

MZA4

THE MOTHER OF LIFE



A Maztican Epic Adventure

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THE MOTHER OF LIFE



he is the goddess to all that live in the True World and she is considered the Mother of All. Her name has been given to the very land itself, where it is said all of mankind stands upon her body. It is she who gave birth to Qotal, Zaltec and their brothers and sisters, though she herself no longer lives. She is Maztica, the Mother of Life.

INTRODUCTION

The Mother of Life is a collection of four interconnected adventures that form one grand epic. Individually, the series of adventures were known as the "True World Resurrection," but each had a wildly differing theme.

Each adventure is updated here, together, in one grand adventure book which spans levels 5-12, though it could be adjusted for both lower and greater levels easily.

The adventures themselves remain compartmentalized, and might be run individually if desired, but almost an entire campaign could be run within these pages with minimal work from the DM.

UPDATED ADVENTURES

On DmsGuild, the adventures **TWR1 The Sea Demon's Pearl**, **TWR2 The Maztican Ball Game**, **TWR3 The Door of Stars** and **TWR4 Zatal - The Mountain of Fire** brought together one giant narrative. All four adventures are included in this product and are given much needed updates.

The general backgrounds of each adventure are summed up below.

THE SEA DEMON'S PEARL

When the young son of a fisherman named Asquel surprised his village elders and returned alive after missing for weeks, he returned with a black pearl the size of which the coastal town had never seen.

Asquel became somewhat of an instant celebrity, and his family was lifted from the poverty from which it once languished. Little did the boy know that the pearl was not all that he brought home. The Sea Demon had followed its prize home and soon the whole town would suffer for Asquel's theft.

THE MAZTICAN BALL GAME

The Maztican Ball Game is a game within a game! It is a sport wholly unique to the True World and it can be played by four or more players.

This portion of **The Mother of Life** contains rules for the sport, the mechanics behind them and an adventure set up in the style of a tournament in which the players can become underdog champions in a long established cultural phenomenon.

True champions of the Maztican Ball Game will bring the players to the attention of powers that are making bold moves in the True World. Heroes in Maztica don't only arise from slaying monsters.

THE DOOR OF STARS

In the mountains of Huacli, a secret lies which has kept the Otomi people safe for many generations. Yet still there is danger, and while much of it comes from a city full of undead, what once protected the Otomi might now be their undoing.

ZATAL

Like a poisonous and bloated pustule, Mount Zatal has been a source of terror for the True World since time immemorial. It is the source of the Darkfire and much of Zaltec's own personal power, and for many decades it continued to grow.

What secrets lie in the depths of the mountain remain unknown, but it is certain that the Eater of Hearts will not make it easy to discover. Perhaps somewhere in its bowels, in the bottom of the very megadungeon itself you might find what Zaltec has been hiding since the very Age of Immortals.

CONSEQUENCES

The Mother of Life has major implications that will impact the future of Maztica in extremely important ways. In the past two hundred years, the continent has suffered the invasion and plunder from Amnian foreigners, being ripped from the world and brought to one plagued by dragons, and then brought back just as life began to settle once more.

Perhaps the people of the True World are due some good news for once, but only brave adventurers will be able to bring back the Mother of Life for a True World Resurrection of epic proportions.

WHAT YOU NEED

This adventure is exclusively an epic adventure set in the western continent of Maztica. It would be difficult to apply much of what is written here to other settings as the adventure has major implications specific to the True World.

In addition to the core 5e books, it is highly recommended that you pick up the gamut of free DMsGuild Maztica products, particularly **MZC1 the Maztica Campaign Guide**, **MZS1 Monsters of Maztica** and **MZM1 Teotl Magic**. The campaign guide gives a general overview of the setting, the monster compendium gives statistics for creatures included in the adventure and teotl magic is heavily referenced in the Sea Demon's Pearl.

REQUIREMENTS

The adventures are most appropriate for characters who begin at level 5 or 6. It can be adjusted for lower or higher levels with a small amount of work from the DM, but it is expected that the PCs are at least 10th level by the time they reach Chapter 4.

THE SEA DEMON'S PEARL



The Mother of Life - Chapter 1

CHAPTER 1 - THE SEA DEMON'S PEARL

Pearls have brought great wealth to southern Far Payit ever since the arrival the Faerûnians over a century ago. This wealth does not always come without a price paid in blood. The skills necessary to harvest pearls have been passed down through many generations of experienced divers, but every now and again tragedy strikes.

Often, this means only the death of the diver, but this time an entire community might suffer due to one overzealous young boy. Can the heroes solve the riddle of the Sea Demon's Pearl before it is too late?

THE TOWN OF CUITZILLI

The arrival of the Golden Legion and the subsequent influx of foreigners over a century ago changed the True World in subtle ways. One of these changes is the value that has been placed on items and simple objects that once seemed far less important. Pearls are one of these items, and the Faerûnians' love of them has spread even among the natives who once thought of them as ornamental at best.

The idyllic town of Cuitzilli sprung up nearly overnight due to this budding fascination. Located south of Tulom-Itzi on the Sea of Azul; the coastal town is surrounded by tidal lagoons that were at one point exploding with oysters. Though some of these lagoons have run dry due to decades of overzealous diving, many still remain unexplored and undiscovered.

THE FISHERMAN'S BOY

Asquel is like many young boys in Cuitzilli – brave, adventurous, and the son of a simple, poor fisherman. The divers of Cuitzilli have become somewhat a ruling class, and they guard their precious lagoons from those who would take from their source of wealth. Asquel, at the age of only twelve, had decided he had seen enough of his family's suffering and without their blessing, he sought to make a fortune on his own.

Blessed with an almost unnatural talent to remain underwater, he believed that he could sneak into a local lagoon and steal enough pearls to lift his family from poverty. Hopefully, his family would sell his stolen pearls in the marketplaces of Tulom-Itzi without getting caught.

Asquel attempted his thievery in the early hours of the morning, but was captured, beaten and dumped into the ocean by the greedy owners of the tidal lagoon. Slipping in an out of unconsciousness, Asquel survived his ordeal and the flotsam that held him afloat brought him many miles to the north. When he awoke, it was in a large and untouched lagoon far from Cuitzilli.

The boy recovered over many days, long after he was sure his family thought him dead. A tenday into his recovery, Asquel heard a great splash in the center of the lagoon that drew his attention. Having regained enough strength to swim to the location of the sound, Asquel dreamed of the succulent fish he might have for dinner that evening. One more solid meal and he felt he could begin the long journey back home.

When he reached the center of the lagoon, he did not find his fish, but a great shadow drew his attention to the bottom. Asquel dove deep that day, perhaps deeper than he ever had before. He dove until he could no longer bear the burning in his chest and the pounding pressure in his ears.

But then he saw it, an oyster bigger than any ever seen. Not even the boisterous divers of Cuitzilli had ever spoken of one so grand. Even more remarkably, sitting inside the open shell was a fist sized black pearl. Here, in this distant and hidden lagoon, Asquel had found the solution to his family's poverty. He knew that when he returned home, his family would hail him a hero.

THE SEA DEMON'S PEARL

In Faerûn, the dreaded intelligent rays known as the *ixitxachitl* are a menace in the seas, rivers and underground lakes. What few know, however, is that the creatures did not originate in Faerûn, nor are they found in their original, most powerful form.

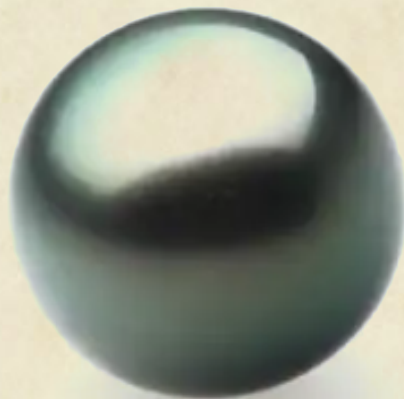
The Maztican *ixitxachitl* is a beast to behold. Grand in size, savage in temperament, cunning, but often far less intelligent – they are truly demons of the sea.

Some say the *ixitxachitl* worship the demon lord Demogorgon, others say their god is the Great Ray, *Ilxendren*, or even the ancient Dagon. Whomever they worship, the Maztican *ixitxachitl* care only for themselves and they are gods in their own worlds.

Connected to this power is a fist sized Black Pearl. A Black Pearl is an extension of their dark powers and they can only ever have one which it carefully grows and cultivates in a massive clamshell. The Pearl allows an *ixitxachitl* to summon all sorts of beasts to its side who obey its commands and tend to its needs.

The Black Pearl must remain relatively close to the sea demon for its power to work, but the *ixitxachitl* have been known to allow it to slip into the hands of others on occasion. The sea demon knows that its new owner will be blamed for the attacks that soon ensue and the added chaos brings joy to the cruel creature.

Asquel's pearl is one of these Black Pearls, and it has been brought to Cuitzilli. The village elders have decided to purchase the pearl from Asquel personally for a hefty sum and use it as a symbol of the village's prosperity.



It will become the centerpiece for a growing community, and Asquel represents what can become of even the lowliest fisherman with hard work and perseverance.

It is now only a few short tendays after the boy's return, the culprits who beat him and left him for dead were punished and their assets seized. What the elders did not realize, however, is that the Sea Demon has followed the boy, and when the attacks from the sea begin, few are prepared.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

The adventure begins in Cuitzilli, but the reason that the party is in the town is largely left for the DM to decide.

Some possibilities could be centered on the bounty of pearls themselves. The bulk of the recovered pearls are sold in Tulom-Itzi, and the journey through the jungle is a treacherous one for even the hardest of caravans. The adventures could have been hired in any major settlement in Payit or Far Payit to guard this caravan, bringing in as much as 500 gq (2,500 gp) upon the journey's completion.

The first wave of attacks should begin before the players set out.

CUITZILLI

The map on this page indicates Cuitzilli's location in Maztica in the Far Payit region. On the following page is the map of Cuitzilli itself and the caverns of the sea demon are only just off to the west, deep underwater.

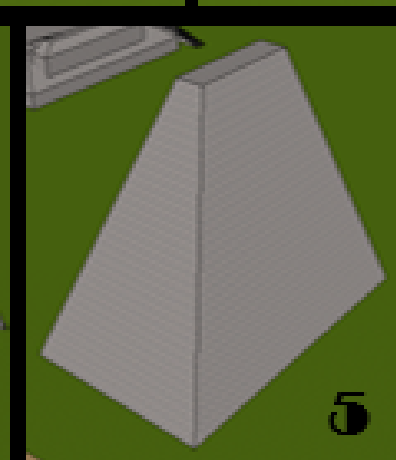
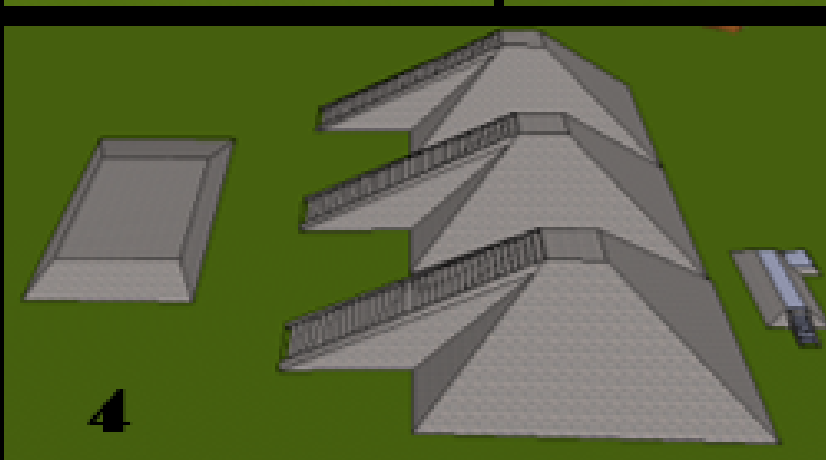
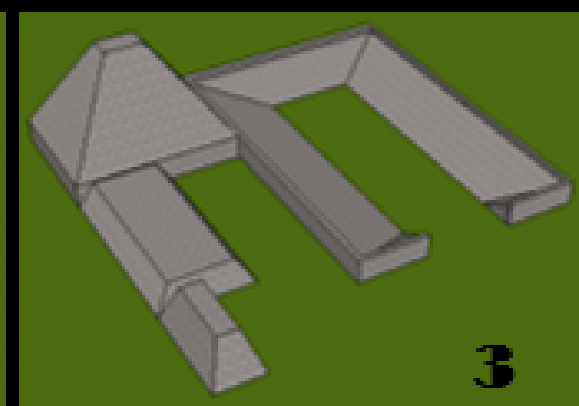
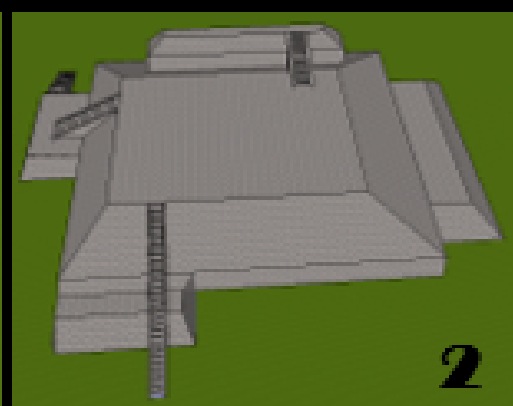
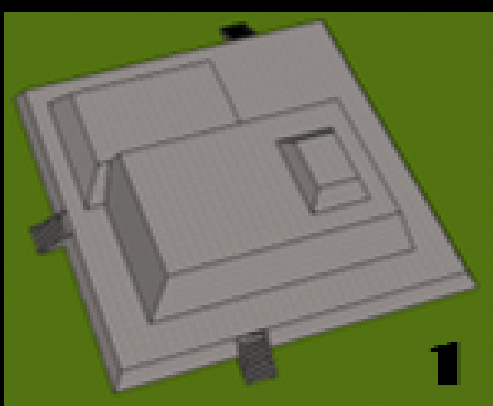
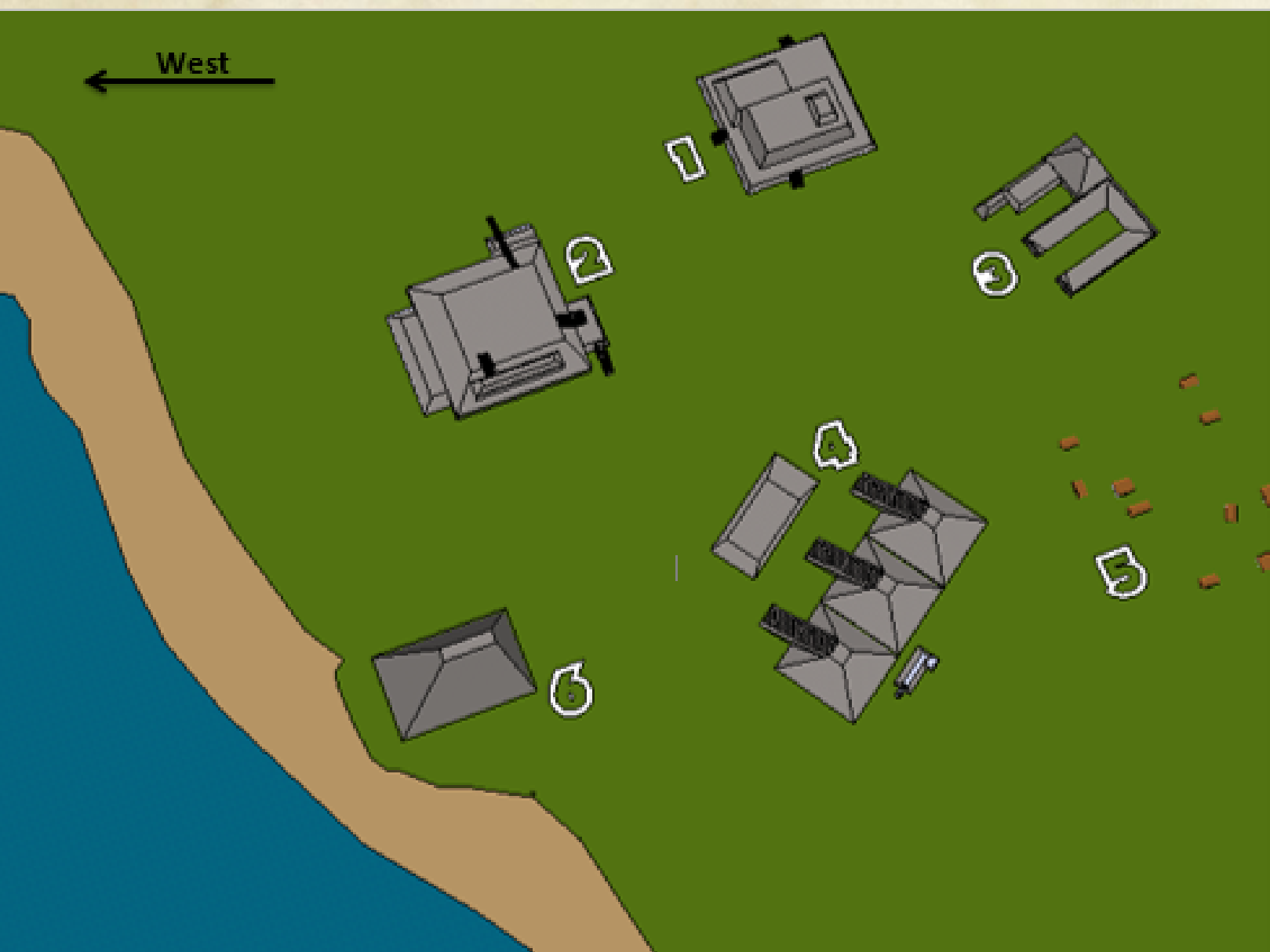
AREA 1. TEMPLE TO UMBERLEE

One of the founding members of Cuitzilli was a Golden Legion legionnaire who helped Alanza DaNosta destroy the great Star Worm, H'Calos.

A well respected sailor, the legionnaire abandoned Cordell shortly after the beast was defeated and helped victims rebuild their lives here. The sailor worshiped the god Valkur, but understood the importance of keeping Umberlee's wrath from falling upon any who depend on the seas.

His stories of Umberlee grew in local legend until eventually some of locals began to worship her and the name of the town, which means "crooked one of the sea" is an homage to the goddess.





Very few townsfolk worship the Bitch Queen, particularly after the century long silence of the gods, but almost all respect her power and realize that much is dependent on her mercies. When the attacks begin from the sea, naturally her displeasure is a perceived cause.

AREA 2: PLAZA

What might appear to be the largest temple is actually a bustling marketplace for fish, fine objects of pluma or teoatl art (and the occasional work of hishna), exotic birds, etc. Pearls, of course, are abundant, and typically worth only 75% of their normal value due to a flooded market.

Teoatl tamers here have cleverly learned to use the sea's bounty within their works of art, and they are well known elsewhere as far as Kultaka. This form of craftsmanship here has become quite commonplace, and beautiful art abounds which consists of kelp, corals, scales, and of course – pearls.

AREA 3: THE BALL GAME

In Cuitzilli, the Maztican ball game is taken quite seriously, and its stadium is also the location of the town's administrative center. Elders frequently meet here with the most prominent divers to decide regional disputes and diving rights. This all occurs of course, after they all attend a match and bet vigorously on their favorite players or team.

Most meetings involve copious amounts of the alcoholic beverage known as octal.

One whole side of the court is removable, and is only put into place at the beginning of a match in order to let in the throngs of attendees.

The Black Pearl is kept here on display for all to see, and it typically has visitors at all times of the day. The pearl is heavily protected.

AREA 4: THE TRIPLET TEMPLE

While Umberlee is appeased in Cuitzilli, the sister goddesses Nula, Eha and Watil are the most commonly worshiped. As the goddesses of animals, the wind, and plants respectively, the sisters are ideal for a society that is so dependent on the natural world around them.

These temples are also heavily guarded and said to hold one of the greatest stores of pearls known in all of Maztica.

Female teoatl tamers and casters are common here. Much of the research into their relatively new source of magic has been done deep within the temples. The sister goddesses are known to approve of their efforts, and have contributed much to the development of the magic.

A large platformed terrace sits in front of the temples and contains a rather lush garden which brims with vegetables and rare medicinal jungle plants.

AREA 5: TEMPLE TO QOTAL

Qotal, like in most of Payit and Far Payit, was once the prominent deity in Cuitzilli. His worship however, has declined precipitously during the long silence of the gods and his great pyramid lies all but abandoned. There is a long platform atop the pyramid which is still used to spot fisherman far out to sea and on the darkest or foggiest of nights, large fires are set atop it to guide them back home.

AREA 6: RESIDENCES

These are the homes of the typical resident of Cuitzilli, though dozens more are located further east of the town itself. Many of these homes form what can almost be seen as small communities of their own with Cuitzilli proper forming a community epicenter.

Each home is made of typical Far Payit housing materials such as wood, thatch, vine and reed, though they also tend to use a strong variety of kelp found in the sea nearby that dries as strong as hemp rope.

EVENTS

Only shortly after the PCs arrival in Cuitzilli, the ixitxachtli appeared in the waters just off the town's shore and it located a cavern large enough to hold its bulk so it could use it as a temporary residence.

Maztican ixitxachtli actually prefer to roam open areas they have claimed as their territory and this is far from its home lagoon to the north.

This particular sea demon is not yet ready to make its presence known. Instead, its close proximity to the Black Pearl has allowed it to activate the pearl's ability to summon sea creatures from the deeps and command them to cause havoc on the residents of Cuitzilli.

The ixitxachtli has no control over which types of creatures are summoned, but those that do come are directed to attack the shores immediately.

EVENT 1: PLESIOSAURS

Watchman are typically hired by fisherman and stationed atop the temple whenever they are out checking nets or attempting to bring in a profitable haul. The watchmen spot something terrible occur in the distance.

A typically beautiful afternoon in Cuitzilli is shattered by the sounds of frantic horn blowing coming from the top of the old Temple of Qotal.

Bellowing with a conch shell and pointing towards the sea, a watchman has the attention of everyone on shore. Within moments, four men board canoes armed with spears and plumastone tipped harpoons.

In the distance, swirling waters and an occasional fin surround the last upright canoe of three. Men and women from the two overturned canoes scream and splash at the water around them when suddenly a long, snakelike head appears from the sea and snatches a helpless victim. The water immediately turns red. You see a few canoes that remain on the shore only a short row from the battle.

The canoes on the shore are not designed to hold more than two medium sized creatures and the party will likely have to split up into pairs. Three could fit into a single canoe, but doing so would risk the canoe overturning during battle. With three in the boat, every time a player makes an attack they must make a DC 12 Dexterity check or fall prone.

A missed check by 5 or more causes the boat to overturn, dumping everyone in the water. Players in the water suffer disadvantage against the plesiosaurs on attack and defense rolls due to the flotsam, churning waters and general chaos. They also instantly become targets for all remaining plesiosaurs.

In the time it takes for the players to reach the battle, another canoe has been tipped and both a plesiosaur and an armed fisherman have been killed. The remaining three rescuers are engaged with another while two beasts go for the defenseless humans floating by their canoes.

The players can only save everyone by splitting up their attacks since the plesiosaurs are cunningly choosing to separate their prey.

If the players defeat their opponents they can help the two fishermen (who have the statistics of a **tribal warrior**) fight off the remaining plesiosaur.

If the players do not kill all three **plesiosaurs**, the battle will end up in the deaths of all of the humans.

The slain fishermen were all members of a rather popular family who were known for their generosity with the poor and talents for crafting teoatl talismans. If the players bravely faced the plesiosaurs and managed to prevent further death, the house matriarch named Eleuia offers them each 400 gp worth of raw pearls.

If one player stood out among the party, she offers him or her a small hemp bracelet with shark's teeth and pearl charms as a token of her appreciation.

This bracelet has the magical ability to summon creatures of its own and its full abilities can be found in the appendix.

EVENT 2: SAHUAGIN

Not long after the bodies (or what remains of them) are laid to rest the second attack comes from the sea in the form of a sahuagin raid.

The attack occurs at night and takes the form of squads of 8 **sahuagin** or 1 **sahuagin baron** with three normal **sahuagin** accompanying it.

Attacks occur at areas 1, 4 and 5 and the players should attempt to thwart however many they can. Only higher level parties (or those with greater numbers) should face the baron led groups, and adjustments to the number of normal sahuagin encountered should be made as the DM sees fit.

At the battle's conclusion, the townsfolk will start to become suspicious of the frequency of attacks. Two in as many days is unheard of but some believe that it could still be coincidence.

At the moment, there are a number of theories that are beginning to gain momentum. Some correctly blame the Black Pearl, but most think it is simply Umberlee's will, and a small but growing number blame the attacks on the presence of the characters themselves!

The young farmer boy Asquel who originally found the pearl is convinced of the truth, but he greatly fears the repercussions for his family should it be found out. Occasionally, the players will see him in a crowd staring at them. He doesn't quite know what to make of them yet, and he will not respond to being hailed.

EVENT 3: SAND SHARKS

There is at least 200 feet of sandy beach at any given point near town and there is always over a dozen men, women and children on it either working or playing at any given point in the day. If the characters set foot on the beach at any point during the day read to them the following scene.

Cuitzilli is a town of impressive folk with strong wills. Despite the tragedies of recent days life is going on as normal and as it always is on clear, hot days such as today; the beach is crowded.

The sun glare on the white sands is overwhelming and you are not quite sure you see what you think you are seeing, but it looks as if a fin just surfaced not from the water, but rather cutting through the sand itself.

You look around yourselves and realize this is no hallucination. There are undoubtedly fins in the sand and you aren't the only ones to have noticed. A woman screams and grabs her child as a fin approaches. Another woman, possibly an aunt or friend, gets between the mother and the strange beast brandishing only a piece of driftwood. Others around you scream and run for the temples.

A bizarre school of creatures known as sand sharks have been called by the Black Pearl despite the fact that they are no longer creatures of elemental water. They are cunningly intelligent and malicious creatures who swim through the sand as a regular shark would swim through water.

Incapable of "swimming" through anything harder than soft sand, they can at best travel under the ocean to find prey from beach to beach. The creatures are thankfully rare, but there are a half dozen **sand sharks** on the beach at the moment. The creatures can be easily avoided if the players decide to flee to the town, but this will mean at least three townsfolk who were too slow are killed.

EVENT 4: ICNOYOTL

When the sand sharks are disposed of and the characters return to town Icnoyotl, a village elder and famous pearl diver with the statistics of a **noble** will summon them to area 3 via a young messenger. First he will invite them to watch a ball game, and then he will wish to discuss the recent attacks.

When they arrive at the ball game and Icnoyotl finds them he approaches and begins to speak in either the Payit or Maztican tongue (he is fluent in both).

Welcome to our growing town of Cuitzilli. Had I known folk of your renown had come to my home we could have prepared a meeting under more pleasant circumstances. I am Icnoyotl, and though time may have stolen my talent from me, I was once regarded as the greatest of pearl divers as my father Zomantzin had been before me.



Iconoyotl explains to the characters that he has placed quite a large wager on this particular game and at its conclusion his excitement about winning is palpable. Iconoyotl offers each character a wooden cup of octli and finally gets down to business.

As you have seen, and I thank you eternally for your assistance, my home is currently under siege for unknown reasons. Attacks from the sea are not unheard of here in Cuitzilli, but three so close together can simply not be coincidence.

There is a reason these creatures are targeting our humble village and though I am unsure of the specifics, I believe it to somehow be related to the displeasure of Umberlee. Do you know of the Crooked One of the Sea for whom our town is named?

If the players already know this bit of history, Iconoyotl continues.

You have proven yourselves recently and unlike others in town, I do not believe that your arrival has led to these attacks. However, I do believe you can help us stop them. Our warriors are few, and they are needed to guard the town in case of another raid. Would you help us find the source of Umberlee's displeasure?

Now I am sought after for the wisdom that comes from experience and I do what I can to help my beloved Cuitzilli continue to grow strong for my children and grandchildren. Is there anything you wish to know about Cuitzilli before we discuss the matter at hand?

Iconoyotl is a braggart and quite greedy, but he does have the town's best interests in mind. The old diver has skin like darkened leather but his blue-green eyes indicates that at least a small part of his ancestry is non-native.

The retired pearl diver is willing to give the entire history of Cuitzilli to the characters and he describes its main areas if they are curious. After a bit of discussion, he invites the characters to come join him for some entertainment at the nearby ball court. The game being played is known as òllamaliztli and it is relatively common in Maztica.

There are differing versions throughout the True World, but this one has removed the stone rings that typically accompany a court of this size. The characters might not understand the rules, but it is obvious that the athletes may not use their hands. The Maztican ball game, or a specific version of it, is the entire focus of Chapter 2 of this adventure.

The players are not in any way obliged to help, but the attacks will continue in the coming days with increasing frequency until the town itself is finally abandoned. Fishing and pearl diving are put on hold, and they are unfortunately crucial to the town's economy and survival. The ixitxachitl will not be content with the return of its pearl and it will remain to ensure Cuitzilli's destruction.

If the players refuse to help but remain in town, the townsfolk will increasingly place the blame on their presence as the attacks continue. At some point, the players may be dealing with an angry mob in addition to the threat from the sea.

Iconoyotl explains that the village elders would likely reward them with a fortune in pearls should they bring back proof that they stopped the attacks from continuing, though he stops short of making a guarantee.

EVENT 5: IT'S THE SEA DEMON!

The players may determine the source of the attacks through a number of means, including a variety of divinations, but if they are stumped, the young and brash Asquel who has a growing sense of guilt approaches them.

Greetings brave ones. I believe I may know the reason the Cuitzilli is under attack. I have angered the Crooked One, and she has cursed us! Can you please help me?

Asquel knows there is something in the waters just off the coast that is directing the attacks and he suspects it is all connected to the pearl. If the players agree to help, he reaches into a bulging pocket and pulls out the Black Pearl, which he has stolen once again.

I don't know if I can be saved, but hopefully Umberlee will take her mercy on Cuitzilli. She is here, just a short distance off the shore and I believe she waits for this to be returned to her. I do not know if the goddess will reward you or destroy you, but I myself cannot return it. I fear her anger at my theft will not even allow me to get close.

Asquel is correct that the attacks originated from the theft of the pearl, but the Maztican ixitxachitl is no goddess, and returning the pearl will not satisfy it. It is a cruel being who can command the pearl's magic from afar and it will not be satisfied until the town is abandoned or destroyed.

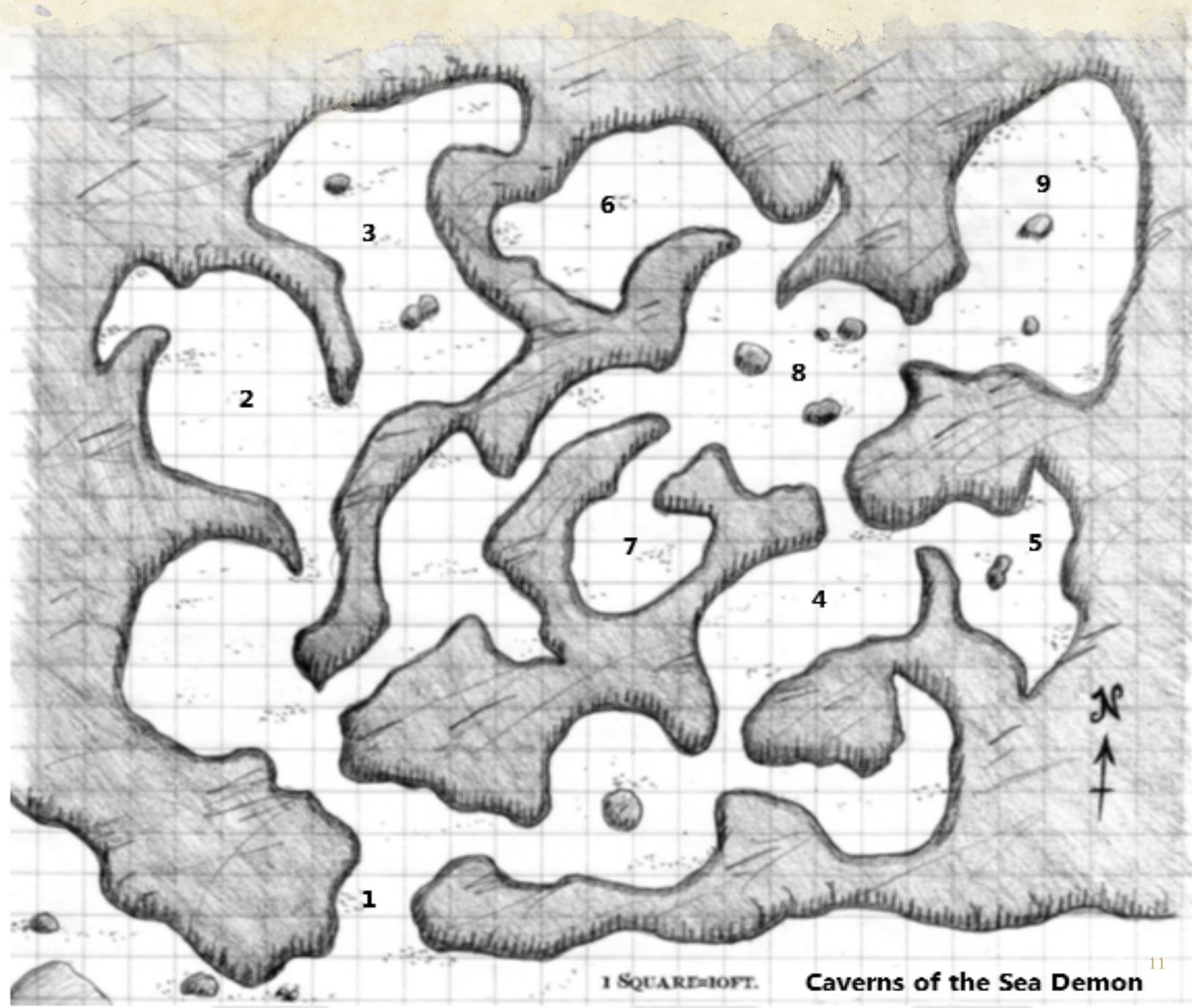
If the players decide to destroy the pearl or bring it out of the range of the sea demon's control the daily attacks will stop, but the beast itself will not leave the nearby waters and it alone can effectively halt the town's growth and economy. It is difficult to maintain a seaborne economy when entering the water leads to a swift death.

Asquel's theft of the pearl went remarkably smoothly, and the town elders are clueless as to its whereabouts. If they notice the players carrying it, it will require a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince them of the folly in keeping the pearl. Unconvinced elders will not attack but the characters will never truly be welcomed back in Cuitzilli again.

The markets will shun the characters and Asquel's family will be forced to return their newfound wealth.

CAVERNS OF THE SEA DEMON

Even in visible range of the shore the water gets very deep, very quickly. The ixitxachitl has found some natural caverns on the sea floor where it has taken up a temporary residence.



It would likely remain here only until it is confident Cuitzilli becomes uninhabited out of sheer cruelty. At such a point in time, it would dismiss the creatures it has summoned and return to its lagoon to the north. The merrow would likely remain and continue to inhabit the caverns.

ROOM 1: ENTRANCE

The entrance to the caverns are covered in a thick bed of kelp obscuring the entrance. Even so, the sea floor is otherwise nondescript, and the contrast makes the entrance relatively easy to find. In order to do so, the PCs should make an Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check, each with a DC of 10.

What the characters will likely not notice however (both DCs increased to 19) is the carnivorous, ambulatory kelp that intermixes with the more mundane varieties. The kelp is fast growing and its spores permeate the mundane varieties. The kelp is incredibly fast growing, and if the players leave the caverns to rest, it will have fully grown back by the time they return.

If the PCs ever leave the caverns to rest elsewhere, the kelp will have regrown by the time they return. There is no way for them to permanently remove the recurring menace.

The statistics for the **carnivorous kelp** can be found in the appendix.

ROOM 2: CAVERN OF MERROW

The merrow in rooms 2 and 3 were actually the first creatures summoned by the Black Pearl, but the sea demon finds them pleasing, and prefers to use them as valuable guards rather than raiders.

Three **merrow** occupy this chamber at all times, with the rare exception of when one is searching for food. The merrow carry a total of ten small pearls worth 25 gp each here.

ROOM 3: FALSE HOARD

Only two **merrow** occupy this cave and they seem to be guarding a sunken treasure chest. The merrow make a good show of defending their "hoard," which is in fact a **mimic**.

Should the PCs get to within reach of the mimic, it will attempt to surprise the PCs with its attack.

ROOM 4: EFFERVESCENT CHAMBER

As the characters get closer to the south most portion of this cave from elsewhere in the caverns, they will notice a definite drop in the water's temperature. The cave's ceiling is higher than others, reaching almost 40 feet at its highest point and the top half is filled with foul, but breathable air.

A rare aquatic offshoot of brown mold has grown in this chamber and it keeps the other inhabitants away. The air is a byproduct of the mold's natural body processes and small bubbles can constantly be seen floating up from the cave floor, causing an almost effervescent affect that isn't quite enough to obscure sight.

Every turn that the PCs start in this room, they will have to make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. Any who fail take 2d10 cold damage. The mold is part of the reason this branch of caves and tunnels is mostly unoccupied and pearl controlled creatures will only follow the PCs here if directly commanded by the *ixitxachitl*. The sea demon itself will not pursue characters fleeing characters here, but will instead attempt to head towards the merrow chambers to eventually cut them off from escaping.

ROOM 5: PILLAR ROOM

The temperature in this room is still noticeably uncomfortable, but it is not damaging and it is safe to rest in here, as no minions will willingly pass through Room 4 to get here. There is a long, thin stone in the room's center which almost reaches the ceiling and looks somehow out of place. The pillar is not free of sea flora but the players will easily note a symbol engraved deeply into the pillar.

Make an Intelligence (Religion) check based on the characters' background (DC 10 for native born, or DC 15 for Faerûnian characters) to pick up on the fact that the symbol is of the mother goddess Maztica.

Any player who touches the symbol will suddenly feel warm despite the chilled waters and have a vision of the dead goddess who beckons them from atop a pyramid that stretches beyond the edge of sight. Before the character can do anything the vision ends.

At this point the character will gain Inspiration. Each character can only have the vision and gain its benefit once however. They are now also immune to the cold damage dealt from the aquatic brown mold, but not other forms of cold.

This is the first real hint connecting the PCs to the greater adventure epic, and throughout the upcoming days, you might want to remind PCs of their vision which may recur while they dream.



ROOM 6: THE ARTIST

The only remaining resident of these caves prior to its occupation by the *ixitxachitl* is a strange **chuul** whose alignment is CN. This chuul has a penchant for artistry.

As the players enter this chamber, read the following.

A greenish glowing light permeates the chamber and you see a large tentacled lobster-like creature in the far corner of the room. Its back is turned to you and it seems to pay you no mind.

The glow comes from what you can only describe as “paintings” on the inside of large clamshells that are scattered throughout the chamber. For every shell that glows, there are ten scattered about that appear to have gone dark.

Unlike the vast majority of its kin, this chuul is not necessarily hostile and it is content to be left alone. Long ago, the chuul was under the direct influence of an aboleth that fled for other regions. The sudden disconnect drove the chuul insane and it discovered that it had an ability to take bioluminescence from surrounding waters and create a type of living pigment.

Using the insides of giant clamshells, the chuul started to calm its mind by creating what it considers art using its tentacles and these new aquatic pigments. The *ixitxachitl* finds the chuul’s art pleasing and has left it alone.

There is a form of aquatic sea lice in this cave that can easily become agitated and cause severe itching if the characters initiate any violent or sudden movements. If the PCs attack the chuul, they will suffer disadvantage on all melee attacks and casters will have to make a successful DC 10 Constitution check to successfully initiate or maintain concentration. This effect wears off after the PCs leave the cavern.

The pigments are actually made of millions of microscopic organisms and they tend to eventually die after a time, so the chuul’s work is temporary at best. There are currently three “living” clamshells that could fetch up to 3,000 gp each to a buyer and an additional masterpiece worth 5,000 gp. The phosphorescence dies within a single day out of water and a week if it remains underwater.



If the PCs figure out a way to magically preserve the pigments, the chuul might even agree to trade such knowledge for its masterpiece.

ROOM 7: SAHUAGIN RAIDERS

This cave is where the *ixitxachitl* allows its next raiding party to settle before they are sent off to terrorize Cuitzilli. Currently there are 5 **sahuagin** and one **baron sahuagin** here, a slightly larger raiding force than the PCs might be used to.

The baron sahuagin has some treasure in the form of 6 uncut emeralds worth 200 gp each.

ROOM 8: RELIQUARY OF THE PEARL

The only item occupying this large chamber is the empty open clam that once held the Black Pearl of the sea demon.

It is surrounded with the same phosphorescent glow that the chuul in Room 7 uses as a pigment. Read the following to the PCs when they enter the chamber.

Surrounded by glowing water, you see what may be the largest clamshell you have ever seen. It is obvious that this must be the one that the young Asquel spoke of. A pad of pinkish flesh lays in the clams center, openly waiting for its prize.

If the players believe somehow that returning the Black Pearl will sate the *ixitxachitl*’s wrath, they are sorely mistaken. However, they are certainly free to try and thereby trigger this clever trap.

Any PC who places the Black Pearl in the clam will need to make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or become trapped by the clam which instantly snaps shut. The PCs can free their companion by doing at least 100 points of damage to the clamshell which is AC 16, but at the start of each turn, the pressure exerted by the clam will do 4d8 bludgeoning damage to the trapped victim. A trapped creature cannot cast spells or make attacks of their own.

The sahuagin raiders from Room 7 will also be alerted and arrive in a single turn as a large roar emanates from Room 9. This battle could be quite deadly for the PCs if they are short a member.

ROOM 9: THE SEA DEMON

In this, the largest of all the caves you have encountered so far, you see a creature that reminds you of why you sometimes fear the depths of the sea.

Superficially, it resembles the gentle rays of the oceans, but its glowing red eyes and horribly fanged teeth give the creature a demonic countenance.

The sea demon does not address you, or hesitate in the slightest – it immediately goes on the attack.

The **Maztican ixitxachitl** is a CR9 monster, and as such, this is a challenging battle for the players. To make matters worse, if there are any remaining merrow or sahuagin in the caverns they may come to the aid of the monstrosity.

The Maztican ixitxachitl's attack is relatively straightforward and if the players are fully rested the battle is most definitely winnable. The creature is stubborn, and will refuse to flee from what it considers to be lesser creatures.

CONCLUSION

As the sea demon breathes its last breath, the magic in the Black Pearl dies with it, but its value as a treasure of the sea remains. Cuitzilli's elders have no desire to see the Pearl returned and consider it a worthy parting gift to the adventurers that saved their town.

Icnoyotl is extremely impressed with the PCs and might be the source of additional adventures. While arrogant, he is a trustworthy patron. Though it is slightly out of character, he sees to it that Asquel's family never has need nor want again.

Life in Cuitzilli, thanks to the PCs returns to normal within a few weeks, and the players will always be welcomed here.

APPENDIX

The following new monsters and magic item can be found within this chapter of the adventure.

CARNIVOROUS KELP

Carnivorous kelp is an underwater menace which is very difficult to eradicate completely. It grows back within a single day to full strength as long as it receives enough sunlight filtering through the surface of the ocean. It is believed to have been spawned in much the same way that assassin vines were created, or at least have some relationship to such deadly flora.

CARNIVOROUS KELP

Huge plant, unaligned

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 57 (6d12 + 18)

Speed 5 ft., swim 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius) passive

Perception 11

Languages -

Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

False Appearance. As long as it remains motionless, the carnivorous kelp is indistinguishable from natural kelp.

ACTIONS

Crush. One creature grappled by the carnivorous kelp must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 22 (5d8) bludgeoning damage. If a creature that needs air or water to breathe fails this save, all of the air or water is forced from its lungs and it immediately begins to suffocate.

Multiattack. The carnivorous kelp makes two melee slam attacks, or one slam and one crush attack.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) bludgeoning damage and a Huge or smaller target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and unable to breathe, and the carnivorous kelp can't grapple another target.

MAZTICAN IXITXACHITL

Ixitxachitl are a menace throughout Toril. They plague the seas, rivers and most notably the underdark waterways. The Maztican ixitxachitl is similar in shape to its Faerûnian brethren, but it is far more primitive of a creature, far larger, and less intelligent. However, its cruelty is unmatched, earning it the nickname among native Mazticans as the “Sea Demon.”

Primeval Being. If Maztican ixitxachitl are aware of their connection to their lesser kin in Faerûn, they don't show it. Sea demons only know that they always have been and there are legends of their existence from the earliest of ages. Perhaps the giant sea dwelling scorpionfolk known as the palophonti know more of their origins, but they certainly aren't telling.

Black Pearls. Every sea demon is connected to a fist sized, magical black pearl. The pearl is grown in hidden lagoons that the ixitxachitl protects violently, but once the pearl is fully grown and active, the sea demon allows it to fall into the hands of others. The sea demon can activate its magic at up to a mile distant and it can be used to draw evil sea creatures to either the location of the ixitxachitl or the pearl itself.

The sea demon can directly command those it draws to its own presence. Destroying a Black Pearl is simple, but their value at 5,000 gp makes this undesirable to most, and many will ignore the havoc they are causing, even if they suspect the source. The Sea Demon understands the greed of mankind well enough.

MAZTICAN IXITXACHITL

Huge aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18

Hit Points 147 (14d12 + 56)

Speed 0 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	7 (-2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +5, Cha +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Senses darkvision 90 ft. passive Perception 11

Languages Abyssal, Ixitxachitl

Challenge 9 (5000 XP)

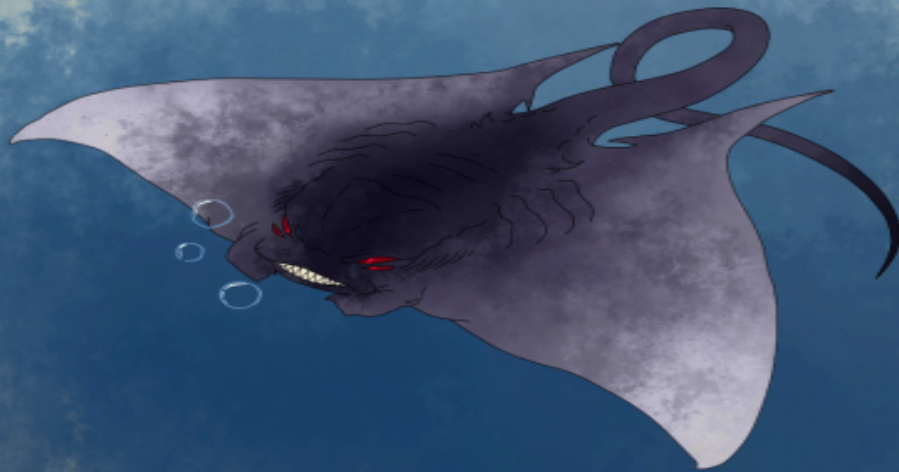
ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 27 (6d6+6) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Barbed Tail. When a creature provokes an opportunity attack from the Maztican ixitxachitl, the ixitxachitl can make the following attack instead of using its bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit* 33 (6d8+6) piercing damage.



SAND SHARK

No doubt the result of magical experimentation, sand sharks are strange creatures that resemble normal reef sharks, but live in a far different environment.

Difficult to Kill. Sand sharks are aware that they are nearly unassailable when burrowing. When they are close to death, they will stay deep in the sand until the rest of their pack finishes off an opponent.

Magical Creations. Sand sharks were once normal reef sharks, but undoubtedly some wizard or other practitioner of magic created them to protect the shores of his or her beachfront tower. The sand sharks, whether intended or not, spread out by traveling under the seas along routes of soft sand and sediment.

ELEUIA'S BRACELET

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement) [teotl]

Eleuia's bracelet is a permanent teotl talisman that has been infused with magic of the sea. The bracelet has numerous charms made of shells and other thematic representations of the sea connected to its golden band.

If the wearer is in or on a sea which would normally contain reef sharks, he may summon 1d4 to come to his aid once each week. The sharks can understand simple commands even from underwater, but are not intelligent enough for complex actions.

In addition, the wearer has advantage on all checks that involve swimming and may hold his or her breath for twice as long as normal.

SAND SHARK

Medium, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 18 (4d8)

Speed 0 ft., burrow 40 ft.

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

Skills Perception +2

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine

Senses passive Perception 12, tremorsense 30 ft.

Languages -

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Earth Breathing. The sand shark can breathe only underground in loose sand or earth.

Pack Tactics. The sand shark has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the shark's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Regeneration. The sand shark regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. The sand shark dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points.

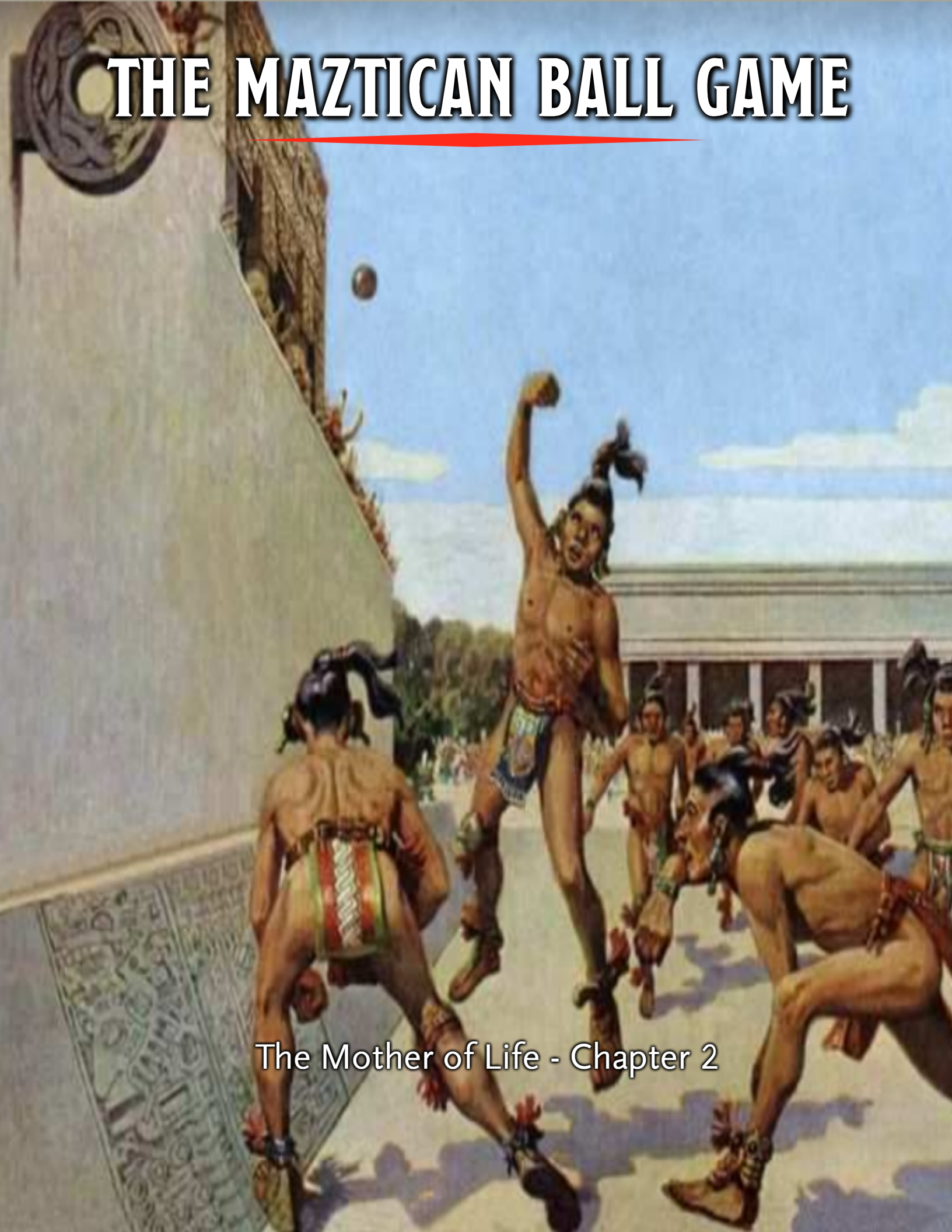
Sand Glide. The sand shark can burrow through sand. While doing so, the sand shark doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.



THE MAZTICAN BALL GAME



The Mother of Life - Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2 - THE MAZTICAN BALL GAME



With all of the adventuring, monster slaying and treasure collecting that goes on daily in the Realms, it might be hard to imagine that there are also activities that don't require spells or swords. Though culturally, the consequences might still be important, the Maztican Ball Game may be exactly such an activity.

INTRODUCTION

This book is the second chapter in the *Mother of Life* epic adventure. It is far different than any of the other chapters and includes the mechanics for a sport known as òllamaliztli as much as it has encounters for the PCs to overcome.

In reality, DMs who wish to skip this chapter could do so easily, but it will give the players a unique interlude to the monster bashing that occurs in most other adventures. This does not mean that the chapter doesn't have its own challenges!

In addition to the mechanics, this book also defines the Grand Tournament; a competition that occurs in Kultaka once every five years and whose winners become historical figures in the True World.

Òllamaliztli over the centuries has become a cultural phenomenon for the whole of the True World. The sport has spread to Faerûn, and one day soon we might see Waterdhavian nobles drinking copious amounts of octal while watching their favorite athletes perform.

WHAT IS THE BALL GAME?

The Maztican ball game has existed for hundreds, if not a thousand or more years in Maztica and is practiced among myriad cultures from Far Payit all the way to Huacli and Kolan.

None know who actually invented the game but all are certain that its origin was in one of the city-states of Huacli. The game's true name is Pokolpok, whose origin is actually from the dead language Téenek. Téenek was last spoken in its pure form over 1,000 years ago in Huacli, though some words and phrases can still be found in modern times.

The Nexalans were the first to popularize the game and they gave it the name òllamaliztli which is the most commonly used name today, though in Payit, "Tlachtli" has also maintained some popularity. In their ignorance and difficulty with the Nexalan inflection, newcomers from Faerûn call the game "Poke-a-Tok", a derivative of the Téenek name, but those who use this name today are often ridiculed.

The version of the rules presented below are the most common for òllamaliztli, but there are dozens of variations.

ÒLLAMALIZTLI SIGNIFICANCE

The Maztican ball game has grown in popularity and changed its rules into many forms. It has held religious significance, and both its winners and losers have been the subjects of sacrifice to the gods in varying locations and times.

Plutoq is known to favor the game, and his more bloodthirsty priests tended to lead the ceremonies of sacrifice in the past. Typically, Plutoq's priests only sacrificed the willing winners of major tournaments that often lasted many years in Huacli and the participants were considered honored and guaranteed a place by Plutoq's side in the afterlife.

Plutoq is even rumored to have taken the form of a human in the past to observe or even participate in the game. Strangers are known to be treated like royalty in Otomi in particular if they demonstrate exceptional natural talent. After all, they could always be the mountain god in disguise.

Zalteco, not to be outdone, used the game in Nexal and Kultaka as an excuse to slaughter. In almost direct opposition to Plutoq's tournaments, only the best players or teams avoided the ministrations of the obsidian blade.

Kiltzi, and to a lesser extent Qotal, look upon the game favorably as its outcomes have often been used to settle local disputes peacefully in the past.

THE ÒLLAMALIZTLI COURT

The court is typically 50 feet wide by 100 feet long and sunken 30 feet below into the ground with solid stone walls on all sides and a compacted clay floor. Grandstands rise up from the edges of the walls on all sides.

The court is divided in two halves by a midcourt line. At the midcourt line, 15 feet up on either side is a vertical ring 12 inches in diameter. Along the back portion of each court half (the baseline) is a goal that is recessed into the wall.

The goal is 20 feet wide, by 10 feet high, by 5 feet deep. Typically, a removable hemp net is attached to the goals, but on occasion these are replaced with retractable fences.

Some courts have secondary uses, such as gladiatorial battles, and the goals can be used as holding pens for combatants and wild beasts.

A dashed line 20 feet from each goal runs the width of the court. Another dashed line surrounds the vertical rings at a distance of 10 feet.

There is a cross mark at center court. Some courts have floors which angle slightly starting 15 feet from each side wall that reach 5 feet up when they intersect the walls.

GAME RULES

The rules of the game vary by region, and can be easily altered to suit your campaign. There are dozens of versions that have been practiced throughout history.

SETUP

The Ball Game is played by 2 teams of 4 players each, though it may be played by more in some scenarios as long as both teams have even numbers. The game is played with a 6 inch diameter solid rubber ball made from native Maztican rubber trees.

OBJECTIVE AND SCORING

The first team to 3 points wins the game. The best out of 3 wins a match. Most afternoon contests consist of a single match. In playoff or tournaments, longer set or series can be played which is the best out of 3 matches.

When a ball ends up in your opponent's goal, it earns you one point. If the ball goes through a vertical ring earns your team 3 points which is an automatic victory for that game.

This is exceedingly rare and doing so will make that player something of a local legend. Shots can only be attempted from inside the associated zones (i.e. from within 20 feet of a goal, or 10 feet of a vertical ring).

STARTING PLAY

The game begins with one player from each side coming to center court at the cross mark. A referee holds the ball at the game's start within the palm of his hand. On his whistle, each player attempts to smack the ball out of his hand, backwards towards one of their teammates.

This "slap ball" procedure is repeated to get the ball back into play after a goal, or if it is ever knocked into the grandstands. This is the only time a player may touch the ball with his hand on offense.

ADVANCING THE BALL

The ball can be advanced by touching it with any part of your body except feet and hands. The ball can be advanced by "dribbling" it on one's knees in sort of a high-stepping motion, or with their elbows by bouncing it off the court.

The ball is more commonly advanced via passing. Opponents may use any part of their body, including feet and hands, to intercept a pass or block a shot. However, they may not grasp the ball at any point.

Shoving or "checking" is totally legal, and a fan favorite part of the game.

Violating a rule gives the opposing team automatic control of a ball after a moment of stopped play at the location of the violation.

POSITIONING

Players may begin the game wherever they like, so long as they are behind their team mate who is participating in the "slap ball." Otherwise, there are no restrictions on positioning at other points of the game.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The use of magic, weapons and racial magical abilities (like *misty step*) are strictly forbidden in the ball game. Participants may also not use any other form of movement such as flying or burrowing while playing.

GAMETIME MECHANICS

Start by rolling initiative for all players as you would in a standard combat. Note that every check in this section that is given an unassigned DC Ability check, is the player's choice of either Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) as some player's use finesse, while others try to muscle their way to victory.

SLAP BALL

Each team picks one player to go to center court to participate in the "slap ball." Each player makes an opposing Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, the player with the higher score successfully knocks the ball back to a team mate of their choice.

ACTIONS

Actions are basically the same rules as in combat. Players can move, dash, disengage, attack (though the only attack allowed is a shove/check), steal, block, pass, dribble and shoot.

DRIBBLE

A player must succeed on a DC 5 check to get the ball under control to dribble it with their knees or elbows. If successful the player can then move, but their movement is slowed by half their walking speed (dribbling a hard rubber ball is tougher than just running straight ahead).

A player can choose to move more carefully when dribbling, which negates the DC5 check. However, in this case, the player may only move at 1/3 their normal speed, rounded upwards.

DASH

The same rules apply as in combat.

PASS

A player must succeed on a DC 8 check to pass the ball. The ball can be passed 30 feet. For every increment of 5 feet beyond 30, add 2 to the DC. On a failed check, the ball is fumbled and is now a loose ball in that player's square.

Any other player within their reach can obtain the ball as a bonus action.

Passes can be bent up to 45 degrees at a cost of 1/2 the travel distance. Passes can also be bounced off the sidewalls and ricochet in a direction the passer intends at a cost of 1/2 the pass travel distance.

RECEIVING A PASS

Receiving a pass is done as a reaction to a ball coming into a player's area, and thus it doesn't take an action. To receive a pass a player must succeed on a DC 8 check to successfully receive and control a pass.

On a failed check the ball is fumbled and is now a loose ball in that player's square, any other player within reach can obtain the ball as a bonus action.

Any time a player receives the ball on a pass, as a reaction they can either shoot or pass themselves immediately.

INTERCEPTING A PASS

As a reaction, a player can intercept a pass with a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check when the ball goes through a square within their reach.

If the ball actually passes through the square the player is occupying, they have advantage on the roll.

STEALING THE BALL

Any player within reach of the player possessing the ball can attempt to steal it. Each player makes a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, the winner now possesses the ball. On a steal attempt the player who started with the ball has advantage on the check.

GOAL SHOT

Any player within the 20 foot strike/attack zone may attempt a shot on goal. It is a DC 10 check to shoot accurately on goal which is slightly more difficult than simply advancing the ball. A failed check results in the ball being fumbled and in such a circumstance, it is now a loose ball in that player's square and any other player within reach can obtain the ball as a bonus action.

Missed shots on goal result in the ball being fumbled in front of the goal and it also becomes a loose ball.

RING SHOT

Players may attempt to score on either vertical ring. Any player within the 10 foot strike/attack zone of a vertical ring can attempt a shot.

Given the circular nature of the attack zone, players only need to be standing partially in the circle (representing at least one foot in the attack zone).

A successful DC 20 check is required to put the ball through the ring and score. A failed check results in the ball being fumbled, in which case it is now a loose ball in that player's square and any other player within reach can obtain the ball as a bonus action.

Missed shots on a ring result in the ball being fumbled in front of the ring and it becomes a loose ball.

BLOCKING A SHOT

As a reaction, any player within reach of a player shooting, or within reach of a player's target, can attempt to block with a DC 15 check.

On a successful block the player who blocked the ball can deflect the ball 10 feet in any direction or gain its possession. On a failed check, it may be blocked by another defender within reach, or it reaches its intended target, possibly resulting in a score.

SHOVING AND CHECKING

Players may shove opposing players as they would in combat.

The shoving player must use Strength (Athletics) versus the "victim's" Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) save (victim's choice). If the shove succeeds the player who was shoved is knocked prone.

HELP

Much as it is in combat, players can help one another. If a player is within reach of a teammate they can help them on their next action, providing advantage to that player's check. This assistance is thematically something like setting a pick or perhaps lifting a teammate up into the air to help them get a shot off over the other contestants.

DELAY

As in combat, a player can delay their turn in initiative and trigger it as a specified time.

WALL RUN

Players can run up the side walls at up to 1/2 of their walking speed if they make a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

A player making a wall run can avoid all opportunity attacks and can occupy the same square as an opponent or ally.

Wall runs are often used to help score Ring Shots. A player can attempt to wall run, receive a pass and then shoot a ring shot. A Ring Shot attempted from a position on the wall is at advantage unless of an opponent has also done a successful wall run and is within reach.

A player who finishes their turn on the side of the wall falls prone, which is often considered a price well worth paying if a ring shot has just been scored.

A tactical move that often leads to a ring shot is if Player A possesses the ball, while Player B attempts the wall run. Player A delays their action until Player B is in position. Player A then fires a pass to Player B who can still receive the pass and attempt to shoot it through the ring.



OPPORTUNITY ATTACKS

As in combat, be careful crossing through your opponent's reach, he may shove you over!

OPTIONAL RULES AND MECHANICS

The following rules and mechanics are optional. While they might complicate the game, they might also be used to enrich the sport and its realism.

OPTIONAL RULE: THE LONG SHOT

You might want to allow players to shoot from greater distances, and different regions of Maztica have different variations on this rule.

If you choose this option, players can attempt shots from outside the associated "attack zones". The first 3 squares beyond the goals are at a DC 15, the next 3 are DC 20. Shots may not be taken from beyond half court.

For ring shots, the next 3 squares outside the main attack zone are at DC 30 and DC 35 beyond that.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: INJURIES

If you want to take into account that players might become injured, roll a Constitution save every time a player is knocked prone by either being shoved or falling from a wall run.

The save DC is 7 for being shoved and DC 10 for the wall run. If they fail the save, they are injured and must either make a substitution for another player or continue to play while moving at half speed and taking Disadvantage on all game checks.

Most venues will stop the game for a substitution, at which point a new Slap Ball occurs at the midcourt line.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: HOME COURT

If the DM wants to include the effects of a home court advantage, each player on the team could be given inspiration on a single ability check during a game. This may also be given if the DM determines the crowd is particularly raucous for either or both teams during a high stakes, or championship game.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: SCALING THE GAME

The mechanics for ðllamaliztli are designed for characters in the first tier to maintain a competitive game. High level characters, particularly if they have proficiency in acrobatics or athletics, can be quite effective at the game, defeating the competition in short order.

When there is a level imbalance, this is as it should be; as higher level characters are assumed to be greater in talent.

When teams are more evenly matched in level, however, the game should not always be a quick win. Great offense will undoubtedly be negated or at least slowed by equally great defense.

Take the average level of all players on each team, and the average level of all players on the court. If the average level of each team is greater than three levels, do not use this mechanic; let the far less talented team get slaughtered.

However, if the teams are evenly matched (average levels are three or less) you should adjust all of the game DCs according to the overall average as follows.

Average Player Level

DC Increase

1-4	+0
5-8	+1
9-12	+2
13-16	+3
17-20	+4

THE GRAND TOURNAMENT

Although the sport may have begun long ago in Huacli, the Kultakans currently have the largest tournament of ðllamaliztli in the True World and they have for close to a century.

Teams come from all over and are even diverse enough to include the occasional Nexalan team of orcs. This is the only time that any such creature would ever be allowed to walk into Kultaka without being slain instantly. The tournament itself is held in a village that lies within sight of that poisoned homeland of the beasts of the Viperhand.

The village is named Tonaltzintli and when the Grand Tournament is held, it becomes a bustling city for many moons before and after. The tournament is known everywhere and the names of its champions are spread far and wide by the traveling merchants known as pochteca.

It only occurs only once every five years so teams practice and train hard during these long intermissions. The prizes for winners are known to be grand, but the pride for one's home nation is also worth more than any amount of gold to most of those who compete.

Champions become legends as much as any adventurer ever could.

ENTERING THE TOURNAMENT

Teams need to be sponsored by a nation or other power group which they will represent in the tournament.

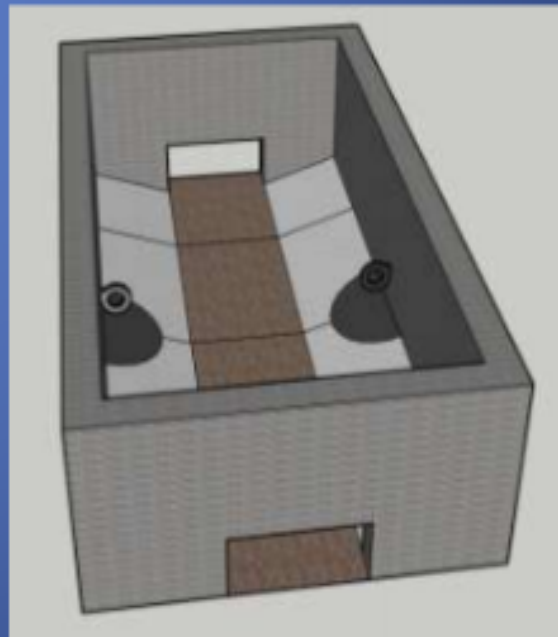
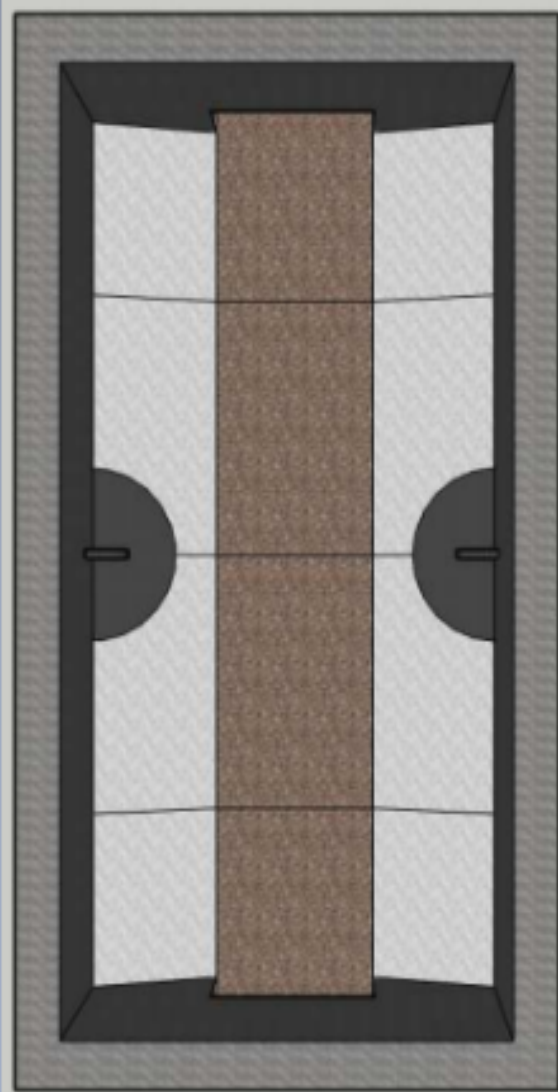
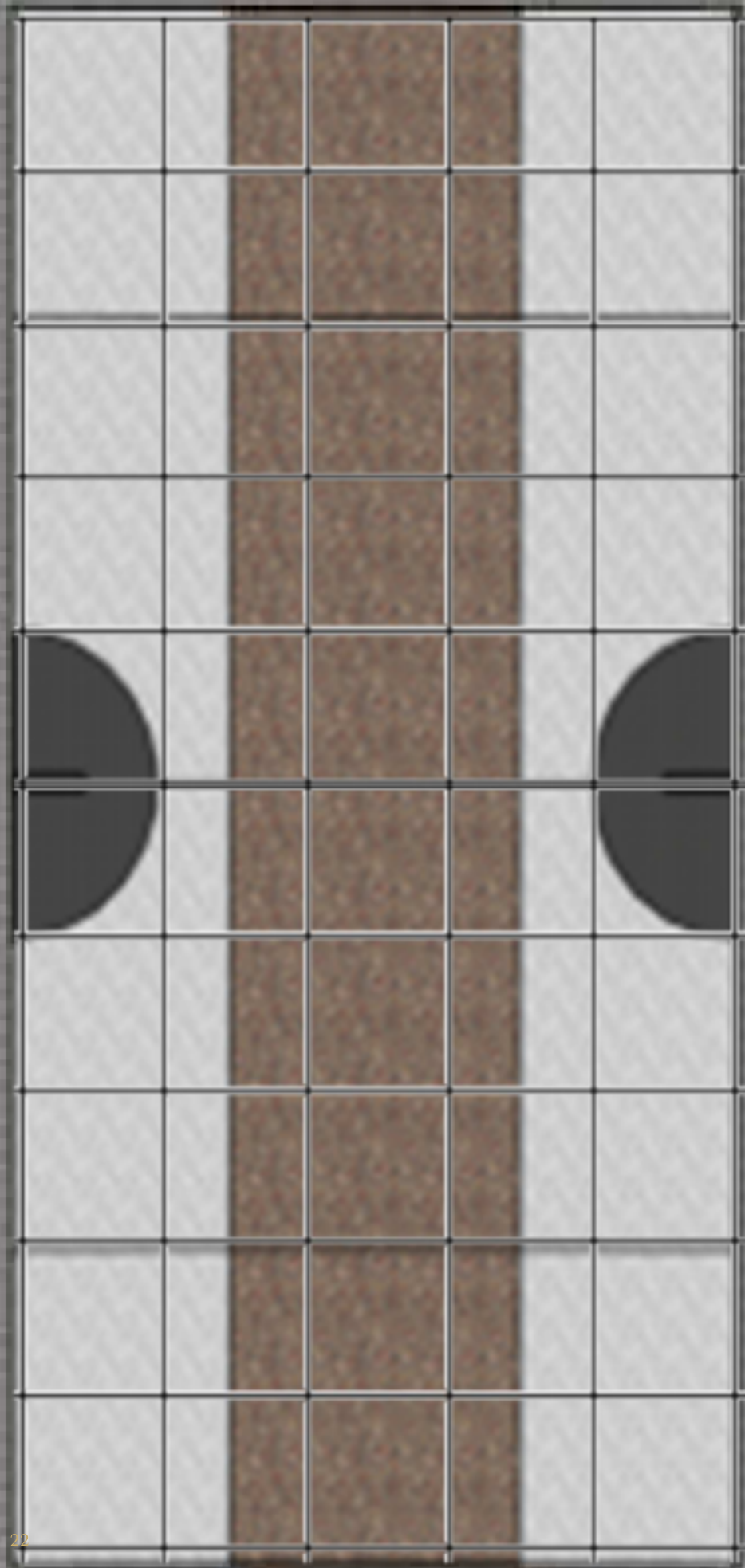
In the past, the Payit, the Far Payit, the Kultakans, the Otomi (representing all of Huacli), Kolan, Pezelac, the Green Folk, the Tabaxi, the Desert Dwarves, Helmsport, the Short Folk and yes, even the orcs of Nexal have fielded teams.

There are also teams that specifically represent a single faith or deity – Plutoq, Qotal and Eha all have teams sponsored by their temples.

A decade ago, dragonborn settlers originally from the world of Abeir put together a team of their own, but have yet to truly master the game rules. They have lost in the first round on both of their appearances, but this year's team is said to be much improved.

If the players want to be included, they need to find a sponsor. If the players approach a power group, the DM can simply determine that the group has decided to be a sponsor or they may require the PCs to perform some kind of task in order to insure sponsorship. This can lead to other adventures if the DM so desires.

In keeping with the *Mother of Life* adventure, one power group seeks out the party shortly after their involvement in the events of *The Sea Demon's Pearl*. They are a druidic order dedicated to the dead goddess Maztica.



Members of this organization have been cropping up all over the True World in recent years waiting for what they believe will be the return of the goddess and a victory in this tournament will bring them needed attention. If the player's have had visions of the goddess from their involvement in the prior chapter, the druids can sense the player's connection to MAztica and seek them out.

The tournament does not require any sort of entrance fee. The marketplaces in Kultaka are flooded with monetary exchange during this event and locals benefit greatly.

All costs are provided by the Kultakan government due to the economic surge and the individual athletes are for want of nothing during their stay in Kultaka.

TOURNAMENT RULES

The tournament is a bracket competition where matchups are randomized. The number of teams in the competition occasionally requires teams to receive a bye, and their selection is also random.

Violence of any sort is strictly prohibited, and there are over two dozen of Kultaka's finest jaguar knights, hishnashapers and hishnacasters ensuring that rivalries or standard hatreds do not reach the point of bloodshed.

THE GAMES: DAY 1

The games will occur in the order given below with some colorful descriptions of the happenings and results of each game. When the players' game comes up, statistics and a description of the opposing team will be given along with relevant game modifiers.

Note that the tournament lasts four days in total. There are four games on the first, second and third days, with the two semifinal games and finals on the fourth.

TABAXI VS. PAYIT

This game is an energetic and perfect first matchup between two teams with similar playing styles. The tabaxi turn out to be simply too quick for the Payit team (who incidentally made it to the semifinals five years prior) and win the match 3-1.

The Payit and their fans are disappointed, but after the loss, most stay and switch their allegiance to a second favorite such as Far Payit or Pezelac.

PEZELAC VS. NEXAL

No matter whom they are actually at the tournament to watch, the entire crowd roots for Pezelac in this matchup. This gives the players inspiration and Klatilli, the team's sole female member, scores within the first minute of the game.

Though it falls short of actual jeering, possibly out of fear of the orcs, the crowd is all but silent when the orcs score or make a move.

Other than their reactions, this game goes quite smoothly. Alas, to everyone's disappointment, the orcs are simply too big and they muscle their way past Pezelac 3-2.

Pezelac's fans keep their interest as an upcoming match includes the dragonborn who are relative newcomers to their nation.

DESERT DWARVES VS. THE SHORT FOLK

This matchup causes great mirth among the spectators and disparaging comments about height are quite frequent in the crowd. The dwarves use their strength to overpower the Short Folk and the score is 2-0 rather quickly.

Then one of the dwarves falls to the floor and begins drooling after being checked by a filthy looking halfling that swears incessantly in his native tongue. The short folk come back after a substitution is made and tie the game 2-2.

As the teams continue to compete, Hishnashapers detect that the dwarf was poisoned using kurari poison. All of the halflings are searched and as suspected, the dirty halfling was wearing a hishna ring that could inject poison on contact.

The halflings are ejected from the tournament and banned for the following decade. The dwarves, who were highly favored to at least make it to the finals this year, are more than angry that their best player could not finish the tournament.

This incident has the potential to cause diplomatic issues between the two peoples.

DRAGONBORN VS. GREEN FOLK

The dragonborn have yet to ever win a game since they first entered a team. This game is extremely defensive and remains 0-0 for an extended portion of time. No one can seem to score until the unthinkable occurs. One of the dragonborn, an agile member of the Maztican newcomers named Tekamal, takes a random shot at one of the side rings and miraculously, it scores!

The normally stoic dragonborn fly into a fit of celebration and the crowd goes wild. The dragonborn remain the beloved underdog team that wins the hearts of many. This goes a long way towards changing opinions of the newcomers to the True World.

The Green Folk, mysterious and silent as they are, disappear within moments of losing, as do the few that came to watch them.

THE GAMES: DAY 2

The second day of the tournament starts earlier as most that have come to observe the games have already arrived in Kultaka and there are short interludes of entertainment between the games.

Whoever the PCs are playing for, they are the first to play. As a relative unknown going up against a mediocre team, the game is not well attended.

THE PCs VS. KOLAN

Kolan's team consists of four players and one substitute should anyone get injured. The team consists of the following players, all of whom are level 3 characters (class is irrelevant and proficiencies are given below).

Player 1: Dexterity 15 (+2), Proficient in Sleight of Hand and Acrobatics (+2). This player starts the game with the Slap Ball.

Player 2: Dexterity 16 (+3), Proficient in Acrobatics (+2). This player is the leading scorer for Kolan.

Player 3: Strength 14 (+2). Proficient in Athletics (+2). This player loves to shove other players and sometimes does so when the move isn't even particularly tactical.

The crowd seems to love it, and he enjoys the response.

Player 4: Strength 13 (+1). Proficient in Athletics (+2). A younger player with a good future in the game, but has yet to really reach his potential.

Substitute: Dexterity 13 (+1). Proficient in Acrobatics (+2). A veteran of these tournaments, this player is past his prime but was once a crowd favorite.

He is not as agile as he once was and repeated injuries, in addition to advancing age, have slowed him down. If he enters the game, the crowd will go wild, giving him inspiration.

If the players win by two points or shut out the other team, they too will become crowd favorites and will draw attention the following day in the markets.

Merchants will offer them heavily discounted wares (50% off) if they agree to wear or hold the purchased materials during the tournament.

KULTAKA VS. FAR PAYIT

This game is mildly embarrassing and frustrating to those who traveled many days to watch Far Payit play. The highly skilled Kultakans aid and assist each other repeatedly, performing wall runs and blocking almost any shot the Far Payit attempt.

The game is over quickly and Far Payit loses 3-0.

ENTERTAINMENT - THE GLADIATOR

After the Kultaka/Far Payit debacle, two dozen jaguar knights ring the edges of the court and at least as many drums begin to beat from among the crowd.

A muscular Kultakan enters the court from one goal to the roar of the crowd. He wields a massive maca in one hand and wears only war paint and a small loincloth.

At the opposite goal, the players will first hear a roar that silences the crowd, and then they gasp as a purple black puma-like creature enters the court. The creature is no ordinary puma, however, as its six legs and pronged tentacles would suggest. The creature is hard to place in any one location and its movements are difficult to follow.

The Nexalans, who have otherwise behaved quite well during the tournament, are riled by this creature's presence.

At this point, the DM has an option. If he would like an actual encounter to occur that requires combat, the orcs of Nexal could start a riot. This creature is a **displacer beast**, which in some ways is sacred to the beasts of the Viperhand.

While these competing orcs are not members of that vile organization, they are quite used to obeying their jagre masters; ogres who can take the form of such a creature.

The distraction causes the gladiator to lose focus and he is ultimately slain by the displacer beast's tentacle attack. Worse yet, a small tabaxi child falls to the court floor only 30 feet from the displacer beast and gains the creature's attention. Busy with calming the riot and getting the orcs under control, the Kultakan jaguar knights are of no help during the battle.

There are a number of potential rewards for rescuing the tabaxi child. For one, the child's clan approaches the players the following day and hands to them a beautifully woven hemp necklace. The necklace is not magical, but it depicts an extremely skilled figure of what they explain to be the Cat Lord; a god of sorts worshiped by the tabaxi.

The necklace does not contain any precious materials but could be worth 300 gp for its craftsmanship. Its true value, however, is more in its use as an indicator that the wearer has provided some great service to the tabaxi. Any first encounter with tabaxi will always give the wearer advantage in any Charisma based checks unless the wearer attacks.



The Kultakans will also be grateful that their tournament was not ruined by the death of the tabaxi child. The team will take it easier on the players during the championship game, and the crowd will no longer give the Kultakans “home court” advantage.

QOTAL VS. THE OTOMI

As the crowd simmers, the players may be surprised to see that the orcs have not been slain, nor have they caused any damage to anything living.

The incident is quickly passed on by as two new contenders enter the court. The Otomi ignore the pooled blood that stains their half of the court while those who represent Qotal look upon it in disgust.

After such an exciting afternoon, the game goes relatively without incident. After a particularly hard shove, it is thought that one of Qotal’s team members was injured, but he returns to score what ends up their only goal.

In the end the Otomi win 3-1.

PLUTOQ VS. HELMSPORT

If there is any team that is despised more than the Nexalans, it is the players of Helmsport.

Plutoq’s faithful consists of two desert dwarves and two stocky humans who appear to be almost as dwarven as their teammates. Shockingly, the PCs might eventually notice that one is, in fact, a female.

Plutoq’s team controls the ball for the vast majority of the game and the folk from Helmsport really don’t stand a chance. Perhaps they could have beaten the dragonborn, but there was no way otherwise that they would advance to the second round.

Plutoq’s faithful muscle their way to a 3-0 victory.

Chants of “poke-a-tok!” resonate from the crowd; a pejorative name once misused by the invaders from Amn in reference to the game and now used only to embarrass Amn’s pale skinned descendants.

ENTERTAINMENT – BARD AND BIRDS

Qotal’s faithful brought a contingent with them to help entertain the crowd and garner favor with the Kultakans where not many temples of Qotal can be found.

This troupe takes the form of a humanoid plumazotl bard and five bird plumazotl. Very few of the attendees have ever witnessed such creatures and even after the chaos and excitement of the game, along with copious amounts of octal being drunk, the crowd quickly quiets.

The humanoid is shaped like a man but his body is comprised completely of feathers. His assortment of instruments is also apparently formed of the same plumage.

The bird plumazotl which accompany him sing while he plays. Somehow the music is both haunting and uplifting and though he plays for only a few short songs, the crowd leaves satisfied and ready for the playoffs the following day.

PLAYOFFS: DAY 3

The excitement during the playoffs is palpable both on and off the field. Now that the less talented teams have been eliminated, the competition gets stiffer and the games become more intense. Shoving and wall running moves increase dramatically as every player wants to please the crowd.

TABAXI VS. THE DESERT DWARVES

This game is a pure pleasure to watch, with the extremes of both styles of play competing at the highest of levels. The tabaxi finesse their way through the desert dwarves and score quickly with a wall run, but the dwarves answer back by shoving their way through to the goal.

The game is 1-1, then 2-1, then 2-2. Finally, the most talented player on the tabaxi team takes an unnecessary shot at the ring and he fumbles the ball. The desert dwarves pick up and dribble the ball past the last of the tabaxi defenders (who misses a steal) and the desert dwarves win 3-2.

Both teams share a good natured and sportsman-like goodbye at the games conclusion.

THE DRAGONBORN VS. NEXAL

Tekamal, the dragonborn player who scored the ring shot in the match against the Green Folk, continues to show his skill in this game. He scores a few minutes in against the much more talented Nexalans.

This is all to the great delight of the crowd, many of whom are still reeling from the earlier riot the orcs caused. Many called for the disqualification of the team, but since nothing technically occurred during a game, the Kultakans didn’t think it appropriate.

One to nothing soon became 1-1, then 1-2 and finally 1-3. The dragonborn leave the court to a standing ovation; undoubtedly a team to watch in the next Grand Tournament.

THE PCs VS THE OTOMI

The Otomi are experienced players who come from a long tradition of playing the ball game. With the exception of one player, they are mostly a finesse team, aiding each other where needed and constantly trying to steal the ball.

If they are down 2-0 at any point or seem outmatched, they will start taking more shots at the ring, hoping to put the game away in one lucky moment. These players are all level 5 characters (class is irrelevant and proficiencies are given below).

Player 1: Dexterity 16 (+3), Proficient in Sleight of Hand and Acrobatics (+3). This player starts the game with the Slap Ball and he rarely loses. He is known to be a bit of an all-star and comes from many generations of players. The player is aging, but it hasn’t slowed him down a bit.

Player 2: Strength 18 (+4), A bit of an oaf, this player is fond of shoving other players, but he isn’t otherwise a very talented player.

He fits well on the team, however, filling a role of neutralizing other large players. He stands at over six and a half feet tall and is rather difficult to knock down.

Player 3: Dexterity 15 (+2), Proficient in Acrobatics (+3). Though not as purely talented as Player 1, strong as Player 2 or as nimble as Player 4, this female Otomi is both smart and patient. She almost never makes mistakes and keeps herself positioned far from others when controlling the ball.

Controlling the ball is what she considers good strategy, and she believes that scoring will come when a good moment presents itself.

Player 4: Dexterity 17 (+3). Player 4 is the youngest on the team and the most inexperienced but she is a natural talent. She loves to try the wall run and Player 2 has been trained to aid her in her favorite move.

Substitute: Dexterity 13 (+1). Proficient in Acrobatics (+3). The substitute was only recently replaced by Player 4 and he is not taking it well. He despises his teammate and is willing to embarrass her simply out of spite. He carries a mirror hidden in his tunic.

This team is slightly more difficult to beat than the team from Kolan and really should be considering how popular the Ball Game is in Huacli. However, the players should still win this matchup if they use decent tactics.

If you would like the players to gain a bit of an advantage, have the substitute player sabotage their own team by reflecting a light in Player 4's eyes every time she attempts to shoot or make another important move. This will give Player 4 disadvantage on whatever maneuver she is currently attempting.

The judges, crowd, and even Player 4 herself will not be able to detect the source of the distraction considering it is coming from one of her own teammates!

If the players win by two points or shut out the other team, they will receive even greater benefits and discounts than they received after their first win (75% off). Admirers of the opposite sex will flock to the players as well, leading to all manner of roleplaying possibilities.

KULTAKA VS. PLUTOQ'S FAITHFUL

Another intense game to watch, this match lasts longer than all the others so far before the score is even 1-1. The defense is incredible, and judges mark a record number of blocked shots and steals.

Plutoq's faithful are outmatched talent wise, but they manage to take advantage of their physical strength and position themselves in such a way to keep their main scorer in possession of the ball. Eventually they strike again leading Kultaka 2-1.

The unthinkable happens for a second time in this tournament however, as the jaguar knight player Ach-to wall runs and scores a near perfect ring shot. The second one of the tournament! Kultaka advances to the semifinals.

FINAL GAMES: DAY 4

The rest of the tournament assumes that the PCs have won both of their first matches. If not, the Otomi would currently be in their position and would eventually defeat the Desert Dwarves, only to lose to Kultaka in the finals.

If the Players have reached this point, the "adventure" is already considered successful and the Druids of Maztica have received the exposure they are looking for.

The Players will receive the rewards from their benefactors at the end of the tournament. The remaining teams in the semifinals consist of the player characters, the Desert Dwarves, the Nexalans and Kultaka. Out of those four, the orcs are the only ones to actually fear the players and one of their players approaches the PCs just before the next match.

THE OFFER

The orc, smallest of his team but amiable in his own way, approaches one of the PCs in the early hours of the morning; long before the crowds arrive for the semifinals.

He approaches in peace, with no obvious weapons or ill intent. He offers one of the players a small talisman of hishna shaped like a small beetle.

The orc (truthfully) explains that the beetle is actually a fetish of a water bug common in Nexal known as *axayacatl* and a primary food source for the beasts of the Viperhand.

This particular talisman is magical and can be chewed upon once each day. After the talisman is chewed upon (which requires an action), it will allow the user to make a single non attack action at advantage, even if the talisman is no longer in the character's possession.

This action could be a saving throw or proficiency check, but either way it can only be used once each day (and only by one person or being).

The orc claims that the talisman is a gift that can help the players defeat the desert dwarves, whom the orcs despise.

The *axayacatl talisman* is a hishna talisman and is truly a gift, but the orc's intentions are not to defeat the desert dwarves. Rather, the uncommonly perceptive Nexalans have determined the players are actually more of a threat than the dwarves.

When a being carries the blessing of the talisman (whether or not the actual talisman is in their possession or not), they detect as magical. This is a side effect the orc will not mention.

The players can refuse the talisman, take it and use it, or simply claim that it will be used and pocket the item. If it is used, one of the hishnashaper judges will undoubtedly detect its magic and the players will be immediately disqualified, allowing the dwarves to advance.

If it is refused, the orc grumbles his disapproval but does not push any further. Pocketing the item will anger the orcs, but there is nothing that they can do; the orcs fear their own disqualification in case the ruse is exposed.

Players who try to cheat their way through the tournament get what they deserve.

THE PCs VS. THE DESERT DWARVES

The desert dwarves are a cheerful lot and they are perhaps the most excitable of all the teams. They long for this type of competition and the current level of the teams they are playing make them all the more giddy.

The dwarf team is pure strength, and despite their otherwise kind nature, they tend to play a bit rough. The players should not leave this game, win or lose, without a plethora of bruises.

Remember, the players do not need to win this match in order to have earned a great deal of respect and satisfy Maztica's druids. These players are all level 9 characters.

Player 1: Dexterity 13 (+1), Strength 17 (+3), Proficient in Sleight of Hand and Athletics (+4). This player starts the game with the slap ball. The dwarf is a talented player, but he doesn't usually win the Slap Ball against the more competitive teams.

Player 2: Strength 18 (+4), Proficient in Athletics (+4). Short and built like a rock, this player loves to shove others, and there have been times where the entire opposing team was left lying on the court because of his style of play.

Player 3: Strength 16 (+3), Proficient in Athletics (+4). Another solid player who uses brute force to dribble his way into shooting range, this dwarf is the highest team scorer, mostly due to assists from others who clear his way to the goal.

Player 4: Dexterity 14 (+2), Proficient in Acrobatics (+2). The sole female player on the dwarf squad and also the only one that uses any semblance of finesse. She took over this position in the game against the Short Folk. She has remained a starting player because the substitute has lingering effects still from the poison.

Substitute: Unavailable

KULTAKA VS. NEXAL

If the players defeated the desert dwarves, this game is believed by most to be the actual championship game. The rivalry between Kultaka and Nexal runs high considering both nations are continuously at war with each other.

The players (yes, even the orcs) for the most part, try to keep national politics out of the game and this isn't the first time the two have matched up. Though the teams play and act as if they despise each other, there is more than a bit of mutual respect between the athletes. Pleading by the Kultakan players is in fact the deciding factor that the orcs weren't disqualified for their rioting.

As expected, the game is top notch when it comes to pure talent. There are very few fumbles but still numerous blocks as each team manages to keep control of the ball for extended period of time. The orcs score first, but are answered in quick succession by two Kultakan goals; one after a wall run that seemed to go half the length of the court!

Feeling as if they were on the defensive and accepting the fact that they were simply outmatched by the Kultakans, the orcs started to take more frequent ring shots. One took a strange bounce and played right into the front of their own goal where a Kultakan picked it up and put Nexal away for good, 3-1.

THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

If the Kultakans are up against the Desert Dwarves in the championship, the game plays out much like the game against Nexal, except one of the Kultakans gets badly injured after a hard shove. Regardless, the Kultakans take home the victory to the adoration and wild cheering of an exuberant home crowd.

If the PCs are in this final game, they will be the heavy underdog, but the respect they have gained from the crowd will be palpable, as well as from the other teams in the tournament.

The Kultakan strategy is relatively straightforward. They use a combination of strength and finesse moves with a penchant for wall runs and they favor assisting each other continually. The Kultakan strategy is impeccable, and the DM should play them as so. The Kultakans are all 9th level characters.

Player 1: Dexterity 18 (+4), Proficient in Sleight of Hand and Athletics (+4). This player starts the game with the Slap Ball. Known to be the best player in the tournament, he has been known to singlehandedly defeat entire teams.

Player 2: Dexterity 16 (+3), Proficient in Acrobatics (+4). This female player is quick and light. She is known for her lengthy wall runs which are nearly impossible to stop.

Player 3: Dexterity 16 (+3), Proficient in Acrobatics (+4). This player never scores, but is somehow involved in almost every goal with an assist. The other players are really as good as they are because of this silent hero's tactical play.

Player 4: Strength 16 (+3), Proficient in Athletics (+4). This player positions himself to defend, allowing his more agile teammates to play offense.

He is almost impossible to get by and his block shots have been known to send the ball almost out of the court.

Substitute: Dexterity 16 (+3), Proficient in Acrobatics (+4). This talented player would certainly be a starter on pretty much any other team, but the Kultakans are stacked with all stars and thus he has sat waiting for his chance in the last two tournaments (now three).

He is not bitter or jealous of his teammates and cheers his team on relentlessly.

Note that if the player characters saved the young child from the displacer beast earlier in the tournament, the Kultakans will take it easy on the players as almost a subconscious sign of respect.

They will attempt repeated ring shots for one, which is not the best strategy for this team. If the players go up 1-0, they will unleash their full skill set.

In addition, Kultaka is the home team and the crowd will be raucous to say the least. This activates the "Home Team" game option and each player will have inspiration for one check. This too is negated if the players saved the child as the crowd roars for them just as loudly.

REPERCUSSIONS AND REWARDS

As stated earlier, the goal of this chapter was to give exposure to Maztica's druids, a new power group in the True World. The druids rightfully believe that in order for the goddess to return to the world, there needs to be a significant amount of belief.

If the players made it to the semifinals they have more than accomplished this goal as their story spreads across the continent. The druids will be in contact with the heroes again very soon and they have certainly have grown to trust the PCs.

Literally every nation and almost every power group in Maztica participated in this tournament. There were dozens of the traveling merchants known as pochteca who will spread tales of the PCs talent and deeds far and wide. Players should not be shocked (particularly if they won it all) if they are recognized in the far corners of the continent.

Tangible rewards are in no shortage either. The Druids of Maztica are not technically all actually druids and they count a number of plumaweavers in their organization. If they make it to the semifinals, the players will each be given what amounts to a *Quaal's feather token* of their choice, except that the tokens are woven with an image of the goddess Maztica's symbol and are considered pluma magic talismans.

The reward for winning the tournament in the distant past has always amounted to some religious significance which in some cases led to sacrifice. After Cordell and the Amnians invaded however, their influence has led to some actual rewards.

The winners of the tournament (and only the winners, there is no second place prize) receive a large golden annulus molded in the shape of the ball game's ring which is worth 5,000 gp for its gold content alone. With the craftsmanship included an interested buyer might pay as much as 8,000 gp.

Finally, the players receive experience awards for their success in the tournament. Award them the following experience values.

Action	Experience
Defeat Kolan	CR3 (700 XP)
Defeat Otomi	CR5 (1,800 XP)
Kill Displacer Beast	CR3 (700 XP)
Refuse Orc Offer	CR5 (1,800 XP)
Defeat Dwarves	CR7 (2,900 XP)
Defeat Kultaka	CR9 (5,000 XP)

OTHER TOURNAMENTS

If the PCs express satisfaction in their participation or victory, perhaps the DM might want to develop some tournaments of his or her own.

Follow the format given in these pages, but the tournaments elsewhere could be much smaller if desired, sometimes consisting of only four teams.

Remember, the PCs are famous now, and there will be plenty of upstarts and young players who want to find fame of their own with a single lucky ring shot against Maztica's champions.

Tabaxi

Payit

Desert Dwarves

Short Folk

Kolan

The PCs

Qotal

Otomi

Pezelac

Nexal

Dragonborn

Green Folk

Kultaka

Far Payit

Plutoq

Helmsport

THE DOOR OF STARS



The Mother of Life - Chapter 3

CHAPTER 3 – THE DOOR OF STARS

The Nexalan Empire was once vast and overpowering. It subjugated nations far and wide and it was once thought to encompass the whole of the True World. Despite their distance from Nexal, the city-states of Huacli were no stranger to the empire's reach. Yet somehow the Otomi always managed to resist.

The city-state of Huacli won many battles and often set the Nexalans fleeing back to their valley with hardly a slave in tow. Undaunted, the Nexalans brought about greater and greater forces to bring down the stubborn Otomi, and the inevitable conclusion would be victory. But when the overwhelming force finally marched into the city itself, they found naught but a ghost town.

Abandoned homes, temples, even meals left uneaten were all that could be found. The treasures were few, and although copper could be found in relative abundance, the haul was hardly worth the campaign's expenditures. After many seasons and many attempts, the Nexalans finally gave up and left the Otomi.

The secret that has saved the city-state was a relic of an ancient time and unknown origin. Before they inhabited the mountains and valleys of Huacli, there was a nation of folk known as the Zateca. The Zateca spoke a language called Téenek that still has some words in use in modern Huacli, but that is not the only remnant of their civilization.

THE DOOR OF STARS

The Door of Stars is an artifact that predates even the Zateca, and they are said to have found it hidden in the same mountain cave in which it still resides. The Door is a gateway to other worlds, controlled by a series of crystals and unknown symbols; a "control center" of sorts. The Door is utterly unbreakable, as is its control panel.

Sixteen crystals arranged in a sequence on a four by four panel open doors to different worlds and allows for nigh infinite permutations. Experimentation is almost useless to find "random" worlds but it has been done before (most just keep the gate unopened). In the circumstances where one has been found, it has only caused disaster; once allowing an otherworldly retinue of vampires and their spawn to enter the True World and decimate the Zateca population. The Otomi know this, and experimentation is strictly forbidden.

The Otomi know of one specific sequence which leads them to a world where surviving Zateca relocated a thousand years past. In this world, their name has been bastardized over the centuries and they are now known as the Sapotec. It is to this land which is sometimes called Mechica, where the Otomi flee when under duress.

Other sequences are said to exist hidden in ruins that are themselves hidden deep in the mountains.

THE ZATECA

The Zateca inhabited Huacli long before the current civilization and its city-states. They were a peaceful people, at home in the mountaintops, but very similar in temperament to the Payit far to the east.

MATHEMATICS AND THE DOOR OF STARS

The door of stars has sixteen available crystal slots. This means there are exactly 20,922,789,888,000 ways that they can be arranged. In real time, it takes 3-5 seconds to switch the positions of any two crystals or at least 30 seconds to rearrange them all. Even if the Door of Stars connects to 10,000 worlds this would mean the probability of randomly guessing the permutation for another world to be 0.00000005%.

They found the Door of Stars early in their prerecorded history and came across the crystal sequence that opens the door to Mechica. Whether the sequence was found in an old ruin or through experimentation is unknown, but when they entered they encountered a native population known as the Mechica. The Mechica were not outright hostile, but also did not entirely welcome the Zateca. An uneasy truce formed as the Zateca colonized the uninhabited mountains of the new world. The Mechica mispronounced the Zateca name and over time the Zateca became known as the Sapotec.

On Toril, the remaining Zateca sought to find new worlds through the Door of Stars. Whether out of greed or simple curiosity, they experimented with abandon. After many years and tens of thousands of attempted sequences, the door finally opened to a world of pure darkness.

Within moments, a retinue of vampires and their spawn poured through the door and killed all the Zapotecs they could find. Within a decade, the Zapotec civilization on Toril was no more and the vampires were prepared to move beyond Huacli's mountain borders.

THE BAT FOLK

Unbeknownst to both the Zateca and the invading vampires, another race took note of the horrors that came through the Door of Stars. A shy civilization of bat folk believed to be related to creatures known as desmodu inhabited the mountains and remained virtually unknown to the Zateca. The vampires threatened their underground caverns making unlikely allies for the besieged Zapotec.

The Maztican desmodu were fierce in defense of their home. In another decade of time, with heavy losses among the bat folk, the vampires were driven back in what became known as the Purging of Nochte. The vampires were backed to the coast of Huacli and onto a tidal sand bar as the desmodu picked them off one by one astride their giant bats. The sand bar went for many miles and ended at an uninhabited island.

The undead were pushed to this island just as the tide came in and destroyed swaths of their vampire spawn. The cruel undead have languished on this island for many centuries now, ravenous and degenerate. They call their kingdom Nochte, and slaughter any who approach.

BACKGROUND

This chapter of the adventure begins in the city-state of Otomi. The “nation” of Huacli is more unified in recent years than it has been in the past but in reality, the whole region is more of a collection of independent governments and city-states.

Otomi is considered by outsiders to be a capital of all of Huacli, but this is not technically true. Getting the player to Otomi where the chapter begins is a task mostly left to the DM, but the Druids of Maztica should have a part in their summoning. Perhaps a simple missive indicating “important work with repercussions for the whole of the True World” arrives in their possession only shortly after their success in the Maztican Ball Game. A prominent druidess, Malinalli of the Otomi, will have sent the missive summoning them here to the mountain city in order to determine if the PCs desire to continue in their role. She will offer 100 gold quills (500 gp) through the messenger simply for the PCs to make the trip.

By now, the players should realize that something major is afoot in Maztica. The Druids, having seen their skill and unexpected performance in the Kultakan Grand Tournament, now believe that the characters will continue to play a major role in what they are hoping will be the resurrection of their goddess. If the PCs had the vision of the goddess from the Sea Demon's Pearl, they will know that the druids are correct.

THE DRUIDS' PROPHECY

Malinalli will approach the PCs within hours of them entering the city. The druids have existed for some time now, organizing when the gods stopped answering prayers and when the sky turned to steel over a hundred years ago. Now that the world is back to what it once was, the druids consider this the fulfillment of a prophecy that the goddess Maztica would return.

In their visions, the druids have been told that they must first acquire an item known as the *Risa Stone*. The magic of the Risa Stone could distract Maztica's son Zalteco long enough to allow her tonalli (soul) to reunite with an immortal body. Otherwise, the vindictive god of war would personally strike down any who attempted such a deed.

Unfortunately, the Risa Stone is not of this world; and if heroes were to acquire it for her, they would have to pass through the Door of Stars.

The *Door of Stars* has existed since time immemorial and it is hidden in a cavern deep in the mountain passes. The Door can connect to many different worlds, and the Risa Stone exists in one.



ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

After a few hours in the Huacli city Otomi, the player characters will be approached by the druidess Malinalli who summoned them. She will explain to the PCs the adventure backstory and send them on their way.

For the first phase of the adventure, the PCs will have to infiltrate a City of the Dead known as Mictlatepec in order to obtain a code long kept secret by the Otomi.

In the next step of their journey, the players will have to brave an underground journey to the Door of Stars and open the portal. They will be set upon by an ancient vampire and his spawn who has survived an ancient purge, but the characters may find allies here in unexpected corners.

Through the Door of Stars, the PCs find themselves in a whole new world; one very different from their own where foreign, yet familiar gods and myths reside. In this land, they need to locate the fabled *Risa Stone* and take it by force from a nation of cruel men and women known as the Mechica.

Getting it back to the True World will require the PCs to find additional allies in this strange land among the gnomish tlaloques and the shy Sapotecs; a people who once inhabited the True World but migrated here long ago.

With the *Risa Stone* in hand; the Druids of Maztica reward the PCs handsomely before preparing them for their next mission.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

As stated in the background, the PCs should already be in Otomi where they are approached by the druidess Malinalli who has the statistics of a **druid**.

Greetings to you travelers and blessing in the name of the Mother of Life. My name is Malinalli and I serve the goddess Maztica herself – to whom you are already known.

I have foreseen that your role in returning her to us is grand, but only if you choose it to be. Do you accept your fate?

The players might accept, remain unsure or outright refuse to help. If they accept or remain unsure (but continue to listen), then continue below. If they refuse, express Malinalli's sad, but not angry disposition. She was certain that it was the PCs that she saw in her visions, and this turn of events makes her question her own worth rather than express anger towards the characters.

In this case, she will inform the PCs that she will remain in Otomi for a tenday, at which point she will seek out others of her kind to discuss what has gone wrong. Effectively, this ends the adventure as the PCs will never know of the *Door of Stars* or the *Risa Stone*.

Malinalli has nothing beyond the original gold quills she offered the players to travel here and she makes good on this promise. If they ask for more to continue she remarks "the gratitude of the Mother of Life is not enough for you?"

She will not give more and in fact does not have anything more to offer. Assuming the PCs allow her to continue, read the following.

Understand that from this moment forward, you are privy to information that only the Otomi know. If you were to pass on this information to their enemies – there is little I could do to convince the whole of the city from hunting you down.

The Otomi have always been fierce warriors and were one of the few to withstand the empire of Nexal when it was at its height over a century ago. Even when they were outmatched, the Otomi were able to disappear where none could find them. They would use the Door of Stars to evade their tormenters.

At this point, Malinalli will relay to the PCs all of the information about the Door of Stars in the background. She will also relay the history of the Zateca, their decimation at the hands of vampires, and carefully explain their transition in Mechica to the people known as the Sapotecs. Most importantly, she will explain to them that their quest is to find and obtain the *Risa Stone*; an artifact that will help them return the goddess Maztica to the True World!

Continue with the following once she has given the PCs their history lesson, or if forward thinking players ask about the specific sequence for the control panel at the Door of Stars to enter Mechica.

Huasteco is the chieftain of the Otomi and he guards the crystal sequence with his life; knowing that the Door of Stars will always be a refuge for his people. I know of only one way that you will be able to convince Huasteco to share the proper sequence with you and allow you to travel to the Door.

In the mountains, there is a city known as Mictlatepec. It is no ordinary city, and one that is only occupied by the dead. It has been a thorn in the side of Huasteco and the Otomi for centuries.

A creature, once a man, but now a terrible and damned being named Alban rules over his dead subjects in Mictlatepec. He does so with the power of a talisman of hishna. If you could either destroy Alban or take his talisman, Huasteco would be eternally grateful. With this deed accomplished, and my word of your bravery, he would not refuse you.

The PCs may have more questions. Malinalli also knows the history of Mictlatepec and will gladly explain all she knows but she is eager to see the players on their way. Before they go, Malinalli blesses each player individually.

If one or more of the characters has roleplayed exceptionally well at this point (particularly in regards to their background) this blessing gives the character or characters inspiration.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Eagle knights patrol the hills and valleys in the immediate vicinity of Otomi and keep it relatively free of both predators and the occasional wandering undead. The trip, however, is two full days into the mountains and well out of range of these patrols. If the PCs are itching for a fight, perhaps they could come upon a band three wandering **mictlaneca scouts** and one **mictlaneca priest** that have wandered from Mictlatepec.

Before long, and at twilight, the PCs will see the city atop a nearby mountain that has been cleanly leveled. Intact temples and pyramids grace the man made plateau, but there are no signs of anyone living while the sun begins to set.

MICTLATEPEC

When the Zateca were the primary people living in the mountains and valleys of Huacli, Mictlatepec went by the name Tehuatepec. It was primarily an administrative city, used to help govern and keep records for the surrounding region.

When the Zateca lost most of their civilization to emigration and the predations of vampires, its role began to change. At first, it became a center for trade in fine pottery and the city became ironically known as a refuge from the undead vampires. In order to avoid the potential despoilment of their remains, the Zateca began to bury their dead within the boundaries of the city itself.

Because of this tradition, the remaining Zateca began to refer to the city as “Mictlatepec” which means “The City of the Dead” and the name stuck.

Over time, Mictlatepec's relative safety became a valuable commodity and only the noble and powerful were allowed to remain within its confines. With time, the dead outnumbered the living as the greedy took more and more for themselves. The last of its rulers was a spoiled noble named Alban. He created and enforced very strict laws that allowed him to rule successfully for many years, but very few would say his rule was just.

He also desired to continue his rule of the City of the Dead perpetually. Alban reached out to his royal hishnashaper; a loyal Zateca named Moctexa. Moctexa created a powerful talisman which he called the *talisman of perpetual life* and gave it to the despotic ruler. Alban wore the talisman until the end of his natural life and arose once again after his natural death when the sun set. He became the very first mictlaneca which means “dead one” both in the Zateca's native tongue Téenek and in modern Huacli.

Moctexa was horrified at his own creation but continued to serve. In exchange for a promise from the dead king to respect his own eternal rest, Moctexa agreed to forge other items of hishna known as *knives of perpetual service*. With these obsidian daggers, Alban cut out the hearts of hundreds of his subjects and they too arose as dead ones.

Today, Mictlatepec is silent during the day as the undead abhor the sunlight. But as the last rays of light drop behind the mountain, the undead leave their chambers and engage in what might seem to otherwise be a normal “life.”

Unless they intentionally wait, the PCs should arrive just before dusk. The city is utterly deserted during the day but the mictlaneca do not actually rest. Rather, they wait in tunnels under the city or in the darkness of the various buildings.



MICTLANECA

If the players hope to wipe out the mictlaneca by waiting for day and clearing out each building one by one, Alban will quickly realize his city is under attack and consolidate all his remaining forces in the palace and its below ground tunnels. Allow the PCs to engage this tactic for perhaps a day or two, but warn them that the mictlaneca seem to be catching onto their plan and are prepared with greater numbers each day the attacks are attempted.

A full on assault on the city is not advised as there are literally hundreds of undead. When the city is in sight, but before the PCs have entered, read the following out loud.

Other than the whistling of the wind, the City of the Dead is bereft of sound and motion. As the last rays of the sun disappear behind the mountain you prepare yourself for what you know is soon to come.

Within moments you hear your first sound of the night as a small creature comes charging at you from one of the temples. It is fast and quadrupedal and you do not recognize it until it barks out a high pitched yelp and charges your ankles. Somehow, the creature does not appear to be a natural being.

The creature is a **skeletal chihuahua** created by Alban. It is not much of a threat to the PCs on its own, but the barking will draw the attention of four **mictlaneca guards** and their **mictlaneca knight** commander which guard the city's main entrance and outskirts. This attack occurs prior to most of the mictlaneca emerging from their tunnels, so the battle will not yet alert the city.

WAKING THE DEAD

From this point forward, it is imperative to the PCs' survival that they maintain at least a semblance of secrecy in their actions. If the PCs are in the city the average "citizen" will ignore the players for a time as they go about their nightly business. Nighttime Mictlatepec is a horror to behold with its shambling bodies and foul smelling residents, but it can be navigated temporarily by PCs who behave themselves.

There are hundreds of** mictlaneca commoners** wandering about the city performing normal activities as if the city itself still lived. Starting a fight with them is ill advised and for every turn the PCs battle in the open there is a chance (roll of 6 on a 1d6) that the entire city becomes alerted to their presence. At this point, the players only hope is to escape in order to come back long after the alert has died down which will take a tenday at least.

When they return, the guards and knights that have been destroyed will be replaced. In total, there are 470 **mictlaneca commoners** armed with makeshift weapons, and 10 will arrive each turn to fight the PCs if alerted. After ten turns of battle, the buildings will start to empty as the entire city mobilizes.

Entering and fighting inside or atop the various structures of Mictlatepec does not hold the danger of alerting the city, but the PCs should be very careful not to let the battles spill out into public areas such as the inner courtyard.

1. INNER COURTYARD

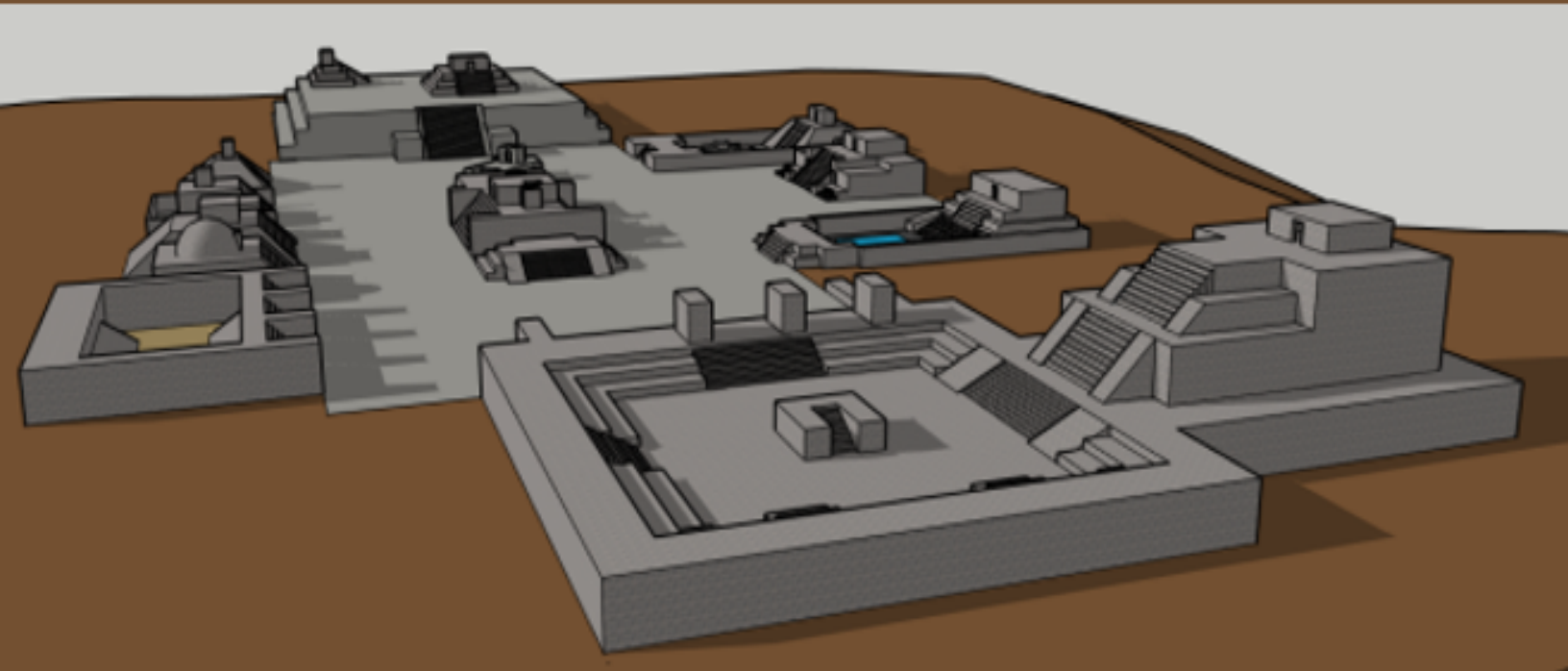
There is no plant life in the inner courtyard and it seems to be kept free of growth by commoners who shamle about performing their nightly duties. The ground is made of smoothed stone and it is difficult to see beyond the edge of the city and mountaintop into the surrounding valleys.

The city might have one time been considered beautiful as you note the buildings standing out clearly against the starlit sky.

Two **mictlaneca cult fanatics** lead separate cleanup crews throughout the city grounds and it is best that they are avoided altogether. PCs who encounter such beings need to succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to avoid having the fanatics sound the alarm.



Mictlatepec





2. TEMPLE OF ZALTEC

A 30-foot high platform dominates the southern portion of the city and is dedicated wholly to the worship of Zaltec. Mictlaneca commoners are allowed on the platform but not in the main (2b) or auxiliary temples (2c) themselves.

The main temple connects to underground tunnels where the priests and acolytes hide from the sun during the day, but the auxiliary temple does not have such a connection. Thus, it is possible for the PCs to rest in 2c without being attacked during the day.

Unfortunate victims are brought here after being captured elsewhere and are sacrificed in one of the two temples. Currently, there is a living **aarakocra** being held behind a stone slab in 2c which requires a combined Strength of 45 to move. The aarakocra is in good shape and is actually willing to fight alongside the PCs if rescued.

If the players believe it is a liability, they can set the aarakocra free as it can easily escape by flying out of the city. Either way, the aarakocra could be a source of future adventures and its rookery lies far to the north in a rookerie known as Tikka-Ti-Jarra (see **ANA1 Dark Clouds over Anchôromé**).

Both living and undead beings are sacrificed here. The living are changed into mictlaneca using a *knife of perpetual service* wielded by one of the priests in 2a. Undead, which include mictlaneca who have lost in the ball game or have otherwise displeased Alban, are torn apart and thrown to the commoners who feed upon the grisly parts. All sacrifices occur promptly at midnight.

The main pyramid is an additional 15 feet above the platform and contains a 10 foot stone structure. Two **mictlaneca priests** and 3 **mictlaneca acolytes** occupy the structure performing rites of worship to Zaltec. The occupants will attack any creature that enters the temple and is not bound for sacrifice other than other priests, acolytes or Alban himself.

The smaller auxiliary temple contains 4 **mictlaneca acolytes** who behave similarly. The two priests wear golden necklaces worth 250 gp each and one carries the *knife of perpetual service*. There is no other treasure to be found.

3. MARKET COMPLEX AND TREASURY

The courtyard of this complex is surrounded by a 10-foot platform at its eastern end, a 20-foot stone building to the west, and 10-foot walls to the north and south. A **mictlaneca noble** stands atop an auction block in the center of the courtyard protected by two **mictlaneca guards**. Four **mictlaneca commoners** also stand ready to relay messages or items elsewhere in the city.

In the northeast corner of the courtyard, a **mictlaneca commoner** sells “food” in the form of skeletal chihuahuas. There are 18 in total which he will release should battle break out.

Sitting atop the pyramid shaped stone building is Mictlaneca’s “Minister of Trade,” a **mictlaneca veteran** who supervises all business in the city. He is attended by two **mictlaneca commoners** and is currently busy negotiating trade with three **mictlaneca acolytes** from the Temple of Zaltec.

Below the pyramid, accessible via a stairway from its main entrance, is the city’s treasury. It currently holds 17,500 gp worth of moldy mayz and cocoa beans, quills of gold dust, jade, turquoise and mostly copper blades. If the players attack this complex, the commoners will scatter and alert the city.

4. TEMPLE OF THE DANCERS

Alban and the mictlaneca love nothing more than to capture women of noble birth and bring them here for extended torture and eventual sacrifice. Alban refers to these unfortunate folk as his “dancers” and he employs a **mictlaneca bard** to carve their tortured likeness in stone tablets. There are currently 31 of these stone tablets in the south end of the building.

There are currently no living dancers here but there are three wooden barrels. Two of the barrels contain normal skeletons dressed in fine garb. If the PCs make a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they can recognize the same fine clothing from depictions in two of the tablets.

The third barrel contains 5 gold quills worth 25 gp.

Two **mictlaneca priests** and the bard wait atop the 20-foot platform at the end of the central staircase. One priest holds a *knife of perpetual service*.

5. PALACE OF THE WARRIORS

This building is the military command center for the city and is best avoided by the players. A 10-foot tall platform surrounds a courtyard and central fountain. The water is obviously fouled, but should the PCs be so foolish as to drink from it they must make a DC 15 Constitution save or become poisoned. They may make another check at the beginning of each of their turns but until they succeed, they have the poisoned condition.

At night, the inhabitants are all over the compound practicing drills, fixing weapons and in some cases relaxing. There are 26 **mictlaneca veterans** here, but their leader is the most fearsome of all; a **mictlaneca champion** who one day hopes to dispose of Alban and lead the city to war.

Under the main building, there are chambers with treasure that is used to pay the veterans and it includes 1,300 gp worth of cocoa beans, 224 gold quills (1,120 gp) and chunks of jade and turquoise worth 500 gp total.

6. OBSERVATORY

Notches in the wall of this arrow shaped structure allow for observation of a variety of celestial objects, but one notch has been filled in with thatch and mud. PCs who make a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check realize the filled in notch was connected to the movements of the sun.

Some mictlaneca have left their moccasins here and one is a pair of *moccasins of free movement* whose owner did not realize it was valuable.

7. TEMPLE OF AZUL

The stairs and ramps on the south side of this structure lead to a 20-foot tall platform where priests of Azul hold their ceremonies. There are three **mictlaneca priests** and three attendant **mictlaneca acolytes** here who hold no treasure.

8. TEMPLE OF TEZCA

The east and west stairways lead to this structure's 20-foot platform which has two open stone buildings that face to the east. Neither building has a roof so the *mictlaneca* will not be found here during the day. A third stone structure between the others also opens to the east and a wooden ladder leads to its rooftop.

The four **mictlaneca priests** here have gone nearly insane due to the fact that they may never again lay their eyes on the sun and it have not been able to for centuries. If the players do not attack, they might be able to convince these priests to destroy themselves by making a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

If such an event occurs, they will also tell the PCs that Alban wears the *talisman of perpetual life* around his neck at all times, giving an accurate description of the object. They will also mention that shortly after the ball game, Alban will be alone offering prayers to Zalteco in the Royal Complex.

If the players attack, the priests will respond with violence but don't seem to be into the fight, suffering disadvantage when defending against an attack.

9. TEMPLE OF QOTAL

This ancient temple has not been occupied in centuries, but the *mictlaneca* leave it alone in order to avoid angering the Plumed Dragon. It is a safe place to rest.

10. PRIEST'S TOMB

The small stone structure upon this 20-foot platform guards the secret entrance to the tomb in the pyramid. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a small trapdoor under an altar.

The ladder that leads into the tomb ends in a large chamber. This chamber contains the remains of Moctezaxa, whose final wish for eternal rest was actually upheld by Alban. The chamber has no light, but if the players bring their own, Moctezaxa's eyes sparkle with a green glow.

Moctezaxa however, is truly dead and the green sparkle is the result of two valuable emeralds that have been placed in his eye sockets. The chamber holds several pieces of worked gold worth a total of 1,000 gp and the two emeralds are worth 250 gp each.

The *mictlaneca* consider this structure sacred, or at least Alban does, and they fear his wrath. Players who set foot upon it at night might alert the city to their presence and initiate an attack as described in "Waking the Dead."

11. PALACE OF THE MERCHANTS

The central courtyard extends into this structure, and a staircase on the west side leads up to a 20-foot platform which supports a stone building.

The 100 square foot central courtyard is open to the sky and attended by 21 female **mictlaneca commoners** who weave, make pottery, sit and talk or play games. There is also a finely dressed merchant, who is a **mictlaneca noble** and he is attended by four **mictlaneca veteran** guards.

The merchant incessantly counts the treasure in the room, which consists of 2,700 gp worth of cocoa beans, coral buds, jade, turquoise, copper blades and gold quills.

If PCs try to take anything, the noble will call out and the entire complex will attack, including the commoners. Otherwise, they ignore the living; even if the players attempt to speak to them.

12. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

This building is empty at night time, but it is where five of the **mictlaneca commoners** from building 11 spend their days.

13. MERCHANT'S TOMB

An open stone building sits atop this pyramid and inside a stone block has been moved to uncover a tomb entrance. Unfortunately, the once rich tomb has long since been looted, and all that remains are pieces of worthless broken pottery. There are also no living or dead inhabitants.

14. WARRIOR'S TOMB

The building atop this 20-foot platform is spherical in shape unlike any other structure in Mictlatepec. Inside, the walls are decorated with the exploits of what must have been a powerful warrior.

There is a plainly visible trap door in the center of the floor which leads down into an empty tomb, but this is a central hub for the tunnels that permeate the undercity.

During the day, nearly the entire population of Mictlatepec can be reached via the crawlspaces connected to the tomb. At night, the *Mictlaneca* exit to live their normal "lives."

15. BALL COURT

When the sun first sets over the city, many of the city's residents descend upon the ball court to watch their only form of entertainment that does not involve torture or killing.

In this court, the *mictlaneca* play a version of *pokolpok* where there are only three players per team. There is a team of reigning champions consisting of three **mictlaneca veterans** who routinely play against three **mictlaneca commoners**.

The losers are then brought to the Temple of Zalteco for sacrifice at midnight, while the winners continue to practice.

If the players so choose, they may play the game against the *mictlaneca veterans*, but win or lose, the veterans and a dozen *mictlaneca commoners* attempt to capture the characters.

The only difference is that if the PCs win, the sacrifice will be performed with a *knife of perpetual service*, so that they can continue their nightly victories for eternity.

16. THE ROYAL COMPLEX

The Royal Complex is the largest structure in Mictlatepec and it is the home of its ancient ruler, Alban. Commoners are not allowed anywhere on its grounds, even if it is under assault.

The central courtyard (16b) is ten feet above the city floor, and staircases, ramps, and steps lead up to a surrounding platform (16a).

In the center of the courtyard is a 10-foot pyramid which Alban climbs nightly to worship Zalteco alone. This is the best time to confront Alban, as he does not have his typical retinue of guards.

Steps also lead up to the Royal Palace (16c), where **Alban**, 12 **mictlaneca veterans** and 2 **mictlaneca priests** spend the majority of the evening. The Royal Palace also contains considerable treasure in the form of gold quills, turquoise, jade and an assortment of gemstones worth a total of 7,000 gp.

There is also a *spiderwalker hishna talisman*, as well as a *talon of Zaltec* that Alban wields in battle.

If the players wait for Alban to perform his nightly rites to Zaltec, read them the following.

You see one of the dead that stands out from all the rest enter the central courtyard and start to climb to the top of the temple in its center. He is dressed in finery unlike any you have seen so far and wears a plumed headdress that most certainly indicates royalty. A necklace of jaguar claws and human teeth adorns his neck among other pieces of jewelry. The mictlaneca is most certainly the one you seek – the dreaded Alban, ruler of the City of the Dead.

TAKING THE TALISMAN

Killing Alban and taking his necklace, which is obviously the *talisman of perpetual life*, will ensure the players receive the proper crystal sequence from Huasteco along with his blessing and a promise that they are forever welcome among the Otomi. The characters will not want for food or lodging ever again among the city-states of Huacli, and most will treat them as the heroes they are.

Once the PCs acquire the talisman, they may recover from any wounds in Otomi, speak to Malinalli and prepare for their journey to the Door of Stars. Malinalli explains that the way is not always safe, and they will have to be wary of the surrounding dark in the tunnels.

THE DOOR OF STARS CAVERNS

Huasteco provides directions to the caverns where the Door of Stars is located. The entrance lies only a few miles from Otomi, but it is deeper into the mountains towards the west coast of Maztica. Huasteco indicates the location of the secret door that leads to its chamber, but he is unaware of the new inhabitants of the caverns.

In addition, the Huasteco gives the characters a second sequence; one that will return them to Huacli when they are ready to return.

1. BRIDGE OF STARS

The characters will recognize the Bridge of Stars from a description provided by Huasteco. It is a landmark they were told to look for to identify the proper caverns.

The bridge itself is remarkably sturdy, and it needs to be considering the entire population of the Otomi occasionally must flee across it.

2. BATTLE SCENE

This chamber is strewn with the corpses of three humans wearing garb that is unknown elsewhere in the True World, or even Toril itself for that matter.

There is also the corpse of a giant bat that has been ripped to shreds by either claws or fangs. If a character makes a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check, they will realize the clothing comes from an ancient kingdom of vampires known as Nochte that once plagued the Zateca of Huacli and led to their exodus to another world.

3. BAT FOLK

The fabled bat folk of Huacli are only spoken of in the most ancient legends, yet here one rests, having lost its mate and its mount to the vampires of Nochte. Read the following if the players enter the chamber.

A creature unlike any you have seen sits by a fire with another corpse of its race. It appears to be some form of anthropomorphic bat, but powerfully built with expressive, sad eyes.

The creature is obviously distraught and when it notices you it hisses and chirps with a high pitched sound that is only barely in your range of hearing. It does not immediately attack, and it seems to allow you to make the first move.

The creature is a **Maztican desmodu**; rare in the extreme, except in the mountains of Huacli and perhaps in parts of Kolan. The desmodu speak their own language, but this one has picked up enough of the Maztican common tongue to communicate haltingly with the PCs.

Its voice is so high pitched that it is somewhat painful to listen to and the sound seems out of place coming from a creature that looks so brawny and powerful.

If the players do not attack, the desmodu asks who they might be. It knows of the Otomi and the desmodu hold no outright hostility towards humankind.

No matter if the players lie or tell the truth, the desmodu knows that no man would be in these caverns were it not looking for the Door of Stars.

The desmodu introduces itself as Xio'trioc and the corpse is that of his mate, recently slain by an ancient enemy of the desmodu and of mankind as well.

Xio'trioc pleads with the characters to help gain some revenge on the vampire and its remaining spawn. He and his mate already destroyed three in the battle scene but at least two remain.

In return, the desmodu swears to guard their return to Huacli, because the trip is known to cause disorientation and the players will otherwise be vulnerable. If the players refuse to help the vampires will kill the desmodu and wait at the Door of Stars for the players to return.

5. BAT CAVE

Fifty normal **bats** rest in this cave and will not be disturbed by PCs who are accompanied by the desmodu. There is also one **giant bat**, though it is terribly injured and unfit to enter battle unless it receives healing from the PCs.

If healed, the bat will accompany the desmodu, but the ceilings are too low in areas 6 and 7 for Xio'trioc to ride this mount.

Caverns of the Door of Stars

1 Square=10 feet



6. VAMPIRE SPAWN

Two **vampire spawn** remain in this cavern, guarding the rest of their master in room 7. They attack immediately upon spotting the desmodu. Player characters that are unaccompanied are given warning hisses and if they back out, the spawn do not follow.

However, they will warn their master and if the PCs enter the Door of Stars, all three vampires will be waiting for them upon their return; a very deadly prospect for the players.

7. VAMPIRE OF NOCHTE

Most of the **vampires of Nochte** are forced to reside on their island kingdom to the west of Huacli, but some have either found a way back to the mainland or remained here from a time before the vampires were banished.

This vampire of Nochte is the former, having found its way through vast underground tunnels that pass deep under the ocean.

Though tough, this vampire is a straight up battle and with their superior numbers and the desmodu's help, they should be able to overcome it.

The vampire wears a fine gold laced robe with attached shards of obsidian that is worth 500 gp for its beauty alone, but it also has abilities similar to a *robe of stars*.

The significance of the vampires finding a way back to Huacli is left for the DM to expand upon in future adventures.

ROBE OF NOCHTE

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This dark black robe is laced with strands of golden thread that stand out clearly against the pitch cloth.

It has powers very similar to a *robe of stars* including an attuned wearer receiving a +1 bonus to saving throws while they wear it.

Instead of stars, the robe has six shards of jagged obsidian that do not blend in entirely with the robe. While wearing the robe, you can use an action to grab one of the shards and use it to cast *obsidian shards* as a 5th level spell. At dusk, 1d6 removed shards reappear on the robe.

While you wear the robe, you can use an action to enter the plane of Mictlan along with everything you are wearing or carrying once every 7 days. You remain there until you use an action to return to the plane you were on.

You reappear in the last space you occupied, or if that space is occupied, the nearest unoccupied space.

8. SECRET DOOR

Huasteco was very clear in his description of what to look for to find the entrance to the chamber of the Door of Stars. The desmodu can also help the players locate the hidden groove that blends almost seamlessly with the wall. If the players are here for some reason without either clue, a DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check or DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to find the secret door even if they know approximately where to look.



9. THE DOOR OF STARS

Read the following description as the players step inside the room.

In front of you lies what you assume is the fabled Door of Stars. The door itself is nothing more than a circular stone ring, obviously ancient and obviously crafted by living hands.

Through the stone ring, you see nothing more than the cavern wall. What really draws your eyes is what most certainly must be the control panel. Set in a carved stalagmite, sixteen beautiful spindle shaped crystals are arrayed in the slots of the four by four panel. They each glow slightly with a different vibrant color. Together, the lights form a gorgeous array.

The crystals can be removed from their slots and easily moved into others that are unoccupied. Once all 16 are arrayed, they gently lock into place whether or not the sequence leads to another world. The players have been warned about experimenting with the crystals, but if they insist, it is up to the DM as to what occurs.

Mathematically speaking, there is almost no chance the players will find a working combination, but if the DM is feeling particularly devious (or prefers to take them on a side trek of sorts), risk-taking PCs might just get lucky. The portal only opens to worlds and regions of those particular worlds that have some connection to the real world's Mesoamerica. This could be in its gods, culture, language, etc.

The array given to the players by Huasteco from top left to bottom right is Crimson, Jade, Rose, Sapphire, Blue, Pink, Orange, Olivine, Emerald, Amethyst, Magenta, Yellow, Ruby, Black, Ivory, Ochre. The return array is Yellow, Ivory, Crimson, Emerald, Ochre, Ruby, Rose, Blue, Sapphire, Magenta, Olivine, Pink, Amethyst, Orange, Black, Jade. Symbols around the ring of the Door indicate the return sequence, but the PCs cannot comprehend the language it is written in without magic.

If one of the players grabs a hold of a crystal, it feels warm to the touch and slightly electric. They cannot be brought more than a foot from the control panel under any circumstances. There is no magic or force that can break a crystal, the panel, or the door itself that isn't of a divine origin.

Once in their proper sequence, the Door begins to shimmer, revealing a sunlit world unrecognizable to the players. The flora is certainly different, and some creatures fly or run by that the players will not recognize (such as the strange bird on the chapter cover).

This gateway is two way and remains open as long as the crystals remain in place. Xio'trioc will diligently guard this end of the gate so that the PCs may safely return, but there is an identical panel on the other side that the PCs will identify the moment they step through the Door.

The portal causes mild disorientation (Disadvantage on attack and defense rolls for one minute) after walking through. When the PCs step through the gate, proceed to Area 1 of Mechica.

MECHICA

Mechica is the name of both a people and the land where the Zateca once emigrated long ago. It is where the Otomi retreat to in dire circumstances, though they have not been to Mechica since the Nexalan Empire last set upon their city. Memories of interactions between the Sapotec and Otomi are fading.

The circumstances in Mechica today are rather dire as the Sapotec people (once the Zateca of Huacli) are under siege by the Mechica. The Mechica have almost all become werejaguars, and now only worship the cruel Tezcatlipoca where they once worshiped many deities.

Sacrifice, as it has been for centuries, is performed upon the ancient artifact known as the *Risa Stone*. Where once its magic was used to polymorph men and women into jaguars and other animals it is now stained with the blood of thousands who have had their hearts ripped from their chests.

MECHICA IN D&D HISTORY

Mechica was first introduced in **Dragon Magazine Issue #70** from February 1983, written by author Gali Sanchez. Finding the magazine and reading the adventure is in no way necessary to play this portion of the Door of Stars, but it could certainly help flesh out some of the background. The world in which the Mechica are located will also always be here for the PCs to further explore. The circumstances described in Dragon showed a much less violent Mechica than in this adventure. Tezcatlipoca, once just one god among many, has always schemed to become the sole deity worshiped by the Mechica, and he did so by slowly encouraging its people to take the powerful forms of werejaguars. Now, other gods are virtually unknown and their worship is outlawed.

There is a war between the Sapotec and the Mechica, and while the players are here they might be able to assist the Sapotec as they simultaneously steal the *Risa Stone*. Just taking the blood soaked artifact itself pleases the Sapotec, and aids them in their war.

1. THE SAPOTEC

Read the following to the PCs as they step through the gateway.

As you step through the Door of Stars you feel an immediate sense of nausea and disorientation. The world you saw beyond the Door slowly comes into focus and you immediately sense the warmth of the sunshine.

The world is much like your own, but you don't recognize all of the plants or small creatures that scurry by. You see a doorway and panel of crystals very similar to the one you just used behind you, though the panel is covered in detritus and growth.

Some rustling in the bushes draws your attention to a brown skinned human who drops the basket of fruits he is carrying and points at your party. Shockingly, he smiles before running off into the woods. You hear him yelling in a language you do not recognize.

The characters have just encountered a Sapotec adult male. Once, long ago, his people were known as the Zateca before they immigrated to this world through the Door of Stars.

They are under siege; hunted by the dreaded werejaguars of the Mechica. Should the PCs attempt to follow it is only a short way to the Sapotec encampment.

When the PCs catch up to the human, read the following to them.

From Malinalli's description, you believe you recognize the identity of the man now. He is one of the long lost Zateca people; who on this world go by the name "Sapotec."

Other Sapotec begin to appear from your surroundings. They are obviously not hostile and many are laughing, smiling or falling to their knees in joy. They speak in a language which you cannot understand, but you do recognize one word, the name "Quetzalcoatl."

A wizened elder Sapotec steps forward from the crowd and in halting common begins to speak to you.

From generation to generation, the Sapotec teach their most wise the "language of the ancients." Though there will be frequent grammatical errors, the players should understand the elder and he will understand them.

The elder, named Xiuhtotepec, fills in the PCs in on any history they already don't know about Mechica. He then explains to them that their arrival was prophesized by their god Quetzalcoatl. The PCs should know Quetzalcoatl from their own world as either an old name or one closely related to the Plumed Dragon, Qotal.

He explains how the Sapotec are at war, and the Mechica wish for their utter annihilation. The Mechica are no longer human, and can change forms between that of a man and a powerful jaguar, or even a creature somewhere in between.

A character who makes a simple DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check realizes this must be a lycanthrope. At this point PCs can offer their help and allow them to do so without explaining to them that they will not be able to take the Risa Stone without Sapotec help.

The *Risa Stone* lies in the Mechican city of Tenocatlan where only a sufficiently distracted population will be safe enough for the PCs to enter. Assaulting the city alone is suicidal.

Xiuhtotepec explains to the players that three tasks would break the Mechica sufficiently for the war to favor the Sapotec.

First, there is a race of the "small men of the rains" who the players should establish an alliance with. These reclusive beings who call themselves the tlaloques, typically avoid the Sapotec.

The PCs will hopefully pique their curious natures.

Xiuhtotepec knows that the Mechica capture and sacrifice these gnome-like beings as well, so if the characters gain their trust, they might ally with the Sapotec.

Next, the players must assault a training camp known as Ocelotlacan, where the werejaguars receive their training and kill their battle captain. Without him, Mechican tactics in warfare will most certainly suffer.

Finally, acquiring the *Risa Stone* from Tenocatlan itself will crush the Mechica. Xiuhtotepec has foreseen that they will immediately lose the favor of their god Tezcatlipoca, whom the PCs might believe to be Zalteco of their own world.

Without his favor, the Mechica will no longer be able to pass on their lycanthropy. Xiuhtotepec tells them to return to the Sapotec before taking on such a venture after they have established communications with the tlaloque and gaining their pledged support.

The players are welcome to stay as long as they wish in the Sapotec camp to recover from past battles and prepare for their adventure. They are handed crude, hand carved map of the region on a stone tablet with general locations for Ocelotlacan, the tlaloques, and Tenocatlan.

They are given a similar one of the city of Tenocatlan for the future assault as well. The PCs are then warned to beware patrols of the jaguar-men and to always be on their guard as they are sent on their way.

2. WEREJAGUARS

The PCs don't have to travel very far before having their first encounter with the Mechica. One **werejaguar**, a **werejaguar servitor** and two jaguar pets ambush the players as they step out into a small clearing in the woods. The werejaguar wears a *ring of protection*.

If the DM desires to put random encounters in this portion of the adventure, most will consist of a similar make up for each encounter. The patrols are everywhere and have eliminated many of the normal creatures that prowl the environs.

3. THE TLALOQUES

Normally a playful race with a fey-like temperament, the tlaloques have become guarded and xenophobic in recent years. Their clan lost dozens to Mechica raids and they no longer trust as easily as they once might have.

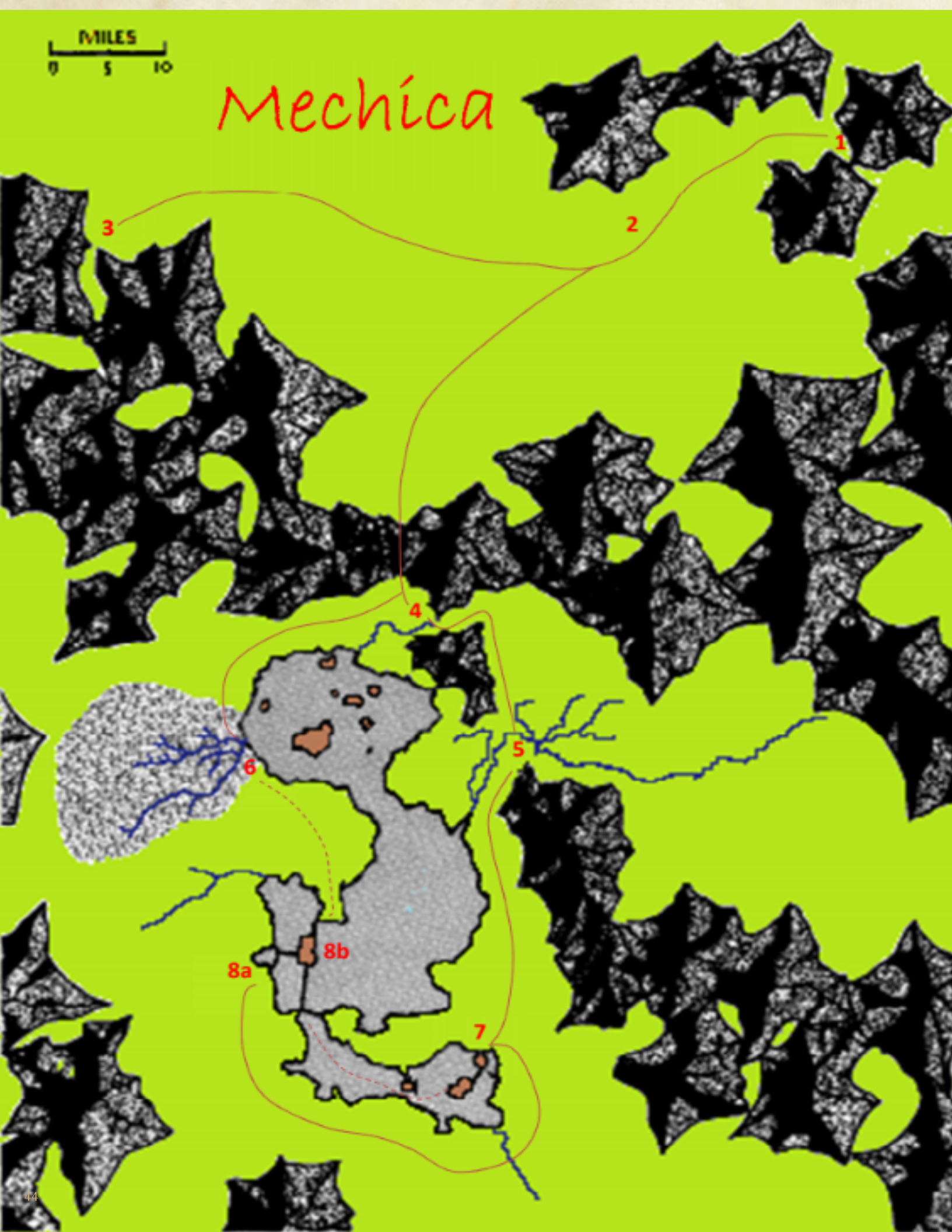
Ten **tlaloque guards** patrol an entrance to the mountain pass that is the only way to get to their encampment without going around the mountain completely. They stand upon a walkway 30 feet up on a wooden barricade armed with longbows. They have half cover.

A **tlaloque priest** commands the guards, and he speaks to the PCs from behind a barricade which gives him full cover. The sky also begin to darken as the tlaloque guards use their *control weather* ability to summon gale force winds. If the PCs are hostile, the guards pepper them with arrows from above the barricades.

The tlaloque have their own language and the player characters will have to use magic to communicate. The tlaloque elder says the following.

MILES
0 5 10

Mechica



You are not of the Sapotec, and you are certainly not of the jaguar folk who hunt us like animals. Explain who you are and tell us why you are here!

At this point the PCs have no reason to lie and should give the tlaloque elder their entire story. Informing the elder that the Sapotec wish to ally against the Mechica, ending their depredations once and for all serves everyone's interest.

Once the PCs explain their quest the gate opens and the elder, who calls himself Nopaltzin, steps forward to speak to the PCs.

So the big folk want an alliance now that they too have become prey? Where were they when it was only the tlaloque who were hunted? Why should we trust those who only seek to help when it is they who need the help? Do you not see that we are protected here?

Allow the PCs to roleplay this interaction. Nopaltzin truly desires this alliance, but he does not want to be taken advantage of. Good roleplaying or a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check with a DC of 15 should ensure the tlaloque's assistance, but first they will need to prove their mettle. With a successful DC 20 check, the tlaloque will instantly agree to the alliance. In the case of the former, Nopaltzin continues.

The Mechica have taken from us a something of importance and desecrated the most holy of temples of the gods. We understand your quest and wish to assist you, but as you can see we cannot risk war if our allies are not ready.

Show me that it is worth risking my people. Recover our relic and eradicate the Mechica who defile our temple. If you are successful, the magic, bows and spears of the tlaloque are yours to command.

Without this small action, there can be no alliance.

If the PCs ask for additional information, Nopaltzin speaks of Teotihuacal, the fabled "City of the Gods."

In Teotihuacal, Nopaltzin explains, there are three temples which the Mechica will need to be cleared from. In the greatest of these, the temple of Tezcatlipoca, they will find something important to the tlaloque's god Tlaloc.

If the PCs retrieve this item and eradicate the resident werejaguars, the tlaloque will find them worthy of alliance. Nopaltzin pinpoints the location of Teotihuacal on the Sapotec map. If asked exactly what they are looking for, Nopaltzin claims that they will know when they see it.

4. OCELOTLAGAN

The werejaguar raiding parties rest, train, and resupply in these barracks. It is currently occupied by 9 **werejaguars** (including Matlipoca, the war captain) and 29 **werejaguar servitors** spread out among a dozen buildings.

The Sapotec will have told the PCs to scout the southeast building where their spies have indicated Matlipoca resides. Matlipoca is known to be a remarkable tactician in addition to being a battle master.

If the characters manage to slay him the Mechica forces will not find leadership such as his for a long time. The PCs should be able to enter the southeast barrack relatively easily as the werejaguar hardly expect this type of assault. However, Matlipoca will be found with his guards – one werejaguar and two servitors. This will be a difficult battle, but it will be an impossible one if the PCs have raised the alarm.

Matlipoca's barrack is far enough from the others that a normal battle will not automatically give away the intrusion. If the PCs use flashy or exceptionally loud magic however, at the DMs discretion, the alarm might be raised and it would be best that the PCs make a hasty retreat.

Retreating would be a shame, however as Matlipoca is an avid art collector and his barracks contains three featherwoven portraits that could be sold for 500 gp each. Matlipoca also carries a cloth of woven black feathers which actually functions as a *portable hole*.

Clever PCs who make a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check realize that the item would make the perfect container to transport the *Risa Stone* when they get their hands on it.

5. TEOTIHUACAL

Also known as the "City of the Gods," Teotihuacal is actually no more than three temples formerly dedicated to the deities Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca, and Quetzalcoatl, though the Mechica long ago reconsecrated all three to Tezcatlipoca. The area is not nearly as occupied as it once was as most of the worship of Tezcatlipoca takes place in Tenocatlan itself these days, particularly in the presence of the *Risa Stone*.

If the PCs enter the northernmost structure, they enter what was once known as the Pyramid of the Moon. What was once a place of worship for the war god Huitzilopochtli has become a dumping ground for waste.

Half a century ago, an earthquake cracked the pyramid and a significant portion of the pyramid fell into an underground chasm. Some horrors from beneath caused havoc among the Mechica but were soon put down by reinforcements from Ocelotlagan. Now, the pit is filled with refuse and a rather content **otyugh** that attacks any creature who it finds in its trash.

Persistent PCs will find a chunk of jade worth 50 gp if they make a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check after the otyugh has been slain.

The smallest temple is surrounded by pillars in the shape of serpents, thought three have been toppled (yet are surprisingly intact). This is the former temple of Quetzalcoatl and it too has been left in disrepair.

Currently, it is occupied by a large family of **onca augusta** including two adults, three young adults (use **panther** statistics) and three noncombatant kittens. The giant jaguars are quite loyal to the Mechica and attack on sight.

Clearly the most spectacular and grandest temple belongs to Tezcatlipoca and is known as the Pyramid of the Sun.

Inside, the PCs will have to overcome three separate groups consisting of one **werejaguar** and two **werejaguar servitors**. After dispatching the third group, the PCs will find a feathered tarp that covers a flat item approximately four feet tall.

This is the “Smoking Mirror” which effectively behaves as a *mirror of life trapping*. In the mirror’s twelve cells, there are twelve tlaloque, each a warrior with the statistics of a **tlaloque guard** captured and waiting to be sacrificed at a future date upon the *Risa Stone*.

The return of these warriors is what Nopaltzin requires to gain the tlaloque as allies. If the PCs keep the Smoking Mirror covered, they might assume the mirror itself is what the tlaloque require.

Without any malice, Nopaltzin would actually prefer to keep this misinformation alive and secretly free the trapped tlaloque away from the PC’s eyes. He is embarrassed over their capture which explains why he never mentioned what they were meant to retrieve in the first place.

Of course, if a PC becomes trapped and incidentally frees a tlaloque warrior, the gig is up.

The tlaloque send a small delegation (including Nopaltzin) to the Sapotec and within hours a war council is formed.

You may roleplay this event, allowing the PCs to input their ideas and tactics, but in the end Nopaltzin and Xiuhtotec agree to attack Tenocatlan simultaneously from the northern and southern causeways simultaneously.

Shortly afterwards, the PCs should infiltrate the city and steal the *Risa Stone*, though both leaders would’ve preferred its destruction. Now that Matlipoca is dead, the removal of the *Risa Stone* should end the Mechica threat permanently.

Xiuhtotec owns a special set of *sending stones* except that the items are considered rare, come in a set of four, and each use of sending contacts the holders of each of the other stones.

The stones will be given to the tlaloque, the PCs, Xiuhtotec, with an extra carried by a Sapotec war captain.

The assault will only work if the Mechica are surprised, therefore the PCs need to clear out any werejaguars in the swamps of Tepozatlan and Xipe and Xico islands. In these two locations the tlaloque and Sapotec, respectively, plan to set up base camp and stage their attack.

6. THE SWAMP OF TEPOZATLAN.

Tepozatlan is a bug infested, disease ridden swamp that both the Mechica and the Sapotec ignore and give a wide berth. The tlaloque consider it perfect to keep their forces and presence secret since they are not bothered by its conditions.

However, in case there are Mechica scouts, they do ask the PCs to clear out any potential dangers that lie ahead for the tlaloque.

After a few hours of trailblazing, the PCs will indeed come across a werejaguar, but it will be most certainly dead and found half eaten. PCs who examine the corpse will be attacked by its killer, an **ahuizotl** that lairs in the swamp.

The ahuizotl has accumulated 1000 in golden nuggets that can be found easily in its nearby lair.

7. XIPE AND XICO ISLANDS

The Mechica have been attacked before over a century ago by a group of adventurers that easily cleared out these two islands and the werejaguars have not forgotten the lesson.

There are now seven **werejaguars**, a dozen **werejaguar servitors** and ten jaguars (**panthers**) that protect these islands and the 37 canoes that are moored here.



However, it is imperative that the islands are cleared as it is the only way the Sapotec can attack Tenocatlan without being spotted prematurely.

Although the Sapotec originally thought it necessary for the PCs to clear out the islands alone, this is obviously an impossibility without some assistance from the Sapotec. Xiuhtotec will suggest that the PCs cut off any werejaguars who attempt to flee to Tenocatlan to warn of the impending attack while the Sapotec battle the islands' inhabitants.

This should be a hard encounter for the PCs, and it is suggested that the battle consists of 5 werejaguar servitors and two werejaguars.

Once the battle is over and assuming the PCs were successful, the Sapotec will also have killed or captured all the remaining Mechica on both islands. The stage for the assault on Tenocatlan is now set.

8. TENOCATLAN

Tenocatlan has been blessed by Tezcatlipoca with a mythal-like force which prevents any sort of teleportation into its location, though teleportation within its confines is still possible.

The PCs could approach via the shallow waters that surround the city, but they have been stocked with thousands of piranha (use 20 **swarms of quippers**) which serve as both a food supply and protection for the city.

There are three causeways that lead to the city. Using the Sapotec sending stones, the tlaloque and Sapotec should coordinate their attacks simultaneously, with the PCs infiltrating from the western causeway only slightly afterward.

Most of the city's forces will concentrate on the assault and the PCs will need to head directly to the Palace of Cuactehmoc. There are other locations in the city to explore if the PCs desire, but the chance to ruin the entire plan increases as they stray from the main target. If the PCs insist on exploring beyond the scope of the adventure, have them run into increasing numbers of werejaguars and their servitors.

TENOCATLAN

If the PCs wish to explore Tenocatlan further and you can get your hands on a copy of **Dragon Magazine Issue #70**, pages 44-46 to flesh out the city. You might want to also consider changes that might have occurred in over a century.

8A. THE WESTERN CAUSEWAY

Normally, each causeway is guarded by dozens of werejaguar servitors and at least five werejaguar. However, most of the forces have been called to the northern or southern causeways to battle the tlaloque and Sapotec.

On the bridge, however, a single **werejaguar** and his **kamatlan** pet remain behind and the PCs will have to deal with them.

8B. THE PALACE OF CUACTEHMOC.

Cuactehmoc, the king of Tenocatlan, has both been blessed and cursed by Tezcatlipoca.

Long ago he fled a superior force of adventurers who invaded the city and nearly destroyed the *Risa Stone*. The stone was recovered, but Tezcatlipoca transformed his priest into a **jaguar lord** for his cowardice.

The now immortal priest has lost his magic, but protects the *Risa Stone* with a powerful new body and his two **onca augusta** allies.

CONCLUSION

The tlaloque and Sapotec forces will battle from night into day and back to night again, but will eventually fight to a standstill.

Once the PCs report through the sending stones that they have acquired the *Risa Stone*, they will cease attacks and retreat back to the Sapotec encampment to the north.

Even if the PCs fail, they do not prolong the battle. If the PCs do lose, the Mechica will be momentarily stunned at the surprise attack, but will redouble their efforts in upcoming weeks.

Eventually, they will wipe out and sacrifice both groups to their cruel god. If the PCs manage to secure the *Risa Stone*, they will have broken the power of the Mechica and will be hailed as heroes among both the tlaloque and the Sapotec.

Tezcatlipoca will withdraw his favor from the Mechica, and the werejaguar will lose their ability to pass on lycanthropy, not to mention they can no longer create servitors.

The remaining werejaguar will be far less aggressive knowing that they no longer have the backing of their deity.

Perhaps, if the DM desires, a population of Sapotec and tlaloque wants to immigrate through the Door of Stars to Toril and the True World. This could be an excellent role playing opportunity for the PCs as they negotiate an alliance with Huasteco and the Otomi, perhaps even the desmodu.

It would be very interesting for the Sapotec to return as Zateca and retake their old ruins, perhaps even Mictlatepec!

Malinalli will be ecstatic to see the PCs and the *Risa Stone* when they return to Otomi. Her smile fades as she ominously explains to the PCs the next step in their quest if they choose to continue.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The Door of Stars is a gateway to an infinite number of adventures. Perhaps there are crystal sequences hidden elsewhere in more ancient parts of the True World.

There is also the mystery of who exactly created the Door of Stars? Was it the batrachi in a time before man and even the gods? Perhaps the writing around the Door offers a clue or perhaps the PCs find a *king's tear* stone which gives them clues to the past?

The vampires of Nochte are now aware of the PCs and have apparently found at least one way back to the True World. Do the PCs need to make an expedition to Nochte? Will the desmodu assist them in the vampires' final defeat?

How about the tlaloque and Sapotec who return to Maztica? Undoubtedly, the cleaning out of Mictlatepec and return to its old name Tehuatepec can make quite an excellent campaign.

Of course, the quest to resurrect the goddess continues...

MONSTER STATISTICS

As elsewhere in this adventure, creature statistics from this chapter can be found in either the **Monster Manual** or in **MZS1 Monsters of Maztica**.

New creatures found in neither of those two sources can be found here, in addition to a repeat of the Mictlaneca template for ease of reference.

ALBAN

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (hishnahide plate)

Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +7

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Resistances necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Teenek, Maztican

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Alban takes 10 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces Alban to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, Alban drops to 1 hit point instead.

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of Alban must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to Alban's Stench for 24 hours.

Spellcasting. The alban is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The alban has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mending, sacred flame, spare the*

ALBAN

Alban is the undead progenitor of the mictlaneca. He rules the dead city as he always has with an iron fist and guards his *talisman of perpetual life* closely, never removing it.

Undead Traits. Alban does not need to eat, sleep, breathe or drink.

dying

1st level (4 slots): *divine favor, guiding bolt, healing word, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, magic weapon, prayer of healing, silence, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope, crusader's mantle, dispel magic, revivify, spirit guardians, water walk*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement, guardian of faith, stoneskin*

5th level (1 slots): *flame strike, hold monster, mass cure wounds*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) thunder damage.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) bludgeoning damage.

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an equal amount to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes on a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain by this attack rises 24 hours later as a zombie under Alban's control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed. Alban can have no more than twelve zombies under its control at one time.

REACTIONS

Guided Strike (Recharges After A Short Or Long Rest).

Alban grants a +10 bonus to an attack roll made by himself or another creature within 30 feet. Alban can make this choice after the roll is made but before it hits or misses.

MAZTICAN DESMODU

The desmodu are a race of flightless bat-folk that are bulky and powerful. Maztican desmodu are an offshoot of the race that have been isolated in the mountains of Huacli for many centuries and have developed very different abilities due to this isolation.

In temperament, they are quite similar to normal desmodu, but they are even more secretive than their Faerûnian counterparts.

Maztican desmodu despise undead of any form, particularly vampires, and they have successfully turned back an invasion of vampires from an otherworldly realm known as Nochte.

Maztican desmodu use a weapon which has a blunt edge and a sharpened blade which is typically made out of bone and known as a notbora.

DESMODU, MAZTICAN

Medium humanoid (desmodu), neutral good

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

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

Senses blindsight 120 ft. (negated by silence) passive Perception 11

Languages -

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Subsonic Vibrations. As a bonus action, a Maztican desmodu can begin to emit subsonic vibrations that affect creatures that can hear. This hum can take the form of despair or hope. Hope offers a +1 bonus to all allies on attack rolls, damage rolls, saves and skill checks. Despair causes all creatures that are hostile to the desmodu to suffer a -1 penalty to attacks and skill checks. The effect has a radius of 30 feet centered on the desmodu. The effects from multiple desmodu do not stack. A creature may make a DC 16 Constitution save (and then again at the beginning of each of their

turns) to avoid the effects of despair. Once they make their save, they are immune to that desmodu's despair for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage and the target continues to an additional 1 point of damage per bite at the start of the desmodu's turn for a minute. Multiple bite wounds stack.

Multiattack. The Maztican Desmodu makes 2 melee attacks.

Notbora. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 9 (1d10+4) bludgeoning damage or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage

Screech (1/Day). The Maztican desmodu can produce a screech as an action which has one of two effects on creatures that can hear the desmodu. The screech can stun creatures in a 30-foot radius centered on the desmodu (except other desmodu). Creatures who fail a DC 13 Constitution save are stunned for 1d4 turns. If the Maztican desmodu chooses, it may focus this screech into a ray which can cause 17 (5d6) thunder damage to a single target in a 30 foot range.

MICTLANECA TEMPLATE

A humanoid can become a mictlaneca. When a creature becomes a mictlaneca, it retains all of its statistics except as noted below. New abilities are based on the base creature's CR.

Type. The creature's type becomes undead and it gains undead traits.

Alignment. The good-evil axis of the creature's alignment becomes evil.

Resistances. Gains resistance to necrotic damage unless it is already immune.

Immunities. Gains immunity to the charmed, exhaustion, and poisoned conditions and poison damage.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The mictlaneca takes 10 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

New Abilities/Actions. The creature gains the following abilities and actions based on its original CR. Each ability uses the proficiency and stat bonuses of the base creature.

CR Range	New Ability/Action
0-1/2	Undead Fortitude (as Zombie)
1-2	Bite (as Ghoul)
3+	Bite and Stench (as Ghost)
*CR 3+	Life Drain (as Wight)

*Only if created with the *talisman of perpetual life*.

SKELETAL CHIHUAHUA

These small undead are a nuisance which typically serve as pets or food in Mictlatepec.

Undead Traits. Skeletal chihuahua do not need to eat, drink, sleep or breathe.

SKELETAL CHIHUAHUA

Tiny undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 2 (1d4)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3
Damage Immunities poison
Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages -
Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Keen Hearing And Smell. The skeletal chihuahua has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., Hit: 1 piercing damage.

VAMPIRE OF NOCHTE

The vampires of Nochte not what they once were in the days when they first arrived on Toril. Centuries of starvation in their island kingdom first made them feral, but they have since grown used to less sustenance and their forms have grown weaker for it.

Their savagery has lost them their ability to charm, much of their magic, and their ability to call bats when using Children of the Night.

Undead Traits. Vampires of Nochte do not need to sleep or breathe.

WEREJAGUAR SERVITOR

Werejaguar servitors are not true lycanthropes and remain in what would be considered their hybrid forms were they actual werejaguars. They are dimwitted and compliant, almost always under the command of an actual werejaguar, thus giving them their common name.

Werejaguar servitors have a number of origins, but the most commonly known servitors are created on the world of the Mechica where they are created from normal humans using the power of the *Risa Stone*.

WEREJAGUAR SERVITOR

Medium humanoid, lawful evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't obsidian
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands Mechica but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The werejaguar servitor makes one bite attack and one claw attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10+2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) slashing damage.

MAGIC ITEMS

The *Risa Stone* is a legendary item of transformative power sacred to the Mechica.

THE RISA STONE
Wondrous item, legendary

The Risa Stone is an ancient item of great power that was created by the god Tezcatlipoca and is sacred to his clergy. It can store power derived from sacrifice and use it to permanently change the form of those who are sacrificed upon it or to fuel the magic of the spells of those who touch it.

The stone's appearance is of a reclining man holding his hands on his chest. A human body can be strewn across the man's lap in preparation for sacrifice. For every human sacrificed, the Risa Stone stores a single "charge."

The stone can hold a maximum of 10 charges. A character in physical contact with the stone may then use these charges to power a spell of level 3 or lower (1 charge), 5 or lower (2 charges), 7 or lower (3 charges).

It can also be used to transform a man permanently into a jaguar (1 charge) or a werejaguar servitor (2 charges).

Jaguars and werejaguar servitors obey the one who transformed them if the being who performed the sacrifice is a worshiper of Tezcatlipoca.

The transformation may be reversed using powerful magic at the DMs discretion, but should require spells of higher than 7th level.

CHARACTER OPTIONS

The tlaloque are a subspecies of gnome with strong ties to the water element, particularly in regards to the weather.

They are typically beholden to the deity Tlaloc, or his Maztican counterpart Azul, though their outlook is far kinder than the worship of such a cruel god might suggest.

GNOME SUBRACE: TLALOQUE

As a tlaloque, you feel most comfortable in the soaking conditions of a torrential downpour.

You are a creation of Tlaloc, a god of the rains with whom the world cannot live without, yet there are other deities that also might have earned your worship.

TLALOQUE GNOME TRAITS

Tlaloques share the following traits in addition to the traits of all gnomes.

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom increases by a score of 1.

Control Weather Five or more tlaloque's working in concert (each using an action) can cast *control weather*.

Cold Adaptation. Tlaloque's are not subject to gaining levels of Exhaustion from cold temperatures. They are not otherwise resistant to cold damage.

Language. You can speak, read and write the language of the tlaloque.

Alignment. You worship the only good aspects of your deity and typically have a neutral or good alignment. You also have a tendency towards law because of your belief in the natural order of things.



VAMPIRE OF NOCHTE

Medium undead (shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 102 (12d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Teenek, Maztican

Challenge 9 (5000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the vampire of Nochte fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Misty Escape. When it drops to 0 hit points outside its resting place, the vampire of Nochte transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that it isn't in sunlight or running water. If it can't transform, it is destroyed. While it has 0 hit points in mist form, it can't revert to its vampire form, and it must reach its resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in its resting place, it reverts to its vampire form. It is then paralyzed until it regains at least 1 hit point. After spending 1 hour in its resting place with 0 hit points, it regains 1 hit point.

Regeneration. The vampire of Nochte regains 20 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If the vampire of Nochte takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vampire's next turn.

Shapechanger. If the creature isn't in sunlight or running water, it can use its action to polymorph into a Medium cloud of mist, or back to its true form. While in mist form, the creature can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. It is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing, and it can't pass through water. It has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and it is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage it takes from sunlight.

Spider Climb. The vampire of Nochte can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. The vampire of Nochte has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. The vampire of Nochte can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. The vampire of Nochte takes 20 acid damage if it ends its turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into the vampire of Nochte's heart while the vampire of Nochte is incapacitated in its resting place, the vampire of Nochte is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The vampire of Nochte takes 20 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack

rolls and ability checks.

ACTIONS

Bite (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire of Nochte, incapacitated or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the vampire of Nochte regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a vampire of Nochte spawn under the vampire of Nochte's control.

Charm. The vampire of Nochte targets one humanoid it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see the vampire of Nochte, the target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by the vampire of Nochte. The charmed target regards the vampire of Nochte as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under the vampire of Nochte's control, it takes the vampire of Nochte's requests or actions in the most favourable way it can, and is a willing target for the vampire of Nochte's bite attack.

Each time the vampire of Nochte or the vampire of Nochte's companions do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the vampire of Nochte is destroyed, is on a different plane of existence than the target, or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

Children Of The Night (1/Day). The vampire of Nochte magically calls 2d4 swarms rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, the vampire of Nochte can call 3d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire of Nochte and obeying its spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until the vampire of Nochte dies, or until the vampire of Nochte dismisses them as a bonus action.

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). The vampire of Nochte makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Unarmed Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampire of Nochte can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The vampire of Nochte can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The vampire of Nochte regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The vampire of Nochte moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Unarmed Strike. The vampire of Nochte makes one unarmed strike.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). The vampire of Nochte makes one bite attack.

ZATAL

The Mother of Life - Chapter 4

CHAPTER 4 - ZATAL

Mount Zatal was once considered the center of the True World when the ever-expanding Empire of Nexal seemed unstoppable. Zaltec, the bloodthirsty Eater of Hearts, has manifested his power more than once in the rumblings of the mountain's fiery belly.

Zatal's significance is not that of a simple symbol, however, and there are secrets within the mountain that very few could even guess at. There are miles and miles of tunnel systems, mostly formed by the natural effects of lava, but others have been carved by intelligent hands. These tunnels hold entire societies of their own, many who have no contact with the world outside of the volcano.

Though it is not a "dungeon" in the traditional sense, the world existing just below the surface of Mount Zatal is ripe for discovery and adventure. The tunnels and chambers could be explored for months, with only a small percentage of the mountain's secrets ever being revealed.

HISTORY OF ZATAL

Much like Zaltec's greatest pyramids, Mount Zatal has grown over the ages. The pyramids however, grew because new architecture was placed atop the old in order to forever expand upwards. Zatal on the other hand, has grown from within. Like a boil or abscess, there is a poison deep in the core of the mountain which literally pumps its evil, life-corrupting magic forever outwards and upwards.

THE HEART OF MAZTICA

Maztica is both the name of the continent and of its inhabitant's deceased mother goddess. Some say that the two are in fact one and the same. Though it is widely accepted that the goddess' husband Kukul created mankind, she was known as the true source of life and highly favored among the people for her role.

Maztica's son Zaltec resented Maztica's popularity and though he did not seek the love she received from her worshipers, he sought an equitable level of fear. Zaltec, the Eater of Hearts and Bringer of War wished to be exalted above all others. In order to accomplish this, he created hishna magic and bequeathed it to mankind. Hishna was a brand of magic which tapped into the inherent power of claws, fangs and talons and the resultant power allowed man to flourish and war in Zaltec's great name.

Disgusted at what her son had wrought and the resultant cost to life, Maztica created pluma magic. Pluma was an equivalent magic of feathers and life that she passed to her son Qotal, who then in turn passed it on to mankind.

Zaltec was infuriated over the loss of worship and approached his mother in a fit of rage. He beheaded her with his great dark macuahuitl and the weapon's fine edges shattered on impact. The black obsidian tips lodged themselves deep within both the head and body of the goddess.

Some elders have claimed that this was the original source of the existence of plumastone across the body (continent) of Maztica, and while that has yet to be proven it is certain that a force known as the Darkfire (sometimes Darkfyre) was born that day.

Zaltec left his mother's corpse but took from her a still beating, corrupted heart from which he would occasionally feed. Instead of sating his hunger, Zaltec only sought more and from that day forward, Zaltec yearned for a fresh flow with a far greater hunger than ever before.

Zaltec brought the Heart of Maztica to a valley in what is now known as the Valley of Nexal. He took it deep underground to a natural cavern where its veins naturally took root and flared with the corrupting force of the *Darkfire*. To this day, it beats an irregular beat that manifests as the rumblings of a semi-active volcano. Mount Zatal began to grow, quickly at first, but soon slowing to only a foot or so each year.

Over thousands of years, Zatal's reddish-orange glow became the most prominent feature in the True World's horizon for many miles. In conjunction with the great city of Nexal, Mount Zatal eventually became the heart of an empire and perhaps the whole of the True World itself.

Zaltec's involvement in the region was mostly kept secret, but the Bringer of War's brothers did not sit by entirely idly. The Lake of the Gods formed not long after the mountain dominated the valley, and it is the will of Zaltec's brothers manifested in the physical world. The lakes are believed to have kept the mountain in check, lest it grew to take over the whole of the True World.

THE VIPER OF ZATAL

The continent of Maztica had a history that existed long before even the gods arrived on Toril in their prehistoric forms and created the race of man that have come to dominate it. The creator races once graced these lands, first in the form of the serpentine sarrukh, then the amphibian batrachi and finally the avian aearee.

The sarrukh may have been long gone from the world upon mankind's arrival, but there were still remnants scattered in the darkest regions. An individual sarrukh once known as Mixcoatl slept an age-long sleep in the very cavern to which Zaltec brought the Heart. The Darkfire energy of the Heart (and the god's not inconsequential presence) woke the slumbering serpent and the ancient being was awed. It is unknown what kind of deal was brokered on that day but the sarrukh, now changed by the corrupted life energy of the Heart, agreed to serve as its guardian forevermore. Mixcoatl assumed the name "The Viper" and has secretly had a hand in events that have been falsely attributed to Zaltec himself.

DAWN OF AN EMPIRE

Far to the north of Zatal, a people who actually referred to themselves as the Mazticans, lived in caves and communities in a dryer, less fertile land.

Unbeknownst to the majority of mankind, Zaltec had decided that this unlikely group would be his chosen people. The Eater of Hearts manifested his image to a Maztican shaman named Tecco, and commanded him to lead his people south. Zaltec chose Tecco knowing full well that the Mazticans would obey, as Tecco was known for his detailed and accurate visions. For his whole life, Zaltec had guided the shaman.

The Mazticans were many thousands strong and they eventually came to the Valley of Nexal, which at the time had three cities already established near the base of Mount Zatal and the shores of the Lake of the Gods. The three cities were known as Tezat, Azatl, Zotil and when the Mazticans arrived all three maintained a precarious balance of power. If one grew too powerful the others would join forces to reestablish balance. The situation had remained under these circumstances for many decades.

The Mazticans initially served as a major boon for the city's inhabitants. They accepted menial work for the slightest of wages and only settled in waterlogged lands unwanted by the majority of the populace. Their knowledge of war was also known to be exceptional and the Mazticans were not greedy with their knowledge. After a number of years, and a strategic betrayal the Mazticans came to dominate Azatl, Zotil and Tezat. Within a few decades of their arrival, the newly declared Empire of Nexal spread beyond its valley, and the mixed inhabitants came to refer to themselves as Nexalans with great pride.

It wasn't long before Zaltec established his utter dominance as the primary god of the entire empire. Many sacrifices were made in his name, and the flow of fresh hearts consistently fed the vile god. On one occasion, after the ascendance of a new emperor (known as a Revered Counselor), a paltry sacrifice of one-thousand hearts was offered; inciting Zaltec's anger.

He awakened the Viper who had become attuned the corrupted life-magic of the Heart of Maztica and with its power the Viper caused the eruption of the volcano. Many more lives were lost and Nexal was burned nearly to the ground.

The Empire of Nexal was undoubtedly the greatest human empire to ever grace the True World. Yet as powerful as they were, even they could not handle the coming of Cordell, the clergy of the foreign god Helm, and the Golden Legion. Wielding weapons and magic unseen before in the True World, the invading force of Faerûnians and their native allies (consisting of Payit and more importantly the long established Kultakan enemies of the empire) decimated the Nexalan Empire. It took far less time than they could have ever imagined.

The last of the Revered Counselors of Nexal, Naltecona, was slain and the invaders trampled upon hundreds of years of history. Hoxitl, Zaltec's high priest, beseeched his god for deliverance and the Bringer of War responded by awakening the Viper once again. Those who were loyal to Zaltec voluntarily wore a symbol known as the Mark of the Viper, and together created the Viperhand Cult.

Through the god's will, interference from the foreign deities Helm and Lolth, and the terrible corrupting magic of the Darkfire, Zatal erupted with magical energies in an event known as the Night of Wailing. Survivors of the terrible night fled as the Lake of the Gods boiled and the men of the Viperhand became orcs, ogres, trolls and new beings known as jagres who could change forms between ogre and displacer beast.

Hoxitl became the grandest of them all, towering over even the most massive jagre. Eventually men returned to the Valley of Nexal, but only the most vile and unwanted. Life in the heart of the once great empire became short for the children of Maztica and Kukul.



THE DESCENT

The True World has seen its share of upheavals in recent centuries, and the Night of Wailing should have been the worst. Alas, it would not be so. When the repercussions of Cordell's invasion and the creation of the Viperhand finally settled, what might have been considered a "new normal" was established. Faerûnians became a somewhat common sight, particularly in the settlements of Helmsport-Ulatos, Trythosford, Tukan and a number of others. Mazticans managed to maintain their old ways and in some cases learned much from the invaders. They could certainly not have handled the Viperhand without the assistance of Cordell's Golden Legion, but that was hardly consolation for what had been done to their land and culture.

When all seemed normal, the sky one day began to shimmer and warp. Those who stared into its wavering form grew nauseous, but within moments the effect abruptly stopped. The sky, however, had changed from its normal bright blue to a steely gray.

Clerics of the gods sought answers immediately from their deities but the only response they received from the gods was silence – cold, empty nothingness. They knew almost instantaneously that the gods had either abandoned them, or were somehow cut off from their prayers.

The repercussions of this event were of course felt across the True World, but in the Valley of Nexal where the beasts ruled and mankind was reduced to an eternally fearful shadow of themselves, a new upheaval was set to occur. Hoxitl had begun to taste divinity himself, but he too could not hear the voice of his patron. Thinking his master displeased, Hoxitl organized a massive assault on the remaining human population of Nexal. Much like the Feathered Wars of old, every orc, ogre, troll and jagre was instructed to incapacitate instead of kill. Thousands of humans were captured and Hoxitl planned a truly grand sacrifice.

In lieu of the standard temple sacrifice, Hoxitl thought it would please his lord to perform the mass sacrifice upon Zatal's caldera. In a single file, the thousands of slaves marched up the mountainside and Hoxitl made no secret of his intentions. Once their hearts were removed and while the body still clung to life, the offerings would be fed directly in the fires of Zatal.

Hoxitl did not understand that it was not only Zalteco who had grown silent and the chosen of other deities had also begun to panic. Though typically somnolent in the depths of their own watery lairs in Zatal, the great rain dragons known as tlaloatl awoke when they lost the constant hum of their watery lord Azul.

When they emerged they found thousands of men led by not more than a hundred of Zalteco's foul Viperhand near their demesnes. The tlaloatl, confused by Azul's silence, attacked mercilessly which allowed the humans to escape into hidden tunnels in the mountain. Hoxitl lost much of his prize that day but managed to singlehandedly slay an ancient rain dragon.

Hoxitl, understanding the depths of his failure, chose to rip his own heart from his chest with his powerful claws and cast it into the bubbling lava. What was left of his retinue observed the great sacrifice and fell to their knees in reverence.

Though the gods were gone the Heart of Maztica remained deep within the mountain, nurturing the Darkfire and tended to by the Viper. Its corrupting magic emanated once again through the mountain tunnels and slowly changed the escaped humans over the span of a generation. Nothing remains of mankind, though many thousands of grimlocks now roam the upper tunnels.

AZURE SKIES, AGAIN

For over a century the gods remained silent and the True World changed in uncountable ways. Threats both new and old hardened its inhabitants and mankind found new ways to defend themselves in their new world. Once again a "new normal" was established with entire generations never having seen the blue skies of Toril.

As it had once been, so did it return. The shimmering and warping began once again as it did a century past. The grey, steel sky slowly changed to azure once again, and in the event known as the Sundering, the True World had found its way back to Toril.

Though they had long slept, the gods returned, and Zalteco was the first to awaken. He shifted in the grand cavern beneath Zatal and the mountain rumbled.

THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs have completed Chapter 3, the adventure starts immediately after its conclusion. The druidess Malinalli can give the players the secret historical background of Zatal to an extent. She is one of only a few who knows the source of the Darkfire, but she doesn't know about the Viper or any of the other inhabitants of the mountain.

Malinalli tasks her heroes with recovering the Heart of Maztica from the mountains depths and to do so she provides them a few items that can help. She gives each PC a *feather of fire resistance*. Worn somewhere on the body (typically in hair), these red feathers provide fire resistance without the necessity of attuning to the item, but only retain their magic for a month. They were crafted by plumaweavers in service to the goddess.

She also gives them a stone that grows warmer to the touch as the holder gets closer to the Heart of Maztica. The signals are easy to determine and the stone will unerringly lead the PCs through the miles upon miles of lava tubes and tunnels in Zatal. The stone also has a single teleportation use that leads directly to the Sunstone in the House of Tezca desert. Once the PCs acquire the Heart, they are instructed to use the spell where she will be waiting to perform the resurrection of a goddess.

STARTING IN CHAPTER 4

While the text of this chapter assumes that the PCs have participated in the other chapters of this adventure, it does not need to be so. Simply assume that another group managed to acquire the Risa Stone but perished in the process. Without the Risa Stone, the final encounter will be quite deadly.

The adventure begins in the Valley of Nexal, a blasted land full of monsters and the dreaded Viperhand cult of beasts. While most of these encounters can be skipped by stealthy or cautious PCs, they are available should the players decide to explore.

THE VALLEY OF NEXAL

Four cities once graced the Valley of Nexal but all but one lies in a state of ruin. The Beasts of the Viperhand survive in the region due mostly to a food source known as axayacatl supplemented with meat from captured humans and the small amounts of remaining game in the region.

Axayacatl is a large water bug found by the millions in the now foul smelling Lake of the Gods. Orcs harvest the water bug with massive nets and pound the creatures into dough. They are often cooked in lime water and put into mayz husks before eating.

The valley itself was once quite fertile, but the eruption of the Night of Wailing ruined most of the agriculture. Vegetation has returned, but the valley itself still looks as bleak as it did in the years following Zatal's eruption.

Below are descriptions of each city and additional features of the valley. The DM may expand on them if the PCs wish to explore further and entire adventures could be had within some of these sites. Exploring the Valley of Nexal is not truly necessary for the completion of the adventure.

AZATL

Azatl was once the center of the remaining human population of Nexal after the Night of Wailing. It was a city of scoundrels, consisting of the dregs of society both native and foreign. After the Spellplague, the jagre Hoxitl ordered the beasts of the Viperhand to surround the city as trolls and ogres captured the thousands of men and women. These folks were marched up the side of Zatal, their hearts meant as an offering to Zaltec.

Shortly after the first sacrifices were performed, rampaging tlaloatl inadvertently freed the humans and thousands escaped into the tunnels of the volcano. The humans survived, never again to see the light of day. Over time, the evil energies of the Darkfire transformed these men and women into the grimlocks that now inhabit Zatal.

Ironically, the immigration of these humans to Zatal displaced rat-like creatures of fire known as rylkar who then overran Azatl. Now the city is crawling with these fire rats, and not even the Viperhand finds any use in entering. Anything that could burn is now long gone, but there are rumored treasures that the rylkar have not yet destroyed.

RYLKAR NEST

If the PCs enter the deserted city of Azatl, all that is left of the deserted homes is stone and adobe, where there was once straw, lime and clay as well. Most of the roofing is gone and what could once be found inside has rotted and become worthless.

If the PCs insist on searching the ruined residences, you should roll a 1d6. A result of 1 means they find 1d4 gold quills (5 gp each) that were left behind in a long ago raid. On a roll of 2 or 3, they come upon a rylkar nest. Rylkar are mean spirited rat-like creatures that have been displaced from Zatal by the grimlocks.

The map provided details a typical rylkar infested ruin. In this example, the aboveground portion of the home is a mess of mud and rotted thatch. In a corner of the home, the PCs may find a 3 foot square hole that leads into the darkness.

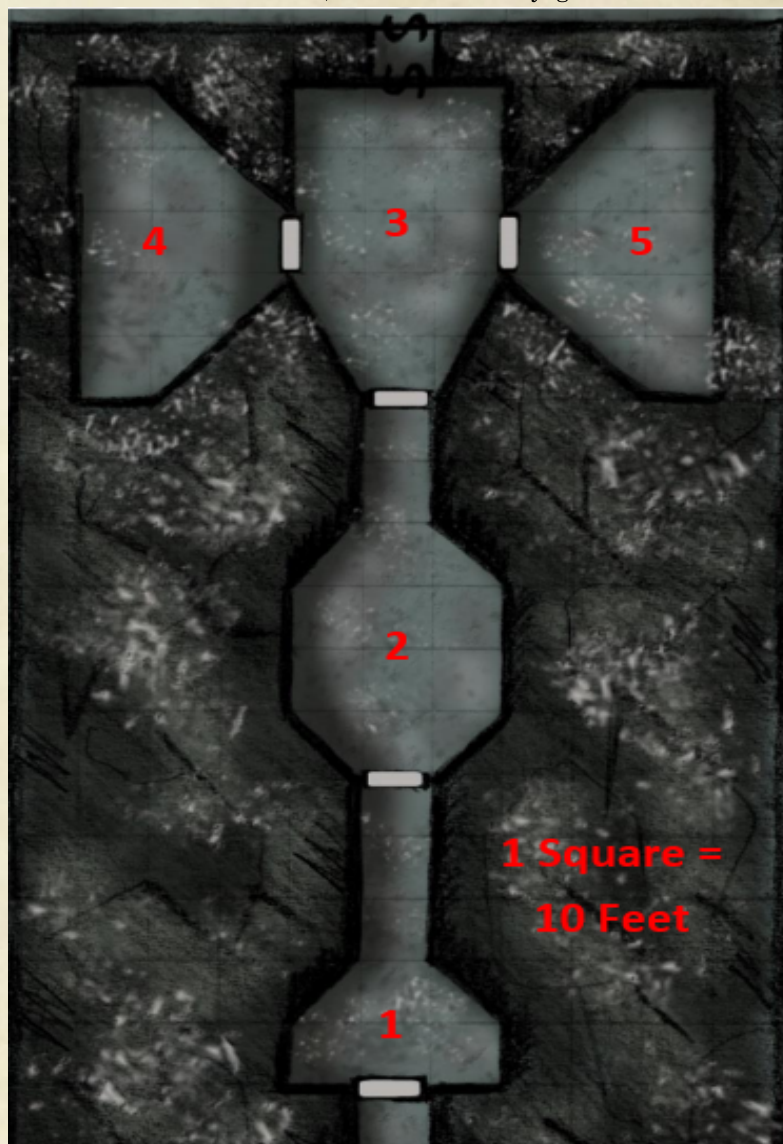
Steps lead downwards about 10 feet into what was once a hidden temple to Qotal. The former resident was one of the few worshipers of the forbidden deity that could be found in Nexal, but he is long gone. The doors are still in place, but easily broken off their hinges and 3 foot diameter holes can be found in the base of each which the rylkar use to travel from room to room.

ROOM 1

This area will begin to give PCs an indication of the foulness of what they are soon to find. The ground is soaked from recent rains that have flooded this part of the temple and the water is fouled and crawling with small vermin. Regular rats occasionally swim through the muck feasting on the worms and roaches. PCs who are foolish enough to attempt to drink any of the water must make a DC 11 Constitution save or contract sewer plague.

SEWER PLAGUE

Sewer plague is a generic term for a broad category of illnesses that incubate in Sewers, refuse heaps, and stagnant swamps, and which are sometimes transmitted by creatures that dwell in those areas, such as rats and otyughs.



When a Humanoid creature is bitten by a creature that carries the disease, or when it comes into contact with filth or offal contaminated by the disease, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

It takes 1d4 days for sewer plague's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include fatigue and cramps. The infected creature suffers one level of Exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of Hit Points from spending Hit Dice and no Hit Points from finishing a Long Rest.

At the end of each Long Rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of Exhaustion. On a successful save, the character's Exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of Exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

ROOM 2

The horrid stench in this room is overwhelming, and bones are strewn everywhere.

The room is also brimming in two **rylkarspawn swarms** that attempt to consume any who enter.

ROOM 3

This used to be the central chamber for rites to Qotal. A statue of a plumed dragon was smashed into pieces by the rylkar harridan's bulk when it first found the temple. The room is as foul smelling as any of the others and if the PCs search the rubble, three **rylkar madclaws** smash through the door from Room 4 to attack.

A DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check will locate a secret door behind where the statue once stood that leads to other areas within the city that were sympathetic to Qotal once long ago.

ROOM 4

This is the lair of the rylkar madclaws and if the PCs were attacked by its occupants in Room 3, there is only one remaining. This **rylkar madclaw** is barely alive. Having been the runt of the four, it has recently been fed on by the others and it only barely clings to life as its entrails are spilled within the chamber.

The rylkar here have collected a few baubles that they have kept hidden from the harridan, which hardly ever leaves its chamber anymore. In total, there are 13 pieces of jewelry made of bone, beads and pretty but worthless stones. Only one made of tiger eye and jade is worth anything and could likely be sold for 250 gp.

ROOM 5

This is the chamber of a **rylkar harridan** and its two **rylkar tormentor** guards. Here it rolls in its own filth and will not even bother to attack until one of its tormentors is slain.

Once it is slain, the PCs may move its bulk and find the treasure which it lays upon. Doing so, however, exposes them to a particularly virulent strain of sewer plague which only requires contact with the harridan's body and a failed DC 15 Constitution save to contract (though subsequent recovery saves are still DC 11).

The treasure consists of 40 filthy gold quills (200 gp) a dozen assorted small gems in a rotted pouch worth 50 gp each, and a small hishna talisman in the shape of an eagle's claw which can cast *lesser restoration* once before becoming nonmagical.

TEZAT

Tezat has been a ruin for longer than any of the other cities. It is a smaller city than Azatl, and what is left of it has effectively become a holding pen for sacrifices to Zaltec.

Five jagre overseers command dozens of trolls, ogres and hundreds of orcs who keep captives miserable, but at least alive. The only remaining structures are made of stone, and even those are only loosely held together. There are frequent escapes and rebellions, but the jagre are brutal in putting down organized resistance. There has not been a mass uprising in a decade.

The PCs may want to attempt to free slaves in Tezat, but spending too much time in the ruined city is most certain suicidal. Bands of roaming **Viperhand orcs** (1d8+1) led by **Viperhand trolls**, **Viperhand ogres**, or even one of the five **jagre** overseers is commonplace. If PCs lose a member of their party, a replacements could be found among the prisoners.

For every hour the PCs spend in Tezat, roll 1d6. A roll of 5 indicates one of these bands of creatures and a roll of 6 indicates a band with a prisoner in tow. Entering any of the dilapidated buildings also forces one of these rolls. There is little treasure to be found in this hellish prison.

ZOTIL

Zotil was destroyed by lava when Zatal erupted and has never been rebuilt or unburied. During and after the Spellplague, however, orcs that approached too closely began to disappear. Hoxitl would assign orcs who angered him to "guard" the Nexalan city as a particularly cruel form of punishment.

The humans of Zotil were killed almost instantly on the Night of Wailing when lava poured into its streets. The dead sat silently until they were awakened and set free by the Spellplague. Now, a parasitic form of undead known as lacunae ghosts roam freely among the hardened black lava.

ORCS AND LACUNAE GHOSTS

If the PCs approach or enter the blackened walkways of Zotil, describe the following scene to them.

The ground beneath your feet is smooth but uneven. You need to pay close attention to your every step in order to not break an ankle or leg. You are standing atop the remains of a city buried in lava and only the rare stone rooftop remains unburied.

From one of these forgotten ruins you hear the sounds of battle – a sound that soon turns to piteous wailing.

A regiment of five Viperhand orcs managed to anger Hoxitl greatly by allowing a captured jaguar knight from Kultaka to escape their clutches. As he surmised, the escape was intentional. This is because this particular band of Viperhand orcs is rather unlike most.

They are the team of *öllamaliztli* (Maztican ball game) players that competed in Chapter 2. If the players participated in that tournament, they will certainly recognize these particular orcs and the orcs will recognize them as well.

Hoxitl condemned the orcs to this “post” knowing they would not last long with the restless spirits that occupy the ruins. If the PCs choose to get involved in the battle, the four remaining orcs (one has been slain) will redouble their efforts and assist the PCs. There are seven **lacunae ghosts** attacking the orcs and they will immediately turn on the more powerful PCs.

Once the battle is concluded, what the PCs do with the orcs is truly up to them. They could leave the orcs to their fate but they certainly won't make it another week as there are hundreds of lacunae ghosts in the city. Cruel PCs might slay the orcs or if they are confident in the orcs' redemptive arc, they might attempt to smuggle them out of the Valley of Nexal.

The Kultakans, despite their longstanding hatred of the Viperhand, know these orcs and might be sympathetic to their plight. These particular Viperhand orcs are neutral in alignment and make steadfast allies. The information they have about the Valley of Nexal would be invaluable to the Kultakans.

NEXAL

There are close to 50,000 inhabitants in the Valley of Nexal (outside of Mount Zatal) and half of those live in the city of Nexal itself. In addition, Hoxitl, now a semi-divine being in his own right personally rules the city with an iron fist. Squadrons of Viperhand orcs patrol in and around the city and attack humanity on sight. If they can overwhelm their victims, they attack to capture for later sacrifice. Against a well-armed party they will use lethal force.

Patrols are similar to those in Tezat, but triple the number of Viperhand orcs and every regiment is led by a **jagre** with a **Viperhand ogre** or **Viperhand troll** lieutenant. Also, encounters occur every hour on a roll of 3-6 on 1d6. There are never prisoners in tow, as human sacrifices are only allowed in the city upon their impending death.

MOUNT POPOL

Mount Popol would be considered a decent sized mountain elsewhere in the True World but in comparison to Mount Zatal it can almost easily be overlooked. Mount Popol is not in danger of erupting, but it is currently home to a family of rare dragons known as **beljuril dragons** that have had their eyes set on inhabiting Mount Zatal for a long time now.

Less than two years ago, the family attempted to occupy caves near the caldera of Zatal but they were summarily attacked by *tlaloatl* and chased back to Mount Popol. A young *beljuril* dragon was slain and now the dragons seek revenge. They are hostile to the orcs and other Viperhand creatures that approach Mount Popol, but have negotiated some form of détente with Hoxitl and have agreed to stay away from the cities.

PCs that enter Mount Popol's environs might be approached at first by an adult *beljuril* dragon (the patriarch) known as Xiveris who is not necessarily violent. The family currently consists of two **adult beljuril dragons**, one **young beljuril dragon**, and three **wyrmling beljuril dragons**.

The dragons live in caves found near the Cicada Springs near which a great aqueduct was once built during the reign of the Revered Counselor Axalt, father to Naltecona. The aqueduct now lies in ruins.

GRASSHOPPER SPRINGS

Grasshopper Spring has somehow retained its purity despite the foulness found nearby in the Lake of the Gods. Were the beasts of the Viperhand to care whether they drank fouled or pure water, they would only gather it from this fresh source.

The spring originates somewhere deep underground and is maintained by a colony of thirty **chac**. They deter orc patrols any opportunity they get but are also not known to be any friendlier to mankind. Encounters with the **chac** do not necessarily have to be hostile but if the PCs wish to rest at the spring they should be prepared to perform some task for their hosts.

Recuperating with the **chac** is certainly a possibility if it is required by injured PCs. The **chac** will task the PCs with killing a **Maztican ahuizotl** that inhabits the shallow east end of the spring and occasionally devours unsuspecting young **chac**. The Maztican *ahuizotl* “collects” turquoise whenever it can get its claws on the stone, and has 625 gp worth of it in 8 chunks of various sizes.

LAKE OF THE GODS

The Lake of the Gods formed ages ago at the whim of Zaltecs' brothers in order to keep an eye on his actions. It was a reminder to the Nexalans that Zaltecs was not the only deity that demanded worship and recognition. Nowadays it is a shallow and muddy mess, home to thousands of waterbugs known as *axayacatl* which serve as a primary food source for the entire valley.

CORDOTL

Cordotl was once a town that had the potential to grow into yet a fifth city in the Valley of Nexal but, like the empire itself, it was destroyed during the Night of Wailing. Cordotl is nominally abandoned and Hoxitl does not pay it any mind. It lies in the shadow of the dragons of Mount Popol, and an old trade road to Palul passes through its abandoned causeway but only those in hiding are actually willing to call Cordotl home.

If the PCs enter Cordotl, they might encounter Elentepoc, a **jagre** outcast who worships Plutoq instead of Zaltecs. Elentepoc lives in a large home shaped like a small *ziggurat* and it is guarded by four **jaguar stone guardians**.

FIRES OF ZATAL

Mount Zatal was once growing at a rate that threatened to overtake the Lake of the Gods in only a century but this growth ceased on the day of the Blue Breath of Change. If the PCs do not destroy the Darkfire and take the Heart of Maztica from the mountain it will begin again.

Once the volcano fully destroys the lake, the beasts will no longer be able to survive in the valley and will need to push outwards, starting a full scale war with nations such as Pezelac and Kultaka. Though eventually this will lead to the destruction of the Viperhand, Pezelac will certainly fall as will most of Payit. The Kultakans would hold their ground as they always have.

THE VOLCANO SURFACE

The surface of the mountain is steep and barren but life still manages to find a way to thrive. Fire resistant scrubs form the ecological bottom rung and they are eaten by a variety of herbivorous small mammals. These are in turn consumed by larger predators most commonly the fire lizards of Zatal. These distant relatives of the desert dwelling itzamti can be found in relative abundance and they are only typically aggressive if hungry or threatened.

There are dozens of caverns that pepper the surface but only six lead down into the depths of the mountain. Without Malinalli's *heart stone*, it might take the PCs days, if not weeks to find the correct entrance. As it is, they should have a hostile encounter with a mated pair of **fire lizards of Zatal** that see the PCs as a threat to their nest of three eggs. The eggs are relatively easy to find near a river of slowly flowing lava. Without protection, approaching within 10 feet of the eggs would cause 4 (1d8) fire damage and touching the eggs would cause 5 (1d10) fire damage. The embryos inside the eggs will die if not kept sufficiently warm but could be sold in cities such as Tukan or Helmsport for 250 gp each if the embryos still lived and if there was some way to transport the scalding eggs.

When the PCs find the entrance to the Fire Caves, they are attacked by a creature known as a **living lahar**. This ooze typically feasts on grimlocks who wander too close to the entrance from below, but it will gladly dine on the tastier fare that the PCs represent.

Though one of Cordell's men once likened the tunnels under Zatal to be "Maztica's Undermountain" the layouts of both "megadungeons" are in fact quite different. Where most of Undermountain was created intentionally, the vast majority of Zatal was formed by natural lava tubes. They crisscross each under without any delineated levels and usable maps are impossible to come by. The movement of magma changes somewhat regularly and within a few years even the most accurate become obsolete.

Needless to say there are hundreds of miles of these tunnels, the most stable of which tend to attract settlement. There are five "levels" of the volcanic underground but more than depth this description is more accurately defined by its inhabitants. Level five is clearly the deepest part of the volcano other than the vein of magma that leads into the unreachable depths of the world.

The PCs will have encounters on each level but the timing of those encounters is up to the DM. Even with the *heart stone*, it will take the PCs at least a week to find their way to the Heart of the Mountain and the order given does not have to be followed linearly. If the DM has underground encounters of his or her own that they would like to include refer to the general descriptions of each level and find a proper placement.

FEATURES OF THE UNDERLEVELS

The underground areas of Zatal are always hot, but in many places are dangerously so.

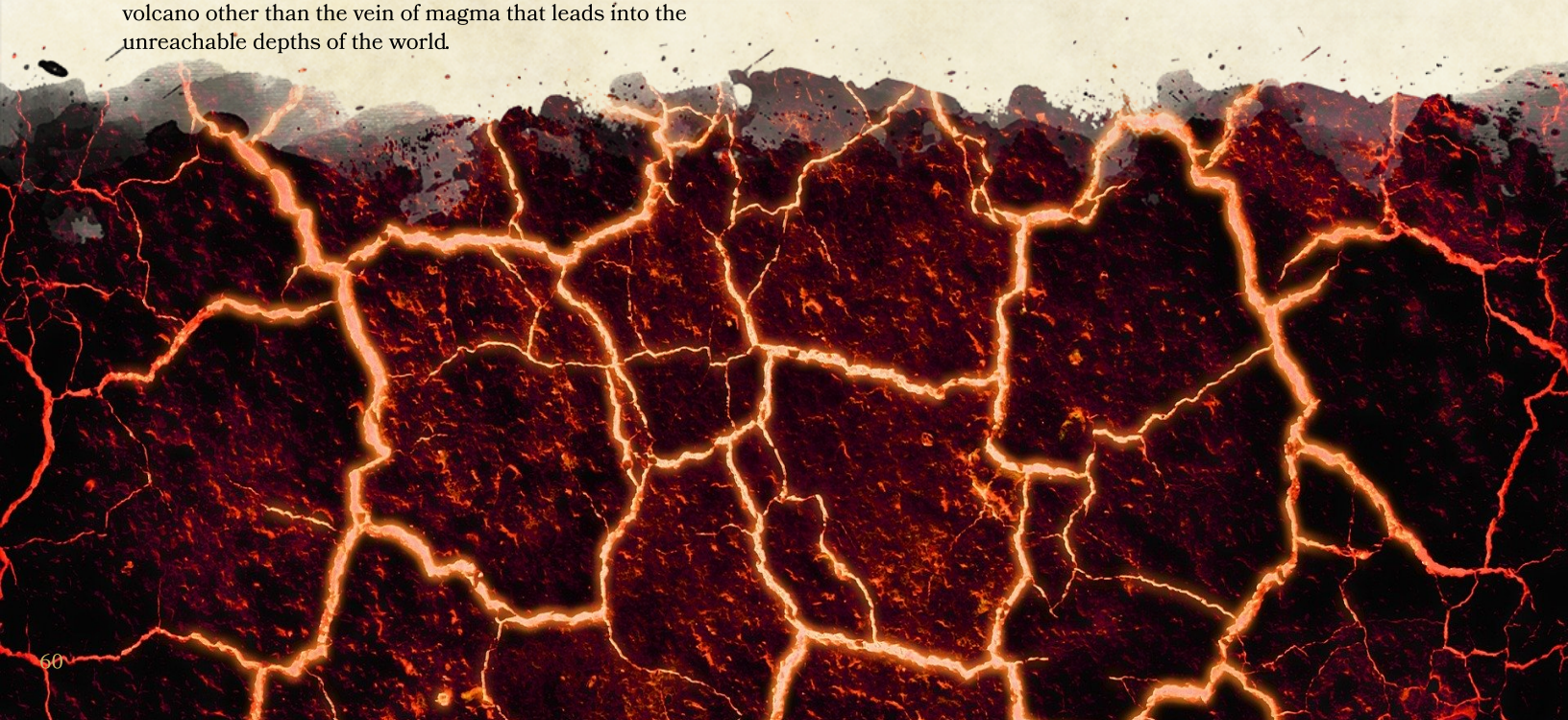
Fatigue. Characters that aren't at least resistant to fire become exhausted from the heat twice as fast as normal and must drink twice the amount of water to survive. The feathers provided by Malinalli offset this environmental danger. Caverns, rooms or tunnels on Level 2 do not have this feature.

Light. Cold chambers are pitch black, but those with magma radiate dim light within 30 feet of the magma itself.

Magma Breach. Hot lava flows throughout the mountain and is easily avoidable when seen. However, in some places, it flows just behind a thin crust or wall, and can come crashing through at any time. In each room, roll 1d6. A result of 1 means the room is unstable. If a caster uses an evocation spell with area of effect damage roll there is a 1% chance per point of damage caused that a breach occurs. If a breach occurs, lava pours into the room causing 16 (3d10) fire damage to all within the chamber and then again at the start of each turn.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check can determine if any particular chamber is stable before it becomes a danger. If the PCs are so foolish as to come into contact with magma otherwise in the adventure, refer to the following chart to determine the amount of fire damage dealt.

Contact	Fire Damage
Touch	11 (2d10)
Extremity Immersion	33 (6d10)
Wading	55 (10d10)
Falling In	99 (18d10)



LEVEL 1 - THE CAVES OF FIRE

The Descent resulted in the occupation of the lava tunnels by thousands of humans and they either displaced or ate whatever occupied the livable caverns. Eventually, the food started to run out and they delved deeper into the volcano. The humans could not overcome the firenewts or the powerful tlaloatl and it wasn't long before they started to turn on each other. Cannibalism became the only means of survival.

The evil sentience that powers the Darkfire sensed this degenerate evil and waves of dark energy pulsed into the outer chambers. The magic transformed every remaining cannibal into the blind grimlocks which they remain to this day.

The map provided represents a sample portion of the Fire Caves which are occupied primarily by one colony (one of many) of grimlocks. The DM may add other encounters of his own to the map or expand the Fire Caves to include additional sections of the DM's own design. The players will walk through over a mile of winding tunnels such as these before Level 2.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 1

Read the following out loud when the PCs enter the Caves of Fire.

The air is as stifling and hot as it is elsewhere in the Fire Caves, but there doesn't seem to be much in the way of magma here. Stalagmites and stalactites decorate the cavern and in the center of the cave you see four incredibly foul-smelling undead gnawing on a bloated corpse.

Four **ghasts** attack the PCs, dropping their current meal for fresher fare.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 2

In your careers as adventurers you have seen untold horrors, and you are certainly no stranger to the undead. However, the creature you see before you awakens the same hesitance you experienced in your first battles.

In many ways it defies description, but you make out some sort of giant scorpion-like creature whose torso is that of an undead human. As it comes into focus, you realize that the torso is actually being regurgitated. As the newly formed undead hits the floor and rises to its feet, a second replaces it from the beast's belly.

From the shadows you notice more of the foul smelling undead approaching. The unholy beast and its minions attack.

This undead abomination is a **hurachnid**. This creature has a belly that is far larger on the inside than it is on the outside and it can regurgitate its past "meals" as ghasts who defend the hurachnid and bring it additional prey.

The hurachnid has disgorged the four ghasts from the other room, and has two more **ghasts** with it now, including the one the PCs just observed it disgorge.

If the PCs defeat the hurachnid they can rip open its gullet at which point they find seven more bodies that should not fit in the small enclosure. The corpses are not animated and one has a beautiful set of perfectly cut diamond earrings worth 400 gp. The earrings are not a typical style for inhabitants of the True World.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 3

As you move beyond the caverns of the strange undead scorpion abomination, you had expected the stench to abate. It has, but it has been replaced by one that is equally terrible.

Bones litter the stony floors in between stalagmites and stalactites and you recognize most of them as being human. There are three obviously blind humanoids enjoying a leg bone that still has a moccasin attached.

These three **grimlocks** are the first that the PCs will encounter in these caverns. They are gluttonous and cannibalistic and will attack the PCs without fear. The moccasin is one of a pair and the other can be found amid the bones with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. They are *moccasins of striding and springing* which behave exactly like *boots of striding and springing*.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 4

This is unfortunately the latrine and refuse pit for the entire community of grimlocks, though they are not terribly discerning. A vile pool of excrement and floating body parts pollutes what might have one time been a fresh underground spring. Seven **grimlocks** currently occupy this chamber and attack upon discovery.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 5

Five grimlocks guard a cave that is used as a larder of sorts for the cannibalistic creatures. Two human bodies, two desert dwarves and even a half dozen grimlock corpses are stacked atop each other, each in a variety of states of decay.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 6

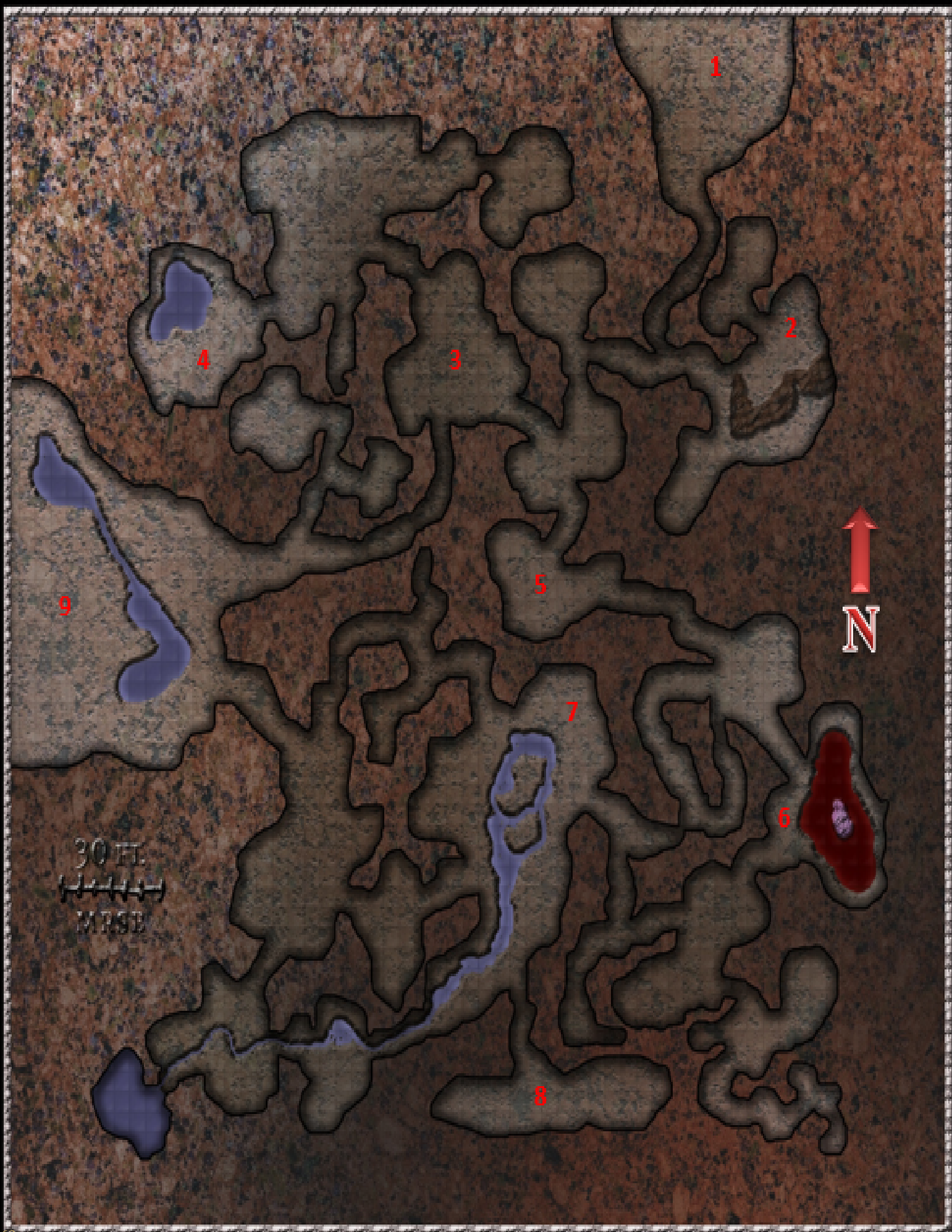
In the grimlock caverns, this is the only one that actually contains some of the flowing magma that is so commonplace elsewhere in the tunnels.

While the grimlocks do not like to waste potential food, the occasional dispute leads to the losing grimlock being tossed into the magma. Fifteen **grimlocks** are here now throwing a helpless and bound one into the fiery pit. There are also two **magma mephits** that the grimlocks generally avoid cavorting in the lava as well.

The mephits will delight in the chaos of a battle and join in attempting to shove grimlocks and PCs alike into the magma.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 7

This is the main "community center" for the grimlocks if such a thing can be defined. Relatively fresh water forms a river that flows deeper into the tunnels before disappearing under the tunnel floor to the southwest.



PCs who follow the flowing water will need to be able to breather water for at least six hours before they come upon the lair of an adult tlaloatl. The rain dragon will not be happy to find intruders.

The water in these tunnels stays fresh because of the strong flow and it is currently occupied by twenty-five **grimlocks** who will rush the PCs with little in the way of tactics.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 8

The entrance to this cave is guarded by eight **piercers** that disguise themselves among the dozens of stalactites on the ceiling. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow the PCs to catch a glimpse of some movement up above. The cave itself doubles as a nursery and treasury but all the grimlock young have recently been devoured by ghosts. The grimlock have stationed two **grimlocks** as guards here that use their knowledge of the piercer's locations and blindsight to avoid being hit.

Grimlocks no longer truly value treasure, but the belongings of their human ancestors can be found here. All in all, there is 225 gold quills worth 1.125 gp, 60 semiprecious stones worth 10 gp each, and a variety of differently sized chunks of jade and turquoise (15 in total worth 750 gp).

There is also a book whose covers are made of black mica bound with a thick copper wire. This is a magical book called the *grimoire of the earthstoker* that contains some very unique new spells which can be found in the Appendix.

GRIMLOCK CAVERNS 9

This cavern starts at a higher elevation on its east end and gradually dips down the further west you go into the cavern beyond the edge of the map.

Beyond this point lies a mile or so of additional caves that become progressively more humid. Eventually, they cool off completely as the PCs enter Level 2 of Zatal. Malinalli's *heart stone* will continue to lead the PCs in the right direction.

LEVEL 2 – THE CHILDREN OF AZUL

Tlaloatl occupy Mount Zatal in significant numbers because their deity Azul commands it. Azul, a brother god to Zalteco, has often allied with the Eater of Hearts. However, he also does not fully trust his brother and longs for a day where Zalteco ceases his meddling in the affairs of mankind. Azul bears some great guilt from a long past age that he does not speak of, even with his priests. This secret is said to be guarded somewhere within the mountain.

The caverns and chambers claimed by the tlaloatl are known to be wholly different from the rest of the volcano's interior. Cool mist and moist caverns exist wholly separate from the bubbling lava and boiling heat nearby. There are even lakes and rivers within the mountain; one is rumored to be made completely of molten gold!

The Blue Grotto is a small portion of the miles of tunnels and chambers in Level 2. It is the abode of two young and mean-spirited tlaloatl known as Umeteotec and Umeteatl along with their minions. The walls are coated in harmless blue algae and are lit by glowing worms which give the whole grotto a bluish glow. The effect would certainly be considered beautiful were it not for the hostile inhabitants.

BLUE GROTTO 1

The entrance to the Blue Grotto is completely submerged and the water elemental allies of the rain dragons keep the current continually churning and difficult to swim in. Submerged PCs need to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to advance on their turn, even if they have a swim speed. The submerged tunnel is 60 feet long before the PCs can surface.

BLUE GROTTO 2

Two **water elementals** work constantly keeping the waters of the Blue Grotto fresh and churning for the tlaloatls. They also make it incredibly difficult for grimlocks or other inhabitants of the volcano to enter the grotto. They attack any who enter uninvited.

BLUE GROTTO 3

When the tlaloatl were only wyrmlings, they attempted their first magical summonings into the Plane of Water and found they could only call forth a few of the snakelike water weirds. The four **water weirds** have never been given the task of guarding the grotto and they can be avoided if the PCs aren't immediately hostile.

Floating in this area is a set of armor made of *mariner's hishnahide scale mail armor*. The armor was accidentally knocked into the water by Umeteotec from the dragons' hoard and it floated here over time. The tlaloatls' will be infuriated if they see it in a PCs' possession and will attack the offending character first.

The water weirds will rise from the water surrounding PCs as they grab the armor, but will not immediately attack. The PCs can wholly ignore the curious elemental creatures if they desire.

BLUE GROTTO 4

The tlaloatl occasionally make forays into the outside world and intimidate water based creatures that they encounter. Generally, Umeteatl snatches up such creatures with his jaguar head and drags it back to the Blue Grotto to act at least as an unwilling guard.

Such is the case with the **chuul** and five **giant crabs** that inhabit this part of the Blue Grotto. The chuul attacks all who approach the area and the crabs attempt to pick off pieces of meat as the battle rages.

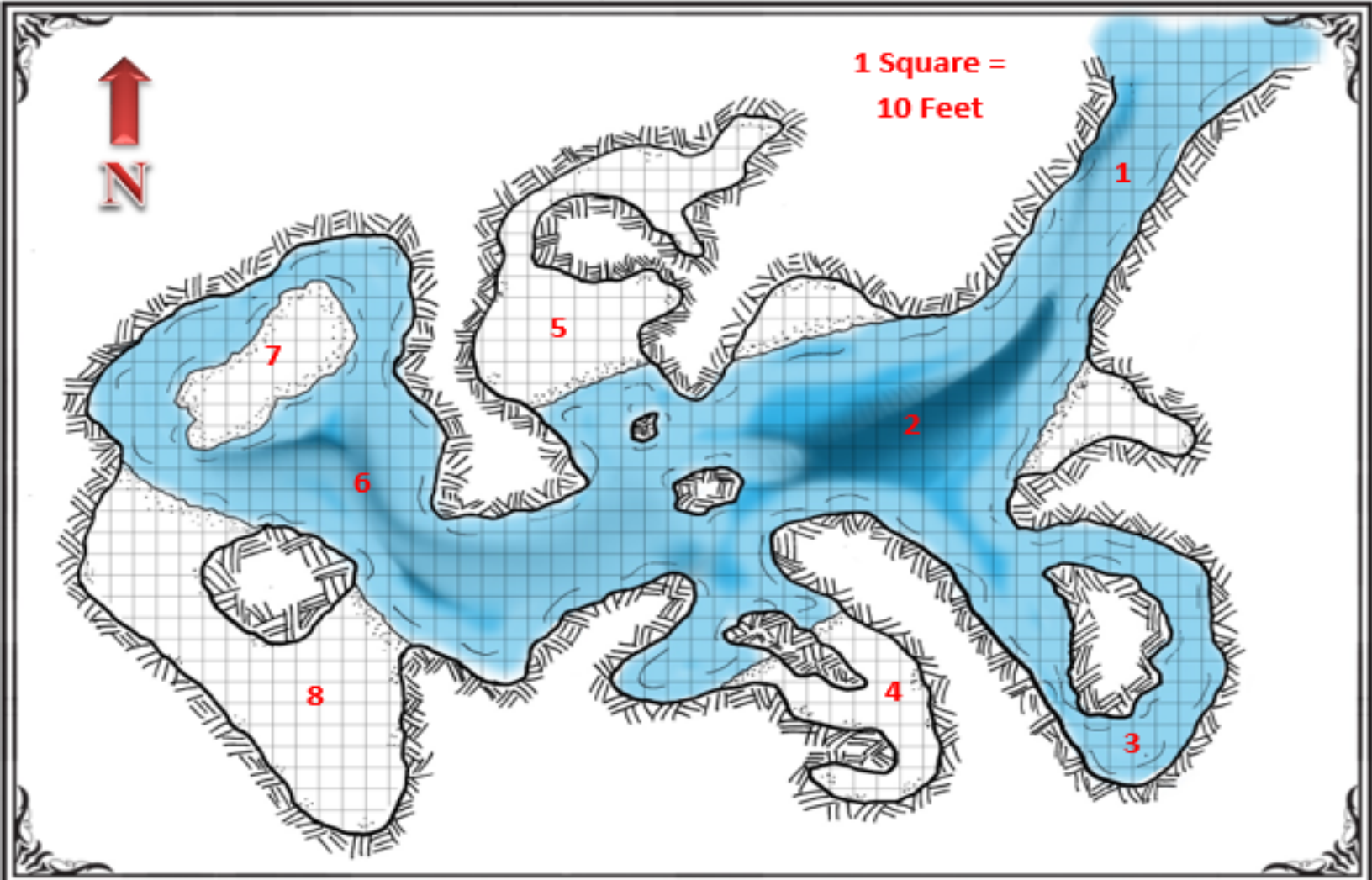
BLUE GROTTO 5

A **giant crocodile**, taken from the swamps of northern Kultaka and brought here wedged in mass in the rear portion of this cavern but hunts giant crabs that live in the soft mud of the shoreline. The ten **giant crabs** that remain stay hidden underground for fear of being eaten and will not be encountered unless the PCs actively try to dig them out.

BLUE GROTTO 6

The Blue Grotto opens up into an area where the water calms a bit and the rain dragons lair. Though they get along with each other, the tlaloatl do not coordinate their attacks well. Umeteotec inhabits the island at area 7, and Umeteatl inhabits the cavern at area 8.

Whichever the PCs encounter first, the other dragon will arrive at the start of the second turn of battle.



BLUE GROTTO 7

Umeteotl lounges on the island in the northern portion of the Blue Grotto lake. He is spoiled and completely detached from his god Azul, leading him to behave in a manner unlike most tlaloatl. It believes that one day Azul will seek to punish him so it is responsible for capturing and summoning as many guardians as it can. Upon discovery of the PCs, it will offer them the option of either serving, or dying.

Umeteatl, as the more “responsible” of the two, guards the treasure that belongs to the dragons and is loath to leave the hoard. It will do so however, when it senses its brother is in danger. The PCs will have to fight both **young tlaloatl**s after one turn of battle.

BLUE GROTTO 8

Umeteatl’s lair is carved with images of their history that are quite detailed. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check allows the PCs to decipher their entire past. They show the two brothers as wyrmlings in service to Azul whom they thought abandoned them while Maztica was on Abeir. They stopped performing their duties and were actively hunted by other, more powerful rain dragons.

Eventually, they killed and ate all their remaining human allies, including the hands that carved the grotto walls, and have remained hidden in the grotto for over a decade.

The treasure the dragons have amassed is not extensive, but it contains some wondrous items that PCs might find useful.

The tlaloatl have 60 gold quills (300 gp) and Amnian coins (1,500 cp, 350 sp, 200 gp, 45 pp) in addition to a ruined painting of Cordell whose gold frame could be sold or melted down for the equivalent of 200 gp, 6 chunks of jade (50 gp each) and 4 chunks of turquoise (50 gp each).

Magic items include a *gizzard of Enotepec*, *hishnacoils*, and a large sealed clay jug that contains 2 doses of *octli of strength*.

LEVEL 3 - THE FURY OF TEZCA

Though their forces can easily reach the surface by bypassing the tlaloatl and pushing through the grimlocks, a firenewts and their strider allies occupy what is considered the third level of Mount Zatal’s undertunnels.

These firenewts hate mankind, but have threats of their own to deal with within the mountain and rarely venture forth. This level is considered the largest of all and is generally pretty deep below ground. It is the most volcanically active level of them all and generally surrounds the massive tube that leads directly to the caldera.

In addition to geography, Tezca himself also maintains magic that prevents the magma from completely filling the level and can drop the effect if he so chooses.

These firenewts worship Tezca and this angers their former patron Imix, the Prince of Evil Fire. Imix has encouraged magmin and salamanders to eliminate the disloyal lizard folk, but they maintain some protection from Tezca.



This war has been at a stalemate for centuries, and even when Tezca was silent on Abeir, the magic remained. Other fire creatures occupy this level in great numbers, particularly magma mephits who greatly enjoy antagonizing the war and fomenting chaos.

One region that the PCs may drop in on is the Cavern of Imix. Including its smaller side caves, the Cavern of Imix stretches almost 500 feet from end to end.

The caverns are a central location for a war that rages between three factions of fire creatures. The firenewts of Zatal, an incursion of salamanders that were dispatched by Imix, and a small group of the dwarflike azer who cannot find their way back to their elemental home. All the while, a dozen lava mephits snipe at the weak or injured, adding to an already chaotic battle.

The PCs should enter the caverns from the SE cavern and the entrance is in the ceiling. Luckily this is the lowest part of the cavern ceiling at only a 10 ft drop. The cavern itself can reach as high as 60 feet elsewhere, particularly in the central chamber.

Unfortunately for PCs the only way through this area leads at least through the mephits and the firenewts, but if the PCs strike out on their own and engage in battle, the salamanders may attack as well.

The azer are not hostile to the PCs and see the added muscle that the group represents as a blessing from their own Prince, Zaaman Rul. The encounters that follow are designed for the DM to stage, but the PCs can participate in the outright war to follow, hopefully tipping the balance in favor of the azer.

Combatants include seven **azer**, twelve **magma mephits** who only attack when one side is weakened, eight **salamanders**, fourteen **firenewt warriors**, 3 firenewt warlocks of Tezca who use the same statistics as **firenewt warlocks of Imix** and five **giant striders**.

If the PCs enter the main chamber with the azer, all combatants will appear from their respective chambers and a massive battle will commence. The DM is encouraged to only give as many combatants to the PCs as the can handle as many will be fighting each other.

At the conclusion of the battle, and assuming that the PCs and azer have won, the azer will take over the cavern and fortify both entrances. The PCs are welcome to rest here at any point in this or future adventures in Zatal.

LEVEL 4 - THE FIST OF PLUTOQ

The fourth level lies below the mountain and is on relatively even ground compared to those above. Instead of lava tubes, natural caverns exist here in abundance and its appearance seems more like elsewhere in the Underdark than it does in the center of a volcano, but it is still dangerously hot.

Like Azul and Tezca, the earthen Plutoq has also taken many centuries of interest in his brother's activities and his creatures occupy this level in order to keep watch on happenings in the volcano.

The level is rife with elemental creatures of stone; including gargoyles, elementals, and xorn.

There is also said to be a cavern with a large stone ziggurat and temple to Plutoq. The temple atop the ziggurat is occupied by a couatl that has abandoned its worship of Qotal and now calls Plutoq his patron. Because of this, he has developed some new powers and an altered appearance. The environs of the temple is described below along with an encounter with the strange couatl himself. The couatl's name is Macuilluztatl and he is of a very rare, if not unique subspecies known as a piedracouatl.

PLUTOQ'S ZIGGURAT 1

Plutoq's influence in this region and the chemical rich atmosphere inherent in the volcano has caused the growth of some very large quartz crystals in this cavern. The crystals have in turn attracted two **xorn** who do not wish to lose their food source. The xorn attack any PCs who enter.

Significant chunks of crystal can be broken off the walls with a successful DC 12 Strength check but they are not very valuable. Each weights 1d6+1 lb and could only be sold for a single gold quill (5 gp). In addition, magma flows just beyond the cavern walls and each removed crystal requires the PC to check for a magma breach. The xorn inherently know which crystals to avoid.

PLUTOQ'S ZIGGURAT 2

A **Maztican golem** created by the piedracouatl stands motionless in the center of this cavern behind a small copper bowl with 6 glittering red rubies inside. The piedracouatl keeps an eye on this chamber with his crystal ball and observes the PCs actions.

He will not immediately assume they are hostile if they attempt to take the rubies but a display of powerful hishna magic will make him assume they are agents of Zalteco. The gems do belong to him however, and if they destroy the golem (which animates once it or the bowl is touched) he will seek recompense of a magic item. Any item of uncommon rarity or greater will do. He will also insist that the gems are returned, unless the PCs assist him in the battle against the gargoyles. Each ruby is worth 200 gp.

PLUTOQ'S ZIGGURAT 3

This large cavern has a large stream that runs through its length. It is fresh and and is safe to drink from, but a swarm of blind carnivorous fish (treat as a **swarm of quippers**) attack any who place an extremity in the water or immerse themselves.

In addition, a thirst of 24 **stirges** occupy the stalactites and attack if any blood is drawn or the PCs make enough noise to wake them. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check allows the PCs to notice the sleeping creatures on the ceiling.

PLUTOQ'S ZIGGURAT 4

A half dozen **gargoyles** once served Macuilluztatl faithfully atop the ziggurat. Their cruelty always bothered the serpent and eventually he could no longer abide their torments of other creatures, even intruders.

Macuilluztatl created stone guardians and golems to replace the gargoyles and eventually cast them out. The gargoyles desire revenge but are hesitant to attack on their own. The arrival of the PCs is just what they need to destroy their former patron.

30 ft



When the PCs enter this chamber read the following.

A human male, emaciated and pale, sits chained to a stone in the center of the cavern. Surrounding the human are five stone statues of terrible creatures that look like the dreaded tzitzimil, but with wings. The statues do not move and the man whispers for you to “be silent, lest you wake the sleeping guardians.”

The human male is one of the gargoyles wearing a *hat of disguise* and he will gladly allow the PCs to free him. The statues are the other gargoyles, but they will remain unmoving. The “human” points to a key that is just out of his reach that unlocks the shackles, though he continually implores them to remain silent.

The disguised gargoyle identifies himself as Tecotecuani and says he is a Kultakan that was captured by a “foul snake creature that lives in a hidden temple of evil.” The magical disguise and surrounding circumstances are quite convincing, requiring a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check for the PCs to notice something is amiss unless they move to touch Tecotecuani.

He will beg them to arm him despite not being in any shape to fight. He also wants the PCs to attack the “snake creature to the north” on sight, but will not pursue this if the PCs grow suspicious of an overly eager former prisoner. He will beg the PCs not to attack the statues because of his fear and their “immense powers.”

It is important to note that Tecotecuani has had his wings destroyed and removed in a previous battle, allowing his shape as a human to become more convincing using the *hat of disguise*.

PLUTOQ’S ZIGGURAT 5

When the PCs enter the cavern that contains the ziggurat, they will notice the structure immediately. It is well lit from inside and a great serpent stands in the temple doorway, as if waiting for the arrival of the PCs. If Tecotecuani is with the party, he implores them to attack before the “demon-snake” can use its magic.

How Macuilluztatl reacts to the PCs is dependent on their actions in area 2. If they did not take the rubies or destroy the golem, the stony couatl warns them not trust in their present company if Tecotecuani is with them, or welcomes them to Plutoq’s Ziggurat if the gargoyle is not.

If they took the rubies and/or destroyed the golem, he will not say anything but can be easily convinced that the PCs are non-hostile with a successful DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

He is far more suspicious if the PCs used any form of *hishna* magic against the golem, thinking that the PCs are an agent of Zaltec. It would then require a DC 18 check to turn him friendly in such a scenario.

An untrusting couatl demands the PCs leave the environs after compensation for the golem and a return of the gems. He will attack PCs that do not comply, activating his four **stone guardian eagles** and his remaining **Maztican golem**. This will be a deadly battle with the **pedracouatl** even with the assistance of the other five **gargoyles** who arrive from area four at the end of the first turn.

The gargoyles will turn on the PCs when the couatl is dead.

Assuming the couatl is friendly it telepathically warns them again about the disguised gargoyle, just as the others flit into the cavern. In this case, the pedracouatl and its guardians assist the PCs.

Once the battle is over and assuming the PCs are victorious against the gargoyles, Macuilluztatl invites them into the temple of Plutoq for a meal and some conversation. The couatl politely answers any questions the PCs have and claims he has information that could help them if they seek the Heart of Maztica.

“The stone in your grasp might guide you to the heart of the goddess, but you must know what it has become. Zaltec has fed from it for centuries, and it has developed a life of its own. This life is not kind nor motherly like the goddess, but rather hateful and cruel. It is the source of the evil energy known as the Darkfire, and it will not be easily defeated.”

This should pique the PCs’ interest since Malinalli did not know of its current status, only how to find it. The stone serpent continues.

“And the Heart is not the only danger you shall face. Zaltec no longer resides in his chamber, but he has left an ancient guardian. One as old as the gods themselves in their current forms and from a time before man.

You will need to defeat this being, who calls himself the Viper, if you are even to challenge the Darkfire. I am here to observe, so I cannot help you directly, but I can offer this to your greatest warrior.”

With that, the pedracouatl presents a glowing, obsidian studded spear known as a tepoztōpīlli. He claims it is called *Onotlatlatzin*, and it’s great power could be used to harness lightning.

Its greatest power of calling lightning, according to the couatl, will not be possible in the underground caverns, but its wielder will be immune to the Viper’s most deadly attack. The weapon is intelligent and can be found in **MZC1 The Maztican Campaign Guide**.

The pedracouatl escorts the PCs beyond its ziggurat and points the PCs in a direction that makes the stone of the heart grow incredibly warm, almost hot to the touch. Less than a half mile from the ziggurat lies the grand entrance to the Heart of the Mountain.

LEVEL 5 – HEART OF THE MOUNTAIN

Deep below the mountain lies a massive cavern that is roughly shaped like the ventricles of a heart. This area is known as the Heart of the Mountain and contains the corrupted, blackened heart of the goddess Maztica.

It also holds a physical manifestation of the obscene force known as the Darkfire, the former sarrukh creature known as the Viper, and the currently unoccupied resting place of the deity Zaltec himself.

HEART 1

When the PCs enter the Heart of the Mountain read the following out loud to them.

You can feel the soul of the whole of the mountain in your skin and your bones as you enter what you know Malinalli and Macuilluztatl both described as the "Heart of the Mountain." It is difficult to explain, but it oozes hunger and transformation simultaneously. You can almost feel your fingers wriggling about themselves as if they want to warp into something... different.

Black flames pulse across the ceiling and occasionally flare out towards you, but they do not reach where you stand. This must be a manifestation of the infamous Darkfire; the power responsible for the Night of Wailing and source of much of the evil that has plagued the True World for ages now.

While the Darkfire might not be an immediate threat, perhaps the massive white serpent that slides into view is.

As anticipated, the serpent is none other than **The Viper**. It was once sarrukh, but centuries of exposure to the transformative energy of the Darkfire has made it what it is now. The Viper will attempt to spit forth lightning bolt after lightning bolt at the PCs. The creature is a nightmare to behold and it will show no mercy.

The serpent slithered from its lair which contains the collected skulls of thousands of its victims, but it does not otherwise care for treasure. Four **swarms of poisonous snakes** weave in and out of the skulls. If the Viper is slain, the Darkfire flares causing 5 (1d10) necrotic damage to all living beings in the Heart of the Mountain.

The Darkfire noticeably becomes more active. If it manages to kill a PC, the dead PC is immediately resurrected and transformed into some terrible creature from the Monster Manual that is not otherwise common (or even known) within the True World. Possibilities include an umber hulk, a gorgon, or a bulette. Such PCs can only be changed to their true form using a wish, or divine intervention, such as Maztica's blessing at the adventure's conclusion. The creature will attack its former allies.

HEART 2

This is the chamber where the avatar of Zaltec awoke from its long slumber soon after Maztica returned to Toril. There are no stalagmites and it seems as if most of the stalactites have come crashing to the cavern floor, where the outline of a massive human-like form can be found in the stone.

Each turn that the PCs begin in this chamber, the Darkfire flares as it did when the Viper was slain with all the accompanying effects. As the PCs turn the northeastern cavern, they see a sight which horrifies even the most stalwart PC.

HEART 3

Read the following description to the players as they peer into the cavern.

Deep in your chest, you can feel the beating of your heart and as you approach the third cavern, it becomes so loud that it drowns out all other sound.

As you peer around the entrance you realize it is not the sound of your own, but rather the massive, desiccated heart of a dead goddess.

What was once the heart of the goddess of life and the mother of the True World is now a corrupted, blackened monstrosity. It is the size of a small giant, but its tendrils; veins and arteries actually, hold it aloft from the cavern walls.

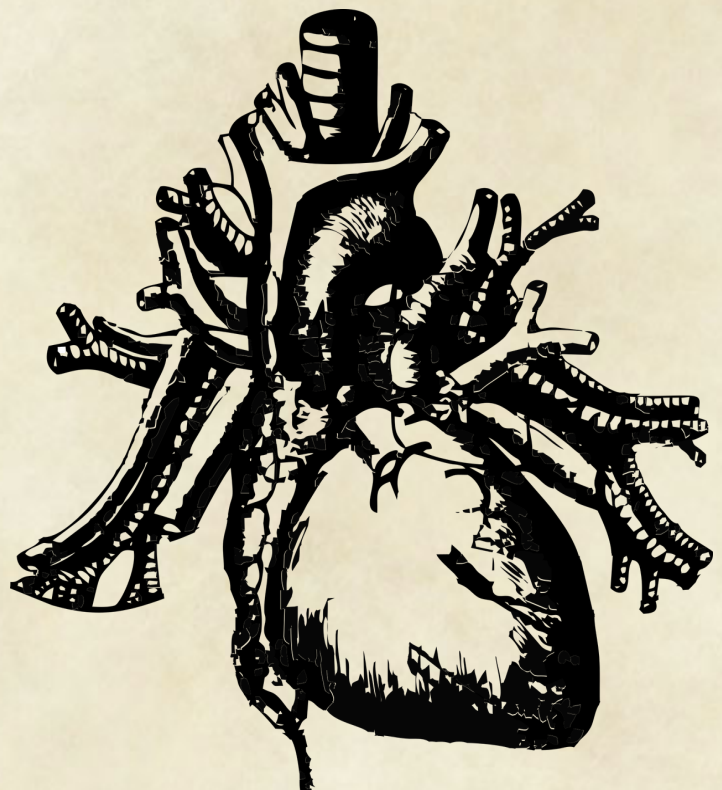
The Darkfire pumps through those dry pathways rather than blood. The Heart of Maztica has become the Heart of Zatal and the soul of the corruption which infests these lands.

The heart reacts to your presence as if sentient and a number of the blue black tendrils pull from the wall. Darkfire flares as the tendrils slash at you like the whips of a slaver.

As described, this monstrosity is the **Heart of Maztica**, and it is both sentient and evil. Destroying the heart is difficult due to the fact that it continually draws power from the Darkfire itself, an energy which it created and feeds.

As the PCs damage the heart with spells and weapons, they will not notice damage, but with each point of damage, the Darkfire that infuses the cavern will begin to lessen. As the PCs damage the heart the Darkfire's presence will visibly lessen until enough damage is done that the heart would be destroyed. When this occurs, the Darkfire will disappear in its entirety, and the heart will shrink to the size of a normal human's and fall from the wall.

Once the heart is defeated, the PCs should secure it and use Malinalli's stone.



THE SUNSTONE

When the battle is over, and the PCs have secured the Heart of Maztica they can use the stone given to them by Malinalli to teleport to her presence instantaneously. She is deep in the desert of the House of Tezca in the Chical Hills and at the fabled lake of quicksilver known as the Sunstone.

Read the following to the PCs when they use Malinalli's magical stone.

A light flashes from the stone and suddenly the whole world glares brightly around you. You realize from the fresh air and warm sun that you are no longer under Zatal and it takes a moment for your eyes to adjust to your surroundings.

Before you sits a great lake - but there is no water to be found. Instead, liquid silver shines brightly in the midday sun. You can barely look upon it without shielding your eyes.

Before you even get a chance to wonder over your new surroundings a familiar voice says, *"Welcome to the Sunstone."*

Malinalli of Maztica stands beside you as if she were expecting you right at this moment in time. She is flanked by two desert dwarf women dressed in similar garb to the druidess. She introduces them as Citlalmina and Coszcatl and explains that they will be assisting Malinalli in the ritual.

Malinalli and the dwarves begin to set up for the ritual and if the PCs have participated in Chapter 3, they will recognize the altar that Malinalli pulls from a portable hole. Its shape as a reclining man makes it instantly recognizable as the *Risa Stone* from the land known as Mechica. She will explain to the PCs that it is an important part of the ritual. When Malinalli is ready she tells the PCs the following.

"Hold in your hands the Heart of Maztica and grasp each other closely. Touch the silver of the lake. What very few know is that it is the lifeblood of our goddess, spilled when her son so cruelly betrayed her. When you do so, you shall see the spirit of our Mother in the spirit realm of Maztlan. Ask her to return, with her heart in your hand she will follow."

The Sunstone is indeed the blood of Maztica and all the pieces needed for her resurrection are together except for one; her soul. When a PC touches the silver lake under the conditions explained by Malinalli, all who are in contact with the PC are transported to the first realm of the Maztican afterlife. When the PCs arrive, read the following.

The first thing you notice is that you are surrounded by dozens, if not hundreds of skeletal creatures. They appear more curious than hostile, and you have a moment to notice that you are in a grand temple surrounded by a pyramid that stretches beyond what the eye can see. Before you can even address the strange beings, the temple starts to fade. Were those in fact the zizimime of which the elders speak?

When the temple and pyramid disappear, they are replaced by a lush island, surrounded on all sides by a vast sea. You see a number of great caves in the distance and the wispy white form of a motherly woman emerges. She moves towards you, bearing a smile on her face.

As the PCs will likely surmise, this is indeed the spirit of Maztica. She will come before the PCs and smile, but she will not speak. She motions to the Heart and to her own chest, where the PCs may now notice there is a great cavity. When the PCs hand the Heart to the goddess-spirit they are transported back to the Sunstone where they see a miraculous sight.

Standing in the center of the silver lake is the pale spirit you encountered in the afterlife, but she is bigger...much bigger. Towering about 30 feet above the lake, you realize that almost half of her "body" lies submerged. The goddess-spirit puts the heart into her chest and it grows and fuses into its old resting place with a flash of light.

The silver of the lake begins to flow upward, giving the spirit form and matter.

Suddenly, as if a mountain had crashed behind you, an explosion of dirt and force knock you forward. A primal growl booms from the dust and smoke. What appears to be a glowing black macuahuitl of titanic proportions swings through the cloud.

Zalteco cannot abide the resurrection of his mother and he is here, personally, to stop it. After a century of somnolence and recent unrelated battles, Zalteco's avatar is greatly weakened, but the PCs must keep him occupied while Maztica's own body reforms.

Read the following out loud.

The massive stone avatar ignores you and heads directly for Maztica, who seems helpless as she reenters the realm of the living. He takes what can only be practice swings with his macuahuitl as he approaches her.

You know you cannot stop the walking god in time, even if you could stop him. But then from behind, you hear the voice of the druidess call out to the Eater Of Hearts.

"Bringer of War, it is here that you may have what you desire. You have feasted on the heart of the Mother for millenia, why not partake of the heart of her greatest servant as well?"

With that you see Malinalli lay back on the Risa Stone. It's magic begins to glow as Malinalli and the two dwarves chant. In a sudden move, one dwarf plunges an obsidian dagger deep into Malinalli's chest and begins to cut. Your look of horror is met by Malinalli's smile.

"Do not be afraid my children, this is what must be done. I have long sought to return to my goddess and now thanks to your actions, she will be there waiting for me."

With her last words, Malinalli dies and the dwarf removes her heart and presents it to the avatar of Zaltec. Torn between the goddess and the heart, Zaltec hesitates, finally turning towards Malinalli as the Risa Stone pulsates.

Within moments, the avatar takes the heart, along with the two dwarves and swallows them all whole. He turns toward Maztica whose legs and hips are now solid as the godflesh slowly reforms. The difference this time, is that you stand between the statue and it's prize.

Malinalli's sacrifice has allowed the PCs an opportunity to slay the **avatar of Zaltec**, the Bringer of War and Eater of Hearts. Even in its weakened state, the avatar of Zaltec is a CR 17 monster; a deadly encounter for the PCs. If the PCs are outmatched, remember that they have fought long and hard to get to this point. When all hope seems lost, the newly resurrected Maztica intervenes.

Though you realize your name will be spoken in legend, you begin to realize that this is not a battle you will walk away from. Zaltec is simply too powerful; mere mortals cannot stand against the mighty macuahuitl of the Eater of Hearts.

The stone statue that is Zaltec stretches his macuahuitl to the sky and it crackles with a black energy that reminds you of the now extinct Darkfire. He winds up for a mighty swing as he turns towards you.

Then, like a mother taking a dangerous toy from her infant child, the goddess Maztica puts her now fully formed hands across the flat of the blade and snuffs out the black energy.

The PCs have now faced off against the Viper and the corrupted Heart of Maztica; the goddess could certainly help them against the avatar. Depending on their condition at this point, Maztica could either destroy the avatar of Zaltec outright or the PCs could continue to fight. In either case, the avatar's macuahuitl, its deadliest attack, no longer does additional necrotic damage.

When the avatar of Zaltec is defeated, read the following to the PCs.

The final blow is dealt to the great stone statue that is Zaltec and it begins to crack. The blood of a thousand-thousand sacrifices pours from its wounds like a fountain and begins to fill the crater that once held the silver blood of his mother.

In one final burst of black fire and blood, the avatar is no more. Zaltec is defeated, if not destroyed for evermore.

Zaltec is defeated and the massive form of the goddess smiles upon the PCs. At her side stands the tonalli of Malinalli, who also smiles at the PCs and floats towards them to speak.

"Rejoice, for you have the undying gratitude of the goddess who is mother to us all!" Though no boon could ever repay you for your deeds, Maztica herself has bid me grant you something wonderful!"

Maztica's reward is not of a monetary nature, but rather something the PC's will value as much, if not more. To begin with, she cures any diseases, poisons or any other conditions the PCs are suffering from. She also returns PCs from the dead and brings them to the current location if they have been lost along the way. She will even restore those that had been transformed by the Darkfire.

Secondly, she gives each player a blessing of their choice. These blessings need to be chosen from page 228 of the DMG and include a *Blessing of Health*, *Blessing of Protection*, *Blessing of Magic Resistance*, *Blessing of Understanding*, *Blessing of Weapon Enhancement* or *Blessing of Wound Closure*.

She may also grant a *Blessing of Valhalla*, but this is more appropriately called the "*Blessing of Maztlan*" as the warriors hail from that spiritual realm of the True World (same statistics, but different appearance).

If the DM desires, they may create a new blessing unique to the True World and one appropriate for a goddess of life. When the blessing is granted, Malinalli gives them one final boon of transportation to anywhere in the True World in which they are familiar before both fade away into the ether.



APPENDIX

This appendix contains new magic and monsters from Chapter 4: Zatal.

NEW MAGIC

Most of the new magic items found in Chapter 4 can be found in **MZC1 the Maztican Campaign Guide**, but the Grimoire of the Earthstoker is new and described below. It was originally written as the "Book of the Earthstoker" in **Dragon Magazine Issue 265**.

GRIMOIRE OF THE EARTHSTOKER

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a member of the druid class)

The cover of this book is made of black mica and is bound with copper wire. Its pages are of pressed fire lizard scale and the entire book is utterly impervious to fire. Even full immersion in magma will hardly leave it warm. Inscribed in a druidic dialect is the word "Earthstoker" on its cover. T

he book of the earthstoker is a book of druidic rituals that can draw much of their power from the power inherent in a volcano. It also has some powers that make it invaluable to any who would explore the hidden chambers of Zatal or any volcano like it.

Creatures who are currently touching the book (up to five medium sized creatures) gain resistance to fire damage as long as they are touching it. An individual who is attuned to the book is immune to fire damage as long as they are attuned. Any other harmful effects of lava (poison gases, etc.) are also ignored, but only effects that are directly caused by the lava. The attuned wielder may also wade into magma without losing any movement.

An attuned owner can detect the presence of magma within 200 ft. Because of this, they will always know if the walls of lava tubes or the crust atop a lava flow is safe for others.

The book of the earthstoker also contains notes that identify a second volume. It names, but does not describe, the additional spells lava tunnel, fire on the mountain, break the streets, pyroclastic surge and red skies warning.

Finally, the druid who attunes to the book may add the following spells to his or her spell list; each of which has the ritual tag.

VOLCANIC FOREWARNING

2nd-level divination (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 1 mile

Components: V, S, M (two lodestones rolled together like dice)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

This spell enables the caster to predict any forthcoming eruptions within 1d6 days of their arrival. This spell only predicts eruptions from a natural source, not ones caused by magic or the actions of others.

VOLCANIC RENEWAL

3rd-level transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: 1 mile

Components: V, S, M (volcanic diamond dust worth 250 gp which is consumed in the casting)

Duration: Instantaneous

This spell seeds land destroyed by lava with an amazing rate of growth and vitality. Minerals within the ground fertilize plant growth and attract the same fauna that once inhabited the decimated lands. Within a single year, the land will have returned to the natural state it existed in prior to its destruction.

SEISMIC TRIGGER

4th-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (two lodestones shaken in a tinderbox)

Duration: Instantaneous

This spell only functions in an area that is volcanically active. When cast, the druid calls upon magma in the earth to come forth from the ground from a location of their choosing within range. Each creature standing in a 30 foot sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 8d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

This spell also has the side effect of lessening seismic activity in a region. Depending on the size of the future eruption (as determined by the DM) casting this spell, or multiple castings, might prevent the eruption from occurring.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for every level above 4th.

NEW MONSTERS

The following new creatures appeared within Chapter 4. Others can be found in **MZS1 Monsters of Maztica**.

DRAGON, BELJURIL

The beljuril dragon is a rare and little understood creature found most commonly in seismically active regions which are typically very remote, and always deep beneath the surface of lava flows or dormant volcanoes. Able to breathe in liquid magma and easily survive the infernal temperatures of Toril's mantle, the creatures come to the surface in search of gems. At birth, the beljuril dragon is a dark gray color, like thick smoke. Its scales at this stage are thicker and bulkier than a typical dragon wyrmling, as they must be able to tolerate the enormous heat and pressure in the heart of a newly-active volcano.

Volcanic Stages of Life. Adult dragons always bury their eggs in the ground under geological "hot spots," and its hatching corresponds with the first eruption of a fledgling volcano. As the creature ages, it sheds this outer armor. In its Young and Adult stages, the dark gray scales of its youth begin to separate and the new scales below are bright orange and glow with an inner fire, as if the creature were literally made of lava. In old age, these scales loose much of their luminescence and turn a dull gray-violet.

All About the Rock. The beljuril dragon is named for the unique gems called beljurils which are mined in some parts of the Realms. Fist-sized, round, green gemstones, their most notable quality is their tendency to emit flashes of light at regular intervals. The origin of these gems has long been a mystery and only in the last few centuries have they been discovered to also be a product of the dragon's breath weapon.

Rarely (about 10% of the time) when a beljuril dragon uses its magma breath, the lava left behind hardens into a beljuril when it cools.

A BELJURIL DRAGON'S LAIR

Beljuril dragons are curious and playful. Their preference for inhospitable habitats means that they rarely encounter other intelligent creatures, and they are quick to investigate any sign of unexpected company. They do not particularly seek out combat, but will respond in kind to any aggressive actions against them. If roused to anger, they are as destructive and unforgiving as any other dragon, and have been known to leave an entire countryside in ruins after battle.

These creatures are found almost exclusively around volcanoes, soaking in the heat and seismic potential of the land around it. Due to the nature of their habitat, they are not generally in need of traps, guards, or other elaborate means of defending their treasures. The dragon's lair is usually only large enough for the creature to comfortably swim about in its magma, though it may contain smaller side chambers for storing items (such as books or scrolls) that the dragon doesn't want to burn.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing all initiative ties) the dragon can use one of its Lair Action options. It can't do so while incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions. If surprised, the dragon can't use any Lair Action options until after its first turn in combat.

- The dragon causes a jet of lava to rise from the ground at a point it can see within 120 feet of it. The jet is a cylinder 5 feet in diameter, and up to 60 feet tall. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) fire damage on failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. In addition, a creature that fails the save is splashed with lava that continues to burn until it cools, which takes 1 minute, or until removed or doused with a gallon or more of water (which takes an action). While burning, the lava deals 4 (1d8) fire damage at the start of each of the creature's turns.
- Volcanic gases form a cloud in a 20 foot radius sphere centered on a point the dragon can see within 120 feet of it. The sphere spreads around corners, and its area is lightly obscured. It lasts until initiative count 20 on the next round. Each creature that starts its turn in the cloud must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed saving throw, a creature is poisoned until the end of its turn. While poisoned in this way, the creature is also incapacitated.
- If the dragon is Young age or older, it can use this action to duplicate the effect of the conjure lesser elemental spell, or the conjure elemental spell if it is of Adult age or older. The level at which the spell is cast equals the dragon's proficiency bonus. It cannot use this lair action again until the spell's effect ends. It can conjure only creatures that have the earth element, fire element, or both (e.g. Magmins, Magma Mephits, Fire Snakes, etc.)



REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing a beljuril dragon's lair is warped by its magic, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Water sources within 1 mile of the dragon's lair are supernaturally warm and tainted with sulfur.

- The dragon's presence increases the temperature of the earth deep below the surface, increasing volcanic activity in the affected area mudpots, solfataras, fumaroles, geysers, and other geological features become more common.
- The presence of the dragon causes increasingly wild seismic activity, culminating in a major earthquake, volcanic eruption, or other cataclysmic geological event.

ANCIENT BELJURIL DRAGON

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 444 (24d20 + 192)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
29 (+9)	10 (+0)	27 (+8)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +15, Wis +10, Cha +12

Skills Perception +17, Insight +10, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 27

Languages Draconic, Maztican

Challenge 22 (41000 XP)

Hold Breath. The dragon can hold its breath for up to an hour.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (2d10+9) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage.

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5-6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons.

Magma Breath. The dragon exhales a gout of magma in a 90-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 88 (16d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Energy Lozenge. The dragon breathes a lozenge shaped burst of energy that appears a beautiful green, violet, or blue and sparkles with flashing light at a single target with a range of 150 feet. A creature that is a target and all creatures that stand within 30 feet of the target must make a successful DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 88 (16d10) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d8+9) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is in 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns., ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Heated Body. A creature that touches the dragon or hits it with a melee attack while within a reach of 10 feet or less takes 33 (6d10) fire damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The ancient beljuril dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The ancient beljuril dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 15 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw or take 16 (2d6+9) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half of its flying speed.

ADULT BELJURIL DRAGON

Huge dragon, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 212 (17d12 + 102)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	10 (+0)	23 (+6)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +12, Insight +7, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Draconic, Maztican

Challenge 15 (13000 XP)

Hold Breath. The dragon can hold its breath for up to an hour.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10+7) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6+7) slashing damage.

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5-6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons.

Magma Breath. The dragon exhales a gout of magma in a 90-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Energy Lozenge. The dragon breathes a lozenge shaped burst of energy that appears a beautiful green, violet, or blue and sparkles with flashing light at a single target with a range of 100 feet. A creature that is a target and all creatures that stand within 20 feet of the target must make a successful DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8+7) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is in 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns., ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Heated Body. A creature that touches the dragon or hits it with a melee attack while within a reach of 10 feet or less takes 22 (4d10) fire damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The adult beljuril dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The adult beljuril dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (2d6+7) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half of its flying speed.

YOUNG BELJURIL DRAGON

Large dragon, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +6

Skills Perception +7, Insight +4, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Draconic, Maztican

Challenge 8 (3900 XP)

Hold Breath. The dragon can hold its breath for up to an hour.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10+5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) slashing damage.

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5-6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons.

Magma Breath. The dragon exhales a gout of magma in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Energy Lozenge. The dragon breathes a lozenge shaped burst of energy that appears a beautiful green, violet, or blue and sparkles with flashing light at a single target with a range of 80 feet. A creature that is a target and all creatures that stand within 10 feet of the target must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Heated Body. A creature that touches the dragon or hits it with a melee attack while within a reach of 5 feet takes 16 (3d10) fire damage.

BELJURIL DRAGON WYRMLING

Medium dragon, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +4, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Draconic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hold Breath. The dragon can hold its breath for up to an hour.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10+3) piercing damage.

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5-6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons.

Magma Breath. The dragon exhales a gout of magma in a 40-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Energy Lozenge. The dragon breathes a lozenge shaped burst of energy that appears a beautiful green, violet, or blue and sparkles with flashing light at a single target with a range of 60 feet. A creature that is a target and all creatures that stand within 10 feet of the target must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Heated Body. A creature that touches the dragon or hits it with a melee attack while within a reach of 5 feet takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

HEART OF MAZTICA

The heart of Maztica is a dessicated and blackened remnant of the goddess of life.

For ages now, Zaltec has fed upon its energies and it is the source of the transformative power known as the Darkfire. The heart of Maztica is the engine that has caused endless suffering by powering the Night of Wailing and transforming an entire empire into monsters.

The heart continues to pump corrupted energy into the very mountain of Zatal itself, causing it to grow like a boil on the world. It's evil is set to spread until stopped.

HEART OF MAZTICA

Huge undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 147 (14d12 + 56)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Int +4, Wis +4, Cha +4

Skills Perception +7

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, psychic

Damage Resistances acid

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened

Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 17

Languages -

Challenge 12 (8400 XP)

Regeneration. The Heart of Maztica regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Heart of Maztica takes radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Heart of Maztica's next turn. The Heart of Maztica dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

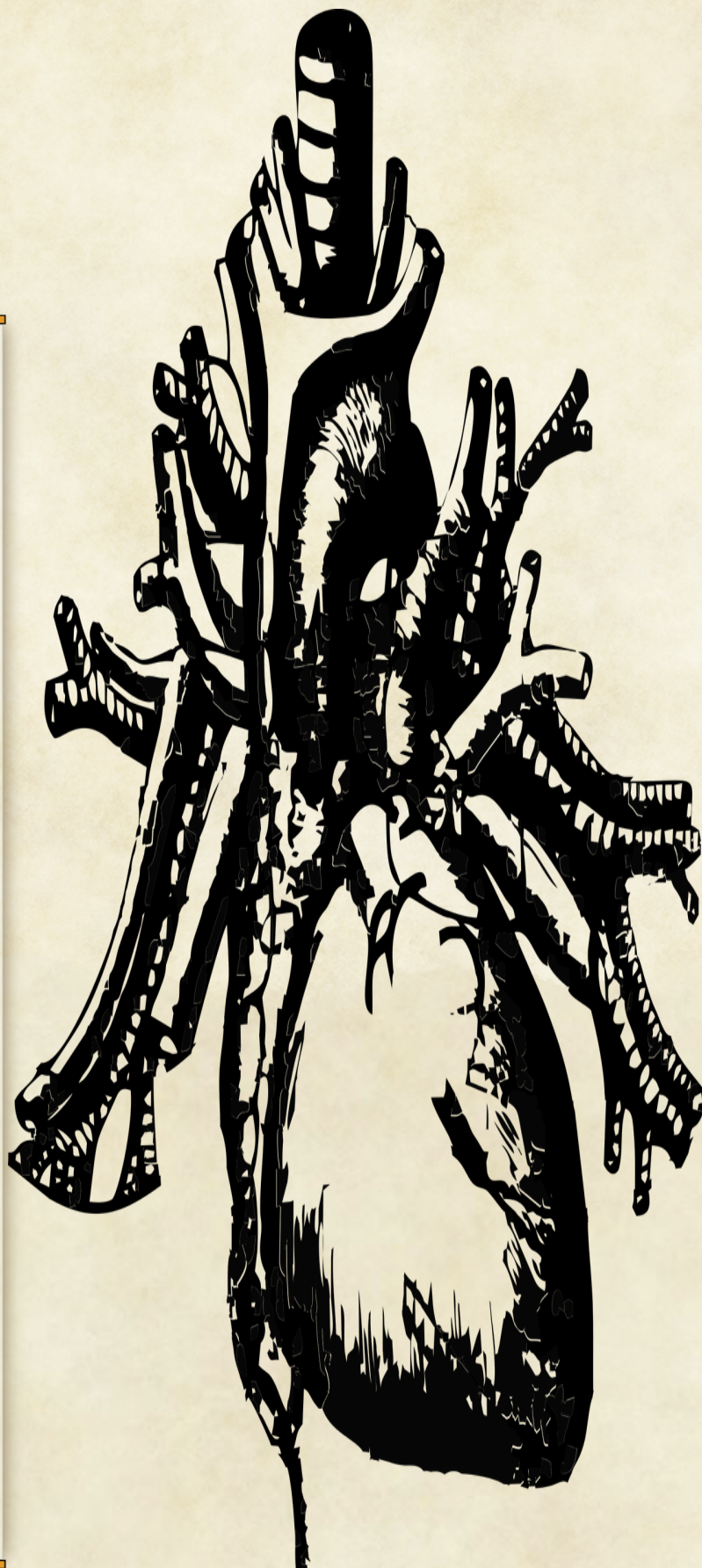
Immobile And Indestructible. The Heart of Maztica is completely immobile, but it cannot be attacked by either spell or weapon from outside a radius of 20 feet. The magic of the cavern's Darkfire deflects all such attacks and absorbs them into itself.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Heart of Maztica makes 2 attacks; one with its veins and one with its arteries.

Arteries. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target.
Hit: 22 (4d8+4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) acid damage.

Veins. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target.
Hit: 22 (4d8+4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.



HURACHNID

The hurachnid has a truly vile appearance. What may at first seem to be a giant scorpion consuming the rotting corpse of a long-dead human, the two bodies combined are in fact one undead creature.

Ghast Masters. The belly of a hurachnid is said to be far larger on the inside than on the outside and those who have seen one disgorge ghast upon ghast certainly agree.

The hurachnid itself is a strong fighter and its deadly stinger paralyzes even the heartiest of opponents. Their primary ability however, is creating an supply of ghosts by disgorging them from their distended bellies.

The ghosts serve their master dutifully and the hurachnid will disgorge as many as they can during battle. When encountered, a hurachnid typically is accompanied by two of its ghosts.

Undead Nature. A hurachnid does not need to eat, drink, sleep or breathe.

HURACHNID

Large undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +3

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 10, darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Abyssal, Undercommon

Challenge 8 (3900 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hurachnid makes two pincer attacks and one sting attack.

Pincer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8+3) bludgeoning damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4+3) piercing damage and if the target is a creature it must make a DC 16 Constitution save or be paralyzed for 1 minute.

Disgorge (Recharge 6). A hurachnid can forgo attacking and disgorge a corpse that it once consumed from which the front half of its body is now comprised of. Once disgorged, the crab-like pincers fall off the corpse and the body animates as a ghast under the hurachnid's control. It is instantaneously replaced with a new body. The hurachnid's belly is larger on the inside than on the outside, and it effectively holds an unlimited number of corpses.



LACUNAE GHOST

Lacunae ghosts are the undead that sometimes appear when an ash fall from a volcanic eruption leaves behind empty space from a living creature's dead body.

Negative Space. A lacunae ghost is not a ghost in the typical sense of the word, but is rather an undead parasite from the negative energy plane that attaches to the remnants of a soul in the negative space formed by a tragic volcanic ash fall. They tend to arrive in great numbers when the proper conditions are met. Lacunae ghosts can remain dormant for centuries when no living beings are nearby.

Ancestral Mercy. Part of the remaining spirit exists still within a lacunae ghost allowing it to fight off its homicidal urges in the presence of the ancestors of its own people. It can detect such bloodlines instantaneously and will not appear to such beings, nor will it attack unless it is itself attacked first. No other beings are afforded this mercy.

LIVING LAHAR

When volcanic activity melts snow or otherwise develops in tandem with large amounts of water, flows of black boiling mud travel down the mountainside killing or destroying all in its path. Occasionally, when subjected to regions of both magical power and evil, these natural events develop a cruel and dark sentience; becoming an ooze of homicidal intent.

Indiscriminate Killers. Living lahars are beholden to no one and no thing. The evil forces that have given them life have given them the sole purpose of destruction for destruction's sake alone. They cannot be charmed or otherwise convinced to do the bidding of any creatures other than their own demented wills.



LACUNAE GHOST

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Int +3, Wis +4

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons or weapons made of obsidian, bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't obsidian

Senses passive Perception 12, tremorsense 60 ft.

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The lacunae 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

Soul Draining Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (4d6+2) necrotic damage and the creature must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature succeeds it only feels a cold chill, but if it fails it has the paralyzed condition for 1 minute.

LIVING LAHAR

Huge ooze, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 142 (15d12 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities fire, acid, slashing

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius) passive Perception 8

Languages -

Challenge 10 (5900 XP)

Amorphous. The living lahar can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Speed Increase. When moving downhill, a living lahar can move at 60 feet.

ACTIONS

Crush. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 30 (4d12+4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) fire damage. If the target is a creature, it must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be caught up in the mass of the living lahar. An affected creature occupies the same space as the living lahar and is restrained. The living lahar can make attacks against a restrained creature as a bonus action each round until it uses this ability on another creature, the creature escapes by making a successful Strength save on its turn, or the living lahar dies.



PIEDRACOUATL

The piedracouatl is an extremely rare type of couatl that has pledged its servitude to the god Plutoq and has been transformed through centuries of service to the stony deity. Piedracouatls can appear much like a stone statue and they are easily mistaken for stone statues when they do not move.

PIEDRACOUATL

Medium elemental, lawful neutral

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +7, Cha +6

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages -

Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

False Appearance. While the piedracouatl remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an inanimate statue.

Magic Weapons. The piedracouatl's attacks are magical.

Shielded Mind. The piedracouatl is immune to scrying and to any effect that would sense its emotions, read its thoughts, or detect its location.

Innate Spellcasting. The piedracouatl's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). The piedracouatl can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good*, *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*

3/day each: *command*, *create food and water*, *protection from evil and good*, *sanctuary*, *shield*

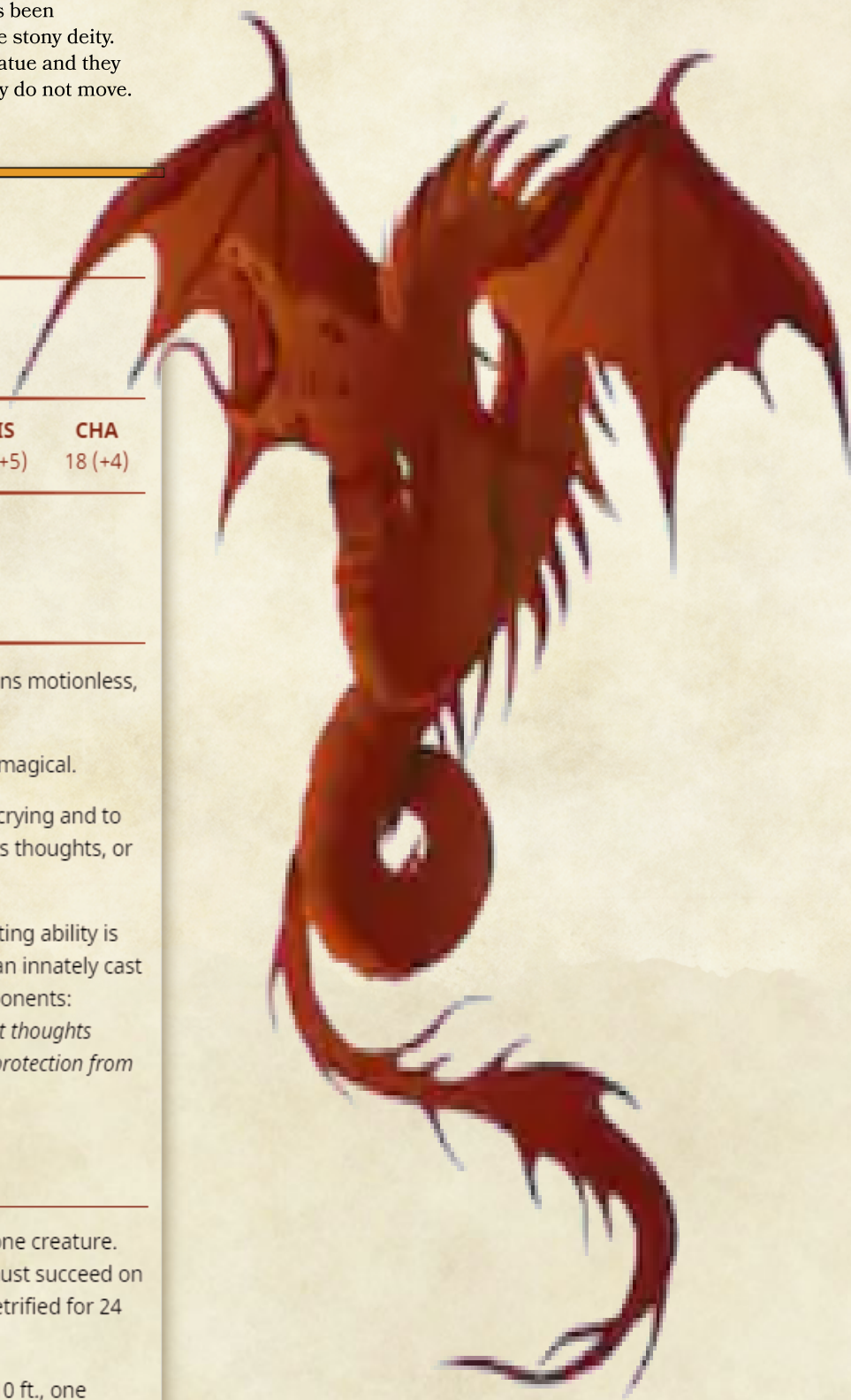
1/day each: *dispel magic*, *dream*, *scrying*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.

Hit: 8 (1d6+5) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become petrified for 24 hours.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one Medium or smaller creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the piedracouatl can't constrict another target.



RYLKAR

The appearance of a rylkar is in many ways similar to a common or giant rat, but they are in far more vile and disgusting creatures. Rylkar are a corruption born of fire and filth. **Infestation of Corruption.** Rylkar have a society of sorts with the lowly and loathsome rylkarspawn at the bottom rung. Rylkarspawn swarm together and devour anything that lies in their path. Above the rylkarspawn are the workers and battle fodder known as the madclaws. Pale furred with blood red eyes, the madclaws must work together to prevent themselves from being devoured by the queen's guards known as tormentors. Even the powerful tormentors however, fall prey to the whim of the blind colony queen - known only as the harridan.

Every colony has only one harridan, though occasionally tormentors and madclaws detect potential in an individual rylkarspawn and flee the colony to form another with the nascent queen.

Born of Fire. Harridan are the only rylkar capable of reproduction and do so only when they come into contact with fire. They use the fire's inherent elemental energy to spawn hundreds of rylkarspawn which will grow and devour each other until only the strongest (future madclaws and tormentors) survive.

Hivemind. Any rylkar within ten miles of their harridan is in constant communication with the rest of its colony through a hive mind where the harridan commands all below her.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing a rylkar harridan and its many offspring is corrupted by the colony's foul presence.

- Foodstuffs and drink brought within ten feet of the harridan spoils and becomes poisonous – inflicting 4 (1d8) poison damage on those who eat or drink it.
- Standing water becomes fouled in an ever increasing radius of 20 feet per day. Plants that aren't eaten by spawn wither and die and animals flee or are eaten.

If the colony is destroyed or dispersed by slaying its harridan, the effects fade over 1d10 days. Plants that have withered need to regrow naturally, however.

RYLKAR HARRIDAN

Huge, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 147 (14d12 + 56)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 15

Languages Undercommon

Challenge 7 (2900 XP)

Regeneration. A rylkar harridan regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the harridan takes fire or acid damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of its next turn. The harridan only dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 32 (5d10+5) piercing damage. and if the target is a creature, it must make a DC 15 Constitution save or contract the sewer plague disease.

REACTIONS

Spawn Swarm (3/Day). If a rylkar harridan takes more than 5 points of fire damage in a turn, it spawns a rylkarspawn swarm in an adjacent square.



RYLKAR MADCLAW

Small monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 49 (11d6 + 11)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 13

Languages Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 10 (3d6) piercing damage and if the target is a creature, it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or contract the sewer plague disease.

Mad Shriek (Recharge 6). The rylkar madclaw can emit a horrible shriek. All creatures except rylkar within a 30 foot radius must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of a confusion spell for their next turn.

RYLKARSPAWN SWARM

Medium swarm of tiny monstrosities, neutral evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Swarm. The rylkarspawn swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa. The swarm can move through any opening small enough for a Tiny creature. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Terror Musk. Any creature that starts its turn in a rylkarspawn swarm's space must make a DC 13 Constitution save or gain the Frightened condition.

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (3d6+4) piercing damage and the creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or contract the sewer plague disease.

RYLKAR TORMENTOR

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3

Damage Immunities fire

Senses passive Perception 13, darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Undercommon

Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The rylkar tormentor makes 3 attacks; two with its claws and one with its bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (3d6+2) piercing damage and if the target is a creature it must make a DC 13 Constitution save or contract the sewer plague disease.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Hate Shriek (Recharge 6). A rylkar tormentor can emit a scream which incites hatred in all rylkar madclaws within 30 feet, giving them a advantage on their next attack to hit and for damage.

THE VIPER

The Viper is the pale white serpent that was once sarrukh – but gave up much of its original form to become the guardian of the Heart of Maztica for its deity Zaltec. It no longer remembers its true name, but relishes its position and power.

As one of Zaltec's most prized servants, the Viper's likeness has become the symbol of the entire cult of the Viperhand and the beasts that they have become.

THE VIPER

Huge monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 184 (16d12 + 80)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +7, Cha +6

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +8

Damage Immunities lightning

Damage Resistances necrotic

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 13 (10000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The The Viper makes two attacks: one with its bite and one to constrict.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.
Hit: 23 (3d10+7) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) lightning damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* 23 (3d10+7) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 18) if the Viper isn't already constricting a creature, and the target is restrained until this grapple ends.

Lightning Breath (Recharge 5-6). The Viper exhales a line of lightning that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 77 (14d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



AVATAR OF ZALTEC

Zaltec has had a number of setbacks recently and is hardly at his full power. This avatar is a manifestation of what he can spare at the time being. As a great walking statue, Zaltec is impervious to many forms of harm, and his massive macuahuitl bears what remains of the power of the Darkfire.

AVATAR OF ZALTEC

Gargantuan fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 186 (12d20 + 60)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Wis +10, Cha +11

Skills Perception +10

Damage Immunities necrotic, fire, poison, psychic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, petrified, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 20, truesight 120 ft.

Languages understands all but does not speak

Challenge 17 (18000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The Avatar of Zaltec has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapon. The Avatar of Zaltec's weapon attacks is magical.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the avatar of Zaltec fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Avatar of Zaltec makes two dark macuahuitl attacks.

Dark Macuahuitl. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (3d12+5) slashing damage plus 22 (4d10) necrotic damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 6). The Avatar of Zaltec exhales fiery breathe in a 25-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 77 (14d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



To RESURRECT A GODDESS...

The goddess Maztica was the goddess of life whose body became the whole of the True World according to the priests and elders of the continent. Her name has been given to the land in honor of her sacrifice and horrifying death at the hands of her very own son, Zaltec.

But what if mankind can do more than just honor the dead goddess? What if there were a way to bring her back?

Cover Art: "*Mayan Myth*"

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FOUR ADVENTURES IN ONE

This book is an update to four adventures originally known as the "True World Resurrection" series. Each has been edited, expanded upon, and better balanced to form a single cohesive whole, hopefully leading to a world shaking event for the inhabitants of Maztica.

This adventure book spans levels 5-12, though it could be adjusted for both lower and greater levels easily. The adventures themselves remain compartmentalized, and might be run individually if desired, but almost an entire campaign could be run within these pages with minimal work from the DM.

The general backgrounds of each adventure are summed up below.

THE SEA DEMON'S PEARL

When the young son of a fisherman named Asquel surprised his village elders and returned alive after missing for weeks, he returned with a black pearl the size of which the coastal town had never seen.

Asquel became somewhat of an instant celebrity, and his family was lifted from the poverty from which it once languished. Little did the boy know that the pearl was not all that he brought home. The Sea Demon had followed its prize home and soon the whole town would suffer for Asquel's theft.

THE MAZTICAN BALL GAME

The Maztican Ball Game is a game within a game! It is a sport wholly unique to the True World and it can be played by four or more players.

This portion of **The Mother of Life** contains rules for the sport, the mechanics behind them and an adventure set up in the style of a tournament in which the players can become underdog champions in a long established cultural phenomenon.

True champions of the Maztican Ball Game will bring the players to the attention of powers that are making bold moves in the True World. Heroes in Maztica don't only arise from slaying monsters.

THE DOOR OF STARS

In the mountains of Huacli, a secret lies which has kept the Otomi people safe for many generations. Yet still there is danger, and while much of it comes from a city full of undead, what once protected the Otomi might now be their undoing.

ZATAL

Like a poisonous and bloated pustule, Mount Zatal has been a source of terror for the True World since time immemorial. It is the source of the Darkfire and much of Zaltec's own personal power, and for many decades it continued to grow.