

CYOA 2

You decide to take a closer look at the dragon altar. Despite the Mayan architecture, the statue is not designed at all like Quetzalcoatl you've witnessed before. Quetzalcoatl was depicted more as a winged serpent, whereas this is a Western, six-limbed dragon.

You hold your glow stick up close and squint your eyes in the dim light. While the rest of the altar is coated in dark moss and mushrooms, the statue at its top is as pure and clean as the day it was carved. The white stone appears almost reflective, despite its coarse appearance. After some closer inspection, you also notice a tiny emerald representing the dragon's eye. The gem is small, but very pure.

Though a part of you doesn't want to desecrate such a unique find, your curiosity whispers silent reassurances. You reach out to touch the stone's surface... and immediately cry out in pain and seize your wrist before you consciously realize what's happening. Though your finger only just brushed the stone, your entire hand feels like it is being forced against a hot stove, and it is spreading.

You drop to the floor, only aware of your own screaming after you stop to take a breath. You squeeze your forearm in a fruitless attempt to dull the pain, yet it continues to spread, all the way up to your shoulder now. You fall on your side, gasping for air and clawing at the afflicted arm. To your horror, your skin begins to slough off in long sheets beneath your fingers. Yet something seems to be preventing you from bleeding.

You scream again as a wave of pain courses through your body, too intense for you to identify a source anymore. Each rapid beat of your heart seems to jet fire through your veins. You continue to claw at your skin, flesh and clothing alike tearing away beneath your grasp. The pain fades marginally, so you get to your hands and knees, clenching your teeth so hard it seems your teeth might shatter. If they did, you doubt you would even feel it.

You gulp in air as fast as your lungs will allow you to circulate it in and out of your body. You try to calm yourself by staring at your hands clenching and unclenching on the ground in front of you. A wave of panic jabs at your stomach when you see them. Beneath tattered shreds of skin, your hands are covered in a glossy, bumpy, dark surface. Sharp, curved claws have erupted from your fingertips. As you convulse with the next wave of pain, they rasp noisily across the stone floor, cleaning narrow swaths of moss from the stone floor.

Your skin burns and itches simultaneously, but the intense urge to scratch is matched by the pain it causes when you do. Beneath your skin, more of the glossy material is revealed. You gradually come to recognize the patterned bumps as scales, but further thought is interrupted by sharp waves of agony from your back.

It feels as though your flesh is being torn apart. At the same time, a heavy weight settles down on you, pushing you towards the ground. You force yourself to stay on your hands and knees, as if doing so will prevent you from slipping into madness. Are you getting heavier, or weaker? Your arms tremble, and you briefly entertain the fantasy that you might pass out from the pain soon. You could almost laugh at the naiveté.

Your voice protests hoarsely, yet no less loudly as your spine is wrenched from both ends. You can feel your neck elongating, making it difficult to continue holding your head up. Your remaining skin stretches and your back arches. You have to readjust your arms and legs to accommodate your new length. Another weight is added at the base of your spine, much heavier than the one on your back, but easier to manage.

Soon you realize that the pain is a mercy. Were it not for its diversion, you would have panicked when your mouth swelled and your teeth began fall to the ground with a sound like tiny marbles. Your next scream is not a scream, but a **roar**. Your face elongates. The typically ignored, peripheral view of your nose is replaced by a rapidly growing muzzle which seems to force its way from your skin like an alligator breaking free of its egg.

You pant heavily, as the pain begins to subside for the first time since your predicament began. Your breathing is harsh and guttural, like an animal's. You look down at your hands – if they are even yours anymore. You flex each of the scaly appendages in turn. They are indeed yours. You lift one hand and turn your palm upward, clenching and unclenching your fist experimentally.

Tiny scales coat your palm, flexing and stretching with your movements as well as skin, but they feel much thicker. Your new claws press against your scaly wrist when you make a fist, but you feel no pain from it. The claws are like larger, stronger fingernails, though they are the color of onyx. You turn your hand over again. Thicker, plate-like scales cover each of your... three fingers, you realize with mild confusion, and the back of your hand. They extend up the length of your forearm.

In a moment of panic, you try to stand. Your body does not cooperate as expected, and you collapse onto your belly. You crane your neck around, shocked at its sudden flexibility, but not as shocked as you are by what you see. A large, scaly body lies sprawled out on the stone floor. The weight on your back is a pair of folded, mucus-covered wings. The weight at the base of your spine is a long, flexible tail.

You take deep, rasping breaths, trying to calm your racing heart, which seems to be the only thing normal about your situation. You suddenly realize that you are incredibly thirsty, as if you'd been suckling cotton instead of drinking water for weeks. *One thing at a time*, you tell yourself. You focus on trying again to stand.

Watching your strange new, multi-jointed legs, you pull them up under your belly so your feet touch the ground. You heave upward with your arms, then with your legs. You nearly lose your balance, but manage to catch yourself. The hard part, now, is to turn around to face the entrance of the small cave.

You move one foot at a time, spreading your new four-legged stance wider than necessary. First your front right leg, then your front left, then your back left-**CRACK!** You freeze. It takes you a moment to realize that your hind foot had landed squarely on your forgotten glow stick and crushed it instantly beneath your weight. The green liquid has spilled onto the

mossy ground, lessening its glow. Luckily, the moss prevents the stone from becoming too slippery, so you can continue.

It is a long and difficult process, but you eventually make your way back into the sunlight, and more importantly, to the ravine. You stumble to its edge and shove your muzzle into the cool, pure water. You snort and recoil as water surges up your nose, sending a fine spray of mist into the air. You try again, this time succeeding in taking a few gulps of water.

The pattern of movement is completely different. You do not have cheeks the same way as before, so you have to rhythmically open and close your mouth to force water to the back of your throat. Only then can you swallow. As you drink, you finally have the time to think about what's happened. Somehow, impossibly, you've physically *transformed* into a *dragon*! The idea is as exciting as it is terrifying. You've always loved dragons, and you've fantasized about becoming one, but it's much scarier than you had imagined.

You wonder if you should attempt to contact your partner, James. You don't think you can talk anymore, but somebody will have to know about this eventually, and James is the only person you think you could trust right now. But of course, there's no rush, is there? You could spend some time exploring your new body. A part of you fears that you might revert back to human form, so you want to take advantage of this time, even if it proves to be an illusion. You are also hungry and eager to test what this body can do. Yet even if you did contact James, it would take him over two hours to arrive, and who knows what could happen in that amount of time.

Yet another part of you wants to set off into the wilderness and live the rest of your life just like this. To be a *dragon*... It's a once in forever opportunity to live out all the fantasies you've had since a child. You do still have family and friends, but would they understand? New relationships are formed, and old ones are forgotten on a constant basis. You might still be able to stay here and be perfectly happy.

What do you choose to do?

- A) Contact James and explore your new body while you wait.
- B) Explore your new body and search for food.
- C) Abandon your old life and set off into the wilderness to live as a dragon forever.