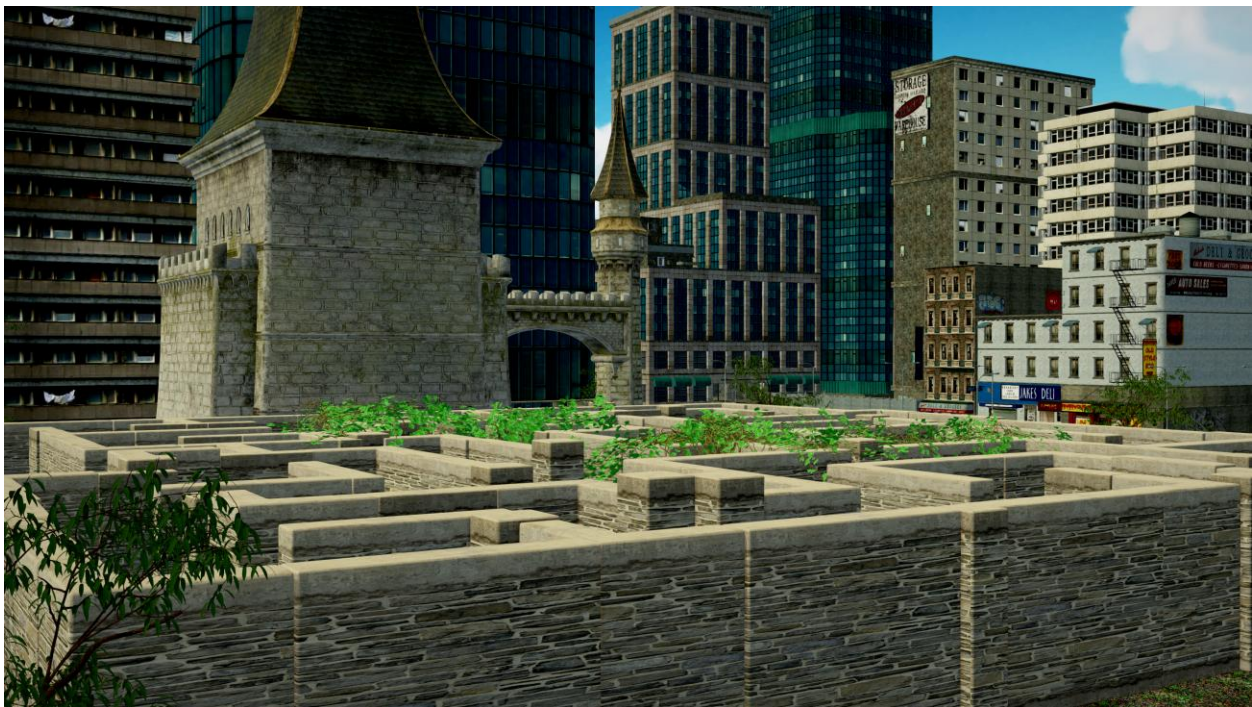


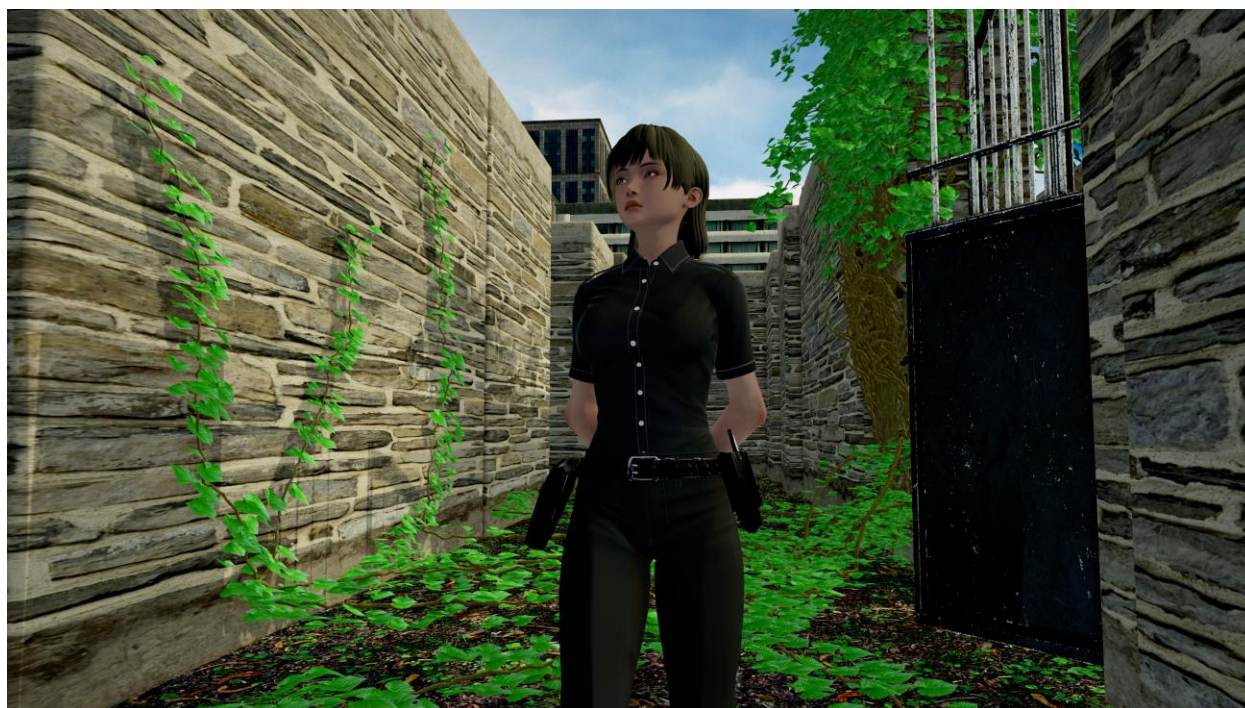


Sherrie sipped on her morning coffee as she chatted with the ticket booth vendor. Her watch *beeped* for 8:00AM, indicating that the attraction was about to open. Already, three women were walking towards the ticket booth, so Sherrie finished the last of her coffee and handed it to the courteous vendor who threw the cup away for her. Sherrie stretched, and she entered the maze to start her rounds.



The old maze was out of place in that downtown area. It had once belonged to the city's first prison, of which one building and one tower remained. In those antique days, prison staff would throw misbehaving prisoners into one end of the maze, naked and dizzy, as a torture method to find their own way out. Back then, the maze was sealed, so it was dark,

compressive, and suffocating. As the city grew, better prisons with more humane punishments for criminal were built, so the original prison lapsed into disuse. Its buildings collapsed, and land was sold off to be developed. The maze's ceiling crumbled, but the walls stood strong. Eventually, the maze and the surviving parts of the prison had been deemed a historical site, and after a small amount of cleanup, the prison maze was repurposed into an attraction. No more than fifty people passed through the labyrinth per day, but it was a well-beloved local fixture all the same.



Sherrie knew the maze by heart after two years of working security for it. She reasoned that if the maze was ever restored to its full, terrible state, she could escape it without any stress. Sherrie began her normal route, keeping an eye out for anyone who might try to enter the maze illegally or overadventurous visitors who might climb the walls.



On the opposite side of the maze from its proper entrance, four college-aged women limbered up on the sidewalk. One of the four, the lithest one, spoke out instructions while they stretched.

“The goal is... to get to the end... but remember, ... you have to get to the actual entrance, first, before you can head to the exit,” she explained. “And remember, avoid the guard.”

“Obviously,” one of the other’s said with a cocky smile, bending down to tighten the laces of her hiking boots, a shoe style unorthodox for the activity ahead but ones she found most comfortable.

“What’s the prize?” the redhead of the group asked.

“The losers pay for lunch,” the fourth member suggested, adjusting her light green hoodie.

“Sounds good,” the leader said, smiling.

All four straightened up and faced the perimeter wall of the maze. The lithe one turned her head back and watched for a break in traffic.



Meanwhile, the first three entrants received their tickets (a mere formality since there was no ticket-taker) and passed through the door, a modern installation mirroring the one at the exit. The first entrant began taking photographs, an avid hobbyist historian. She had intended on exploring the remaining prison building, but when she noticed how few other people were going through the maze at that hour, she decided to improvise before the attraction might get crowded and less fun. The second two entrants were a couple on an early date. They had not known each other for more than a few weeks, but the woman in spectacles wanted to show the other (a new resident) the infamous maze. It had not been the latter's idea of a date, but after some cajoling, she agreed. She kept her pace swift but reasonable, hoping to finish the maze soon so that she might suggest a more fun secondary activity, though she needed to rely on her girlfriend's knowledge to finish the maze fast, and she was in no rush.

Sherrie made her first lap.

At last, the leader of the quartet spotted a break in the passing cars.

“Go!” she exclaimed.



The four women began their parkour session. They climbed up the crumbly walls, and from there, they began to navigate the maze in their own style. The lithe leader with the loose trackpants ran across the tops of the walls like one would run the base maze, but with the added benefit of being able to see the path from above. The boot-wearing brunette hopped across the tops of the walls without slowing her pace. The buxom redhead spent equal time climbing over walls and jogging through the maze on ground. Lastly, the woman in the light green jacket and dark green fingerless gloves ran through the winding, ceilingless corridors in an almost traditional fashion. Of course, all four of them avoided the path and the gaze of Sherrie. The security guard rarely looked up, relying on the edge of her vision to catch wall-crossers. However, the group of young adults were too spry to get in her extended range of vision.



The booted one reached the entrance first, tapping the top of the metal door with her foot and spinning towards the exit. The lithe one cursed, some seconds behind her, and she ran across the top of the door without a pause. Each *clang* caused the ticket booth operator to briefly look up from her Internet-browsing; she blamed the noises on birds and went back to her entertainment on that slow day. Next, the green-themed one reached the door, a minute after running past the confused history-lover who swore that she had been the first one to enter the maze that day. Afterwards, green sprinted for the exit, having spotted the first two already going that way. Finally, the redhead got to the start of the maze, and she did not adjust her pace, knowing full well that she probably was not going to win.



Sherrie talked with her security partner in the main building over the radio, trying to setup a night of cards some time during the weekend out of boredom. While she radioed, she caught the barest flicker of motion from above – the flapping of a pants’ ankle. Sherrie called in a possible intruder and went to investigate.



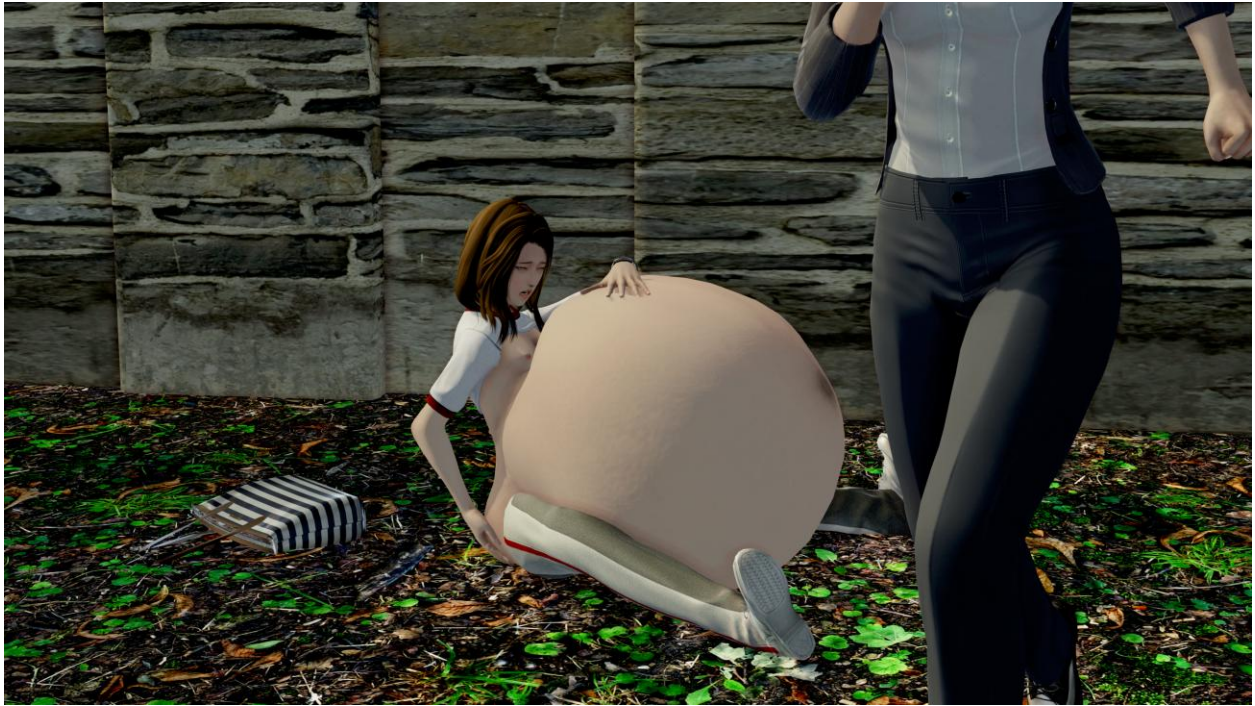
The tops of those maze walls were covered in moss and seedlings, and both the mortar and the brick were crumbly and loose. Hiking boots are made for outdoors activities, true, but they are not made for intense acrobatics across ancient architecture. The photographer took raised her camera to take a picture, but when a shadow passed over the lens, she lowered it in curiosity. Boots slipped off the old masonry when their owner tried to showoff her rival with a flip, and

that brunette tumbled straight down into a mouth opened from surprise. The history-enjoyer was driven to the ground as a woman drove into her gut, the camera bouncing and flashing.



Despite her best efforts, the old local had not been able to slow down the date, her ditz of a catch in a hurry. What's more, the outing was being disturbed by intrusive, raucous ruffians treating the maze like a playground. She was growing frustrated, and she adjusted her spectacles in a huff. However, she noticed that they were in a spot of the maze unbothered, and her date had stopped to look through her purse. She smiled.





The leader of the former quartet saw the fate of her friend/rival, and she lost track of her footing. She, too, stumbled, and her trackpants slid down as she fell. The lithe woman always went commando. She fell straight down on a blonde-haired visitor, who went straight up her bowels. The blonde's partner stumbled back in surprise, and the parkourer sat in shock, her middle bloated. Then, the other woman ran past her, nearly losing her spectacles.



Sherrie was striding along with authority in her breast and duty in her stride. At least, that is how she imagined she looked. She rounded a corner – and bumped into one of the visitors.

“Woah, sorry about that,” Sherrie said, stabilizing the woman, hoping she had not broken the visitor’s glasses.

She noticed that the woman was frantic. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

The spectacle-wearer nervously chuckled.

“Someone fell down from the walls, and she, um…” She whispered the rest into Sherrie’s ear.

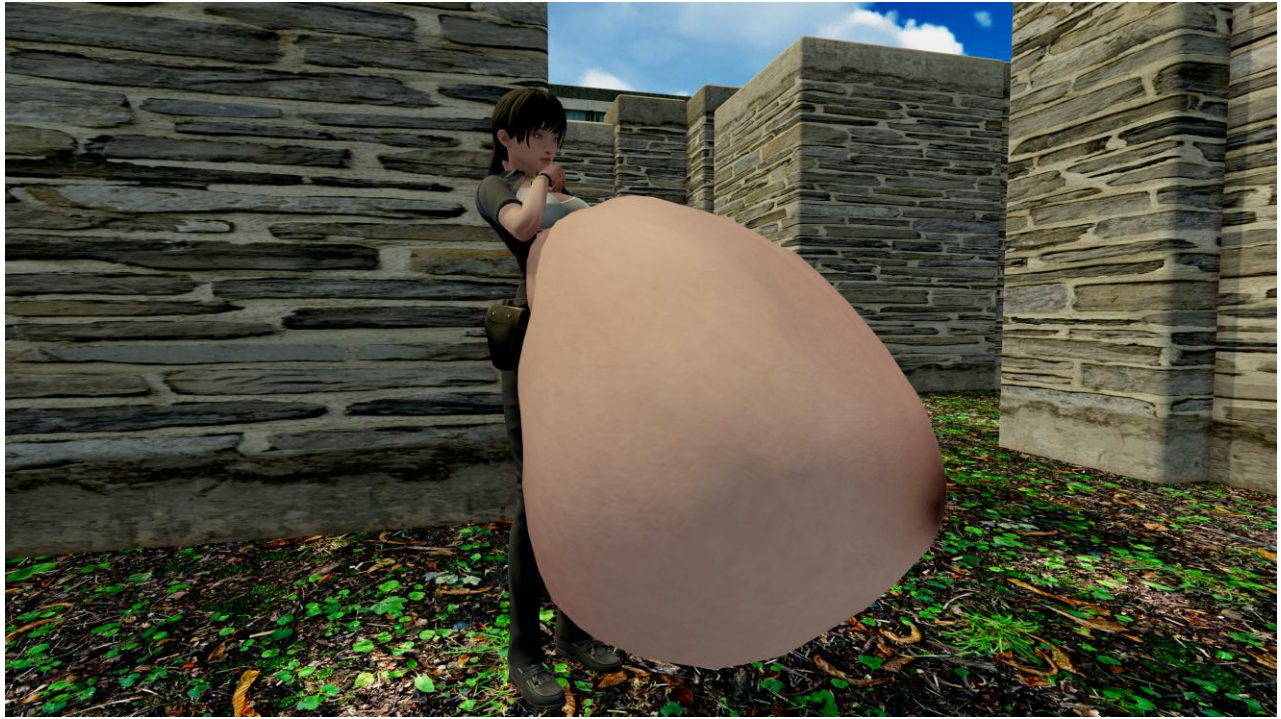
Sherrie blushed and fumed.

“Stay here,” Sherrie said.



The security guard stormed off in the direction that the visitor had come from. She rushed past a particular branch, behind which the jacketed runner hid after a narrow evasion. She glanced to her left and saw the redhead scurrying over a wall, now ahead of her. Once the security guard passed, the green runner sprinted for the exit, her favorite diner at the

forefront of her mind.



Sherrie stepped around a sharp corner, and she spotted a slender woman who she was assured had not paid the entrance price. As well, that woman had an extended stomach. The delinquent stretched her back and groaned. Sherrie strode up behind her, and as per her training, she surprised the trespasser and swallowed her whole. It was a hefty weight in her stomach, and only after she settled did she realize that she had also devoured the paying visitor. With no way to regurgitate the bystander without regurgitating the criminal, Sherrie pressed her lips tight in embarrassment, and she aimed to keep the matter hushed. Luckily for her, since the blonde was new in that city, no one would notice her disappearance. Then, an alibi came to Sherrie when the maze's first visitor, one that Sherrie distinctly recognized, came into view with an extended belly of her own, groaning and rubbing her stomach and head. Sherrie determined that more than one delinquent had trespassed. Sherrie walked up to the visitor.



“Good work,” Sherrie commended.

“What...?” the woman said, camera dangling on top of her belly.

“You caught a trespasser,” Sherrie said. “There’s a reward for you.”

“Really?” the historian replied.

“Yeah,” Sherrie said. “Just don’t tell anyone what happened. It’s a lot of extra paperwork, and you’d have to go to a court and stuff. You’ll get something good, but let’s leave all the hassle to me, okay?”

“Sure,” the visitor said, checking her camera for any damage. The latest picture was a direct shot down her throat of disappearing hands.

Sherrie urged the visitor towards the exit.



The buxom redhead passed through the maze's exit door, victorious. She stopped her watch and raised her arms. Eight seconds later, the woman in green burst through the door, and her shoulders slumped. She sighed, but she smiled with friendly competition. She stuck out her hand, and the redhead shook it.

“So, what do you want for lunch?” the green woman asked.

The redhead grinned. She was not busy for no reason.



Upset that her date had not gone as planned, the woman with spectacles left the maze, mumbling to herself. She stopped when she saw a red-haired woman patting a her freshly-filled stomach. She let out a dry laugh, and she crept up behind the parkourer. With each step she took, she became more and more translucent. The redhead felt a chill down her spine, and she turned at the last second to see a pale maw swallow her down. The ghost cackled as her ethereal stomach bloated with her unwitting victim. College fit made for a different taste than ditzy out-of-towner, but it was flavorful all the same.



The old ghost adjusted her spectacles, and she sank down below the ground to rest near her bones beneath the maze to turn her double meal into ectoplasm. It was common enough, in the old years, for the prisoners to die before finding their way out of the maze, so their jailers would enter with lanterns and shovels and bury them on the spot.

Countless bones were buried there, and her bones in particular produced one of the more lively ghosts.

Sherrie and the remaining visitor exited the maze, and the security guard started to bring her towards the prison building, which the history enthusiast was more than happy to explore. Sherrie radioed for her security partner to take her place; she had an early lunch to digest.

