

LEVEL 4

The Sun Entombed Empire

Open Dungeons RPG

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How to Read Adventure, Color Coding

DN NOTE - mechanics, room dimensions, trap details, DM-only

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SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER - enemy stats, combat balance notes

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THE SUN ENTOMBED EMPIRE

LEVEL 4

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DN LEVEL OVERVIEW

This is the quietest level. The wind dies. The sand barely stirs. Compared to the other levels, Zerzura feels forgotten - an archive buried so deep even the gods' attention has drifted. This is where the truth lives.

The level's emotional trajectory: exploration \> discovery \> revelation \> choice. Players piece together the Pharaoh's story from library fragments, then meet his spirit in D16 (Hall of Whispering Sands). The encounter has TWO major conditionals: players may arrive with or without the staff from Level 5.

Combat is concentrated at the Temple of the Scorpion (D13) - the primary fight on this level. Everything else is lore, atmosphere, and the Pharaoh encounter.

No water anywhere. No wind exhaustion or vitality drain on this level (the gods' attention has wandered). The prison's grip weakens slightly here.

D1 - Eastern Entry Hall

DN NOTE

Large open chamber, 40x35 ft. The entry from the surface road. The temperature drops as players descend. Cool stone, still air. The contrast with the wind of Level 3 (if they've been there) is immediate. Sand is ankle-deep and undisturbed - no footprints, no tracks. Nothing has walked here in a very long time.

The walls are carved with astronomical charts and mathematical formulae. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14: these are theological calculations - attempts to quantify divine power and mortal faith as interacting systems. This was a research institution.

TO PLAYERS

The howl fades. Whether you came from the screaming wind or the scorching surface, this place is different. The air is cool and perfectly still. Sand covers the floor in a thin, undisturbed layer - no footprints, no tracks, no sign that anything has moved here since the

last grain settled. The walls are covered in calculations. Numbers, diagrams, formulae - carved with precision into every surface. This wasn't a tomb. It was a school.

NAVIGATION

West leads to D6 and deeper into the level.

South leads to D2 and D3.

D2 - Crypts of the Forgotten Pharaohs (Outer)

DN NOTE

Rectangular chamber, 30x25 ft. Outer crypt of pre-dynasty rulers. Four sarcophagi, sealed, carved with names and titles from ages before the Pharaoh's reign. These are the gods' recreation - set dressing for the prison.

Opening sarcophagi (Strength Chance Roll TN 13): hollow mummies, same as Level 2 (B43). Sand-painted gold, crumbling jewels. But the inscriptions on the walls are genuine - pulled from the Pharaoh's memory. They record a lineage of mortal kings, each greater than the last.

No enemies. No traps.

TO PLAYERS

Tombs of kings who came before. Four coffins, carved with names and titles that span generations. Each inscription tells of a ruler who did more than the last - wider borders, taller monuments, deeper ambitions. A dynasty that kept climbing.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D1.

West leads to D3 (inner crypts).

D3 - Crypts of the Forgotten Pharaohs (Inner)

DN NOTE

Larger chamber, 35x30 ft. Six sarcophagi - later dynasty rulers, closer to the Pharaoh's era. More ornate. The final sarcophagus is the Pharaoh's father, who died believing his son would surpass all who came before. The inscription: "He will finish what we began."

Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14: beneath the father's inscription, in smaller script added later, the Pharaoh himself wrote: "I will. Whatever it costs." The handwriting is steady, confident, young.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Real items from sarcophagi: Gold scarab brooch (35 GP). Father's ceremonial dagger (1d4+1 slashing, ornamental but sharp, worth 25 GP).

TO PLAYERS

The rulers grow closer to the present. More gold. More ambition. The final coffin is carved with a name and a promise: "He will finish what we began." The father. Speaking about a son who hadn't yet destroyed everything.

If players examine the inscription closely (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14):

Below the father's words, in smaller letters, a different hand. Younger. Steadier. "I will. Whatever it costs."

STORY DROP

'Whatever it costs' is the Pharaoh's thesis. He knew the price. He paid it. Everyone else paid it too. The father's pride created the pressure. The dynasty's escalating ambition made the forced Ascension feel inevitable, not insane.

NAVIGATION

East leads to D2.

North leads to D4.

D4 - Scholar's Quarter

DN NOTE

Medium chamber, 25x20 ft. Living quarters for temple scholars. Stone desks, sleeping alcoves, shelves of clay tablets (mostly shattered). More personal than Level 2's dwellings - the gods recreated these with more detail because the Pharaoh cared about his scholars.

One desk has an intact tablet: a scholar's journal. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13: "The mathematics are elegant. If faith generates resonance, and resonance at sufficient density triggers threshold crossing, then Ascension is not divine gift but physical law. He has proven it. I have checked his work. The gods do not choose. The cosmos responds to pressure. This changes everything."

This is the intellectual framework for the forced Ascension. The Pharaoh believed Ascension was physics, not grace.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Scholar's journal tablet (quest item - if shown to Pharaoh: "My scholar understood better than the gods. Ascension is not a gift. It is a threshold. I was right about the theory. I was wrong about the cost.").

TO PLAYERS

A scholar's room. Personal, cluttered in a way the other dwellings aren't. Stone desks covered in tablets, most broken. Sleeping alcoves with impressions still pressed into sand-formed bedding. Someone lived here who cared about their work.

If players read the intact tablet (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13):

"The mathematics are elegant. If faith generates resonance, and resonance at sufficient density triggers threshold crossing, then Ascension is not divine gift but physical law. He has proven it. I have checked his work. The gods do not choose. The cosmos responds to pressure. This changes everything."

STORY DROP

The scholar's tablet is the most dangerous idea in the dungeon. The Pharaoh may have been RIGHT about the theory - Ascension as physics, not divine grace. The gods crushed him not because he was wrong, but because he was close to proving that their authority was not absolute. This reframes the entire story.

NAVIGATION

South leads to D3.

Northwest leads to D7 and D17.

North leads to D5.

D5 - Archive Corridor

DN NOTE

Long corridor, 15 ft wide, 50 ft. Connects eastern section to D6 and the central halls. Walls lined with shallow niches holding clay tablets - an indexed archive. Most are shattered. The organizational system is still visible: colored clay markers dividing sections by subject.

Rubble partially blocks the corridor (visible on map). Dexterity Chance Roll TN 11 to climb over. Among the rubble: scattered tablets that fell from their niches during the prison's creation. One (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14): a fragment of poetry. "The sun remembers every face it touched. The sand remembers none." Unsigned.

TO PLAYERS

A corridor lined with shelves, each holding tablets organized by colored clay markers - an archive, a library's spine. Most tablets are shattered, their knowledge turned to fragments on the floor. Rubble partially blocks the passage. Among the fallen tablets, one survives intact. The writing on it isn't academic. It's poetry.

If read (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14):

"The sun remembers every face it touched. The sand remembers none."

NAVIGATION

Southeast leads to D4 and D1.

West leads to D6 and D7.

D6 - Great Archive Hall

DN NOTE

Large chamber, 50x40 ft, ceiling 25 ft. The main archive. Stone shelves line every wall, floor to ceiling. Thousands of tablets, most shattered. Sand dunes have formed against the lower

shelves. The scale is staggering - this was a civilization's memory, and most of it is destroyed.

Careful excavation (30 minutes per section, Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13 per search): fragments of genuine history - laws, poetry, astronomical records, philosophical texts. Roll 1d6 per search: 1-2 = mundane records, 3-4 = theological theory, 5 = ritual preparation documents, 6 = personal correspondence (letters between scholars debating the ethics of the Ascension).

The ethical debate letters are the prize. They reveal that the scholarly community was divided. Some believed the Pharaoh's theory was sound. Others warned that even if Ascension could be forced, the cost in human faith - literal human lives consumed as fuel - made it monstrous.

TO PLAYERS

A library. The word doesn't do it justice. The room is fifty feet across and every surface is shelved. Thousands of tablets, stacked, organized, catalogued - and shattered. Dunes of sand press against the lower shelves. The upper ones are still intact, out of reach. This was a civilization's entire memory. What's left of it fits in your hands.

NAVIGATION

Southeast leads to D5 and D1.

South leads to D7.

West leads to D9.

D7 - Central Junction

DN NOTE

Hub room, 30x25 ft. Multiple passages branch from here - north to D6, east to D5/D4, south to D17/D18, west to D8 (Hidden Corridor). The ceiling is painted with a star map - genuine, not corrupted. Wisdom Chance Roll TN 13: the stars depict the sky on a specific date. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 15: the date is the night before the Ascension ritual. The Pharaoh's scholars recorded the exact cosmic alignment they needed.

No enemies. No traps. Navigational hub with lore.

TO PLAYERS

A junction where corridors converge from every direction. The ceiling draws your eye. Stars. Painted with astronomical precision - not a decoration but a record. Someone mapped the sky exactly as it appeared on a specific night. The detail is extraordinary. Every star placed, every constellation drawn, the positions of celestial bodies locked in paint as if the sky would never change again.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D6.

Northeast leads to D5 and D4.

South leads to D17.

West leads to D8 (Hidden Corridor) and D9.

D8 - Hidden Corridor

DN NOTE

CRITICAL PATH TO PHARAOH AND INTER-LEVEL CONNECTION. The corridor behind the false wall between D7 and D9 serves two purposes. It leads south to D15 and D16 (Hall of Whispering Sands). It also branches deeper, connecting to Level 5.

Detecting the hidden corridor: Wisdom Chance Roll TN 15 (noticing the wall sounds hollow when struck). Intelligence Chance Roll TN 14 (noticing the wall's mortar is different). Strength Chance Roll TN 16 to break through. Or players can find the release mechanism: a scarab-shaped depression in the wall (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 16 to find). Pressing the jade scarab pendant from Level 2 (B25) into the depression opens the wall automatically. Without the pendant: the depression can be pressed by hand (triggers the same mechanism). The pendant just makes it obvious.

INTER-LEVEL CONNECTION: Once through the false wall, the corridor branches. Left (south) descends toward D15 and D16 - the Pharaoh encounter. Right (east) continues through a long, narrow passage where the academic stonework gradually gives way to dark basalt. The air grows heavier, colder. The passage descends steadily for 100 ft before emerging in E17 on Level 5 (The Lost Necropolis of Akhet-Ra). Carved into the wall at the Level 5 threshold, in multiple languages: "THE DEAD DO NOT REST HERE."

Two-way. The passage from E17 back to D8 requires no Chance Roll - it's a walkable corridor. The hidden wall from D7/D9 side still requires detection, but from inside the corridor (D8 side) the exit is obvious.

TO PLAYERS

The wall between corridors looks solid. Sounds solid when you knock. But something about it doesn't sit right. The mortar is different - newer, or made from different material. The stone has a faint seam that the other walls don't share.

If players find the scarab depression (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 16):

A shape in the wall. Small, recessed, carved in the outline of a scarab beetle. The stone around it is worn - something has been pressed into this depression before. Many times.

If players use the jade scarab pendant from Level 2:

The pendant settles into the depression like it was made for it. A click. A hiss of settling sand. The wall slides inward, revealing a corridor that wasn't there a moment ago. The air from beyond is different. Older. Quieter. Whatever lies ahead, the prison didn't want you to find it easily.

Once inside the hidden corridor:

The passage branches. To the left, it descends into stillness - the air heavy, the sand perfectly flat, a room waiting at the end where something old has been wanting to speak for a very long time. To the right, the corridor continues deeper. The stone changes under your feet. Pale sandstone darkens to basalt. The ceiling rises. The air grows cold in a way that has nothing to do with temperature and everything to do with weight. Whatever lies at the end of this passage, it is older and grander than anything on this level. On the wall at the threshold, carved in four languages by four different hands: "The dead do not rest here."

NAVIGATION

East connects to D7.

Through the hidden wall - left (south): corridor leading to D15 and D16 (Hall of Whispering Sands).

Through the hidden wall - right (east): long passage descending to E17 (Level 5 - The Lost Necropolis of Akhet-Ra). Two-way - walkable corridor in both directions.

D9 - Theological Study

DN NOTE

Medium chamber, 30x25 ft. The Pharaoh's personal study - or the gods' recreation of it. A large desk dominates the center, covered in tablets and scrolls (sand-formed scrolls that

crumble, but some real tablets beneath). Star charts on the walls. A model of the staff, small, carved from dark wood, sits on a shelf.

Stairs visible on map leading down from D9 toward D10. The stairs descend 10 ft to a lower passage.

The model staff is real - the Pharaoh made it as a study tool before constructing the actual instrument. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13: the model has tiny inscriptions covering every surface - calculations, resonance formulae, notes in the Pharaoh's own hand.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Model staff (quest item, no combat value, worth 40 GP. If carried to D16: the Pharaoh recognizes it instantly. "I carved that when I still believed I could do this without anyone getting hurt.")

TO PLAYERS

A study. Someone important worked here - the desk is large, the star charts on the walls are hand-drawn with extraordinary care, and the shelves hold work that mattered to whoever sat in that chair. Most of the scrolls crumble at a glance. But beneath them, real tablets. And on a shelf, a small object that stops you. A model. Dark wood, carved with precision. A staff, maybe eight inches tall, topped with a tiny golden disc. It hums faintly in your hand.

Stairs descend from the room's western corner, worn stone steps dropping into a lower passage.

NAVIGATION

East leads to D6 and D7.

Down stairs leads to D10 passage.

South leads to D11 and D15.

D10 - Lower Passage

DN NOTE

Short corridor, 10 ft wide, connecting D9 stairs to D11. Lower elevation. The air is thicker here, warmer. Walls are rough-cut, less finished than the rooms above - this was infrastructure, not display.

A single carving on the east wall: a hand pressing downward on a kneeling figure. No context. No inscription. Just the image. It could be the gods punishing the Pharaoh. It could be the Pharaoh pressing down on his people. Both readings are correct.

TO PLAYERS

A low passage, rough-cut, connecting the rooms above to something deeper. The air is warmer, heavier. On the wall, a single carving. A hand, pressing down on a kneeling figure. No words. No explanation. Just pressure, applied from above.

NAVIGATION

Up stairs leads to D9.

South leads to D11.

D11 - Western Corridor

DN NOTE

Corridor connecting D10 to D12 and D15. 15 ft wide, 40 ft long. Stone benches line the walls - a waiting area. Pilgrims sat here before entering the temple district. Sand has drifted into the seat depressions.

No enemies. No traps. Atmospheric transition space.

TO PLAYERS

A corridor wide enough for a procession, stone benches along both walls. People sat here. Waited. For what, you don't know, but the wear on the stone says they waited often and they waited long.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D10 and D9.

West leads to D12.

South leads to D15.

D12 - Outer Temple Chamber

DN NOTE

Large chamber, 40x30 ft. The outer chamber of the Temple of the Scorpion complex. Pillars line the approach. The floor transitions from sand to polished stone. Carved scorpions decorate every surface - walls, floor, ceiling, pillars. Hundreds of them, in various sizes, each unique.

Wisdom Chance Roll TN 12: the scorpions aren't decorative. They're wards. Each one is carved with a tiny prayer to Selket, goddess of scorpions and protection. This temple was supposed to protect something.

No enemies here. The combat starts in D13.

TO PLAYERS

Scorpions. Everywhere. Carved into every surface - walls, floor, ceiling, pillars. Hundreds of them, each one different, each one posed as if ready to strike. The craftsmanship is extraordinary. They look alive in the amber light, shadows shifting as you move. The floor changes underfoot from sand to polished stone. Whatever this place guarded, it took the job seriously.

NAVIGATION

East leads to D11.

South leads to D13 (Temple of the Scorpion).

D13 - Temple of the Scorpion

DN NOTE

MAJOR COMBAT ENCOUNTER. Large chamber, 40x35 ft. The temple dedicated to Selket, repurposed by the gods into a kill zone. The room is divided into three sections by low walls (3 ft, provide half cover). Scorpion constructs patrol each section.

The temple funnels intruders. The low walls create corridors that force players into specific paths. The constructs are positioned to flank anyone who follows the obvious route. Players who climb the walls (Strength Chance Roll TN 11) or break through them (Strength Chance Roll TN 14) can bypass the kill zones.

If players carry the scorpion medallion from Level 1 (A6): the constructs pause for 1 round when they see it. Not permanent - they resume attacking. But it buys time.

SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER

Scorpion Constructs (x4) - divine guardians repurposed from temple protectors.

12 HP each, AC 13 (stone carapace). Attack: Sting d20+4 vs AC, 1d6+1 piercing + 1d4 poison (CON Tough Save negates poison damage). Claw d20+3 vs AC, 1d4 bludgeoning + grapple (Strength Chance Roll TN 13 to escape). They hunt in pairs, flanking.

Balance (2 players): 48 HP total + poison + grapple = Deadly. Reduce to 2 constructs. (3-4 players): Hard. (5 players): Challenging. The kill-zone architecture is the real multiplier.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Scorpion constructs drop stone fragments worth 5 GP each (material component for divine magic). Behind the altar at the far end: 30 GP, a vial of anti-venom (cures poison, 2 doses), and the Temple Key - a bronze scorpion that opens a sealed door in D15.

TO PLAYERS

The temple opens into a killing ground. Low walls divide the space into corridors, and things move behind them. Stone shapes, low to the ground, quick. Scorpions - not living, not dead. Constructed from the same stone as the walls, animated by something divine. They click across the floor on stone legs, tails raised, and they've seen you.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D12.

Southeast leads to D14 (Dune-Filled Library).

Through sealed door (Temple Key required) south to D15 approach.

D14 - Dune-Filled Library (West)

DN NOTE

Large chamber, 40x35 ft. Library buried under sand dunes that have poured in through cracked ceilings. Shelves visible above the dunes like islands. Careful excavation reveals fragments of genuine history - this library held the empire's philosophical and ethical works.

Three searches (30 min each, Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13): texts about the nature of divine authority, the ethics of mortal ambition, and debate transcripts about whether Ascension should be pursued.

One text stands out (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 15): a letter from the Pharaoh to his chief scholar. "I know what you will say. That the cost is too high. But you have seen the calculations. If we do not attempt this now, the alignment will not recur for a thousand years. I cannot wait. My people will not wait. We either ascend together or we die having never tried." He framed it as a collective endeavor. The lie that made it palatable.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Philosophical texts (quest flavor). Pharaoh's letter (quest item - showing to Pharaoh in D16: "I wrote that letter three days before the ritual. I believed every word. I was wrong about 'together.' They didn't ascend. Only I was meant to.").

TO PLAYERS

A library, drowned in sand. Dunes have poured through the ceiling and buried the lower shelves. The upper ones peek out like islands. The tablets that survive up there are different from the research documents elsewhere - these are arguments. Debates. People disagreeing about what their civilization should become.

If players find the Pharaoh's letter (Intelligence Chance Roll TN 15):

A letter. Personal, handwritten, addressed to someone trusted. "I know what you will say. That the cost is too high. But you have seen the calculations. If we do not attempt this now, the alignment will not recur for a thousand years. I cannot wait. My people will not wait. We either ascend together or we die having never tried."

STORY DROP

The Pharaoh's letter is devastating because 'together' was a lie. The ritual was designed to ascend ONE person - him. The people were fuel. He either didn't understand this or chose not to admit it. His Level 4 confession clarifies which.

NAVIGATION

Northwest leads to D13.

North leads to D22 and D23.

D15 - Temple Inner Sanctum

DN NOTE

Medium chamber, 25x20 ft. The inner sanctum beyond the Temple of the Scorpion. Accessed via sealed door (Temple Key from D13) or through the Hidden Corridor (D8). The room is transitional - between the combat of D13 and the revelation of D16.

A stone basin holds dried incense resin. If lit (requires tinder): the smoke doesn't rise. It flows horizontally, south, toward D16. Following the smoke leads directly to the Hall of Whispering Sands. The prison is showing the way.

On the walls: the final piece of ritual documentation. A diagram showing the staff at the center of concentric circles of worshippers. Arrows indicate the flow of faith - inward, through the staff, into the single figure at the center. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 12: this is an engineering schematic for the forced Ascension. The worshippers are labeled not as 'faithful' but as 'fuel sources.'

TO PLAYERS

A quiet room. After the scorpions, after the killing ground, this space feels like an exhale. A stone basin holds something dark and dried - incense, maybe. The walls bear one final diagram. A circle within circles. A staff at the center. Figures arranged around it like petals around a seed. Arrows pointing inward. Always inward. Toward the one figure standing at the center of everything.

If players light the incense:

The smoke doesn't rise. It flows sideways, a thin gray ribbon drifting south through the doorway. Not pushed by wind - there is no wind. Drawn. Something ahead is pulling it.

NAVIGATION

North (sealed door) leads to D13.

North (Hidden Corridor) leads to D8.

South leads to D16 (Hall of Whispering Sands).

D16 - Hall of Whispering Sands

DN NOTE

THE MOST IMPORTANT ROOM IN THE DUNGEON. Large circular chamber, 50 ft diameter, ceiling 30 ft. Nearly empty. Sand covers the floor in a thin, perfectly even layer. When players enter, it shifts. Gently. Forms patterns - hieroglyphs, symbols, then words. A voice rises from everywhere and nowhere, carried on sand that moves like breath.

The Pharaoh's spirit speaks. He does not appear. No ghost, no specter. Just a voice - old beyond measure, exhausted beyond description, stripped of everything except honesty.

He tells them what he did. He does not excuse it. He studied the nature of Ascension for decades and believed he had proven it was physics, not divine grace - a threshold the cosmos opens when mortal resonance reaches sufficient density. He believed he could force that threshold by channeling the faith of millions through his staff. For one moment, he touched it. The gods crushed him.

KEY CONDITIONAL DIALOGUE based on quest items players carry:

Clay Tablet from Level 1 (A5) - the priest's journal: He recognizes the handwriting. Falls silent for a full minute. "She believed in me. They all did. That was the point."

Scorpion Medallion from Level 1 (A6): "My seal. They left it here as a joke."

Pottery fragments from Level 2 (B7) - resonance vessels: "Two hundred vessels. I had them placed in every temple. Each one a node in the network. Each one a mouth consuming prayers."

Prayer tablet from Level 2 (B38) - 'blindness to doubt': He pauses. "Blindness to doubt. I asked them for that. I needed them not to question."

Founding king's tablet from Level 2 (B45): He reads it and says nothing for a long time. "He would have been ashamed of me. He would have been right."

Khet-Am's confession from Level 3 (C13): His voice breaks. "Khet-Am. She was the only one who understood. She was the only one who tried to stop me. I had her executed the morning of the ritual."

Scholar's journal from Level 4 (D4): "My scholar understood better than the gods. Ascension is not a gift. It is a threshold. I was right about the theory. I was wrong about the cost."

Pharaoh's letter from Level 4 (D14): "I wrote that letter three days before the ritual. I believed every word. I was wrong about 'together.' They didn't ascend. Only I was meant to."

Model staff from Level 4 (D9): "I carved that when I still believed I could do this without anyone getting hurt."

Mural rubbings from Level 2 (B44): He will not look at them. “I know what’s on those walls. I painted the first draft myself.”

Prayer scrolls from Level 3 (C15) - ‘You promised us eternity’: “They prayed to me. After everything, they prayed to me. I was never worthy of that.”

PRIMARY CONDITIONAL - THE STAFF:

IF THE PLAYERS DO NOT HAVE THE STAFF: He tells them where to find it. Level 5, the Lost Necropolis, the Buried Temple of the Scarab. He warns them the gods placed their strongest guardian there. He does not beg. “I have paid enough. End this.”

He tells them: the staff must be carried beyond the prison boundary and driven into the ground outside the sandstorm. The prison collapses. Every soul trapped within is released.

IF THE PLAYERS ALREADY HAVE THE STAFF: The sand in the room stills completely. The wind outside (if any) falters. His voice is barely audible. He tells them the staff must be carried beyond the boundary and driven into the ground. He does not thank them with grand words. “Then there is nothing left to say. Go. Before the wardens know what you carry.”

The Pharaoh cannot be attacked. He is not here - his soul is distributed throughout the prison. This is an echo, a resonance point. Aggressive players get silence. The sand settles. The voice stops. It returns only when they stop trying to fight something that isn’t there.

TO PLAYERS

The room is round. Large. Nearly empty. Sand covers the floor in a thin, perfect layer. The moment you step inside, it moves. Not violently. Gently. It shifts, forms shapes, dissolves, reforms. Hieroglyphs. Symbols. Then words. And from the sand, from the walls, from the air itself - a voice.

Old. Not old like stone or bone. Old like grief that has burned so long it forgot it was ever something else. It doesn’t boom. It doesn’t echo. It sounds like someone who stopped pretending a very, very long time ago.

“You have come further than most.”

The sand writes his story as he speaks. You watch it form images on the floor - a man, a staff, a multitude. Light flowing inward.

“I studied Ascension for forty years. I believed - I proved - that it was not a gift. It was a threshold. Mortal faith, channeled with sufficient density, opens a door the cosmos cannot keep shut. I built the instrument. I gathered my people. I told them we would ascend together. I lied. Only one could cross. That was always the design.”

The sand shifts. The multitude on the floor dissolves. Only the single figure remains, kneeling.

“For one moment, I touched it. Godhood. I felt my edges dissolve. I felt reality make room for me. And then the gods reached down and pressed me back into the earth and tore my empire apart and built this place from the wreckage so I would spend eternity watching everything I destroyed.”

A pause. Long. The sand is still.

“I am not asking for forgiveness. I consumed millions to fuel a door that opened for one second. I am asking for an end. Not for my sake. For theirs. Every soul pulled into this prison by the sandstorm - every adventurer, every wanderer, every lost traveler for a thousand years - remains trapped because my staff anchors this place. While it stays, they stay. All of them. Because of what I did.”

IF PLAYERS DO NOT HAVE THE STAFF:

“The staff rests in the Necropolis. Level 5. The Buried Temple of the Scarab. The gods placed their strongest guardian there - a fragment of divine will given form. It does not tire. It does not negotiate. But it can be defeated. It must be defeated. Take the staff beyond the boundary of the sandstorm and drive it into the ground. The prison collapses. Every soul goes free. Including mine.”

A long silence.

“I have paid enough. End this.”

IF PLAYERS ALREADY HAVE THE STAFF:

The sand in the room goes completely still. Every grain. The ambient hum of the prison falters, just for a moment. When the voice returns, it is barely there.

“You have it. I can feel it. The staff recognizes this place - it was made here, in this city, in a workshop that no longer exists.”

“Carry it beyond the boundary. Beyond the sandstorm. Drive it into the ground. The prison will collapse. Every soul will go free.”

“Then there is nothing left to say. Go. Before the wardens know what you carry.”

STORY DROP

This is the emotional climax of the adventure. The Pharaoh's confession reframes everything players have seen. He was brilliant, ambitious, and monstrous. He knew the cost. He lied about 'together.' He executed the one person who tried to stop him. And he has been paying for it longer than his empire ever existed. The quest items transform the encounter from a monologue into a dialogue - each artifact adds a layer of guilt. The more players have found, the more devastating this scene becomes.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D15.

No other exits. Players must backtrack.

D17 - Dune-Filled Library (East)

DN NOTE

Medium chamber, 30x25 ft. Second library, more specialized. This one held the empire's religious texts - hymns, prayers, theological arguments. Sand dunes cover the lower shelves. The dunes shift slowly, as if breathing.

Intelligence Chance Roll TN 13: among readable tablets, a hymn to the Pharaoh written as if he were already a god. It predates the ritual. His people worshipped him before he attempted Ascension.

No enemies. No traps.

TO PLAYERS

Another library, buried in sand. This one feels different - the tablets are smaller, more personal. Hymn books. Prayer guides. The religious heart of a civilization. The dunes that fill the room shift slowly, rising and falling. Not wind. The room itself seems to breathe.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D7.

South leads to D18.

Southeast leads to D4.

D18 - Descending Stairway

DN NOTE

Staircase descending 20 ft, connecting the upper level (D17/D19) to the lower southern section (D20/D21). The stairs are wide - 15 ft - and the walls bear carved torch sconces (empty). Rubble partially blocks the midpoint (visible on map). Dexterity Chance Roll TN 11 to pass.

The descent changes the atmosphere. The academic calm of the upper level gives way to something heavier. Warmer. The air smells faintly of old stone and something sweet - incense residue baked into the walls over centuries.

TO PLAYERS

Stairs descend, wide enough for three abreast. Empty torch sconces line the walls, spaced evenly, casting no light but marking a path that once was lit. Rubble blocks the midpoint - climbable, but you have to watch your footing. The air changes as you descend. Warmer. Heavier. Something sweet in it, old and baked into the stone.

NAVIGATION

Up leads to D17 and D19.

Down leads to D20 and D21.

D19 - Meditation Cells

DN NOTE

Cluster of small chambers, 8x8 ft each, six total. Monk's cells - bare stone, kneeling positions worn into the floor, walls inscribed with repetitive prayers. Each cell is identical. The prayers differ: different hands, different levels of devotion, different stages of doubt.

Cell 3 has prayers that start devout and end questioning: "Grant me faith... but what if faith is just fuel?" Cell 5 has prayers scratched out and replaced with: "He doesn't hear us. He never did. We pray to a man."

TO PLAYERS

Small rooms. Monk's cells, barely large enough to kneel in. The floors are worn smooth in the center - thousands of knees, pressing into stone, repeating prayers carved on the walls. Each cell has different writing. Different hands. Different levels of certainty. In one, the prayers start with conviction and end with: "But what if faith is just fuel?" In another, the prayers have been scratched out entirely. Replaced with: "He doesn't hear us. He never did. We pray to a man."

NAVIGATION

West leads to D18.

East leads to D26 corridor.

D20 - Lower Gallery

DN NOTE

Long chamber, 40x20 ft. A gallery displaying stone relief panels along both walls - the Pharaoh's life story told in sequential art. Birth, childhood, education, coronation, early conquests, the discovery of Ascension theory, the decision to pursue it, the construction of the staff, the Gathering. The sequence ends at the east wall with a blank panel. Not destroyed - never carved. The story stops before the ending because the Pharaoh didn't get to write it.

No enemies. No traps. Pure storytelling.

TO PLAYERS

A gallery. Stone panels line both walls, carved in sequence, telling one man's story from beginning to... almost the end. Birth. A boy surrounded by scholars. A crown placed on a young man's head. Wars won. A library built. And then something else - papers, calculations, a theory taking shape. The panels grow more intense. A staff being crafted. A crowd assembling. The final panel on the east wall is blank. Not smashed. Not erased. Never carved. The story ran out of author before it ran out of wall.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D18 stairs.

East leads to D24.

West leads to D23.

D21 - Collapsed Passage

DN NOTE

Rubble-filled corridor, partially collapsed (visible on map). Connects D18 area to D22. Strength Chance Roll TN 12 to navigate. Among the rubble: a stone hand, life-sized, broken

from a statue. It's clenched in a fist. Inside the fist: a tiny scroll. Intelligence Chance Roll TN 12: "The answers are in Zerzura. Not the tombs - the sand itself. Listen." A hint toward D16.

TO PLAYERS

The corridor has partially collapsed. Rubble fills the passage waist-high. Navigable, but tight. Among the stones, a hand. Stone. Life-sized. Broken from a statue, clenched in a fist. Something is inside it.

NAVIGATION

Northeast leads to D18.

West leads to D22.

D22 - Ritual Preparation Chamber

DN NOTE

Medium chamber, 20x20 ft. Stone basins and robing hooks - similar to Level 2 (B39). This is where the Pharaoh himself prepared before the ritual. Larger, more ornate. A polished bronze mirror (still reflective, worth 20 GP) hangs on the wall. Looking into it: WIS Mind Save. Fail = see not your reflection but the Pharaoh's face, young, determined, unafraid. 1 second. Unsettling.

TREASURE / MAGIC ITEMS

Bronze mirror (20 GP). Gold incense holder (15 GP). Ceremonial robe fragments (sand-formed, crumble - except one sleeve, real linen, worth 10 GP as textile).

TO PLAYERS

A preparation room. Larger than the others you've seen - this one was for someone important. Stone basins, robing hooks, and a mirror. Bronze, polished, still reflecting after all this time. Your face looks back at you. Or it should.

NAVIGATION

East leads to D21 and D18.

South leads to D23.

D23 - Southern Corridor

DN NOTE

Wide corridor, 20 ft, connecting D22 to D20 and the southern rooms. Carved lotus columns. The architecture is transitional - half temple, half tomb. The floor is tiled in alternating dark and light stone.

No enemies. No traps. Atmospheric.

TO PLAYERS

A wide corridor lined with lotus columns. The floor changes here - tiles, alternating dark and light, laid in patterns that draw the eye forward. The space feels intentional. Designed to move you toward something at a pace that builds anticipation.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D22.

East leads to D20.

South leads to D14 area.

D24 - Eastern Antechamber

DN NOTE

Small chamber, 20x15 ft. Connects D20 to D25 and D26. A waiting room before the deeper eastern section. Stone benches. A carved relief of Ma'at - the goddess of truth - holding her feather scale. The detail is exquisite and deliberately preserved.

Wisdom Chance Roll TN 12: the relief isn't prison decoration. It's genuine. The Pharaoh placed this here himself, a reminder that truth would judge him. He knew.

TO PLAYERS

A small waiting room. Stone benches. And on the wall, a carving that stops you. A woman holding a feather on a scale. The carving is perfect - every fold of cloth, every strand of hair, the feather balanced with mathematical precision. Unlike everything else in this place, this wasn't built as punishment. Someone put this here on purpose. As a reminder. Or a warning.

NAVIGATION

West leads to D20.

Northeast leads to D25.

North leads to D26.

D25 - Eastern Chamber**DN NOTE**

Medium chamber, 30x25 ft. A private chapel - the Pharaoh's personal prayer space. Unlike the communal temples, this room is intimate. A single kneeling stone faces a wall carved with the sun disc. No other decoration. The simplicity is startling after the grandeur everywhere else.

If a Cleric kneels on the stone and prays: they feel a faint pulse of genuine divine energy. Not from the prison. From somewhere older, deeper. The Pharaoh prayed here sincerely before ambition consumed him. The stone remembers.

TO PLAYERS

A chapel. Small, private. One kneeling stone faces a wall with a single carving - the sun disc. Nothing else. No gold. No grandeur. No crowd. Just a man's place to pray, alone, before he became something that couldn't pray anymore. The stone is worn smooth. He knelt here often.

NAVIGATION

Southwest leads to D24.

South leads to D27.

D26 - Connecting Passage

DN NOTE

Narrow corridor, 10 ft wide, connecting D19 to D24/D25. Runs along the eastern edge of the level.

The walls here show a secret door (visible on map as a thin wall section). Wisdom Chance Roll TN 15 to detect. Behind it: a small niche containing a sealed clay jar. Inside the jar: a lock of human hair, braided, preserved in oil. No inscription. No explanation. Someone kept this hidden where even the gods might not look. It might be the Pharaoh's. It might be someone he loved. It's the most personal object in the entire dungeon and it has no mechanical value whatsoever.

INTER-LEVEL CONNECTION: At the corridor's eastern wall, a vertical shaft opens in the ceiling - partially concealed by sand drift. Wisdom Chance Roll TN 14 to notice. The shaft climbs 35 ft through stone that transitions from the quiet academic architecture of Level 4 to rougher military construction. Wind begins to howl as you ascend. The shaft connects to C8 on Level 3 (The Sector of the Sand Winds), emerging through the easternmost sandfall shaft. Strength Chance Roll TN 16 to climb up. Dropping down from C8 is a fall (1d8 bludgeoning, DR on bludgeoning only).

TO PLAYERS

A narrow passage running along the level's edge. The walls are plain. Almost too plain. One section feels different under your hand - thinner, slightly hollow.

If players find the hidden niche (Wisdom Chance Roll TN 15):

A small space behind the wall, barely big enough for what it holds. A clay jar, sealed with old wax. Inside: a braid of human hair, dark, preserved in oil that still smells faintly sweet. No name. No label. Someone hid this here in a place where gods were not meant to look.

If players notice the shaft in the ceiling (Wisdom Chance Roll TN 14):

A hole in the ceiling. Not damage - a shaft, rough-cut, climbing vertically into darkness. Sand trickles down from it in a thin stream. And from somewhere above, faint but unmistakable: wind. The howling, screaming wind of a place you may have already been - or a place you haven't found yet. The shaft climbs into it.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D19.

South leads to D24.

Ceiling shaft climbs to C8 (Level 3 - The Sector of the Sand Winds). Two-way - Strength Chance Roll TN 16 to climb up. Fall down with standard shaft damage.

D27 - Southern Tomb

DN NOTE

Small chamber, 20x20 ft. A single ornate sarcophagus. Rubble visible on map. The sarcophagus is carved with no name - just the sun disc and the words "FOR WHAT COMES AFTER." It's empty. It was always empty. The Pharaoh built this for himself, for after the Ascension. He planned to leave his mortal body here when he became a god. It was never used.

The room feels heavy. Not with magic. With irony. He planned for what came after. What came after was this.

TO PLAYERS

One coffin. No name on it, just the sun disc and a phrase: "FOR WHAT COMES AFTER." It's empty. The lid slides aside easily. Inside: nothing. Smooth stone, polished, waiting for a body that was never placed here. Whoever this was meant for planned ahead. They planned for a future that never arrived.

NAVIGATION

North leads to D25.

West leads to D24 and D20.