belt.

“What are you standing around for?” she screams. “Run! I've got this!”

She barks a word and her hand lights up with an electrical discharge, scorching the couatl and making it screech in pain.

You can rush in to help ([go to 562](#)) or take Rija's advice and retreat ([go to 556](#)).

568

A call goes up around the camp. There's no fear or urgency, but instead a certain excitement. Expedition crewmembers stop what they're doing and turn to look at you standing partway up a mountainside.

Even from this distance, you can tell that there is mixed emotion but there's no sign of hostility. You descend the rocky expanse to meet those members who have come to greet you.

A grizzled human man you recognize as a wagon driver from your own expedition walks up to meet with you. He walks slowly with his hands in the pockets of some light worker's pants and stops a few paces away to look at you while sucking his teeth.

"Just you then?" he asks. When you answer in the affirmative he nods a few times, considering that. He sees you looking around at the lizardfolk standing in their midst, some watching you, some staring off into the distance.

"Ah that's right, you took off that night." He hooks a thumb at one of the reptilian warriors leaning on his spear nearby. "Good folks, to be honest. Didn't mean nothing that night, and no one hurt more than a few bumps and bruises. Just wanted to keep us from making a big mistake. Turns out that city we were supposed to find was certain death."

He gazes at you with the impassive lack of curiosity of a man who thinks he's seen it all. When you say nothing, he shrugs.

"Welp," he says finally. "The big lizard wants to see you. Word is she's some kind of shaman. Come on, I'll show you the way."

You are ushered to a tent made of mismatched animal leathers and decorated with small animal skulls, feathers, and semi-precious stones. Among the stones you also see a surprising number of spent Z'lethan crystals hanging alongside more mundane minerals. This is the first structure you've seen among the Z'lethan descendants.

The crewmember opens the flap of the tent and guides you inside. In the dim interior, a thin and wrinkled lizardfolk is seated on a small mound of animal hides. She is bedecked in trinkets similar to her tent and draped with a feathered cape.

"Welcome back," she says in accented but clear Common. Your surprise must have shown on your face. "Oh yes, I speak the Common tongue. And many

others. In my youth, I have even seen one or two of your cities and slept in soft beds. But I think you have more interesting stories to tell? And maybe something to return?"

You realize that she's nodding her head toward Z'ka's tablet.

You can offer the tablet freely ([go to 574](#)) or demand some form of payment ([go to 559](#)).

569

You attack the couatl again and manage to even get a couple of hits in before it frees itself and subdues Rija with repeated bites.

"You cannot defeat me," the couatl says in your mind as it rises up on its rainbow colored wings. *"So just know that you will die a hero, even if no one knows."*

As the creature darts forward, venomous fangs dripping, you can't help but wonder if you made a huge mistake.

YOU DIED.



570

At your comment, Rija's face shifts slightly. A sadness lingers around her eyes, and you realize now that she is quietly mourning Z'ka. And your comment has now added a layer of guilt to that.

You open your mouth to say something else, but she cuts you off with a raised hand.

"I understand," she says flatly. "Let's just get out of here. What do you say?"

She doesn't wait for your reply before continuing her upward march ([go to 563](#)).

571

From the base of the tunnel, you see a switchbacked path up toward the light you see above. This is a far easier path than the one you used to enter.

Looking back over the city of Z'leth, you know that Rija remains out there still struggling with the couatl. There's no way of knowing how long she can last, so you waste no time making her sacrifice for you count.

The climb isn't as long as you might have thought, though the constant checking over your shoulder for the couatl makes it a far more frightening ascent than it normally would be.

You don't stop until you reach a tiny hidden passage. You feel a breeze blowing from the crack and the glow of daylight beyond. Other crevices above also seem to let through beams of sunlight, but it's diffused as if through twisting chutes above.

From outside, the passage entrance is nothing more than a crack in the rock like a hundred others you can see. The jungle hasn't reached this bare jut of stone, but it doesn't matter. There is no way anyone could find this from the outside and know what it was. Even when standing right in front of it, it looks as though it's nothing more than another crag.

Yet, you are greeted by a bizarre sight: not one but two expeditions camped with what looks like the band of lizardfolk that drove you underground. The atmosphere is congenial, even festive. It's apparently dinner time with oddly-shaped beasts turning on spits throughout the camp.

A lizardfolk warrior is leaning on a spear gazing in your direction. He spots you and raises a clawed hand in greeting ([go to 568](#)).

572

You feel a nearly overwhelming compulsion to do as Rija asks, but you manage to resist. The couatl dives at you, speeding past on a powerful beat of its wings, but Rija shoves you out of the way.

"Neither of you will see the sun again," the couatl says. "But your sacrifice will serve everyone who lives above ground."

In response, Rija chants resonant syllables that seem to vibrate the stones around you. She raises her arms over her head. Four stony figures rise up out of the earth to grasp the couatl around its thrashing body, reaching for its wings.

She grabs you and pulls your face close to hers. "Stop. I'm saving you. Now go."

When she pushes you aside, it is clear there is nothing more you can do here but die. She turns away, energy gathering in the palms of her hands for another attack.

If you still decide to remain and fight, [go to 569](#). If you decide to retreat to fight another day, [go to 556](#).

573

You follow after Rija right away. She seems surprised for a moment then shrugs.

"All right then," she says, and turns to leave without another word. You continue after her ([go to 550](#)).

574

You hand the tablet to the shaman, and she accepts it with a deep bow.

"You have our deepest thanks," she says. "But you must now be treated. You have had quite the ordeal and we wouldn't want your condition to worsen. Please sit."

She stands smoothly despite her apparent age and guides you into her seat ([go to 544](#)).

575

You emerge from the dim tent, dazzled by the daylight for a moment. When your vision clears, you see that the same wagon driver who met you on the rocky mountain slope is waiting for you. And others have joined him.

"You look three breaths from death," he tells you. "And I'm sure you have a story of how you got there. Come on."

He and the others gather around you to shepherd you to one of the bonfires. You see a roasted creature with too many limbs and eyes being turned over a spit. Elsewhere you see a vegetable stew bubbling in some coals. It all smells amazing.

And as you are led away to get a hot meal, a fresh drink, and some fireside company the clouds over the horizon break. The setting sun blazes in streamers of reds and oranges, pinks and yellows.

You eat and drink. You tell the story of Z'leth—your version of it at least—and just experience the open air again. But after everyone else has turned in for the night and all but the night watch are snoring by smoky fires, you find that you're still wide awake and alert. Movement catches your eye, and as you watch the shaman slips from her tent with something in her hand.

As you look on, she sets a steaming bowl of thick vegetable stew, a cup of fresh water, and a packet of presumably medicinal herbs next to the now-smoking embers of the campfire.

“You never know,” she says. “We might have some late arrivals.”

As you reach the end of your adventure, your character advances 1 level.

THE END



THE QUARTERMASTER

The quartermaster is a burly man with a bald head crisscrossed with scars and small, soft hands. He's set out his offerings out the back of a wagon, the larger items leaning against the wheels and smaller objects arrayed on a plank set between two empty barrels.

ADVENTURING GEAR

NAME	PRICE	WEIGHT
Backpack	2 gp	5 lbs. (~2.3 kg)
Bedroll	16 sp	7 lbs. (~3.8 kg)
Bottle (glass)	1 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Blanket	5 sp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)
Candle	1 cp	—
Clothes, common	5 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)
Crowbar	2 gp	5 lbs. (~2.3 kg)
Hammer	1 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)
Healer's kit	4 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)
Lantern, hooded	4 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Magnifying glass	100 gp	—
Oil (flask)	1 sp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Rations (1 day)	5 sp	2 lbs. (~0.9 kg)
Rope, hempen (50 ft.)	1 gp	10 lbs. (~4.5 kg)
Shovel	2 gp	5 lbs. (~2.3 kg)
Soap	2 cp	—
Torch	1 cp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Waterskin	2 sp	5 lbs. (~2.3 kg)
Whetstone	1 cp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)

POTIONS

NAME	PRICE	WEIGHT
Antitoxin	15 gp	—
Potion of healing	15 gp	—

TOOLS

NAME	PRICE	WEIGHT
Cook's utensils	1 gp	8 lbs. (~3.6 kg)
Herbalism kit	4 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)

WEAPONS

NAME	PRICE	WEIGHT
Arrows (10)	1 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Blowgun	10 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Shortbow	20 gp	2 lbs. (~0.9 kg)
Dagger	2 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Machete (Shortsword)	10 gp	2 lbs. (~0.9 kg)
Handaxe	5 gp	2 lbs. (~0.9 kg)
Net	1 gp	1 lb. (~0.5 kg)
Spear	1 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)
Whip	2 gp	3 lbs. (~1.4 kg)

If you're unsure about the in-game mechanics of any of these items, you can look them up in your own sourcebooks, on <https://dnd.wizards.com/what-is-dnd/basic-rules>, or on <https://www.dndbeyond.com/sources/basic-rules>.

THANK YOU TO OUR CREDITED BACKERS!

The names that follow are those Kickstarter backers who went above and beyond to help make our dreams a reality. We are so very grateful to the amazing crowdfunding community that helped make this possible.

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Carlie english	David Peterson	Zachery Loflin	Leatherneck1833
Ri Brown	PaisleyParadox	Thereza Rowlands	Carson Brooks
Holger Spohn	Galient Lightbringer	Peter	Paul Mikelonis
King Lutrain	James Ezell	Toph Avary	Ariel the Marshmellow
Katie Hampson	Erik S Johnson	Rene PurpleSnorlax	Eric Becks
Linda Halliday McGarrigle	David Guiot	Gutierrez	RoBroKnowsInfo
Matthew Siddall	Arthur Goldsipe	Wulfgar	ZachieBlade
Shaun Klinefelter	Sarah Ash	Bryan Endoso	HossChaos
Peredhel Green	Jarrood Armour	Bryce S	Antonio "ToniFDZ"
Cptn Greymane	Emma Poor	Bluvs Emporium	Fernández-Giménez
Nonda Zoo	Mr. Oak	Liam Ramsay	Tantalón
Joshua Holden	Eliza (Forever Our Druid)	Douglas V (Thamin)	Kitty Kat
Brian Mattucci	Prof. David Negrin	Asketel Thorne	Terry Kelly
Kara	Maka	Mike "Deg Marz" Martinez	Horiksson
Simen Dahlum	Jason Lieuallen	Michael Oppenheim	Kassandra Areizaga
Michelle Bond	polinchka	Yvonne O'Shea	Sandra Inferi
Daniel/Xiomara	Cullen Boyd	Robert Reppert	Matteh08
Dale Hanrahan	Sue Sills	Álvaro Campos Cabañas	Gauswin Gemlore
T.Shipman	Mattwill	n1rval	Firrigagamer
Moontouched Dragon	Logan Shafer	Jonas Koppen	Behorn
Merdocc	Linmic	Andrew Davis	Kris Spiesz
Evan Mathews	Buddy George (God of	César Vélez	C-Note Major
Eron Carruth	Unbelief)	Matthew Phoenix	MrCynical
Paul "Chuck" Jebe	Yaroslav Platash	Will Britnell	HoyAray
Damian Anica	Jason Lieuallen	Dark Lord Stott	Aaron Farmer
Roger "Frostin" Van Cleave	Alex Jacobs	Mike Welch	Natasha Rowney
Jared Forlines	Steven Johnston Jr	ShackleRatBoy	David A. Nolan
urbi.in.orbit	Jim T. Nguyen	Simon Hunter	Cgan
Bruce Ford	Marko S	Winkle Rumbuckle	Jack Franks
Sarah Gouveia	Franz E. Schneider	Russell "Redjack" Petree	Ramon Snir
Brooke Maier	JudithSJS	Stella	Lisa "Eiramasil" Averett
Jenny Churchill	Andrés Hirunatan	Antony "Ant" Jordan	WA Green
Will Jacobson	Kyle Biddle	Justin Lemist	Malephisto
Fábio Balestro Floriano	Christian Seitzer	David A. Nolan	Ken "Jiriki" Anderson
Dan O'Connor	Peter Champa	Abdulaziz Al-Kaboor	Rustic Tuntuq
Hal J Neat	Michael James Sauble	Noah Braganca	Enturiath
Erik S. Johnson	Robert Neaves	Kris Phi Politowski	Reese Knotts aka Rebar the
Wedian	Thorsten Vieten	Marika Koster	Barbarian
El Ben	Kevin Blackwell	Jiří Čadek	Jacob Casper
Rafael Blanco	Terri	Adam Thayer	Lukayleon
Joshua Southcombe	kandikato	Nick Delgado	Keeboy
Agent Jessalyn	Flick	camille h.	Allen C Smith
Kevin Leintz	James "The Paladin" Seaton	Boring_DM_2021	Jonathan "Capt'n" Kurts
Wade Kutella	Dale Stewart	CosmosKittn the dice	George Crawshaw
R3D S373N	Joshonatir09	goblin	Connor Eckworth
207/217 Gamers	Todd Musgrave	Bryan Atkinson	Mark Omobono
Gail Harmata	Jinx Caskbottom	Garret Jax (monster hunter)	Mercury Mike
Lathaon	Kjeld Froberg	Alai	Dani W
Andar Briggz	Ryuko.Fenix	Cryptofeu	Paul Papanek Stork
BarryX	Le Monarque de Cimerion	Sergey Rozov	Matt Sheppard
Michael Lee-Collings	JoBoh	Jack Sutcliffe	MrMistoffeleez
(MikkaZombie)	Neil Snyder	OwainB	Jagot Tremblay
Maxwell Harker	Andrew Foxx	Phill Elliott	August "DogDays" Lamczyk
MineHack	Ross Shackelford	Kay Kuever	Thomas Sutter

Tim D. Griffin
Jeff C. Bugbee
Jeff Ballentine
Robert 'Brother Bethor'
Carr
Yuval Belenky
Karen Williams
Sharky
Andreas Crux
Carl the not so Great
Christy Furlan
P. S. Walsh
Jonathan McFarland
(Geeks@Play)
Papa Troll
Toddles
Erin D
Jeff Boyer
Emily Rochon
Nicholas Kopit
Nicholas Hall
Nebo
Alex Sabo
Aero Okami
Alex Manzo (bombbuzz)
Mark McArthey
Eric Nicolaievsky
J Perks
Spencer Guerreiro
Bogo Karma
TwchDuk
Jon Woodard
Iona Itova
charles-antoine
proulx-dumont
Dawn of Mike
Darwyn J. A. Stygian
Testdummy94
Damien
Judicael R.
Christopher Becker
Carlos J Morales
Simone Sch.
Alexander Witt
Daniel Miley
Polly K.
Mark "Sollace" Allen
Richard Thrower
Davin Mamissa
Jolene Connelly
Christian Lacerte
BrickmasterE
Dead Fishie
E. G. Holbrook
Ryan Smith

Warren B. Fritze III
Walter Odell III
Michael Lynch
Karen Williams
Matthew Algiers
Jack Sutcliffe
Mark Brady
Cambria Thompson
Scotia Baker
ItalianWereWolf
Cody "Evergreen" Roberts
Colin Alexander
Kim Grier
Maik Neukirch
Nick Newland
Jean-Pierre Wahl
Talen Andersen
Stephen J Alcocer
Andrew Dalby
Rachel Tonte
Goldenhall Guild of Gamers
Michael Boykin
Kevin Davidson
Sara Nilsson
The Girth Gang
Maxwell Harker
Allen C Smith
Bryan Layton
Courtney Dutkowski
Ben Zellers
Carrie Boyser
J Huntsman
Phil Gauthier
Dick "Riechart" Price
Aurel
David N
Lukayleon
Torin Spence
Craig Barton
Thomas Delepinne
Joe Ruether
Tom Burns
Guillaume Dubois
Herr Oswald
Jeff Boyer
Roderick Ramsay
Michelle McFarlin
Skye Burnett
Sean F
Shannon Bockstahler
Emily Rose Romano
Dan Jacobson
Michel Charbonneau
Dennis Wheeler
Yuval Belenky

8pingu8
Devin J Burke
James Bujold
Nathan Briggs
C Schofield KakamaCat
charles-antoine
proulx-dumont
Matt "The Professor" Hayes
Tom McLean
Heather Hagelberg
Jacob Casper
Pierre LeBlanc
Wade Kutella
David Gwydion
Martin Purcifer
Nathan Davis
Nate B
PapaBera
Yan Huard
Benjamin Nelson
Christy Furlan
Richard & Gemma Archer
Steven Neel
Harry Dixon
Nikhil Gupta
Ralph The Black
Steven Neel
Nathan Sheldon-Anderson
sedapanda
Ryan Smith
Jose Lopa
Nobriland
Georgie Carey
Vance Dahl
RubberDuckieGod
Eugene Y
Familie Wloka

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Crystals of Z'leth includes a number of additional resources to extend your play experience or get started quickly.

If you don't have a character made, you can play right away by downloading a pre-made character at obviousmimic.com/pages/pre-made-characters

For the self-DM pack full of maps, tokens, and everything you need to be your own Dungeon Master, go to obviousmimic.com/pages/self-dm-packs

To ask any questions, connect with the community, or just share your latest playthrough visit our Discord server or follow us on social media.



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