

P R I M E V A L

# THE JOURNAL

## THE WATCHERS OF MENG

*by Robert J. Schwalb*

An adventure for characters of levels 5-8





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**F**ew dare to brave the dangers posed by the Jungle of Zaal. It is a tangled place crowded with overgrowth, dangerous wildlife, and carnivorous plants. Few that enter are ever seen again and the ones who do survive its many perils emerge with fevers and madness, their unhinged accounts speaking of strange ruins infested with stranger inhabitants, old magic, and terrifying monsters. As deadly as this place can be, it offers up fantastic treasures, bits of strange magic whose purpose and function puzzle the most scholarly of wizards. Gold coins minted with strange visages on the faces and bizarre weapons forged for creatures of inhuman anatomy hint at the weird culture that once ruled here.

Oola, Mistress of the Whip, knows full well how dangerous Zaal can be and under any other circumstance she would avoid it. Racking up gambling debts greater than she can pay, she now has no choice. Her debtors took her lover, Rien, and promised to send her back to her one piece at a time until she makes good on what she owes. After receiving a severed finger as a warning that they were serious, Oola decided to move her supply of slaves to a buyer in Cheir, a city beyond the jungle to the west from Ansumo. With no time to spare if she would make the transaction and return to her home city, she must lead the expedition through the tangled expanse. Whether she and her cargo make it Cheir is up to the player characters.

**Encounter difficulty:** *The Watchers of Meng* is intended for 5th- to 8th-level characters, but can be modified by adjusting the number of creatures that appear in each encounter. Opportunities exist for the characters to circumvent or flee from some of the more dangerous encounters, such as the potential climactic encounter with the titular Watchers.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The player characters may become involved in the adventure in any way you like, but if you need some suggestions, consider the following adventure hooks.

**Eye of Meng:** The characters learn a priceless jewel rests inside a pyramid at the center of the jungle. The characters might encounter Oola along the way or they might find her as a prisoner in the Slave Pen once the party arrives.

**Hired Swords:** The player characters' reputation finds them approached by Oola to escort her and her cargo through the jungles. She can offer the characters each 100 gp up front, another 100 gp when they reach Cheir, and 200 gp more upon returning to Ansumo.

**Hunting Oola:** The crime lord holding Rien prisoner, a vile man named Kurtubal, believes Oola is

trying to slip town. He hires the characters to track her down in the jungles and bring her back. He'll pay 1,000 gp if the characters bring her back alive or half that much if they bring back her corpse, as he would rather kill her himself.

To use this hook, you'll need to make a few modifications to how the adventure starts. You can start with the characters finding Oola and confronting her, in which case she may try to win the characters to her cause. Or, you can have the characters follow her expedition, catching up with her shortly after her force is attacked and captured by the Meng degenerates just outside the ruins of Meng.

**Lost:** The characters travel through the jungle for reasons of their own—lured by promises of treasure or pursuing an objective related to a different adventure. The group becomes lost and stumbles into Oola's party after they've been attacked by a band of degenerates. The best chance for both groups to survive is to work together.

## OOLA, MISTRESS OF THE WHIP

Orphaned at a young age and raised in Ansumo by herself, Oola (as a **gladiator**) clawed her way out from the gutter to make a name for herself. She owes her success to her willingness to do whatever it takes to survive, whether that means stealing, murdering, or trading in slaves. By twenty, she amassed a small fortune running a brothel, and five years later she had become the most prominent and powerful slaver in town, having won a reputation for bloodthirstiness after castrating her rival and leaving him to bleed out on the streets in front of his home. Always a risk-taker, Oola has a weakness for gambling and though she wins as often as she loses, a string of bad hands and unwise bets landed her in her current troubles.

Oola's wealth is tied up in her slaves and she lacks the coin to cover her debts. The crime lord refused her offer to take the flesh she has for sale, demanding payment, 5,000 gp, in coin or gemstones. While Oola worked to raise the funds, the crime lord took her lover—a former prostitute named Rien—and has been holding her prisoner. Oola may have a hard

### MORAL QUALMS

If you think the players will be uncomfortable helping a slaver deliver her slaves, you can replace this concept entirely by just having the players help Oola deliver 5,000 gp of rare gems to Cheir instead. Remove all mention of slaves and instead have the characters, with Oola, come across the ruins. The degenerates' prisoners are instead locals who have fallen into their hands.

heart, but Rien means enough to her that she will go to incredible lengths to free the young woman from the crime lord's clutches.

The Mistress of the Whip, as she's known in Ansumo, is tall, muscled, with fine features marred by a mass of scar tissue on her cheek and neck. She keeps her black hair short and out her bright blue eyes. She has enemies everywhere, so she never goes about without armor or weapons. She's a skilled warrior and she is not above using violence to settle disputes.

Oola keeps the characters at arm's length, speaking to them only to give them orders. She might warm to other women, especially if they reveal they come from difficult backgrounds or have suffered hardships at the hands of men in power, but she mocks anyone who shows weakness or cowardice.

**The Expedition:** Whether or not the player characters work for Oola, the Mistress of the Whip has the company of 6 **guards** who watch over the 24 slaves (as **commoners** with no weapons) chained together in a line. The guards work for pay. If Oola dies, the guards quit and attempt to escape the jungle. The slaves consist of human men and

women, of which nearly all are young adults that hail from small settlements across the peninsula. Develop these secondary characters as needed.

## THE JUNGLE OF ZAAL

West of the Quosa River where it passes through the Quosa Vale, the Jungle of Zaal is a tangle that covers an area of hilly terrain about 100 miles by 50 miles. Thin-trunked trees stand side-by-side, their leaves forming a thick canopy that dims sunlight to shadows on the jungle floor. Narrow paths weave through the trees, sometimes blocked by brambles and overgrowth, others clear, trampled by warthogs and other woodland animals that live here. Monkeys, exotic birds, countless varieties of insects fill the air with a raucous noise.

The jungle has not fully reclaimed the land from the lost civilizations that once thrived here. Statues, bound in vines, stand as they did a thousand years ago. Cracked paver stones, the foundations of old, stone buildings, and the occasional arch carved to depict impossible and strange creatures can be found throughout Zaal. Although the people who raised these monuments are long gone, they hint at an advanced culture of exceptional skill and learning.

## EXPLORING ZAAL

Oola's route through the jungle winds for nearly 60 miles before it emerges from the jungle a few miles north of Cheir. Though she drives a fast pace, her party of chained slaves and guards can only manage a maximum of 10 miles each day. If the PCs are with Oola's group, they can speed the journey by making a Wisdom/Survival check each day (DC 15) to cover more ground and find shortcuts that reduces the remaining distance by 5 additional miles. PCs tracking Oola have an easy time of it, as the slaves and guards leave a noticeable trail for those that know where to look.

Once within the jungle, the thick jungle growth limits clear sight to 30 feet. Beyond 30 feet but within 60 feet, characters treat the terrain as lightly obscured. Beyond 60 feet, characters treat the terrain as heavily obscured.

## PERILS

While traveling through the jungle, the characters are at risk of encountering some of the more dangerous wildlife. Once every four hours the characters travel, roll a d20. On an 18 or higher, the characters run into something potentially dangerous. Use the Jungle of Zaal Encounters table to determine what the characters encounter.



## Jungle of Zaal Encounters

d6 + d8 Encounter

2	1 guardian naga protecting a ruined temple.
3	1 very territorial abominable sloth*.
4	1d3 serpentman Nessk champions* with 1d6 serpentman temple guards*, hunting for slaves and trophies.
5	2d6 giant wasps
6	4d10 baboons
7	The head of an enormous statue broken and lying on its side. Vines cover all of it but its open mouth.
8	1 giant ape. The ape does not attack female members of the party and may fight to protect them from harm.
9	1d6 + 6 giant spiders
10	1d3 giant vipers*
11	3d6 beastman hunters* with 1d4 trained apes. Kurtubal the crime lord (see "Hunting Oola") hired these savages to bring Oola back. The beastmen are hostile and regard the characters as a threat, even if the characters mention they work for Kurtubal as well.
12	1d3 wereboars
13	1 green hag with 1d2 minotaurs. The green hag has a lair, hidden deep in the jungle. She's neutral to the characters. If they can make her friendly, which happens if the characters give her a gift of 200 gp or more, she reveals that she spotted Oola's party and can direct them there.
14	1d4 shambling mounds

\*These foes appear in the *PRIMEVAL THULE Campaign Setting*

## ENCOUNTERS

In addition to the random encounters, travelers may also encounter any of the following. You can introduce these encounters at any time, in any order. You can also skip one or all of them.

**Degenerates (2,400 XP):** At some point during the characters' journey through the jungle, a band of Meng degenerates attack. If the characters travel without Oola, the degenerates have already attacked her party and taken her slaves prisoner. This band of 6 degenerates (new monster, see appendix) chased Oola when she and her guards ran and have just captured her. If the characters rescue her, she tells the characters her situation and implores them to help recover her merchandise from the monsters, offering a reward as described under "Hired Swords."

If the characters travel with Oola, a large force of 15 degenerates ambushes them in the forest. Each round on initiative count 1, reduce the number of degenerates and slaves by 1d4. The

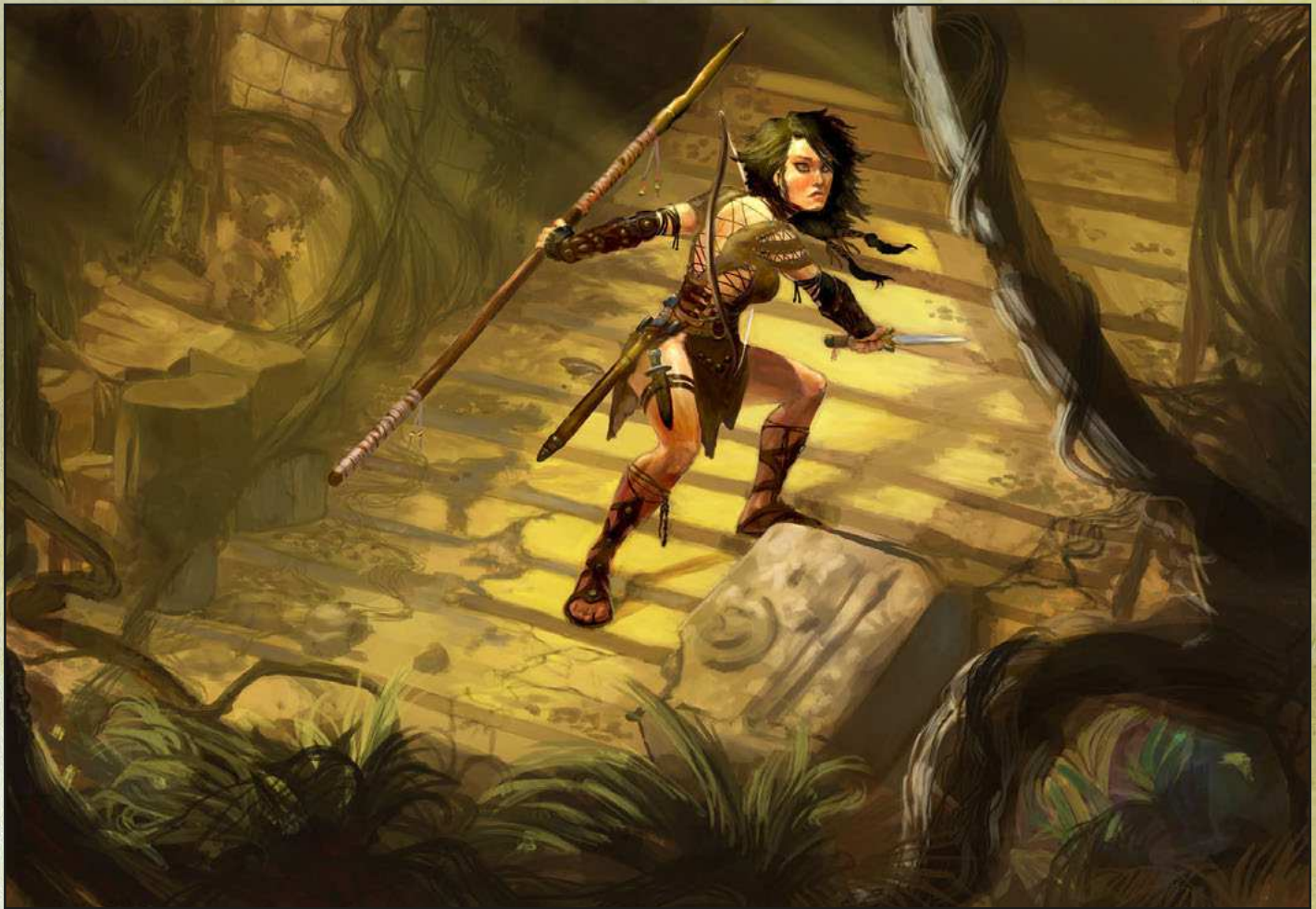
degenerates carry off the slaves. In addition, on initiative count 10, roll a d6. On an odd number, one of Oola's guards dies. On an even number, 1d3 degenerates die instead. The degenerates break off the attack once the number of slaves drops to 0. If Oola survives the fight, she urges the characters to help her recover her goods.

**Stone Heads:** About a mile outside of Meng, the characters spot several enormous stone heads rising from the jungle floor. Each head, 10 feet wide and 15 feet tall, depicts a monstrous visage with large tusks jutting up from its jaw, a single horn extending out from the center of its forehead over a large eye. Characters benefiting from a *detect magic* spell that inspect the heads see they emit a faint aura of transmutation magic. An inanimate head has AC 17 and 27 hp with a damage threshold of 10.

**Mad Refugee:** At some point after the degenerates attack Oola's party, the characters encounter a slave who escaped the degenerates' clutches. The slave, who is named Gungus, is a middle-aged man with a slave brand burned into his cheek. He sports numerous wounds all over his naked body. He's terrified and makes no sense unless calmed, which can be achieved with a successful Charisma/Persuasion check (DC 15). When he settles down, he can tell the characters what happened to him and his fellow slaves, who owns them, where they were headed, and the fact that the degenerates are sacrificing their prisoners to a shadowy demon that haunts the place and then devour the corpse. The slave tells the characters where the other prisoners are being held, but will not accompany them unless forced or convinced with a successful Charisma/Intimidation check (DC 20). If instructed or guided by the slave, the characters can reach the ruins of Meng in 1d4 hours, during which time they have no chance of facing a random encounter.

## THE RUINS OF MENG

Eons ago, interdimensional travelers came to these lands to establish a foothold against their ancient foes, the serpent people, founding a great city. From it, they waged war against their hated enemy, using strange technology and weird magic. While formidable, they ultimately failed and their grand city was reduced to the ruins that still cover the 1-square-mile clearing at the center of the jungle. Although the heights of their civilization lay far in the past, their descendants remain, and hunt



You emerge from the jungle into a clearing, about a mile across, littered with broken buildings, odd statues, and a pyramid standing at the center. All along the edges of the place, you see enormous stone heads, each 10 feet wide and 15 feet tall, depicting monstrous visages. The heads stand about 1,000 feet apart and form a ring along the clearing's perimeter. Between the stone heads, you see several bloody human heads mounted on black wooden poles driven into the ground in clusters, as if to warn off trespassers.

The jungle sounds have grown quiet around you, letting you hear faint sobs and piercing shrieks coming from somewhere in the ruins before you.

The ruins spread across the clearing from the forest edge. Characters are safe as long as they remain in the jungle; the degenerates are preoccupied with feeding on the living. Entering the ruins, however, risks the characters attracted attention from the warped inhabitants. Every 10 minutes or so the characters spend in the vicinity, roll a d6. On an odd number, something finds them. Roll or choose an encounter from the following table.

## Ruins of Meng Encounters

d6	Encounter
1	1 degenerate (see appendix) picking through the rubble for rats.
2	1d6 swarms of rats come boiling out from a collapsed building.
3	1d6 degenerates (see appendix) heading to or coming from the jungle.
4	1d4 phase spiders hunting for things to kill.
5	1 opportunistic wyvern swooping down to snatch prey.
6	2d6 degenerates (see appendix) swarming to tear apart the intruders.

**Exploring Ruined Buildings:** The adventure assumes the ruins surrounding the pyramid serve as lairs for the degenerates, rats, and other things. Most, if not all, contain broken pottery, bones, scraps of rotting flesh, and other detritus. Each location the characters explore has a 10% chance to house 1d6 – 2 degenerates (minimum 0). You can trade out these creatures with others of your choosing.

Characters searching the ruins and getting a success on an Intelligence/Investigation check (DC 15) find 3d6 gp worth of coins in various denominations. Once the characters find six such stashes, they find no more coins in the ruins.

## A. WATCHERS

The stone heads standing at the clearing's edge are similar to the stone heads the characters may have encountered en route as described above and they have the same statistics. The heads remain inanimate unless the player characters take the Eye of Meng from within the pyramid (see location C), at which point the magic infusing the heads causes them to animate to become Watchers of Meng (see the end of the adventure for statistics). These statues have been buried in the ground so that only their heads are visible. It takes 1 minute for a Watcher to pull itself free, at which point, it moves toward the creature holding the Eye and attacks it.

## B. THE SLAVE PEN

A large wooden pen at the base of the pyramid (see below) holds whomever the degenerates capture long enough for them to sacrifice and eat their prisoners. The ground inside the pen is a stew of mud and effluvia sprinkled with the bones of other prisoners that succumbed to disease or their injuries before they could be killed. If the degenerates attacked and made off with any members of Oola's party, they are here, reduced by as much as half their numbers.

Each time a creature complete a long rest in the pen, it must get a success on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected with whatever vile plague you like.

Ropes secure the gate to the pen and can be cut free or untied after about a minute spent working with them.

**Creatures (2,400 XP):** At any time, 1d6 + 3 degenerates loiter around the pen, taunting the inhabitants. From time to time they reach in and drag out one of the prisoners for a bit of sport, which culminates in the freaks tearing their victim apart and feeding on the remains.

- 1d6 + 3 degenerates

The degenerates are easy to surprise, distracted as they are by their prisoners. Characters can make Dexterity/Stealth rolls to sneak up on them with tactical advantage. However, during combat, roll a d6 each round on initiative count 0. On a 6, another degenerate joins the fight.

**Prisoners:** Any prisoners freed during the combat flee by the safest means available. At least one should, foolishly, climb up the side of the pyramid

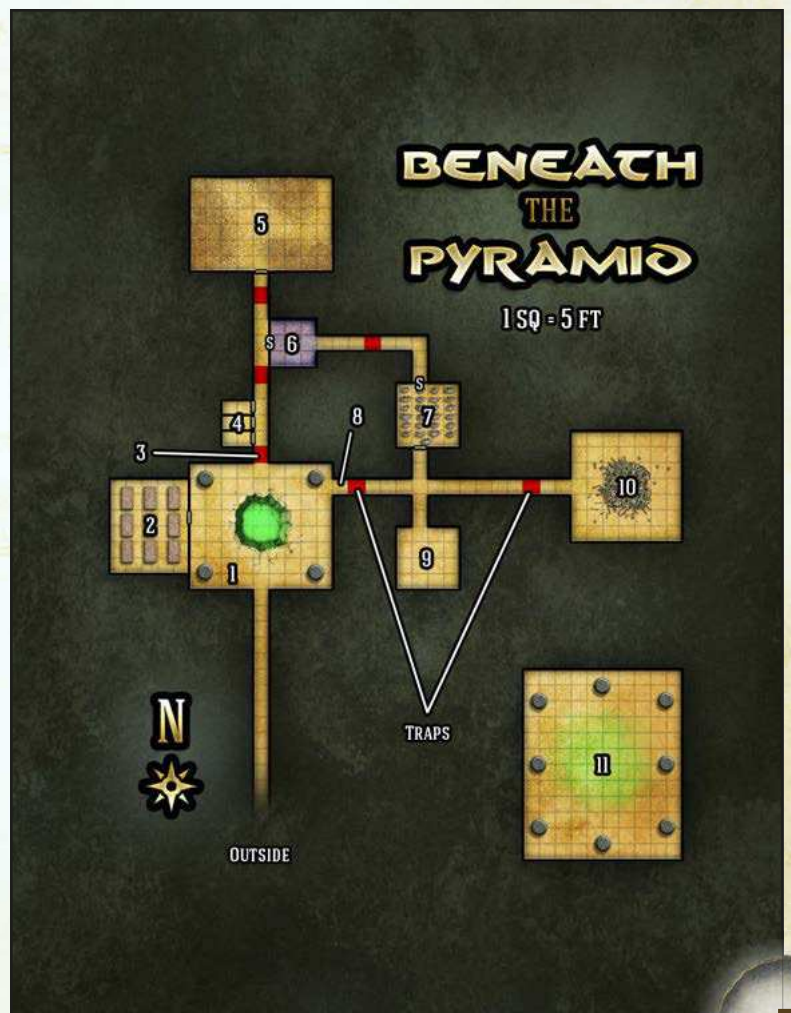
and duck into the opening. If Oola is with the characters, she sees this and decides that she must fetch this slave. After all, she's already lost several slaves so far and she cannot afford to lose any more.

**More Foes:** Once all the degenerates here are slain, a new batch of 1d6 + 3 arrive 1d20 minutes later to eat the corpses of their fellows and take their place.

Finally, if the characters rescue the prisoners and leave the ruins, a group of 3d6 degenerates pick up their trail and give chase. You can use chase rules if the PCs are inclined to evade pursuit, or you say that the creatures catch up to the party at some point in the jungles, foreshadowing the event by describing sounds of hoots and cries from the pursuers.

## C. PYRAMID

An enormous stepped pyramid commands the center of the clearing. The pyramid is 200 feet tall and each side at the base is 250 feet long. Including the base, the pyramid has ten steps. Each step increases the height by 20 feet, but reduces the length on each side by 25 feet until the length drops to 50 feet, at the eighth step. The side length of the ninth step is 25 feet and of the tenth step is 5 feet, which serves as a sacrificial altar.



A 10-foot-wide staircase climbs up the center of three of the pyramid's sides until it reaches the top of the eighth step, where it ends. The rest of the pyramid's exterior is decorated with skulls, macabre scenes of ritual sacrifice, fornication with horrid monsters, and other obscene activities. Blood still collects in the cracks and crevices, hinting at the numbers of sacrifices performed here.

An opening appears about halfway up the southern side of the pyramid. This dark cavity leads to a steep ramp that descends to location 1, which is described below.

The altar crowning the pyramid displays deep gouges in the stone, left by the blades used by the priests before they slid into their present state inside the pyramid. The altar radiates a field of vile energy that makes creatures within 10 feet of it feel queasy. Undead within the area regain 1d6 hit points at the end of each of their turns and make attack rolls with advantage.

## UNDER THE PYRAMID

A small complex of rooms and passages spreads out underneath the pyramid and can be accessed only via the ramp described above. Unless described otherwise, locations are dark and the floors are smooth and free of debris. Ceilings in passages are just 5 feet high and climb to 10 feet in rooms. While in a passage, a medium-sized character has tactical disadvantage when attacking with a non-light slashing or bludgeoning weapon. Finally, hieroglyphics cover the walls and ceilings, depicting scenes of colorful humanoids battling serpentpeople, what look to be flying ships, stars, monsters, and more. While the images prove confusing and complex, characters studying them deduce that they tell the story of the pyramids' builders as described under the Ruins of Meng, above.

The following locations correspond to those shown on the Under the Pyramid map.

### I. PIT CHAMBER

The shaft descends until it ends in a large square chamber with four wide pillars supporting the ceiling overhead. A deep pit from which soft green light emanates stands at the room's center. A horrific odor of rotting meat wafts up from the hole.

The pit descends 100 feet to room 11. The wall is cracked and features some handholds, requiring a successful Strength/Athletics check (DC 15) to climb without ropes or other climbing equipment.

## 2. TOMBS OF THE PRIESTS

Nine upright sarcophagi fill this room, standing in three rows of three. Each lid bears the likeness of its occupant, appearing almost human, but weirdly distorted, with too long limbs, malformed heads, or weird additions such as extra eyes, mouths, tentacles, and digits. Dust hangs in curtains throughout and movement through the area causes the room to fill the air with dust.

The dust in the air restricts vision to just 10 feet, even if the PCs have a light source. The sarcophagi have been sealed shut with lead. It takes about 10 minutes of work to chip away enough lead to open the heavy doors, which itself requires a successful Strength/Athletics check (DC 15).

**Creatures (4,200 XP):** All but three sarcophagi contain the withered remains of long-dead priests, dressed in rotting robes and porcelain masks. The final three each contain one mummy. You can decide which ones contain the mummies. Releasing one causes the other two to awaken and begin pounding on their doors from within. Roll initiative for the other two mummies. One breaks free on its initiative during the second round and the other breaks free on its initiative during the fourth round. The mummies fight until destroyed.

- 3 mummies

**Treasure (750 XP):** Each mummy wears a golden signet ring worth 200 gp.

## 3. NORTH PASSAGE

A narrow tunnel extends north until it ends at a stone door bearing a relief carving of a winged, demonic creature, its mouth filled with twisted fangs.

Two traps protect this passage.

**Gas Trap (750 XP):** The southern trap triggers when a Small or larger creature steps on a pressure plate. A searching character can find the pressure plate with a successful Intelligence/Investigate check (DC 20) or may automatically trigger it by tapping the floor with a pole or similar object. Once found, a character can use thieves' tools to disarm it with a successful DC 20 Intelligence check.

There's a 10% chance for each creature that moves down this passage to step on the plate. Once triggered, hidden nozzles in the walls release plumes of poisonous gas that spread through the passage and out into room 1. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving



throw or take 2d10 poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. At the end of each poisoned creature's turns, it must repeat the saving throw, taking 1d6 extra damage on a failure. Three successful saving throws ends the poisoned condition.

**Blade Trap (750 XP):** The floor beyond 5 feet from the door to room 5 but within 15 feet of it features twenty finger-sized holes bored through the stone. Dust and dirt have filled these holes, making them hard to spot. Searching characters spot the holes with a successful Intelligence/Investigate check (DC 15), while characters might notice the indentations with a successful Wisdom/Perception check (DC 20). Once found, a character can use thieves' tools to disarm it with a successful DC 20 Intelligence check.

The trap triggers when a Small or larger creature moves to within 5 feet of the door, which causes rusty iron blades to shoot up through the holes to impale anyone standing on that 10 foot section. Creatures on the area must make Dexterity saving throws (DC 15). A creature takes 4d10 piercing damage on a failure, or instead moves to the nearest open space to the trapped area on a success.

**Secret Door:** The secret door on the east wall can be found by searching characters if they look in the exact spot or get a success on an Intelligence/Investigation check (DC 20). The door opens by putting 5 pounds of pressure or more on its surface.

#### 4. VAULTS

The door opens onto a cramped chamber filled with shelves laden with clay pots.

The three doors on the western wall of the north passage each open into a small vault. There are 50 + 2d20 pots in each vault, and each pot has a lid sealed with black wax. Breaking the seals and lifting the lids reveals the pots contain the preserved and still-wet organs taken from the mummified priests in room 1. They produce a horrific stench, so that any breathing creature within 10 feet of an open pot must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 10). A creature becomes poisoned for 1 minute on a failed save, or becomes immune to the odor until it completes a rest on a success. Extend the duration by 1 minute for each failed saving throw.

**Treasure (1,000 XP):** One pot, the sixth opened, contains a heap of 1d12 gems, each worth 100 gp. A second pot, the ninth opened, contains a key to room 5.

#### 5. FALSE TREASURE VAULT

The relief-carved door to this room is locked. A character can break it down with a successful DC 25 Strength check or picked with thieves' tools with a successful DC 20 Dexterity check.

Nearly every surface of the chamber beyond the relief-carved door is covered in shining gold coins, jewels, fantastical treasures, and more.

All is not as it seems. All told, there appear to be 10,000 gp on the floor, 666 gems worth 10 gp each, and an assortment of 33 disturbing art objects worth 50 gp each to buyers. The art objects include prosthetic limbs, mechanical objects whose function has been largely forgotten, and paintings of bizarre landscapes. All the objects contained in this room are real for as long as they remain here, but if removed from the chamber, they turn to foul-smelling slime. Characters inspecting the objects using magic, such as the *detect magic* spell, discover an aura of transmutation magic.

**Treasure (1,500 XP):** While most of the treasure behaves in this way, the magic fails to transform 10% of what's carried out from the room. Thus, a character hauling 500 gp from the room would discover 50 gp survived being liberated from the vault. If the PCs liberate the entire treasure room (and clean it), then 1,000 gp, 660 gp of gems, and three art objects can be obtained.

#### 6. CRYPT OF THE MAKER

A large sarcophagus rests on the floor in the center of this chamber. The walls, ceiling, and floor have been painted to look like a starry night. In the center of the east wall is an opening, around which has been painted roiling flames that continue down the tunnel until it turns to the south.

The sarcophagus holds the remains of the Maker, the leader of those visitors who build Meng. The maker is long dead, but inside the sarcophagus, which requires a successful DC 20 Strength check to open, the characters find the Maker's ghastly remains clutching a *cube of force* in its skeletal hands.

**Fiery Trap (750 XP):** The tunnel extending east from this room bears a magical trap. An invisible glyph has been painted above the opening to the tunnel and can be spotted only by creatures that can see invisible things or that can perceive magical auras—the glyph emits an aura of evocation. The glyph counts as a 5th-level spell effect for the purpose of ending it with magic.

When a creature enters the passage from either end, the passage fills with fire 1 minute later. The flames burst out from either end in a 10-foot-long cone-shaped area. Creatures in the fire must make Dexterity saving throws (DC 15). A creature takes 6d10 damage on a failed save, or just half the damage on a successful one. Once triggered, the trap automatically resets.

## 7. TOMB GUARDIANS

Twenty-five withered corpses adorned in rotting leather stand side-by-side in this chamber.

The corpses, while inanimate make moving through this room difficult terrain. Characters searching the room may find the secret door on the north wall with a successful Intelligence/Investigation check (DC 25).

**Treasure:** The corpses have little of value, the armor rotten and weapons corroded beyond use, but the fifth corpse inspected carries +2 scimitar in a scabbard slung on its back. The weapon is made from scrimshawed bone, the carvings depicting nude men and women in great suffering.

## 8. EAST PASSAGE

The paintings decorating the walls and ceiling of the east passage depict human-like faces that look as though pressed against glass.

Two traps protect this corridor as shown on the map.

**Amber Trap (750 XP):** The trap at the western end of the passage is an invisible symbol inscribed on the floor that can only be spotted by creatures that can see invisible things or that can perceive magical auras—the glyph emits an aura of abjuration. The symbol counts as a 5th-level spell effect for the purpose of ending it with magic.

Each creature that moves across this area has a 20% chance of stepping onto the symbol and triggering the trap. When this happens, purple mist surrounds the triggering creature, who must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. The mist dissipates with no effect on a successful save, or hardens into an amber-colored shell that covers the creature completely on a failure. A creature encased in the amber is petrified. It takes 1 hour of work using mason's tools (or similar tools or items) to end the condition and free the character.

Once triggered, this trap resets the next day.

**Polymorph Trap (750 XP):** The trap at the passage's eastern end is an invisible symbol inscribed on the floor that can only be spotted by creatures that can see invisible things or that can perceive magical auras—the glyph emits an aura of transmutation. The symbol counts as a 5th-level spell effect for the purpose of ending it with magic.

Each creature that moves across this area has a 20% chance of stepping onto the symbol and triggering the trap. When this happens, the triggering creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or transform into a scorpion for 1 hour. The effect otherwise functions as the *polymorph* spell.

Once triggered, this trap resets the next day.

## 9. FAMILY CRYPT

Racks cover the room's walls from floor to ceiling. Each rack is 5 feet wide and has four shelves on which rests a linen-wrapped corpse. The room reeks of cardamom and cinnamon.

This room is safe for the characters to rest.

## 10. SLAVE CRYPT

A lowered portcullis bars access to this gruesome chamber. Through its bars, you can see a mound of bones heaped into a pile that brushes against the ceiling. Claw marks on the walls suggest the people were alive when interred here.

A creature can lift the portcullis with a successful Strength check (DC 20).

**Creatures (1,850 XP):** A curse binds shreds of the slaves' souls to the bones. Should a creature enter this room, the bones assemble themselves into skeletons that attack the intruders.

- 13 skeletons

## 11. EYE OF MENG

Below the pyramid and likely accessed via the pit in room 1 is a vault containing the jewel of power known as the Eye of Meng.

A fist-sized emerald rests in a bronze cradle held in the mouth of an enormous coiled serpent carved from stone. Eight wide columns support the ceiling overhead. Each column is made from hundreds of animated stone faces whose expressions show pain, fury, ecstasy, grief, and more. What appears to be leather scraps litter the floor, though inspection reveals they are pieces of flayed skin—swatches with hairs, ears, tongues, and other, obscene parts. All these pieces jump and twitch, as if somehow still alive.

**Creature (7,200 XP):** The stone serpent holding the cradle is a behir that has been held in stasis for nearly a thousand years. The stony surface is simply dust on its scaly body. Should a character relieve the cradle of the jewel, the stasis ends and the behir rises up to attack the intruders. It fights until it has been reduced to half its hit points, at which point, it scurries up through the shaft in the ceiling and attempts to exit from the complex.

- 1 behir

**Treasure (2,500 XP):** The giant emerald in the cradle is called the *Eye of Meng* and is worth 5,000 gp on its own, but it also possesses magical power. Removing the jewel from the complex causes the Watchers of Meng to animate and attack the characters.

**Eye of Meng:** A faint light shines inside this fist-sized emerald that's worth 5,000 gp. The gem has magical power, counting as a unique magic item. It measures its power in charges, of which it has 10 and replenishes expended charges once each day at dawn.

A character holding the Eye may use an action to cast the *light* spell without expending a charge. Alternatively, the character may use an action to expend 1 or more charges to cast any of the following spells from it: *aid* (2 charge), *augury* (2 charges), *daylight* (3 charges), or *flame strike* (5 charges).

A character may also use an action to expend any number of charges. For each charge expended, the character regains 1d4 hit points.

Each time a character possessing the jewel completes a long rest, he or she must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the character's alignment shifts one step toward chaotic evil, starting on the good-neutral-evil axis first. Changes to alignment are permanent, but ridding herself of the jewel and being targeted by a *remove curse* spell cast using a 6th-level spell slot can restore the character's alignment.

## ESCAPE

If the characters emerge from the ruins in possession of the Eye of Meng, when they reach the perimeter of Watchers (the giant stone heads about a mile from the ruins) they witness one of the Watchers pull itself out of the ground and begin to march toward them.

**Creatures (7,800 XP):** The Watcher moves toward the bearer of the Eye of Meng, attacking any who stand in its way. As they defeat the first of the Watchers, a second Watcher enters the fray. The PCs can fight the watchers, or flee into the jungle. There are twelve total Watchers, and they move very slowly through the jungle, so the PCs can outrun them easily once they disengage from combat. However, as soon as one Watcher is destroyed, the next begins its pursuit.

- 2 Watchers of Meng (see appendix)

## THE END

The adventure ends when the characters escape the ruins. You can play through what happens after, expanding the adventure to include additional challenges, or you can just narrate the conclusion. If Oola survives, she likely doesn't have enough slaves to pay her debts, so unless the characters offer to help her, she disappears, leaving her lover to her fate and plotting vengeance against the crime lord who killed her.

The characters might also escape with the Eye of Meng. If so, the watchers remain animated and they pursue the thief to the ends of the earth. Such foes show up at inopportune times, likely causing trouble for the characters, since the watchers are unobtrusive and violent in their need to reclaim the stone. Of course, if they sell the jewel, the watchers become the buyer's problem, who will likely be none too pleased if he or she survives.

## APPENDIX

### WATCHER OF MENG

Giant heads stand on the ground throughout the Jungle of Zaal, each boasting a monstrous visage. Few know who fashioned these statues or for what purpose, but it's clear with a glance that they belong to a culture strange and alien. Each tusked head sports a long horn emerging from the center of its brow above a single, bulging eye. When awakened, the buried body works to free itself from the dirt. After a few moments, the monstrosity pulls free, standing some 30 feet tall.

#### WATCHER OF MENG CR 8

N Gargantuan construct XP 3,900

**Senses** blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., average Perception 9

**Languages** —

#### BASE STATS

**AC** 17 (natural armor)

**hp** 165 (10d20 + 60)

**Speed** 20 ft.

#### ABILITY SCORES

**Str** 22 (+6), **Dex** 8 (-1), **Con** 22 (+6)

**Int** 6 (-2), **Wis** 10 (+0), **Cha** 4 (-3)

#### TRAITS

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

**Bound Guardian** A watcher of Meng, and other creatures like it, are bound to protect an item of magical power. Provided the item remains in the place where it's secured, the watcher of Meng is an object with AC 17 and 27 hp with a damage threshold of 10. If the item is removed from its resting place, the watcher of Meng becomes a creature until the item is returned or the watcher is destroyed.

#### COMBAT ACTIONS

**Multiattack** The watcher makes two fist attacks.

**Fist** (melee weapon) *Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3d8 + 6 bludgeoning damage.

**Shout** The watcher of Meng emits a thunderous noise into a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 6d8 + 6 thunder damage and becoming deafened for 1 hour on a failure, or just half as much damage on a success. Once the watcher uses this action, it must wait 1 minute before it can use it again.

### DEGENERATE

These wretched and terrible creatures might have once been something like humans, but they have been driven mad and have no shred of humanity remaining. Now they exist only to feed, preferably upon the flesh of other humans. They are drawn to places like the ruins of Meng, and can gather in great numbers. They are not subtle attackers, but will take advantage of an opportunity to carry off a captive to feast upon later.

#### DEGENERATE CR 1

CE Medium humanoid XP 200

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; average Perception 10

**Languages** Kalay

#### BASE STATS

**AC** 12

**hp** 22 (5d8)

**Speed** 30 ft.

#### ABILITY SCORES

**Str** 13 (+1), **Dex** 14 (+2), **Con** 11 (+0)

**Int** 7 (-2), **Wis** 10 (+0), **Cha** 8 (-1)

#### TRAITS

**Immune** charmed, frightened

#### COMBAT ACTIONS

**Multiattack** The degenerate attacks with its claws twice.

If both claw attacks hit, it can use feed as a bonus action, gaining tactical advantage on the attack.

**Claws** (melee weapon) *Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d4+1 slashing damage.

**Feed** (melee weapon) *Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6+2 piercing damage, the degenerate regains 1d6 hit points, and attacks against the target have tactical advantage until the end of the degenerate's next turn.



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