


I. The hall opens onto an underground forest, where torchlight glitters off of dozens of petrified trunks. They rise in orderly rows, their bark is shiny and smooth, their shape perfectly round. Branchless, they taper off into the darkness of the vault. Yet time has taken its toll even here, in this forsaken place. Some of the trees are crumbling, others have been cut down, perhaps by the same dark will that confined them to this darkness. They block our path, again and again, until we are forced to carve one out for ourselves. I step forward: My will against their weight. The taste of blood fills my mouth, just as they begin to shatter.

Forwards: I must sacrifice the Talisman that allowed me to carry the torch. I am finally free of its bindings.

II. A new smell fills our nostrils, different from that of stale air. A stench of warmth, of life and death. A truth our eyes only discover many steps later: The hall is littered with beastly bones and rotten wood. What predator could have slaughtered an entire herd? There is no trace of the cloying smell of blood, but we all prepare to spill our enemies'. I gesture for the others to stand back and walk further into the room. Each time I shed light upon a skeletal grin, I wonder whether I will be able to see our enemy before it strikes. Bones crack under my feet. The hall goes on, never changing. Until I reach a gate. Its wood still holds strong, as does the lock. I prepare to strike it down, but stop at the thought of being heard. I root around the floor until I feel the links of a chain. I pull on it, and a key comes free. It was lodged inside a skull.

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III. With each step the path becomes narrower, the dark vault presses in to crush us. The ground itself becomes treacherous: The torch no longer shines on smooth stone, every inch is covered in arid dust. As if a river of sand had invaded the hall. We make our way upstream, until we reach the crack it stemmed from. It opens like a gash on the surface of a curved wall, leading into an half-buried chamber. It somehow resembles a giant well, or the inverse of one. After a few steps we are waist-deep in the sand. My throat is dry, so I give no orders: I let myself sink in this pool of dust, searching for a door or any other passage. The sand buries me to the chest. It scratches and bites. I gasp for air, blinded. But in the end, it yields to my stubbornness and the others can climb through the breach after me. We move on.

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IV. There is no longer sand or dust under our feet, only narrow steps. The hall twists into a stairway and we descend, almost without noticing. The echo of our steps fills the air, our light glides off impossibly smooth walls. There is no rubble here, no stench of death. The Labyrinth feels alive, now more than ever, like a snake after shedding its old skin. It is hard to advance in the dark one behind the other, each of our minds busy picturing the next step below and the dangers lying in ambush. At the head of the group, I raise my hand and bring us to a halt: A new smell fills the air. I kneel, torch in hand, to examine a long groove wedged between the steps and the wall. Without pausing to ask, I bring the flame closer and a line of fire erupts, illuminating the stairway. Freshly-changed oil. The Children of Man have not left this house.

Forwards: I must sacrifice the Talisman that allowed me to carry the torch. I am finally free of its bindings.




V. Still we descend. Ever further from the touch of sunlight and the taste of water. As if reading our thoughts, the Labyrinth lures us further in with a burbling sound that promises to quench our thirst. An underground river? We quicken our step, force ourselves to be cautious as we turn a corner and there is the spring, right before us: A row of stone mouths, wide open as if frozen mid-song. Their music is icy water, babbling from a deep pool. We hesitate, torn between our parched throats and the stern gaze of the sculpted faces. For a long time we stand motionless, until their song warps into a roar of challenge. Finally I step forward and plunge my hands in the waters of the Children of Man. They feel as cold as those stone eyes. When I raise my head, my thirst sated, I feel ice sliding down my throat and into my belly. I take back the torch, struggling to suppress a shiver.

Forwards: I must sacrifice the Talisman that allowed me to carry the torch. I am finally free of its bindings.



VI. The walls of the corridor suddenly stop, leaving our flanks exposed. We move to the side, our steps light, trying to get our bearings. Suddenly there's another light, so very close: Spells rise to our lips, our muscles tense. I lower the torch and the other flame follows suit. I move mine left and right. Still it chases. I step forward and I am upon it. The twin torches reveal a face, and finally I recognise it. It is my own. I strike without hesitation. Yet the face keeps staring, familiar but warped. I flee, and only one of my companions is quick enough to follow. I hear the one I left behind in the dark call my name, but I do not stop running until I find the opposite wall. There is that same face, waiting for me. It appears again a few steps ahead. I force myself to go back. We are a triad again, though we walk by a wall that shows six of us moving. Until I find a gap where there are no reflections.

Forwards: Sacrificing my own Talisman is not enough. I must gesture for one of the others to step forward, then tear another Talisman away from them after taking mine off. We are finally free of their bindings.



VII. We recognise it from afar, in spite of the countless twists and turns. Light. None of us have any strength left to fear it, when we finally step into the great chamber. Torches hang from every wall, their flames high and lively even as our own threatens to die out. At the centre we see an altar, with no one gathered to pray around it. The Children of Man still elude us, but at least we understand the nature of this place. A Temple. I wonder if this is the heart of the Labyrinth. Unguarded, exposed. But I am too tired for questions and I gather all that I have left, all my pain and spite, to strike the altar down. I desecrate the Temple, I trample the offerings. The others stand and watch: There is no triumph in this. I wait to feel the Labyrinth screech, like rope about to snap. But nothing happens. There are many halls leading into the Temple. I bow my head and enter one, without bothering to ponder my choice.

Forwards: I must sacrifice the Talisman that allowed me to carry the torch. I am finally free of its bindings.

ENDING. The heart of the Labyrinth comes abruptly, with blinding sunlight. It is a deep pit, crowned by a patch of sky. I close my tearful eyes and hear the noise outside, smell the scents of the Children of Man. What lies above? I turn to my companions to ask, but they do not look back at me. And so I understand what they have lost. The will to fight, the will our own kin never had in the first place. The truth is that I am alone. The last Prodigy. Everything is repeated many times, infinite times, but two things in the Labyrinth seem to exist only once: Above, the intricate sun; below, me. This loneliness hurts. I want it to end. So I begin to climb, never looking back, my eyes blinded by sunlight. Soon, only one thing will exist only once.

Forwards: I must turn off the torch and stop the soundtrack, if we chose to use one. The game is over.