

[OVERLY EPIC INTRO THEME MUSIC]

Narrator: Welcome to the Labyrinth: A tangled and tortuous maze where the imprisoned are hunted in the dark by a towering, bloodthirsty monster. But don't worry, that was all a long time ago. Nowadays, the Labyrinth is all in your head.

[END OF THEME MUSIC]

Previously on Welcome to the Labyrinth.

Aster: ...what they don't tell you is that the correct path leads to a locked door and the key for it is incredibly dangerous to obtain.

Narrator: You take the dangling string and begin wrapping it back around the ball. || You've reached the very end of the thread and can feel a tiny inscription in the pillar where the end of the thread is tied in a loop. || Fortunately we haven't heard a peep out of the-

[MINOTAUR ROAR IN THE DISTANCE]

Oh come on! Me and my big mouth.

Episode 5 - Marker

You do your best to interpret the curious arrangement of objects in the room. Then you set off in the indicated direction. The whole 'completely shrouded in total darkness' thing hasn't improved. So you hurriedly pat down the walls while swishing your sword around in front of you to detect any nearby obstructions. You pass through the desired exit and valiantly scoot forth away from the intersection room and subsequent, violent monster that may or may not be able to climb ladders. Hey, do you think minotaurs can see in the dark? That would be, like, so unfair. But what isn't in this place I suppose.

[MINOTAUR ROAR FADING AWAY]

It's not long before you've rounded a few corners and put some real distance between yourself and the trapdoor. It is here, as you shift your weight onto your front foot, that you feel the stone floor beneath it sink down just a bit.

Oh boy. That must be a pressure plate. You could have just activated any number of deadly devices! It could be a giant boulder. A wave of monsters. Poison cloud. Acid flood. That's it! Game over, man! Game over! Guess I'll see you after the reset. Sorry about the cruel imminent dea- Oh... I guess it just turned the lights on.

Or rather, a series of slats, high above near the ceiling, slide open to let in some sorely needed sunlight. This diffuse illumination brings the passageway clearly into view. The passageway walls are as indistinct as you've come to expect. But before there's any time to discuss the narrator's embarrassing meltdown moments ago, your attention is drawn to the handsome treasure chest only a few paces away.

Before advancing, you look down to study the pressure plate so you can look out for others in the future. You're standing on a large square stone that stretches the width of the corridor. Even at full speed, there's no way you would be able to jump over this thing. You were certainly meant to activate it.

You step off the pressure plate and note that it remains sunk into the floor and the windows near the ceiling stay open. "Well that's not so bad." You think to yourself. You correctly presume that the chest is unlocked and confidently lift your heel up to the lid before throwing it open with a push kick.

Thanks to this new found luminescence, you spot a cassette tape within the chest with writing on the label that reads, "MARKER." You sheath the sword and fetch the tape player from your satchel.

[CASSETTE TAPE INSERTED AND "PLAY" BUTTON PRESSED]

Aster: Well hello once again, clever and courageous listener. How are things with you? You doing okay? Me? Well, lemme tell ya. This tape threw me for a loop.

It's a bit of a "good news – bad news" situation when it comes to affecting the bonus items you get from the treasure chests. I'm not able to make any major alterations to the bonus items. Stuff like dynamite or a rocket launcher or anything destructive and fun doesn't work. Believe me I tried.

However, I *can* change the bonus items into something more innocuous. So by itself, the item I'm going to set up in this treasure chest won't be all that exciting. But you know what I find is the best thing to use when you're thrown for a loop? A loop-hole. See what I did there? Anyways. This item will be the key to performing a substantial exploit. It's actually ingenious if I do say so myself.

That means you have to stay alive for one more challenge. I trust you'll know what to do when you find my next tape. Or at least I hope you'll have a sense of the possibilities. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees with this. There's no 'correct' way to play it. All we can do is hope that introducing an unexpected element will frustrate the system in a meaningful way.

[SOUND OF FINGERS DRUMMING ON TABLE]

Hmm... That's not exactly the amped-up rallying cry I was hoping to end with. Let's see... Um... Break a leg! No, that's more of a theater thing. Grab the bull by the h-! No, not that one. Go and... beat all the... stupid challenges! That's pretty good. We'll go with that one. Go and beat all the stupid challenges.

[TAPE PLAYER STOPS. TAPE EJECTED]

Narrator: Yeesh. Motivation was never their strong suit. You wonder if the narrator is nervous about this whole 'loophole' business. He thinks it's not worth being cagey about things anymore so he comes right out and tells you, Yeah, dawg! I am highly concerned with what I just heard. I mean, don't get me

wrong. I don't have any loyalty to this place. But I do have a powerful, fear-based, respect for it. Aster got one thing right. There are no guarantees. You're still on your first attempt and you've been doing really well which means you have yet to experience the crushing hopelessness that this place administers oh so effectively. Please, just, be smart, is all I'm saying, okay?

You ponder those ominous words of caution while stowing the tape player back in your satchel. Then, with the tape returned to the treasure chest, you close the lid..

[LID CLOSES. MAGICAL WHOOSH. LID OPENS]

...and open it to find a run-of-the-mill, fine-tip permanent marker. "Well, Aster did say it wouldn't be very exciting." You think to yourself as you toss the marker into the satchel. You start coming up with interesting theories for how it will factor into the exploit that Aster claims to have set up. The narrator is about to start listing them and you're very intrigued. Unfortunately, it has found you.

[BOOMING HOOF STEPS APPROACH]

[BIG SCARY MINOTAUR GROWL]

You whirl around to see a monstrous, hulking minotaur stalk around the corner back down the hall the direction you came from. It stops in tracks as it locks eyes with you.

It stands as tall as an elephant and carries an enormous double-headed war axe in a bestial hand. It has the decency to wear a tattered loin cloth. It has the animosity to pound its chest with a fist as you watch savagery begin to take over.

[BIGGER SCARIER MINOTAUR ROAR]

It lowers its horns at you and starts to paw at the ground with a hoof. You take the hint, turn and run as it gives chase!

[SPRINTING FOOTSTEPS. BOOMING HOOF STEPS]

You reach the next turn and round it at full speed. You had enough of a head start to make it a good ways toward the next corner before glancing back over your shoulder. You watch as the minotaur, unable to control its momentum, careens clumsily around the corner and slams into the wall. You feel the tremor from the impact but the minotaur is unphased as it bounces off the wall and resumes the pursuit. While the minotaur has a much faster top speed, you've got it beat on maneuverability. So here's hoping for short straightaways and lots of corners in your near future.

As you approach the next turn. You see a black line and the word "START" painted across the floor. As you hurdle over it, you catch a glimpse of crude stick figure drawings on the surrounding walls depicting a human being chased by a minotaur. The hieroglyphics are accompanied by arrows pointing down the passage in the direction you're sprinting. You correctly presume that you should pay particular attention to the details you are about to endure.

It's only a short distance from the starting line to where you turn around the next corner. Here, upon the wall to your right, you see paintings of the stick figure human being shot with an arrow. You bound forward, rapidly approaching an unavoidable, huge stone pressure plate just like the last one that let in all the light. Adjacent to this pressure plate, set into the wall on your left is a conspicuous hole perfectly placed to shoot you with an arrow as you step in front of it.

Fortunately, your left arm has maintained a panicked death-grip on your shield this whole time which can easily block an arrow as long as you're holding it in the right position. Speaking of your trusty shield; You definitely remember the important details about the blazon we discussed when you first picked it up, right? Just sayin'. That might be important.

You brace yourself as you tear past the arrow trap. You tuck your left elbow in close to the body and hold your forearm straight upwards so the shield protects your upper-left side. The ground sinks sharply as you dash across the pressure plate.

[WHOOSH SOUND. METALLIC CLANK SOUND]

The arrow strikes the shield hard and ricochets straight down after the impact. Your arm stings a bit after absorbing the shot, but it's nothing a little adrenaline can't handle as the minotaur smashes into another wall as it skids around the corner. You hear its hooves slipping wildly on the stone floor as it finds its footing.

You're curious if the arrow trap will trigger again for the minotaur but you don't feel like sticking around as you take a turn into the next straightaway. You quickly identify another trap coming up fast. Same style pressure plate as before, but this time you see the launcher for the arrow is way down at the next turn on the wall facing you. You make it to the pressure plate, and as you hit it you bring the shield up in front of you with your forearm parallel to the ground and brace.

[WHOOSH SOUND. METALLIC CLANK SOUND]

The arrow hits your shield and is deflected off to your right.

[MINOTAUR ROAR. STOMPING GETTING CLOSER]

The minotaur rounds the corner sooner than you would like. You have the disturbing realization that it is gaining on you as you fling yourself around the next turn. You spot another arrow trap set for you ahead. It's a good thing these passageways are well lit at the moment or you never would have seen the arrow shooter set into the ceiling, aimed straight down at a pressure plate.

This time, you hoist your left forearm up above your head perpendicular to the passageway, positioning the shield so it will work like an umbrella.

[WHOOSH SOUND. METALLIC CLANK SOUND]

The arrow launches straight down, strikes the shield and ricochets directly back behind you. The impact is sharp and the recoil causes you to stumble for a few strides. Fortunately, a brief fit of strategic flailing is all you need to regain your

form and hit the gas.

[HUGE STONE IMPACT AND HEAVY STOMPING]

You take another glance back to see the minotaur has sunk its axe deep into the stone wall at the previous corner, using it as a hand hold to pull itself around the corner and preserve momentum. It almost works but the axe doesn't cleanly pull free from the wall and the minotaur stalls momentarily as it wrenches the axe clean through the corner leaving a giant jagged crater in its wake.

As you round the next turn, you're relieved that the minotaur had to slow down. But that maneuver demonstrates an intelligence and adaptability that is troubling to say the least.

Okay, now what's this dead ahead? You're coming up to a three-way intersection. The path ahead splits left and right and there's a fresh pressure plate waiting for you in the center of the intersection.

There's no time to strategize so you arbitrarily turn left as you stomp around the corner. But it's a dead end. You grind to a halt as you stare directly at an arrow launcher.

[WHOOSH SOUND. METALLIC CLANK SOUND]

Your reflexes make it just in time. With your forearm snapped in front of you, parallel to the ground, the heavy bolt crashes into the shield and ricochets straight down. You spin on your heels to find the path does continue in the other direction.

As you dash back across the 3-way intersection you do not much care for the split-second of eye-contact you share with your pursuer as it frenzies around the previous corner.

Luckily it's only a short sprint to another 3-way intersection with pathways splitting off to the left and right. Again with a pressure plate in the center.

You decide to try another left turn as you take the corner

running across the pressure plate. The good news is you're not looking at a dead end. In fact, up ahead you see the end of this hallway opens up into a bigger chamber. The bad news is that you just stomped on a pressure plate and you don't see the arrow launcher.

You hazard a guess that the pathway behind you leads to a dead end and the recently triggered launcher. Instinctively you twist your upper body to the left so you can hold out your shield behind you. Your left elbow is raised and aimed back at the launcher while your forearm is pointed straight down at the ground.

[WHOOSH SOUND. METALLIC CLANK SOUND]

For a fifth time, you successfully block the attack. The arrow ricochets downwards off the shield. Seconds later, you leave the narrow hallway and move into a large stone chamber. The only thing of interest here lies at the very center. You bolt toward a wooden platform resting on the ground that is connected to a series of ropes and stone pulleys that stretch upwards. You really hope this is a lift of some kind as you hurry on to it and pull the large wooden lever in the center of the platform.

[CREAKING ROPES AND SQUEAKY PULLEY SOUNDS]

The lift starts moving upward... slowly. Looking up, you see a hole in the ceiling, 5 stories up, that matches the size and shape of the lift. Looking around everywhere else, you don't see any way of speeding up your ascension. Which is bad because-

[MINOTAUR ROAR. STOMPING GETTING CLOSER]

The minotaur comes into view as it skids to a stop at the last intersection. It quickly rules out the dead end and starts bounding down the corridor straight at you and the lift.

[MINOTAUR ROAR. STOMPING GETTING CLOSER]

You're roughly one and a half stories up as the minotaur explodes into the chamber. It closes the distance to the lift, leaps into the air...

...And just barely falls short of grabbing onto the wooden platform.

[MINOTAUR ROAR. SLAM INTO STONE]

You gawk down over the edge of the lift to see the minotaur punch and then headbutt the wall in frustration. It turns around, glares up at you, and that's when you see something you hadn't the wherewithal to register before. A large, ornate, silver key dangles on a chain around the minotaurs neck.

After looking quickly around the chamber, the minotaur concedes that their prey has escaped them for time being. It lets out a bitter growl as it crosses its arms and begins drumming its fingers on its bicep. It doesn't blink as it watches you slowly drift higher and higher, further and further away.

As the elevator comes to a stop in a new, large stone chamber you exhale for the first time in who knows how long. The surrounding stone floor forms a near perfect seal around the wooden platform of the lift. You hear the minotaur far beneath you trudge away. You're safe... for now.

Phew! Whaddaya say we get back to calmly analyzing cryptic details of your surroundings. That sounds real good to me right about now. And it just so happens this place is chalk full of cryptic details!

The wooden elevator brought you up into a large round room with 4 exits leading off in the 4 cardinal directions. Stepping off of the wooden platform and walking around you take in a large mural that spans the entirety of the surrounding walls.

The mural looks to be an epic encaustic painting that depicts various scenes of nature all around. Encaustic painting was invented in ancient Greece. It uses pigments mixed into wax. The heated wax fuses to the art surface when it's applied. And the

result is super resilient and water proof so it was used to decorate the hulls of warships among other things.

This mural shows several bodies of water with some sea birds flying and floating amongst them. The type of bird seems specific, and after a moment of consideration, you somehow identify the species of these birds as terns. There are six in total spread out across the painting.

Also spread through the painting are five compass roses you see painted in black wax. Though instead of the points being labeled with the typical N, E, S, W, there are different words written at each point.

One compass rose in the mural is placed between the first and second terns. The North pointer has the word EVERY, painted on it. The East pointer has the word ONLY. South shows the word EVEN, and West shows the word ODD.

Another compass rose is painted in between the second and third terns. Its North pointer shows the word ROTATION. The East shows the word BEARING. The South shows the word POSITION. And West shows the word DIRECTION.

Then there's a compass rose between the third and fourth terns. On this one, North points to the word NOT, spelled N, O, T. East points to the word IS. South has the word MUST, and West has the word WILL painted there.

Two left to describe. This next compass rose it painted right on top of the fifth tern. Its North indicates the word MEASURED. East has the word CARRIED. South has the word SELECTED, and West has the word HEARD.

Lastly, you see a compass rose painted right on top of the sixth tern. Here you see the North pointer indicates the word INSTEAD. Then East shows the word UNTIL. South has the word WITHIN, and West shows the word PREVIOUSLY.

That's all the noteworthy information I have for you at this time. Hopefully, that's enough to put together whatever this

confounding place is trying to tell you.

Gosh, does the minotaur really need to be that angry? And what was up with that key around its neck? Are you supposed to get that somehow!? That seems dangerous! I don't want to narrate that. I'm not cut out for these high-octane, pulse-pounding thrills. You know what? I gotta go decompress for a minute. Yeah, that'll help. That's just what the doctor narrated. Stay out of trouble till I get back, please.

[MOTIVATIONAL ENDING MUSIC]

SPENCER: Thus concludes episode five! And with that, the time for audience participation is upon us. In the next episode, there will be a treasure chest with an item inside of it. Just what will that item be? You tell me. On my website, which is linked in the show notes, you can now submit your answers for the direction you chose to travel at the end of each episode. Everyone who submits a correct set of directions will get to suggest an item for the treasure chest. After a few weeks, the item submission window will close and a survey will be available to all listeners to vote on which item will be in the chest. That survey will also have a few other questions about what action you would choose to take in different situations that may or may not occur in the next episode. Ooh, I'm getting chills just thinking about it!

As always, Welcome to the Labyrinth is designed, produced, and narrated by me, Spencer Beebe. As always, Aster is voiced by the incomparable, Tal Minear. As always, if you like puzzly stuff check out my wares at spencerispuzzling.com. As always, you can find links in the show notes to the facebook group and puzzle people discord server. So if you have comments, questions, or any good pirate jokes, those will be the places to share those. And as always, get lost already.