

The Lost City of Tsumeb

Katie Fleming

It was early morning when the rugged four-seater plane landed just beyond the Estosha Pan. Heat waves rippled throughout the air, and the large orange sun rose warm in the sky.

Lara was the first to hop out of the plane, her boots unsettling the dry sand, creating small puffs of dirt. Kurtis Trent jumped down beside Lara and watched as the plane took off. Both stood silently as they waited to be picked up, each deep in thought about their upcoming adventure.

This would be one of the first journeys with Kurtis that Lara had ever been on. Normally she preferred to travel alone. This time, however, both of them had requested to travel together.

Lara and Kurtis were far from home. They were in Namibia, Africa, making their way to the city of Tsumeb.



When they finally arrived in Tsumeb, they were escorted to a large grass hut. Four men greeted them and asked them warmly to have a seat on the ground.

One man spoke, "We're very sorry we contacted you both with such short notice. We hope you will be able to help us."

Kurtis nodded his head. "What is it you would like us for?"

The youngest of the four men moved in closer. He wore colourful pants embroidered in intricate patterns.

"For many years," he said, "my people have been searching for something. Every one of them who has tried has ultimately failed. As the Emperor of this city, I requested that both of you help me. Ms. Croft, I have heard many stories about you. Your persistence and bravery is astounding."

Lara nodded. "Thank you."

"And as for you, Kurtis," the Emperor continued, "you are one tough person who doesn't let anything stand in your way."

"That's why we need both of you to help us," another man stated. "We know that with your qualities combined, together you will be able to succeed where others have failed."

The Emperor stood up and turned his back to everyone. "You see, there is a legend that has been around for many centuries." He turned back around and faced the group. "The legend tells us that about two million years ago, a great earthquake split right around the entire city of Tsumeb. The city plunged over a thousand feet into the ground, to its final resting place."

"Then what about the city today?" Lara questioned.

The Emperor made swishing movements with his hands. "It rained for one week, then vicious winds blew in desert sand, completely covering any last remains of the city."

Then thousands of years later, Tsumeb was re-created.” He motioned his hands around indicating where they now stood.

Kurtis frowned, and scratched his chin. “So you want us to find the city?”

“That’s exactly it,” the Emperor replied, “because so far those who have tried, only lasted one day. They just couldn’t search because they were much too terrified to continue on. It is said that anyone who tries to find the Lost City of Tsumeb will be lost themselves.”

Lara glanced over at Kurtis and grinned. Anything that was dangerous had her name written on it!

“Not only would we like you to find the city,” the Emperor continued, “but we would also like you to find the Pond of Transformation.”

“This pond, is it located in the city?” Lara asked.

The Emperor nodded. “Yes. However, as it is sacred, no one knows where it is. You’ll probably have to do some puzzle solving to find it.”

Lara grinned, “Then it won’t be a boring trip.”

The Emperor laughed. “Far from it I’m afraid. Once you have located the pond, you might run into some trouble. The legend says that the Khoisan race guards the pond.”

“A challenge...perhaps,” Kurtis chuffed.

“Challenge?” the Emperor raised his eyebrows, “I think you’re in for a big *adventure.*”

“Is there anything else?” Lara asked.

“Yes. After you locate the pond, you’ll have to do a bit of swimming. Somewhere in the pond is an ivory elephant.”

“Why is this elephant so important?” Lara questioned.

A smile spread across the Emperor’s face. “This is the fun part. You see, the legend also says that the elephant once belonged to the Emperor of the city, during that time period. He was a very powerful man! Rumours have it that inside the elephant is a small scroll. The message written in it has never been read by anyone.”

“Who put it in there?” Lara asked.

“The Emperor did. The legend also states that whomever reads the inscription in the ivory elephant from the Pond of Transformation will become, or will have happen what is written.”

“Does have a nice ring to it,” Lara grinned.

The Emperor nodded. “So, we would like you to bring back the elephant.”

Kurtis frowned. “What do you plan on using the elephant for?”

“To place it in our city as a sign to show that the Lost City of Tsumeb has been found!”

Lara wasn’t convinced. “You want us to go to all that trouble *just* so you can say Tsumeb existed two million years ago?”

The Emperor sighed, “I know it doesn’t sound convincing, but that’s the only plan I have for it.”

Lara stood up. “I’d like to discuss this with Kurtis first.”

“That’s perfectly alright. Just keep this in mind, once you have found the city, you can take anything back with you.”

The four men left, and Lara and Kurtis were alone. Lara folded her arms across her chest. “This reminds me of my trip to Antarctica. They’ll be nice to you until you give them what they want. Then, they’ll shoot you right in the back.”

Kurtis nodded. “I know exactly what you mean. They obviously have different plans than what was said. Do you think we should do it anyway?”

Lara frowned, and looked Kurtis directly in the eye. “I’ll do it...but if they give us any sort of trouble, I’m not going to be so nice.”

“When are you ever?!” Kurtis replied jokingly. The Emperor entered the hut and smiled.

“Have you made a decision yet?”

Kurtis stood up beside Lara. “We’ll do it.”

“Excellent! You’ll set out first thing tomorrow morning. Until then, I suggest you both try to get as much sleep as you can. You have no idea what awaits you.”

After he left, Kurtis and Lara were escorted to separate huts. They ate corn and meat for dinner, then soon went to bed.

Ever since her trip to Antarctica, Lara had become a light sleeper. Throughout the night she woke repeatedly to strange whispering. At first she thought nothing of it, but as it continued, Lara wanted to check things out.

Lara’s dark shadow slid slowly out of the hut, and crept quietly towards the whispers. She peered around the corner of the adjacent hut to hers, and saw the Emperor and the three other men circled around a large crackling fire. The orange flames danced across Lara’s face and swirled in her eyes.

The men were whispering excitedly to one another. The Emperor held an incense stick, the others wooden figures and beaded objects. Lara inched forwards to have a closer look. Eventually the men sat down, then each took out a knife from their belts. One of the wooden statues was placed on its back into the glowing coals. One at a time, the men stabbed the figure with their knives.

Lara scowled, and stepped back beside the hut. A moment later, she thought she heard her name and Kurtis' being chanted over and over. "What on earth were they doing?" Lara wondered. She returned to her hut, but lay awake for a while longer. Was it actually an 'adventure' or were Lara and Kurtis headed into a trap that had been waiting for them for over a million years?

After some time, Lara's eyelids closed and she fell into a deep sleep. She had many disturbing dreams filled with dark places and creatures that only existed in dreamland. They ripped and tore at her flesh all night long...

The next day, Lara and Kurtis were awakened bright and early. The hot sun penetrated Lara's hut. As she was washing her face, images from the night before flashed through her mind. Lara could sense that Ferdinand, the Emperor, and his men were up to no good.

Shortly after, Kurtis and Lara met outside for breakfast. They sat cross legged on the sandy ground just outside of the main hut. Everyone in the city had now heard about their journey. People crowded around them, wishing them good luck in different languages. Some presented small items to them as good luck tokens for their expedition.

While they were eating, Lara quietly told Kurtis about what she had seen the previous night.

He frowned as he wiped crumbs from his mouth. “I knew this was a bad idea. Who knows what they have plans for? I don’t trust them one bit.”

Lara nodded. “There is definitely is something keeping from us.”

Just then, Ferdinand appeared with several men and women.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” he asked.

“Not entirely sure,” Kurtis mumbled.

“Yes,” Lara replied, giving Kurtis a look, “we’re ready.”

“Good! All right. You’re going to need some equipment and supplies. It doesn’t look like we’d have much here, but I’ve got my sources.” A large truck pulled up to Ferdinand, and a few people hopped out.

“First off, you’re going to need to change into more reasonable clothes.” Ferdinand handed each of them an outfit. “Your classic khaki shorts, I’m sure you’re pleased to see, Lara.”

She smiled and nodded.

“Next, two dark blue tank tops, with a vest. Now, it can get pretty chilly during the night. Just put on the vest overtop of your tank tops and you’ll be fine. They’re fully insulated and waterproof. You’ll also see there are some pockets on the side. Great for storing small items.”

Lara looked at her vest with satisfaction. “Nice,” she said, pointing to some embroidered writing. *Tsumeb: Private Personnel*

“Yes, well, you have to be well dressed for the job!” answered Ferdinand. Next, a man handed Lara and Kurtis some boots. “You can go just about anywhere in these,” he

said. “Excellent for mountain or rock climbing. They’re also waterproof and contain a switchblade in the sole of the right boot.”

Ferdinand handed Lara a set of holsters. “I did some research on the both of you. Wanted to make sure we got what you liked.” He handed Kurtis a shoulder holster, and smiled.

Another man brought forth two black knapsacks. “They clip around your waist so you can’t lose them. Each of you have been equipped with different items in your bags. In total, here’s what you have: enough ammo to take out a small army, flares, two flashlights, two sleeping bags, a two person tent which inflates in seconds, two hundred foot ropes, plenty of pitons, clamps, safety harnesses, hammers, enough food to last you three weeks, and a couple of leather pouches. There’s also a map that might help you. It’s an ancient drawing of the city that was sketched a long time ago.”

Ferdinand stepped forwards. “Now, your lucky charms.” He handed Lara two pistols, and Kurtis, a desert eagle. Another man handed them each two uzis.

“Looks like we’re all set,” Lara said.

The Emperor nodded his head in agreement. “Good luck, both of you. We know you can do it. You’re the only ones who can!”

Everyone said their goodbyes, then one man drove Lara and Kurtis to the site where they would start their journey. A sudden darkness came over the sky as they began their trek. Nothing could prepare them for what they were about to encounter. It was going to take more than a few bullets to make it through to the end...

As soon as they were dropped off, Lara and Kurtis got to work right away. When the earthquake split around Tsumeb, part of it never sealed up. Supposedly, the only way down would involve some rappelling, spelunking, and swimming.

Kurtis hammered two steel posts into the ground, a couple feet from the chasm's edge. He also put two more pegs in, as emergency backup. Lara wrapped a two hundred foot rope around the safety peg, then tightly around the other. She pulled it to check its strength, then tossed the remaining portion of the rope over the side.

After both of their ropes were secured, they were ready to start descending into the darkened gap. Lara and Kurtis put on their safety harnesses, and backpacks. They attached a safety clamp and line to their own rope. Just in case they fell, their safety line would hold them suspended in the air. Both of them attached another clamp to their rope, then backed slowly over the ledge...

A small bit of sand blew off Lara's boots and fell silently into the darkness below. Her boots fitted snugly to the side of the wall. Kurtis was about ten feet away from her, to the right. He held fast to the wall as well. Both of them pressed their boots hard against the side and pushed out, extending themselves out further. They were able to hang like this without having to hold onto the rope.

Kurtis turned on his flashlight, and looked around. The chasm in which they were descending into was pitch black. There was approximately fifteen feet of space to maneuver in width, ten in length between the two walls. If they had a bit more room, it would be more comfortable and less claustrophobic, however they would have to make do. He hung the flashlight from around his neck on a small chain, and saw Lara do the same. Kurtis wanted to get down as quickly as possible so they could begin their search.

After Lara had hung her flashlight from around her neck, she squeezed her clamp slowly and began to descend once again. The light increased Lara's visibility by fifteen feet. As she repelled, thunder boomed overhead. A minute later, it began to pour rain.

Rain splashed onto Kurtis' face, and dripped down his rope. The walls of the chasm were starting to get slippery from the water that was trickling down it.

"Ease up a bit on the clamp Lara," he called, "the ropes are getting slippery."

Lara looked up at Kurtis who was a couple feet above her, and nodded. "Will do!"

They both continued to descend, carefully watching their footing as they repelled. Up above, the sky had darkened significantly. Lightning crackled and thunder boomed so loudly, that they could feel the vibrations inside their bodies.

"How are you doing?" Lara asked.

Kurtis gave her a thumbs up sign. "Just great, aside from being soaking wet."

Lara grinned. "Don't complain," she laughed, "it'll save you having to take a shower for awhile!"

Kurtis rolled his eyes.

BOOM! Lightning burst from the sky, and sped down into the chasm. It hit Kurtis' rope, instantly burning right through it.

"Woah!" he yelled as he lost grip of the rope and started to fall. His safety rope wouldn't do him any good, since it too had been struck.

Lara heard the boom. She didn't have time to look before she heard Kurtis cry out. Her natural reflexes kicked in, and her hands quickly shot off of the rope. She caught Kurtis by his wrist, and held tight with both hands.

The rain poured down even harder, and splashed over the sides at the top. The lightning lit up the entire sky, shooting in all directions. A strong wind began to blow sand and mud into the chasm.

“Hold on,” Lara grunted through clenched teeth. Her hair was completely soaked, and muddy water poured down her entire body. She struggled to hold fast to Kurtis, but he was slowly slipping downwards...

Back in the main hut, Ferdinand sat on the floor with a few others. “Think they’ll make it?” he asked.

“Not in this weather,” one man said, “there’s no way. They’ll fall for sure. Their ropes will be too slippery.”

“Then we’ve got to go get them!” a woman cried out. “We can’t let them die!”

The Emperor shook his head. “We can’t save them. Every time someone attempts to find Tsumeb the weather turns bad instantly. We wouldn’t be able to save them anyway. It’s just far too dangerous out there.”

Lightning flashed through the sky. Lara held on with all her strength. She hung in the air, only by her safety line.

“You’ve got to get another rope Kurtis!” Lara yelled. The storm above was roaring with life. The wind was picking up speed. “DO IT!”

Kurtis felt himself slipping more by the second. His free hand fumbled at his backpack.

“Hurry!” Lara yelled again. “I can’t hold you much longer!” Wind whipped down the chasm, swinging Lara’s rope back and forth. Water splashed off her head and trickled down her face. It all landed on her hands that were holding onto Kurtis. She barred her teeth as she struggled to hold on.

Kurtis finally got a rope from his backpack. He thrust it up to Lara and tried to press his legs against the wall to keep him up.

Lara swung up her legs and pinned them as hard as she could against the wall, under Kurtis’ back. He grabbed onto one of her legs with his free hand, still pushing on the wall.

Lara worked as quickly as possible with the rope. After she had attached one end of the rope to her safety line, she frantically snapped the ring into Kurtis’ harness.

Kurtis let go of Lara’s leg, and let his feet drop from the wall. Both of them hung by the rope, catching their breath.

“Close one,” Kurtis sighed.

Lara took in a few deep breaths of air. “I sure hope this trip gets even better!” she exclaimed.

Kurtis looked up and scowled. “As long as it doesn’t involve rain.” They were ready to move on again a moment later, but first they had to get more ropes since they had reached the end of the first one. Lara attached another two hundred foot rope to the one they were currently on with heavy duty clamps. Together, they continued to repel further into the chasm.

The sky finally began to clear. Sparse white clouds soon replaced the dark ones, and the hot sun came out from hiding. The heavy winds turned to the slightest breeze, sending heat waves rippling back into place.

Ferdinand smiled at his companions. "I think they've made it," he exclaimed. Feuerbach, Ferdinand's assistant, grinned. "Excellent. These *are* the only ones who can find Tsumeb – and even then it's going to be a challenge."

"My only concern is that they bring me back the elephant, from the Pond of Transformation," Ferdinand declared.

Feuerbach nodded. "And you still haven't decided what we're going to do when we have the elephant. Or, how we're going to destroy you-know-who."

Ferdinand frowned. "Yes, we still have quite a bit of planning to do," he said as he eyed a photograph of Lara and Kurtis.

About half an hour later, Lara and Kurtis had reached the bottom of the second rope. Fortunately enough, they didn't need to attach another, since they had come to a dead end.

"Is this it?" Kurtis asked.

Lara unclipped herself from her safety line and hopped onto the ground. "I doubt it," she answered "I have a feeling we'll have to take a little detour."

Lara led the way into a small opening. The ceiling was very low and they had to crouch low. After proceeding ten feet or so, the ceiling gradually increased. It was pitch black in the cavern. They turned their flashlights on and lit an extra flare.

Soft moans echoed off the walls. The air was heavy and damp. Bats flew by them, and jagged pieces of the cave stuck out in several places. They continued on, following the passage as it twisted and turned.

“Think this ever ends?” asked Kurtis.

“Of course,” Lara replied, “there should be another break around here somewhere.”

Crunch.

“What was that?”

Lara looked down. “Bones.”

“Human?”

“Looks like it.”

Kurtis laughed. “*This* is how far they got?”

Lara frowned. “If this is it, now I really do want to see what’s up ahead!”

“Is there actually anything that frightens you?”

Lara turned her head to look at him. “Nothing I’ve encountered so far.”

The Emperor nodded with satisfaction. “Yes, that does sound like a good idea. The only problem, however, is how exactly are we going to do it?”

One of his men smiled as he held up a knife and motioned it slicing across his neck.

Ferdinand scowled. “No, that won’t do. They always seem to survive whatever comes their way. We’re going to need something more powerful. We must ensure that

their existence seizes to remain here. I want everything to be destroyed. There must not be any evidence in the end.”

After another half hour of prowling through the endless cave, Lara and Kurtis finally came to another pit. Lara bent down and tossed a new flare over the side.

SPLASH!

“Care for a swim?” Lara asked. She walked to the edge and bent down. After grabbing it with both hands, she gracefully flipped over, and fell towards the water.

SPLASH!

“Come on Kurtis,” Lara called up, “the water’s great.”

Kurtis walked to the edge, and jumped in. A second later Lara surfaced behind him. They were in a small air pocket. She lit a flare, and motioned for Kurtis to follow.

After taking in a deep breath, he swam under the water, and followed Lara who was already ahead. His backpack made it hard to swim, but Kurtis pushed on. Lara had swam very far in just a minute, and was running out of air quickly. She didn’t see any more air holes up ahead, so she reached with one hand into a small pocket in her knapsack. Lara withdrew two aqua lungs. Before putting hers on, she waited until Kurtis caught up with her, then handed one to him.

Over six hundred feet above them lay dark clouds. More were moving in by the second. The wind uttered a soft moan, then began to swirl the sand around. The Emperor stood outside looking up at the sky.

“They’re getting close,” he whispered, “I have to hurry.” He walked swiftly towards his private hut. A few bystanders looked at him with confusion. What was going on?

Something sharp grazed by Lara's leg. She winced in pain as some of her blood seeped from the wound into the murky water. Lara shot around, just in time to see a long razor sharp tail disappear into a small hole in the wall.

Kurtis saw Lara spin around in front of him. It was too dark to see why she had done so, but he sensed that something was wrong. He lit a flare, and swam to her side.

Lara grabbed his arm, and made movements with her hands trying to tell him what happened. She pointed to her wounded leg, then to the hole where the creature had disappeared. She took a big breath of air from her aqua lung. Lara raised both of her hands beside her, questioning what had just happened. Then, she pointed at Kurtis.

Use your power to look through the wall! Lara thought. She pointed to the wall, then his eyes.

Kurtis nodded at Lara. He turned to face the wall, then closed his eyes. As Kurtis concentrated, he pulled his arms upward through the water. He looked beyond the wall, into the room beside them. At first it was pitch black, but very slowly his vision adjusted. Kurtis gasped at what he saw, instantly snapping him out of his trance. He opened his eyes, and pushed at Lara to swim. Kurtis' eyes were very large. Now leading the way, Kurtis swam as fast as he could.

Lara frantically swam behind him. What had he seen? Suddenly, something shot out at her. She grabbed her switchblade, and thrashed at the water around her. A strange fish-like creature sped through the water right for the back of Lara's neck. It was a dark brown colour, five feet in length, twelve with its tail. On either side of its rather large head were two tiny silver eyes which seemed to glow in the dark water. It opened its

mouth, revealing several sharp, pointy teeth. It swam faster through the water, picking up speed.

Lara shot around, with the knife held out in front of her. She thrust it into something! The large fish twitched, and tried to pull free. Lara pushed the knife in deeper, and watched as bits of its insides began to seep from its gills, along with a great amount of blood. She yanked the knife out from its body with one swift pull.

About twenty minutes later, Kurtis and Lara sat on a ledge. They had finally reached the end of the water tunnel.

“All that swimming tires you out!” exclaimed Lara.

Kurtis nodded. “Especially with these backpacks.” Both of them sat with their backs to the wall, knapsacks beside one another.

“How’s your leg?” Kurtis asked.

“It’s alright,” Lara replied. She had three long cuts on her leg that were still bleeding. Some of her skin hung in little flaps. “What did you see back there, through the wall?”

Kurtis rubbed his eyes. “Those fish you described. *Hundreds* of them.”

Lara frowned. “Hundreds? I wonder what they are? Should bring a couple back home with me to put in my aquarium. It would make getting that key more of a challenge.”

“It would probably be gobbled up even before you had a chance to get it,” he laughed.

Lara smiled as she munched on a chocolate bar. “Ready to continue?”

Ferdinand nodded. "Perfect." He stood in front of a large metal cage. One chain hung from the ceiling, others from the floor and walls. "This is going to work out just fine."

After Lara and Kurtis climbed into another part of the cave, they decided to call it a day. They were in a large room with a relatively high ceiling, high enough for them to stand up in. Kurtis had just put up the inflatable tent, while Lara un-rolled the sleeping bags. One flare was all that was needed to light the cave. It had been placed in the transparent case of an un-used aqua lung. That way they could keep it in the tent without fear of it catching fire.

Lara opened one of the food packs with her switchblade. It was very similar to ration packs that were used in the army. Just add water, a chemical reaction will occur, and you'll have a nice hot meal in seconds!

After both had finished eating, they got into their sleeping bags, and soon fell fast asleep. The flare flickered softly on Lara's eyelids as they fluttered about. Her dreams were once again full of mystical creatures covered in blood. She fought endlessly against them all night...

The next morning, Lara woke up early. She unzipped her sleeping bag, and quietly climbed out of the tent. The entire cave was filled with a heavy fog. Lara lit a new flare and replaced it with the old one in the aqua lung. She found her knapsack which had been placed near one of the walls. After having a drink of water, she returned to the water tunnel. Lara stood at the edge and peered into the water, holding a pistol at her side. What had they gotten themselves into? Something surfaced in the water as soon as Lara had turned her back... Once she had returned to their camp, Kurtis was up.

“Morning,” Lara said.

Kurtis nodded his head. “All set to continue?”

“Ready and waiting!” As Lara deflated the tent, Kurtis was busy rolling up sleeping bags. Within ten minutes their knapsacks were packed, once again.

“Do you still have the map of Tsumeb?” Lara asked.

Kurtis reached into one of the small pockets in his shorts, and pulled out a soggy, crumpled piece of paper. “*Had* it,” he replied.

Lara frowned. “Now we know that not everything is waterproof,” she sighed. “That’s ok, we don’t even need a map. I never have had one in the past, so why need one now?”

“True. Ok then, lets go!” Kurtis exclaimed. It became darker by the second as the two ventured deeper into the cave. Both had to turn on their flashlights which were gradually beginning to dim...

Kurtis and Lara’s faces glowed brightly from the large crackling fire. Their pictures had been placed in a metal pan on top of blood red coals. The Emperor sat on an elevated stool while a witch doctor sat cross legged on the floor opposite to him. Both of them were in a small hut which was just big enough for both of them. The witch doctor performed several different rituals there everyday.

Ferdinand had his eyes closed as he concentrated on the doctor. They were murmuring different words over and over again, in a language Ferdinand didn’t even know. As he did this, the witch doctor would take handfuls of different spices and herbs from various pouches. He would then sprinkle them on top of the pictures.

Ferdinand nodded his head as the murmuring put him in a trance. He had a feeling that everything would turn out just fine. It was time to stop them once and for all, with all the evil which was contained within them.

Approximately half an hour after they had left their camp, Kurtis and Lara had come to another dead end. They had entered a very tall cave with ledges and little gaps in the walls.

“Looks like we’ve taken a wrong turn,” Kurtis said.

“Not quite. See those ledges? It’s a dead giveaway. Wait here.” Lara dropped her knapsack on the floor of the cavern. She walked swiftly to a block of hardened dirt, and climbed onto it. Lara walked to the wall, and jumped straight up, catching a hold of a small crack in the wall.

“Are you sure you know what you're doing?” Kurtis called up at her.

Lara laughed. “I didn’t build the assault course for decoration, or just for Winston to use.” Kurtis grinned, and watched her carefully. She quickly pulled her legs up, and firmly planted them on the wall. With a swift kick upwards, Lara did a perfect back flip onto a ledge behind her.

“Impressive,” Kurtis clapped from below. She turned so her back was to the wall, and looked straight ahead. There was a walkway leading to another ledge. Naturally anyone would have cautiously proceeded. However, Lara had been around for awhile – she knew a break-away floor when she saw one!

Very quickly, Lara ran forwards. The first section of the floor rumbled beneath her feet, and began to crumble.

“HEADS UP!” she yelled. Kurtis ran to the opposite side of the room, taking cover under a ledge. Lara jumped forwards, bypassing a couple more parts of the floor, and continued to run until she had reached the next ledge. She stood on the very edge of one of the sides, and jumped upwards, grabbing a hold of another ledge. Lara pulled herself up, doing a handstand along the way.

The next part was going to be a little tricky. She needed to sprint forwards, and rely on her momentum to bring her to the next landing, which extended from one side to the other. The ledge that she was currently on, allowed her just enough room for her to get a good running start.

Lara pressed her back snugly against the wall. She looked once again at the gap she needed to clear, then shot off, sprinting at full speed. Lara jumped off the ledge at the last second. She flew into the air, kicking her legs, and slightly moving her arms. Lara caught a hold of the opposite ledge. She hung for a moment, then pulled herself up. As soon as Lara stood up, she heard a loud rumbling sound, coming from her left.

“NOT YOUR STOMACH, IS IT?” Kurtis called up to her. *BANG!* An enormous boulder crashed onto the ledge, breaking a section of it. Lara didn't even need to look. She sprinted full speed ahead as the boulder rolled after her.

As soon as she reached the end of the ledge, Lara realized there wasn't anywhere else to jump to. Without hesitation, she dropped down, hanging from the side. The large boulder rolled by overhead, making the entire ledge tremble. Lara hoisted herself back up, and watched as it smashed right into the wall.

A large dust and dirt cloud instantly erupted when the boulder crashed. As the air slowly began to clear, Lara looked up and smiled. The boulder had broken the wall,

leaving a gap for her to climb into. At the back of the little room there was a lever on the wall.

“So that’s where you’ve been hiding,” Lara said. She walked up to it, and pulled down hard. Instantly, the floor Lara was standing on dropped, releasing her into a chute.

“Woah!” Lara slid down the chute, then when she came to another wall, would slide the other way. Eventually, she slid right down to the bottom, through a camouflaged door.

“Welcome back,” Kurtis said.

Lara smiled, then walked swiftly towards the other side of the room. Part of the dirt wall had been moved aside.

“Hurry, because if this is a timed run, *you’ll* be doing the acrobatics to re-open it,” Lara joked. Both of them proceeded through the opening, and once they were in, the wall slid back into place.

Lara’s face had now turned a blue colour. The Emperor stared at her picture while the witch doctor continued to add various salts to the pan.

“What’s happening now?” he asked.

The doctor looked up into his eyes. “They’re there now, but I cannot say if they will make it. Here,” he handed Ferdinand a small clay cup, “drink this. You’ll need all the power you can get to ensure your victory.”

Ferdinand drank all of its contents, coughing as he swallowed the disgusting liquid.

The witch doctor laughed. “Don’t like it?”

The Emperor shook his head.

“No one ever said that revenge was sweet.” The doctor gathered up his things, then slowly left the hut.

The cave had gotten much darker. Kurtis and Lara had to light two flares each, plus have their flashlights on to see where they were going. They stood in a small room that was just big enough for both of them. On the far side was a hole in the ground, with a ladder that had been made by cut outs of the dirt in the wall. Lara climbed down first, then Kurtis who was not far behind.

A sweet smell of incense drifted throughout the hut. The Emperor lay in bed, tossing and turning. He could not fall asleep, for all he could think about was the days to come. Ferdinand knew he shouldn't worry so much, since he had prepared for this. The cage was all set up, he drank medicine from the witch doctor, had a small army of twenty men, and had played out every possible scenario in his head. He had been waiting years for this, and now that it had finally come, he was going to ensure that his plans carried right through to the end...

Kurtis and Lara stood in front of a large wooden door, which had a stone plaque hanging from it.

“Ye who tries to find the Lost City of Tsumeb will become lost themselves. Turn back now, and save yourself.” Lara whispered. She looked up at Kurtis and grinned. “I’ve encountered many warnings on my adventures, and yet this is another one I’m not going to listen to.”

Kurtis chuckled. “Then lets go!” he pushed on the door, but it wouldn’t open. Kurtis pushed harder, throwing all of his weight on the door. It still wouldn’t budge.

Lara stepped up to the door. “Allow me.” She reached out, and pulled a tiny lever that was in the wall, to the right of the door.

“Could have done that a minute ago,” he huffed. Lara snickered as the wooden door slowly swung open. In unison, Kurtis and Lara gasped at what they saw before them...

Outside, the weather dramatically changed, yet again. The wind began to howl, and the rain came in as fast as it fell. The sky was very dark, except for the occasional burst of lightning. Ferdinand sat on his bed looking out the window. First his hands started to tremble, then his whole body began to shudder uncontrollably. He grabbed a handful of spices that the witch doctor had given him, and sprinkled them all around him as he murmured strange words to himself.

An animal's cry echoed around the walls. It was high pitched, and frightened. A gentle wind was blowing, lightly flapping Lara’s braid against her back. Kurtis and her had entered a new place. A new village in fact. They were looking out at the Lost City of Tsumeb.

“Definitely *not* how I expected it,” Lara remarked.

“Expected flowers and happy people?” Kurtis asked.

Lara gave him a look. “At least with a little more life to it.” Tsumeb was very dark, and secluded looking. There were several huts, all made out of mud. Each of them had been painted with dull colours. Unbelievably, there were many trees which surrounded the huts. They were black and thin, right out of a Halloween movie. Dark

shadows surrounded every single object, making the place seem darker than it actually was. Old clay pots and other household items were scattered at the sides of some of the homes. Some were broken, others still intact.

“Want to camp out here tonight, and be fresh for tomorrow's search?”

Lara shrugged her shoulders. “Sure, why not.” They went to the closest hut, and went inside. She lit another flare in her aqua lung, and placed it on a shelf as they got out their sleeping bags and laid them out. Lara carefully closed the old door which had been made out of long branches, wrapped tightly together with small vines. They hopped into their own beds, and Kurtis was soon fast asleep.

The flare which was beginning to die flickered across Lara's eyes. She was wide awake, and alert. The animal cry they had heard earlier returned, this time, with more than one companion. Lara wanted to know what was making the noise, so naturally, she went to find out.

After she carefully closed the door, Lara stepped away from the hut. It was much darker than when they first arrived. She lit a flare, and proceeded with caution. A shrill cry came somewhere in front of her. Lara grabbed a pistol in her right hand, and held it up at her side.

A moment passed, nothing jumped out of her. She continued on, alert for any sudden movements. The flare Lara carried was very bright. About twenty feet in front of her, was a massive hut. As she drew nearer, Lara could see that it too, like the other ones, was made out of mud.

Over a million years ago, people made the walls from sun-baked mud. Today they were still intact, but a little crumbly here and there. The outside of this one was

phenomenal. Brilliant yellow and red paint had been used to draw mysterious patterns all around the outside. Black paint outlined each shape and picture, with a thick border.

Lara walked up to the grass door, and pushed it inwards. It was fairly dark inside, since there weren't any windows. She moved her flare around in front of her as she viewed the room she was in.

In the center of the floor, was a giant circular rug. At a glance Lara could tell that it had been made out of snake skin – definitely not the softest, nor the prettiest. Several logs rested horizontally along the walls. It looked as if they had once been used as chairs. There were three connecting doors to the room she was in. Lara entered through the closest one on her left.

As she moved her flare around the room, it was obvious that it had once been a bedroom. A large grass bed lay on the floor on the opposite side of the room. A few twigs had been attached to the wall, weaved into a neat design. A small straw basket lay beside the bed, along with a couple cups.

Lara sat down on the bed, and picked the basket up. Inside, was a small wood carving, which she examined closely. The wooden figure was the length of her thumb. It appeared to be some sort of an animal. Pointy fangs stretched from its mouth, and long, sharp claws from its hands.

She turned it over, surprised at what was on the back. It was an exact replica of the front, however, where the animal face once lay was a human face. His face was twisted into a snarl, barring his teeth. Lara tucked it into one of the pockets in her vest, then exited the room.

The second room Lara entered looked like a small pantry. There were many clay pots and cups that were filled with various powders. The last room she went into, had a large straw mat on the floor. At the far end of the room, on the wall, was an enormous picture that had been painted. Lara walked up to it, holding the flare high in the air. The fire flickered off of the paint, making it look as though it was freshly painted.

A few steps led up to a slightly higher landing. In the center, was a woven square box. Lara bent down, and lifted the lid. Inside, buried by a pile of straw, was a small black elephant. She picked it up, and examined it by the light of her flare. It looked like it had been carved out of stone. Lara ran her finger along it, surprised at how smooth it was. She quickly tucked it into her other vest pocket.

After Lara left the hut, she proceeded deeper into the deserted village. Few houses lay ahead as she proceeded into a deep forest. A moment later, her flare took its last breath, then extinguished. She tossed it away, then reached for another one from her knapsack.

Eet, eet! ^{*Ee, ee, eee!*} Lara spun around, her pistol aimed straight in front of her. The loud shrieking sounded around her once again. ^{*Eet, eet, eee!*} Her arm swung to the other side. What was making those noises? Lara's finger moved to pull the trigger, when something as fast as lightning struck her on the back of her head. Lara crumpled to the ground, her legs buckling under her. Two feet away lay her pistol, still loaded...

Kurtis lay in his sleeping bag, sound asleep. One arm hung out, the other tucked inside. A minute later his eyes barely opened, looking at Lara's empty sleeping bag. His eyes closed again as he rolled over, facing a wall of the hut.

When she awoke, Lara couldn't see a thing. Her vision was blurred due to the throbbing pain in her head. After several minutes her eyesight slowly came back. She gently touched the back of her head and felt that her skin was badly torn. Lara squinted a few times and quickly surveyed her surroundings. She was in a very large hut where the ceiling sloped upwards to a point. The floor was completely covered in long pieces of straw which covered the dirt ground.

On each wall, there were large torches which lit up the room. From the ceiling, a small pot hung from a rope, which held a piece of burning wood. About twenty strange beasts had invaded the room. They snarled at one another, baring their pointy fangs.

Lara tried to stand up, but wasn't able to do so since she had been chained to the wall. Her other pistol had been taken away from her. Lara could see one of the creatures holding onto it.

Eet! Eee! One of the beasts scrambled up to Lara. It stuck its hideous face up close to hers, its bright white eyes staring at her. It opened its mouth wide, revealing a set of teeth. Saliva, which was strung from one tooth to another, glistened from the torches. The beast let out a low growl in its throat, then hissed at Lara, some of its saliva spraying onto her face.

“Whew!” Lara gagged, “Haven't heard of a breath mint before, have we?” Its eyes grew wide, and it threw its arms up in rage. The creature cried out, then slashed at Lara with its razor sharp claws.

Lara thrust herself to the side as hard as she could. The beasts' claws grazed her hip, tearing her flesh. They slashed right through her chains and dug into part of the wall. Without a moments hesitation, Lara jumped up and kicked the beast squarely in its

stomach. Another animal crept slowly up to Lara. She back flipped right over it, and punched it in the back of its head.

Two more beasts were running towards her. Saliva dripped from their hideous mouths, their claws arched for attack. Lara smirked, then shot forwards running as fast as she could. The beasts continued forward, any second they would collide. In an instant, Lara jumped upwards, grabbed a hold of the hanging pot, and kicked out with both of her legs. The beasts were knocked to the floor. *BANG!* Another creature began to fire at Lara with one of her pistols!

“That,” Lara snarled, “is *mine*.” She quickly forced all of her weight forwards, swinging from the pot. *BANG! B-BANG!* Lara clenched her teeth as she swung around the entire room. Suddenly, she reached out with a hand and grabbed a torch from the wall.

About ten creatures were still after her. Holding onto the rope with her feet and only one arm, Lara hung extended from the rope. As she spun around the room, she swung the torch at the hideous creatures. They screamed in agony as their black fur caught fire. After one more trip, Lara had scorched them all, except one.

BANG! BANG! Lara dropped the torch to the dirt ground, and retrieved her switchblade from her boot. She flicked it open, and held it steady in her hand. *BANG!* The next bullet sailed right for her hand, she whipped it to the side, letting go of the knife. As it began to fall, Lara dropped backwards, letting go of the rope. She landed on both feet, catching the knife a second later.

The creature made eye contact with Lara. It screeched at her, threatening her with its fangs.

“Showtime,” Lara smiled.

BANG! Lara side flipped to the right, then back to the left as the creature fired at her repeatedly.

“You’ll never get me that way,” Lara exclaimed. The beast hissed at her, throwing the pistol to the ground. It shot forwards suddenly, ready to rip her throat with its claws.

Lara let out a small yawn, then hurled her switchblade at the creature. It plunged right between its eyes, puncturing deep into its head. Lara walked over to it, knelt down, and examined the wound. Blood spurted and sprayed from it, mixing with the dirt and straw on the ground.

Lara ripped her knife from its head. She wiped it off on her shorts, then returned it to her boot. On the way out of the hut, Lara retrieved her pistol happy to have it back snug in her holster.

As she stepped out of the hut, the rising sun reflected something in Lara’s eyes. She looked behind her, eyebrows raised. As the room grew brighter, Lara could see water under the dirt. She walked over to the small pond, tapping her foot into it. There seemed to be a sheet of glass preventing her from getting to the water.

Lara took out her pistol, and fired a few bullets into the ground. Glass sprayed everywhere as it exploded all around her! Lara shielded her eyes with her arm. A moment later, she looked up, in complete awe. All of the glass fragments were frozen in the air. They glistened against the sunlight, sparkling. Lara walked around the perimeter of the small pond looking at the crystalline pieces. It was remarkable, really. It was if someone had dropped a glass mug on the floor, and froze the image. All the pieces hung in different angles, height, and size.

Lara reached out, and pushed on one of the pieces. It wouldn't budge, it was held rock solid in place. She hurried out of the hut to get Kurtis.

Just a minute later, after a long rest, Kurtis awoke. He turned over, opened his eyes and saw Lara wasn't in bed. He blinked again. Where was she?!

“KURTIS! GET UP! QUICK!” Lara came running back to their hut. She threw the door open, and dashed inside.

“What is it?”

“I think I've found the pond,” Lara happily replied. As they packed their things, she told him all about her night.

Ferdinand paced around his room. Feuerbach watched from the doorway. “What's taking them so long?” he growled.

Feuerbach sighed. “It shouldn't be much longer now.”

“I've been waiting a very long time now,” he replied, “I have to destroy...”

“...Please! Be quiet now. You need all the energy you can get,” Feuerbach interrupted. The Emperor wiped his brow with the back of his hand. He snatched up a cup of water and drank it quickly as his gaze drifted out the window...

Lara led the way back to the hut. It took them about half an hour to get there, from where Kurtis had spent the night. Very cautiously Lara stepped inside. The smell of blood wafted throughout the air. Dead creatures lay on the ground, dirt covering their bodies.

“And how come *I* wasn't invited to the party?” Kurtis remarked.

Lara laughed, "It sure was wild." They both walked over to the small pond. Kurtis reached out and touched one of the glass pieces.

"Fascinating."

"There's more." Lara pointed down at the water. It shined so bright it almost hurt to look at it. The walls were made up of glass fragments, each casting light off one another. There was no need for flares here!

"What are you waiting for?" Kurtis asked. "Dive in!" About a minute later, Lara and Kurtis were making their way through the endless tunnel. She handed him back an aqua lung, and put the last one on herself. There was a very strong current which pulled them through quite quickly. Lara really only had to keep balance along the way.

Suddenly, without any warning, the tunnel dropped. Both fell downwards, landing in a large pool of water. Lara kicked to the surface, and looked around. They were in a small room. The pool they landed in was only shoulder height deep. The water looked like there were thousands of crystals floating around in it. Along the perimeter of the room was a small ledge. Lara climbed onto it, taking her aqua lung off. She rested her hands on her hips as she watched Kurtis come out of the pool.

"Looks like a dead end," Lara exclaimed.

"Can't be."

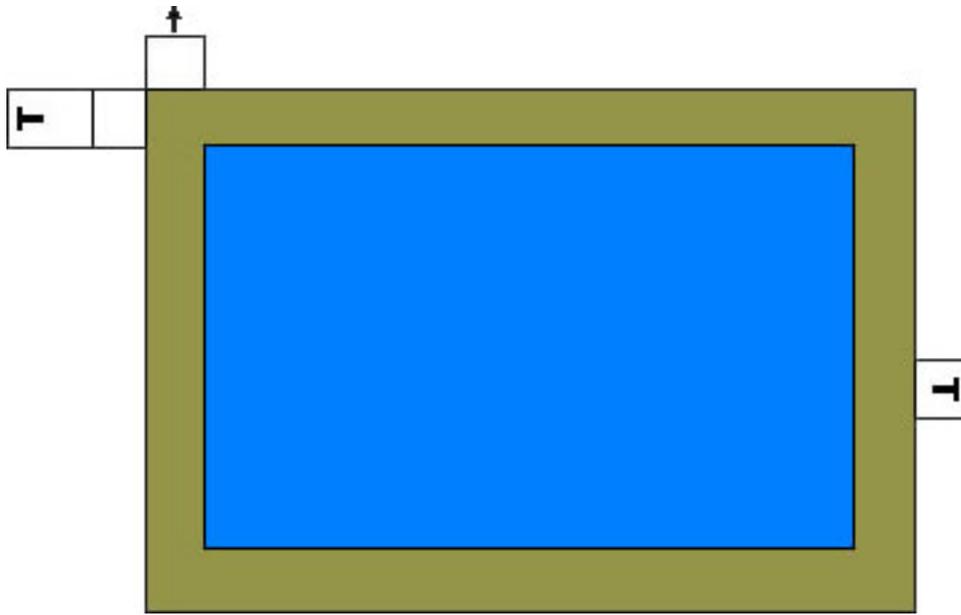
"This *is* the Pond of Transformation...I hope," Lara replied.

Kurtis shrugged his shoulders. "There's got to be some lever or button around here somewhere." He began to search along the wall feeling for something which would let them out.

Lara frowned as she thought about where they were. “The Pond of Transformation...transformation: to change in form or appearance.” She shook her head. It just wasn’t coming to her. Lara sighed as she tilted her head up, and gasped.

“What is it?” Kurtis called to her.

Lara pointed at the ceiling where the water reflected off of the stone. All the crystals from the water formed a picture:



“It’s a map!” Lara exclaimed. “See those squares? I’m sure they’re blocks. The T’s must be levers of some sort.”

Kurtis ran to the right side of the room to where the map showed a single block by itself. He pushed on it with all his strength. It didn’t budge. He pulled on it without any success either.

After studying the map for another moment, Lara smiled. "I've got it." She walked quickly over to the block which was on the top of the map. She hopped back, then thrust herself forward, pushing as hard as she could. It moved in!

Kurtis ran over to where she was. He pulled the block (left to the one Lara pushed on the map) twice until it revealed a gap. She ran out of the space she was in, then entered the short hallway.

"Just as I thought," Kurtis said, "a lever!"

Lara pulled it down. Across, on the other side of the pond, part of the wall swung open.

"That was too easy," she grinned. Kurtis ran over to the door, and pulled a lever that was inside.

"Nothing's happening," Lara said.

Kurtis frowned. "Probably takes a minute or so to kick in." Both stood silently, waiting for a door, or something to open. All of a sudden, the water started to bubble. Lara gazed at the pool as hot steam rose from the water. A second later it started to boil! Some water began to spurt onto the ledge near them. Both took cover in one of the small passageways.

"What's going on?" Kurtis demanded.

"They wouldn't call it the Pond of *Transformation* for nothing," Lara laughed. In less than a minute, a large stone pillar had risen from the bottom of the pool. It stood about three feet above the water. On it, rested an ivory elephant. "That's it!" Lara exclaimed, "That's the elephant we need!"

Kurtis scowled. “But how are we going to get it?” He pointed back to the pool. The boiling water was changing to lava!

Lara shrugged her shoulders. “Easy.” Without any warning, she ran forwards and jumped towards the pillar. She landed on one foot, then quickly caught her balance. Hot lava bubbled all around her. She grabbed the elephant, and secured it in her vest.

“Got yourself in a pickle now, Lara!” Kurtis exclaimed. The hot molten liquid was slowly beginning to rise. The temperature in the room was getting hotter by the second, which sent sweat dripping down Kurtis’ face. The water which had been pouring into the room before was now red hot lava! Lara looked around frantically, then suddenly, she had an idea.

“Push the lever back up,” she replied, “it should change it back.”

Kurtis grinned, “You’re quite a thinker!” He ran back into the short hallway, and pulled the lever back up. Kurtis felt a rumbling beneath him. “Get ready,” he said...

A dark cloud settled above Tsumeb. Children ran back to the safety of their huts, while animals scurried into hiding.

“They’ve got it,” Ferdinand whispered. He stood up quickly and went outside, where several armed men joined him. A moment later, large, thick raindrops began to fall from the sky. Ferdinand raised his arms, and outstretched them.

"COME TO ME!" he roared, "YOUR TIME HAS RUN OUT!" he breathed in heavily as the rain splashed down his body, and into the sand...

The pillar in which Lara was standing started to shake. She looked around, desperately trying to figure a way out. The lava around her hadn't changed back to water. Bubbles popped everywhere, spraying the hot liquid in different directions.

Suddenly, the pillar started to rise. Lara looked up, and saw a small section of the ceiling moving aside.

“Kurtis!” Lara called, “Jump onto the pillar!”

“You have to be nuts!” he yelled back, “there isn't room for both of us!”

“There's going to have to be, unless you'd like to stay here forever.” Kurtis hesitated before making a running jump to the pillar. Lara grabbed onto him and held tight. Unexpectedly, the pillar shot upwards, sending Lara and Kurtis flying right through the hole in the ceiling!

“Woah!” Lara yelled, “talk about express service to the top!” The pillar continued to rise at the same speed. Lara and Kurtis had to hold onto each others arms to keep from loosing balance. They stopped abruptly. Lara tripped forwards from the sudden jolt. She looked upwards, then jumped to grab a ledge. Lara climbed out of the hole, and onto solid ground. Kurtis joined her a second later.

“Well, well,” a voice said, “welcome back.”

Both of them turned around. Ferdinand stood before them, with several men.

Lara nodded. “Thanks.”

“How did it go?”

“Quite quickly, actually,” Kurtis laughed.

“Do you have the elephant?” Ferdinand asked.

“Yes,” Lara replied.

“Excellent! May I have it?”

She slowly unzipped her vest pocket, then hesitantly handed it over.

“At last!” he cried, “may you say your final prayers!”

Kurtis’ face went blank. Lara opened her mouth in shock as she grabbed her pistol.

Ferdinand looked up at everyone. “Stand back.” He took a knife from his belt, and with one swift movement, jabbed it into the elephants back. It split open in two, revealing a small piece of paper. The Emperor dropped the broken elephant onto the ground, carefully removing the fragile scroll. He held it up in front of him, eyes wide with excitement, a hint of fear.

“Domintio per malum,” he whispered.

Lara frowned. What did that mean?

“Domintio per malum: power through evil,” Kurtis answered, as if reading her mind.

“Power through evil? That can’t be good!” Lara exclaimed. Suddenly, smoke began to creep out of the ground. It whirled upwards, spiraling around itself.

“Domintio per malum, DOMINTIO PER MALUM!” the Emperor screamed.

Lara and Kurtis hopped back. Something was definitely wrong.

“DOMINTIO PER MALUM!” he shrieked. Then, as fast as lightning, a huge burst of light hit him. The smoke grabbed at him, encircling his body.

“I can’t see him anymore!” Lara exclaimed. She looked over at Kurtis. “Kurtis?!” He wasn’t answering her. He was deep in trance.

“Rargh!”

Lara was struck from behind – hard. She dropped forwards, doing a reverse roll. The smoke around her backed away, and turned a reddish colour. When she got back up, Lara was holding a pistol right out in front of her, wrist twisted to the side.

Ferdinand stood in front of her! His eyes were clouded over, his face twisted into a hideous frown. Lara didn't even have a chance to move. He sprang onto her, knocking her to the ground. Her pistol spun away from reach, into the smoke.

“*Ugh!*” Lara kicked up as hard as she could. Ferdinand went flying backwards, almost in slow motion. He landed on his back, and before he had a chance to get up, Lara already had her switchblade snug at his neck.

“You'd better tell me what's going on here,” she said through clenched teeth, “or I'm not going to be such a nice girl.”

Ferdinand coughed a response.

“Try again.” Lara pushed a bit harder on the blade. A thin line of blood seeped from the corner.

Another cough.

“Alright then, if this is how you want to play.” Lara picked him up by his neck, and pushed him roughly away.

“You fool!” he cried, “you can't destroy me!” He lunged at Lara, teeth barred like a wild animal. Lara jumped to the side, missing his powerful blow. She turned back around, and began to sprint towards him – blade ready.

Kurtis' mind drifted away. He fought to bring it back, but couldn't. A strong force wouldn't allow him. He saw the Emperor, and the ivory elephant. A man stood beside

him, almost identical in appearance. A black elephant was beside him. But what did it mean? Kurtis watched as it told him everything he needed to know.

Lara gritted her teeth as she went to thrust her switchblade at Ferdinand. He was far too quick. Before Lara could react, he kicked her shin. She stumbled to the ground where the smoke made a heavy blanket around her. She got to her feet, in a stealth position. Lara whirled around, expecting to see Ferdinand right there. All she could see was smoke.

Lara dropped to the ground into a commando crawl. She made her way in the direction she thought he was in. What she didn't know, was that he was trailing close behind.

Ferdinand grinned as he closed in on Lara. Strange claws had taken over his hands. He snickered at the thought of tearing her flesh.

Kurtis' eyes snapped open. It took him a moment before he could get his surroundings. He had to find Lara, and quick!

Lara continued forwards. She didn't have a good feeling inside. Without a moments hesitation, she whipped around into a sitting position and got a little trigger happy with an uzi.

BANG! BANG, BANG!

“Argh!” he yelled.

Kurtis jumped through the smoke suddenly. He hurled his chirugai at Ferdinand.

“Quick Lara!” Kurtis yelled, “the black elephant!”

Lara frowned as she retrieved it from her vest. What had this have to do with the elephant? She tossed it over to Kurtis. He threw it down to the ground where it broke in two pieces. Kurtis removed a piece of paper from inside, and gave it to Lara.

Ferdinand stumbled to his feet. “You can’t stop me this easily! I’ve been waiting to get revenge for a long time now!” He staggered towards Lara, claws outstretched.

After a quick glance at the paper, Lara grinned. “I can see right through you silly. Next time use a paper bag, not plastic.”

“What?!”

“Glass turns to fire as ice turns to dust. Be gone beast! Go back to the past, these words upon you I cast.”

“No!” he wailed, “You can’t do that!”

Lara put her hands on her hips. “I just did.” She turned and walked to Kurtis’ side as his cries sped across the horizon.

A moment later the earth re-absorbed the red smoke. Ferdinand was laying on the ground, getting ready to stand.

“It didn’t work!” Lara exclaimed.

“Yes it did!” he cried out. “Thank you both!”

Lara looked confused. “What’s going on here?”

The Emperor sighed. “It’s a long story. You see, when Tsumeb disappeared, it was because of the Emperor of that time. He was the one who used the ivory elephant to make the earthquake.”

“I still don’t get what you mean,” Lara said.

“His body was re-incarnated into the elephant. He swore that he would have revenge one day. He wanted to rule the entire world! But some people found out about the elephant. They captured him, and tortured him to death. His final words were his plans in his next life.”

“So you knew all along?” Kurtis asked.

He nodded his head. “I didn’t think it would turn out like this, though. I thought he would appear, not take over *my* body! There is something I’d like you to hear, though. The people who found out about him found a journal of his. One of the entries read:

‘A long time ago when the sands were still,

I stood outside alone at will.

A dark figure came to me, and presented a small token which would set me free.

Life had been cruel, and life had been unfair!

I now possessed an ultimate power,

And for everything else I showed no care.

It was a power that could alter time,

A power that would aid you in any crime.’

“Why didn’t you give us all of the details before hand?” Lara asked.

“I didn’t want to scare you away. I *really* wanted him to be stopped, because I knew that one day he’d be back.”

“Fair enough,” Kurtis said. “So now we’re finished?”

“Yes, thank you both very much. You have helped Tsumeb beat an evil force which has been alive for a very long time. But before you go, please accept a small token.” He handed Lara a small wood carving of one of the beasts who kidnapped her.

“Definitely memorable!” she laughed. Ferdinand handed Kurtis a wood carving as well.

“Did you make these?” he asked.

The Emperor shook his head. “No, they were given to me from someone in China.”

After they had said their goodbyes, Lara and Kurtis hopped onto the plane that had brought them to Tsumeb. As they flew into the air, Lara looked out her window and watched the city as it grew smaller. Something caught her eye. She squinted and was just barely able to read a message written in smoke: *I'm always watching you.*

Good, Lara thought, then maybe you'll learn something!

A week later...

Lara sat on her bed, legs crossed. It was before seven, but she couldn't get back to sleep. Something had been bugging her.

“I'm always watching you,” she recited. “There has to be more to it.” As she pondered this a little while longer, Winston brought her in some tea.

“You've really got to do something with that statue! It looks like it's staring at me, every time I walk by it.”

“Will do,” Lara replied. As soon as he left the room, she jumped out of bed and picked up the woodcarving. As she examined it, the sun reflected off something in its eye.

“I wonder...” Lara whispered. She grabbed a knife from her drawer and carefully cut into the wood. She pulled the back off the statue, and grinned. Inside was a tiny metal box. Lara opened it and took out a typed letter.

Dear Lara,

Clever of you to find this. Of course, we knew you would. Ferdinand informed us that you would be aiding them in their attempt to rid Tsumeb of the original Emperor.

Congratulations on yet another successful adventure! We hope you enjoyed your journey.

We are writing because we have a proposition for you...

After Lara finished the note, the phone rang.

“...MP5 and M16? Yes, that’s fine. Headsets and infrared? Lasers? – *Now* you’re talking.”

When she finished her conversation, Lara called down to Winston for a tea to go. Her next stop? Lets just say she's going to have to call Zip, and dig out her old catsuit!

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