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# 5 Room Dungeons

All Volumes  
1-18

Thank you for downloading the 5 Room Dungeons PDF, which contains short adventure seeds you can drop into your campaigns or flesh out into larger adventures. All dungeons in this PDF are submissions from the 5 Room Dungeon contest co-hosted by Roleplayingtips.com and Strolen's Citadel. Dungeon entries had to follow the 5 Room Dungeon template, which is provided at the end of this file (it's a great recipe for crafting your own quick dungeons too). Thanks to everyone who entered the contest. Your great entries are now inspiring and helping game masters around the world. Thanks also to the volunteers at Strolen's Citadel for their hours of editing.

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Special thanks to manfred/Peter Sidor for editing.

Cheers,  
John Four and Strolen



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# The Pool of Unmaking

By John McCulloch

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The Pool of Unmaking is hidden behind a large waterfall in a dense rainforest. A narrow ledge midway down the cliff leads to an opening behind the rushing water. The surface is slick and the waterfall makes a tremendous roaring. Simply getting to the waterfall is a daunting challenge by land or by boat, but finding and climbing to the ledge harder still.

A water elemental lives in the waterfall and takes a strong interest in any intruders into its territory. If the characters are openly hostile it will surely attack, but if they try to plead their case for entry to the Pool, it may allow them passage or try to strike a bargain.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

Through an opening in the rock face behind the waterfall is a small antechamber. It appears to be a natural cavern except for the back wall which has been worked extensively. A stone door stands amidst many carved runes and recessed basins. The door is locked and magically sealed. It cannot be opened until the correct basins have been filled with water. Deciphering the runes will give some clues to which basins to fill with water in what order.

It is possible that this device could perform other magical functions if the correct combination of basins were found.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The antechamber leads to the main body of the subterranean complex. There are stairs, hallways and living quarters from the original builders and guardians of the Pool. Unfortunately many of the walls have developed leaks and some of the rooms and passages have completely filled with water. Navigating this dark, watery maze will involve wading and swimming, and will make any non-magical light source very difficult to maintain.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The guardian of the inner sanctum has outlived all of its creators. This massive stone golem is still standing watch over the Pool itself. It will interrogate any who approach in a long-forgotten tongue, and will not be satisfied until the correct passphrase is spoken. It may be defeated in battle, but extensive prior research by the PCs may reveal some clue to what the passphrase might be.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The inner sanctum contains the Pool of Unmaking. The walls are covered in glowing runes and a large stone cistern sits in the center of the room. The water in the cistern is as still and smooth as a pane of glass. Any magical item placed in the pool will become completely mundane in every way. It is unknown what happens when people are exposed to the water or try to drink it. Water removed from the chamber loses its potency within minutes.



# A Visit to the Witch's Cottage

By Gillian Wiseman

For any number of reasons, the PCs are set on visiting a local herbalist/hedge witch that lives a mile or so outside town and in a patch of forest.

This adventure presumes that the PCs are venturing there in a hurry, near the end of the day. Perhaps someone has fallen ill or been injured, or there has been an emergency in town that she can assist with.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

As the PCs take the path off the main road towards her cottage, they begin noticing small traces of spider web. Soon the webs grow thicker, and then stretch across the path. The PCs are forced to either enter the webs or go back.

A giant spider dwells here, and it will attack if its webs are disturbed. If one spider is not enough challenge, several smaller spiders can join in the attack.

A clever party may circle around and try to find another way to the cottage – this trap can be circumvented in this way if the DM desires, or the PCs may run into the spiders again near the back of the cottage.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

Naturally the PCs will desire to search the webs. When they do, they find 3 bundles hanging from a high tree limb. Investigation indicates that these are recent victims of the spiders, and at least one is still alive and kicking. The PCs must find a way to lower each bundle to the ground and open it to rescue the victims. One is dead, but the other two are still alive. One is conscious – a halfling commoner who was on her way to visit the herbalist. The other is unconscious and close to death – he or she needs some healing or they will likely die soon. The PCs can choose to save one, both or none of the victims. The halfling has no treasure, but the unconscious traveler has a belt pouch with enough money for the PCs to live on for a week or more.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The players travel on, struggling through webs. Eventually they reach the last turn in the path before the cottage – and discover that the stream that crosses the path has washed out the footbridge. They must cross over the fast-flowing but narrow creek in one of three ways – a running long jump, a dangerous climb through trees that hang over the stream (and risk another spider assault), or hike a mile downstream to a place where boulders make it possible to cross dry-footed. But then they must battle their way back through the webs with no path to follow...

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The PCs reach the cottage at last, and make a horrific discovery – the whole cottage is wrapped in spider webs. The herbalist must still be inside, as a dim light can be seen peeping through one window (or perhaps smoke from the chimney). Tiny spiders are everywhere, in their hundreds. Many are spinning tiny webs and dispersing themselves on the evening breeze. One enormous spider which appears to be the “mother” has

taken up residence on the roof of the cottage and if the PCs attempt to enter, she will threaten them, not attacking outright but definitely warning them off. If they attempt to enter the cottage, she attacks and the PCs must defeat her to continue. Note: there could be a roleplaying way around this fight if the DM wishes to create one.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Within the cottage – the PCs have fought their way to the cottage, won over the spider outside, and entered the door – only to discover that their entire battle was for nothing – within the cottage on the floor lies a withered corpse. Just as they believe that the old woman has been sucked dry by the spiders, they hear a whispering noise from the loft above – and look up to see an enormous old female half-spider. Clinging to her are handfuls of the baby spiders she has just hatched.

This creature is an arena (in DnD terms) and is furious with anyone who has killed her babies. If the PCs killed the spider on the roof, she will not negotiate, but will instead attack with all her powers. But if the PCs were able to somehow communicate with the spider outside and it let them in willingly, she will listen to their requests, and can perhaps answer them.



## **Isles of Ice**

By Mothshade

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The challenge is set within a group of floating icebergs on another plane of existence, possibly a pocket dimension or demiplane of icy winds and bitter cold. Of course, the 'bergs can simply be placed in some polar region of the campaign world.

While the PCs can certainly attempt to navigate the treacherous air currents and sudden blasts of ice, there is a race of flying whales that are somewhat friendly to the adventurers and their goals that can safely bear the party in their mouths to the 'bergs.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Not only do the players need to figure out which floating iceberg is their goal, they must convince the whales to carry them there. Will all the characters trust these enigmatic creatures enough to ride forth inside their mouths?

The icebergs float through the air and occasionally collide, causing quaking and breakage. The frozen masses are honeycombed with tunnels and chambers, created by the inhabitants – frost salamanders.

The icy walls of the tube-shaped passages are incredibly slippery – an issue ignored by the frost salamanders that may negotiate ice as easily as solid ground. Many of these passages slope and twist crazily, threatening to shunt intruder's right out of the 'berg if they slide out of control.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The heroes will find that a previous impact has broken a large portion of the iceberg free, and that the entire structure is in two pieces. They must cross a wide gap of empty air and whirling shards of razor-sharp ice to reach the other portion. Savage winds and the erratic motion of both icebergs further threaten the crossing. It is always possible that the two halves will collide at any time, or that another 'berg will drift too close for comfort.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

A large chamber houses the lair of a pair (or as many as necessary) of unusually large frost salamanders and their nest of unhatched eggs. A piece of an item that is the heroes' goal may be found here, but the greater portion lies elsewhere. Alternately, an item belonging to an individual to be rescued may be discovered, but the victim is somewhere else. Some treasure will also be collected here, from previous intruders.

The salamanders will fight savagely to protect their eggs, possibly gaining morale bonuses in combat. If more tension is needed during the battle, another iceberg could collide with this one – hurling the characters about, but not the salamanders. Adventurers that rely on fire effects in battle will find themselves suffering falling ice and sudden flash floods.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The final great chamber at the heart of the iceberg is dominated by a steaming pool of water and an enormous mass of dark ice. A large shape can be seen within the ice – it is a truly massive frost salamander (possibly part dragon or enhanced with elemental properties) lying dormant within. Also noticeable is the object of the quest – frozen within the grasp of the monster. Whether an object or a person, this thing is grasped firmly by the monstrous frost salamander and frozen deep within the mass of ice.

The heroes will have to risk freeing the gigantic salamander to reach their goal. The mass of ice is in the middle of the steaming pool...and the water is melting it in any case – as well as undermining the structure of the 'berg. Time is running out. Of course, there is some sort of fire-enchanted item at the bottom of the pool that is causing the melting – an object that can be used to great effect against the salamander...if it can be reached in time.

During the final conflict, the 'berg will probably begin breaking up – whether due to supernatural melting, or the collision of another drifting mass of ice. A faithful whale, or nearby iceberg, may be their only hope for salvation.



## **The Tomb of the Dragon Queen**

By Joseph Rapoport

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

Built within one of the many mountainous regions of Krynn, the Tomb of Dragon Queen was constructed to honor and hold the remains of the first Dragon Queen and favourite of Tiamat. The tomb is in the form of a

30' long x 20' wide x 10' high long barrow. Within the long barrow is an altar to Tiamat, which if desecrated will bring forth an Aspect of Tiamat to attack the desecrators. Except for the altar, the only other feature within the long barrow is a 10' long x 7' wide x 5' tall rectangular sarcophagus.

No magic will be able to open the sarcophagi as the sarcophagus is a solid block of stone made to look like a rectangular crypt. In fact, with a combined STR 35 check will enable the stone block to be pushed off the entrance to the true tomb.

Once the true entrance is opened, the party will hear the followed spoken in a truly malevolent voice, "Disrupt the Dragon Queen's sleep at your peril!" As the party begin moving down the 31 stairs leading down into the true tomb, once the first party member steps on the 25<sup>th</sup> step (or 6<sup>th</sup> from the bottom) the remaining party, within the long barrow, is attacked by two spectres.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Stairway and Room of Illusion**

The stairs lead to a room whose floor is made to look like a black and white chessboard. In fact, this entire room is covered by an illusion. Anyone venturing upon the chessboard must make a WIS check at -2 as well as a DEX check at -2. The entire chessboard floor is actually a large 20' deep spiked pit. Anyone using TRUE SEEING or any other similar magic will discover the pit illusion as well as the ledges on each wall that lead across the pit and into the next room.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Water Room**

The entrance to the third room slopes downward into a water-filled room. At the bottom of the 50' deep pool there is a small tunnel leading to the next chamber. The narrowness of the tunnel will require any character wearing heavy armour to remove his/her armour in order to travel through the tunnel.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Room of Fiery Woe**

The narrow water filled tunnel leads into a large cavernous chamber. This large rough hewn, lichen lit chamber is dimly lit and will require a light source in order for the party to see that this chamber is guarded by an Ancient Red Dracolich. (This has the potential to be a truly dangerous encounter, but a Dragon Queen would hardly leave anything else as a guard to her burial/treasure chamber.)

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Treasury/Burial Chamber**

If the party is able to defeat the Dracolich, they will have time to search for secret doors in this otherwise empty room. Upon finding the room's only secret door, the party will have found The Dragon Queen's burial chamber and treasury. This room contains the closed sarcophagus of The Dragon Queen.

The sarcophagus can be opened and will contain the mummified remains of the first Dragon Queen, but will not contain any treasure. There is, however, a very large chest against one of the walls. This chest is actually a MIMIC and will attack any who try to open or search the "chest". Once the mimic is disposed of, the party

will notice that some of the mimic's blood will flow towards the wall and through the wall. There is a secret door here. Upon opening the secret door, the party will find that they have discovered the Dragon Queen's treasury. The DM is to fill the treasury as he/she wishes although the treasury will contain a Tome of Ineffable Damnation.



## **The Living Vault**

By Mothshade

### ***Room One: Entrance and Guardian***

This truly ancient vault is said to contain a unique and intelligent construct from a lost civilization. The heroes must vanquish a foe that can be harmed only by a specific metal – the metal from which the construct is fashioned. This metal, whatever it may be, cannot be found elsewhere in sufficient quantities.

Unlike many other dungeon sites, this vault *has* been explored before, but the prison still maintains the defences. These defences take the form of animated objects and devices remotely controlled by the vault itself.

As a result of the prison's efforts, the vault door contains an animated locking mechanism, capable of actively thwarting attempts to disarm it. A rogue or other adventurer must make attack rolls and Disarm attempts to bypass this treacherous mechanism. In addition, the vault door itself may animate as one or more smaller iron golems, once the lock is defeated.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The inner hall or chamber contains a ghastly sight – the animated heads of previous adventurers, set into wall niches and animated by elaborate metallic mechanisms. These are remains of the party that came before – and failed. It is a glimpse at one possible fate that awaits the current batch of heroes. For added shock value, the PCs could recognize one or more of the heads as friends, or even higher-level idols.

The heads retain much of the intellect and personality of their original owners – but they have become rather detached and somewhat mad. The PCs may speak with the heads in an attempt to discover more of what awaits them further in. The heads will be mostly cooperative, but none will give away enough information to fully prepare them for the final encounter.

At this point, the DM should play up the horror of the situation and roleplay the heads as disjointedly as possible. Scatter bits of useful information among barely coherent babble or childish songs. The heads could provide useful details in the form of command words to their former magic items (found in or near the final chamber), an idea of the layout of the rooms ahead, and ominous hints of the final horror to come. Whatever seems necessary and useful at the time.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

At least one of the heads lied. Whether by intention, or by accident, the PCs were given inaccurate information regarding the nature of this encounter.

This encounter area (whatever it may look like) contains a jumble of what looks like broken junk...and a fallen adventurer lying in a cleared area on the floor. Unfortunately, the junk consists of tiny animated constructs formed of broken bits and pieces of whatever has been brought in by previous intruders...and the fallen adventurer is actually just the empty husk filled with animated machinery for locomotion. This terrible double will actually act as an injured hero for a brief time, able to be shaken to consciousness by the PCs. It will seem confused and weary at first (because of the limited cognitive abilities of the animating constructs), but eventually springs to the attack, along with all of the smaller constructs lying about the place.

If more roleplaying opportunities are wanted, the PCs might have some chance of reasoning with whatever intelligence remains of the formerly-living hero that they face. Also, there is a chance that the animating mechanisms can be disabled by skill checks. Straightforward combat should not be the only solution.

At least one useful magic item left by the previously slain adventurers should be found here and the activation word or phrase should be (accurately) known to the party from their conversation with the heads.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The rest of the animated constructs will be encountered here as a last-ditch effort by the vault to defend the inner sanctum. The chamber itself is cluttered with moving alien machinery. Gears and metal devices of all shapes and sizes whirl and clatter as they perform unknowable tasks. Anyone that stumbles or falls into this machinery will take damage and possibly suffer agonizing confinement among the metal parts. It is this machinery that serves to keep the golem physically confined in the central vault.

The largest of the constructs will have the animated head of a departed adventurer. This creature will try to convince the party that it is the golem and that their quest ends here (from some last vestiges of its former personality). Of course, this is nothing more than another puppet of the vault itself.

If battle ensues, the swarm of minor constructs will attack en masse and without quarter, led by the puppet. The puppet will have the use of whatever items and class abilities possessed by the living victim that the DM sees fit. Fallen PCs will be scavenged for parts where they lie.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

This is the prison of the ancient golem. A towering, clanking construct of alien design, the golem is formed mostly from an obviously strange metal. Any attack made against the construct threatens to damage parts of its metal body – rendering them useless. For this reason, the unusual metal should not be something as simple as adamantite or mithral, it should be something notably less sturdy.

As a final horrific twist, the metal face of the golem opens during the encounter to reveal a living humanoid head of any race the DM chooses. This is the golem's creator, from ancient times. The head will attempt to negotiate for its freedom by trading the knowledge of working the needed metal into a usable form, for a new body with which to continue his or her life. Should the DM wish to create a moral dilemma for the players, this body would have to be alive, aware, and healthy at the time its head is removed and the new head attached. The golem's creator could be as choosy as the DM wishes.

If this device seems inappropriate, the final battle could simply play out as usual – with the PCs risking the destruction of the metal they so badly need, if they do not take care during the fight.



# The Sunken Vault

By Nathan °

This dungeon is designed to be used in a swampy location, all encounter suggestions are chosen from a list of creatures that would take up residence in marshy surroundings and the overall theme is one of a lost deposit of knowledge or riches that has been swallowed by the lake itself. To add as much flavor as possible to this adventure a stock setting for this dungeon has been supplied.

## Introduction

The town of Perrymill was once a quiet retreat built along the side of the Tremis river, where it feeds down into Bluesong lake from high up in the Kragskill mountains to the west. For the last 60 years however the town itself has sunk into the edge of the lake. This was a result of a magnificent battle between Ifrandis, the Blue Magister, and an elder water elemental that he summoned at the pinnacle of his studies.

The fight ended as Ifrandis slew the liquid lord and took it's still pulsing heart back into his tower, only to die from it's potent poison, which turned his blood to water in a short time. Ifrandis was enthralled with the element of water and many of his previous studies still inhabit the lake.

## Plot Summary

The Tower of Ifrandis is one of the few buildings whose top still breaks the surface of the marsh on the west side of Bluesong lake. The tower itself is still solid if tilted, standing three stories tall and with a cellar one level down. The tower is not very large, but it is well protected. The previous owner was a collector of elemental trinkets, and the gem of this collection was acquired in his final hours. That prize is the heart of an elder water elemental.

Ifrandis is not yet dead however, but not truly alive either, having become transformed into a strange elemental creature by the poison he suffered and the power of the liquid heart. It is suggested that players have a means to gain water breathing for this dungeon.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### Entering the Tower

Entrance to the tower is gain through the covered roof, a foot deep in water. The metal hatch going down into the building is magically warded and requires a password or countermagic to open. If brute force is attempted the hatch is warded with a shocking spell that should deal enough electrical damage to provide a suitable deterrent, it may affect the whole group due to the water. Once inside, the hatch will seal itself again if the command word is spoken once more.

The top floor was once a finely appointed set of personal chambers for the tower's owner. A bedroom, bathroom, closet, and small study are open and unlocked for perusal. The rooms are all in a clutter however and sopping wet with water seeping through the stones.

Few if any of the objects are recoverable for their actual value. The rooms are so jumbled and littered now that movement should be somewhat impaired and the tilt of the tower should make keeping ones balance a challenge.

The stairs down pass by the open door to the small study, in which a rather ill-tempered Naga has taken up residence and will attack the party unawares if possible. If possibly out-matched or utterly over powering for

the group, she may choose instead to parley if caught, or strike up a deal with the group to retrieve the heart for her in return for knowledge of the rest of the tower and safe passage through her area. She has no wish to face the creature she knows is below.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Library**

This entire floor is dedicated to Ifrandis' scholarly collection of books. A very large selection of material is available here that ranges across a vast variety of topics and many of the texts are rare and hard to find. Unfortunately all of them are ruined from the moisture and seepage. There are two closets here and a locked room between them holds the bulk of Ifrandis' magical texts. In the middle of the room is a moderate sized dark blue crystal ball that had been anchored above the floor by four silver chains that latch onto bronze brackets in the ceiling and secure the orb via silver rings that pinch it.

The room itself does not have a visible path leading down. The tables, chairs, and bookcases that line the walls can all be searched or moved but no obvious means is available. The books in the closed room contain Ifrandis' diary, his spell books, rare and magical texts, and a few trinkets he favored. However it also contains the secret to proceeding, a scroll with the command word that activates the orb.

The crystal ball is a predefined foci for the spell on the scroll, and when the spell is cast upon the sphere it will turn the ten foot radius of stone underneath it into a spiral staircase of firm water down into the next floor. This is unfortunate however as the floor below is flooded.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Ground Level**

The first floor of the tower was breached during it's lonely years, and the front door to the building actually leads straight out into the bottom of the lake. The room is filled with water, and if the characters have not resealed the entry hatch on the roof then once the magical stairs to the library are opened the water raises very quickly, bubbling and churning up through the levels of the tower. If the PC's do not have water breathing this could be deadly. The characters must succeed at swimming away from the stairs or risk being battered against walls and ceilings as the water level rises. If they fail too greatly they should become trapped!

If the PC's manage to survive the tower filling with lake water, then what they find is a single large room dimly lit by light filtering in from outside. If the PC's can see clearly they will notice the large ten foot mosaic on the floor, made from tiled bits of lapis lazuli. The mosaic starts dark blue at the outer edge and lightens as it comes to meet a single golden disk at the center of the mosaic, approximately 1 foot in diameter. The water stairs from above touch down on this mosaic, and if the same password that is used for the hatch above is used here then the mosaic will melt down into another set of stairs identical to the first set, and which descends down into the laboratory.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Laboratory**

Unlike the the first set of stairs this entire floor of the tower is protected by a warding spell to keep unassisted water that is inside in, and the water that is outside out. This means that the lake water on the first

floor will not filter down into the lower level as long as the warding is active, or unless the PC's actively bring it into the warded area. This ward is what has kept the creature that was once Ifrandis trapped here for more than half a century. Ironically his own spells of protection have become his prison.

This level of the tower is filled with tables, water tanks, aquariums, tubes, vials, vats, and other paraphernalia. The whole of which has been smashed and destroyed in various fits of rage of the years, visited upon his prison by the creature that was once Ifrandis. As he held the heart of the elder elemental in his hands Ifrandis had felt his blood turning to water, killing him. In an act of desperation Ifrandis drank the watery blood from the still throbbing heart and completed his unique transformation. Later he would absorb the heart entirely, gaining an unbelievable control over the element he long had felt an affinity for. Now a creature of water he desires to leave but cannot gain his own freedom.

Ifrandis will linger a moment when the PC's enter his chambers, watching in disbelief. If the PC's cannot venture a guess as to the creatures name and speak it aloud rather quickly then he attacks without mercy. If they speak his name it will bring him to a point of attempting to converse with them (Aquan is suggested). If the PC's are able to free him Ifrandis may become a powerful ally (this is a good point to introduce a subplot), but if they fight and slay him the heart will be left behind when his slain form turns to pure water. The powers of the heart are left to your discretion.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Liquaries's Core**

The true name of the elder water elemental that Ifrandis battled was Liquaries, and the heart is his last remnant. Whatever other powers the you feel adequate to bestow upon the heart, it's pulsing form can be used to resurrect the elder if used properly. This may either gain the PC's an ally or be the source of an unintended rampage as the Elder retaliates against what he sees as forceful servitude. The one thing that is certain is that the heart is both item and entity.

The heart itself is an oddly warm and glowing organ of semi-solid water than only deforms slightly when pulsing. It glows with a soft yellow light from deep inside and it's hue can change with it's proximity to water, from darker to lighter. If other water elementals become aware that the PC's have the heart of Liquaries they should grow angry and if able will attack the PC's in order to retrieve it. The transformation that Ifrandis was subjected to could be replicated, if the heart's blood is consumed and the PC is infected with the same blood-to-water poison from another elder water elemental.



## **Warts and All**

By Paul Darcy

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The sleepy town of Amphos has never rated a mention in any adventurer's guide to fame and fortune. So, it is with some surprise that a former friend and adventurer contacts you from this little hamlet located on the edge of a swamp. The once great fighter, in his note, mentions that his retirement has been interrupted by a strange mystery that requires your expertise. So, out of loyalty to an old friend, you make your way to see what is going on.

Your friend anxiously greets you as you enter the village. Leading you along, it becomes obvious that people seem to want to avoid you—a number of doors slam as you pass by. He explains that strange creatures plague Amphos and it is believed that one of them has carried off a little boy by the name of Timmy Flyspeck. You stop in front of a particular house at the edge of town: Timmy's house. The aging warrior says that he believes the boy may still be alive and there may be clues in this home, but the boy's father, while offering a reward for his son's return, strangely refuses to speak to anyone. It is up to you to find a way in.

Mr. Flyspeck is reluctant to open the door. He is a former adventurer himself (a mage), but he keeps that a secret. He may allow the party in if they have an interesting magic item as that is his one weakness. Depending on the appearance of the party, they may be able to intimidate him into granting them entry. Then again, the party may also be able to sneak in if there is a Rogue with sufficient skill. In any case, magic traps and curses upon the doorway and windows should make such a break-in difficult. Further, if the party breaks in, Timmy's father will use a ring of invisibility to try to hide and watch, perhaps waiting for an opportunity to deal with the intruders. Other townsfolk are suspicious and will not grant the party entry.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The Flyspeck home appears to be a modest one, though there are indications all is not what it seems. There is an aura of magic about the place (likely discovered if any of the traps/curses were tripped when breaking and entering). Timmy's room seems ordinary enough though he did have a fascination with frogs. A number of the amphibians live in cages set on a table near his bed.

While examining Timmy's room, a thumping is heard under the main living area floor. The sound seems to be coming from under a rug that a table sits upon—could it be the boy is here after all? If Mr. Flyspeck let the party into the house, he will deny hearing anything, but will not stand in the way if the party begins moving the furniture and rug to discover the trap door. If the party entered by stealth or force, Mr. Flyspeck will quietly try to follow the party.

The trap door leads down to a workshop filled with broken vials and scattered spell components. If it were not obvious before, it should be now that Mr. Flyspeck is a mage, though he will deny it at first. On a counter along one wall is a wand with no charges left (which may be revealed as a Wand of Polymorph) and a boy's shirt ripped open at the seams. If dust on the counter is examined, a boy's footprints will be noticed as well as what appear to be the footprints of a giant frog. There is a door in the wall opposite the ladder used to descend into this shop—it is just now swinging shut.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The door opens into a long tunnel with another door at the opposite end which now stands wide open. There are four doors along the corridor, each opening into a small storage room. The door at the end opens inward from the side of a hill into a clearing at the edge of the swamp. If closed, the door blends in with the hillside and is difficult to see.

The sounds of insects fill your ears as well as the many voices of the frogs living there. You stand in silence a moment, the trail seemingly cold. If questioned again, Mr. Flyspeck finally breaks down. He confesses to once being an adventuring mage who gave it up to start a family in this far-away little town. His wife passed away when Timmy was very young and he, wanting to fit in and provide a good home for his son, decided to hide his former profession from the neighbors. He hid his old equipment in the workshop he built, going down from

time to time to reminisce and research. Timmy must've found out because one day, after returning from the market, Mr. Flyspeck found the trap door open, his workshop a mess, and the discharged wand. Fearing the worst, he searched for his son and used his magic to cause the townsfolk to believe there were hideous creatures on the prowl to keep them away from the swamp.

A commotion is heard in the brush nearby. If the party listens before charging ahead, they'll also hear a deep, croaking voice cry out, "Help!"

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Bursting out of the brush are several giant rats. The rats are escaping, but will defend themselves from the party if attacked. The noise continues even after the rats have fled or are killed. Pushing through the brush a little ways into the sometimes ankle deep water at the edge of the swamp will reveal the source of the commotion: a young black dragon has cornered a giant frog that is desperately hopping behind trees and brush to try to escape. Looking closely, the party may notice that the giant frog is wearing a very tattered pair of pants!

The dragon is hungry and will not take kindly to intrusions. Upon discovery, the dragon will forget its meal and attempt to deal with the obvious threat: the party! The giant frog remains, petrified now, watching the combat.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

On driving away or killing the dragon, the giant frog will hop forward to Mr. Flyspeck. The man will recognize his son's pants on the huge amphibian and be overjoyed. If the party had not figured the clues out already, they will learn that little Timmy indeed found his father's workshop, played around with the Wand of Polymorph, and accidentally turned himself into a giant frog. Panicking, he fled the workshop into the swamp. He happened to return to try to re-enter the house when the party was there, but while he managed to push open the secret hillside door and nudge open the inner door (it was open a crack), he could not open the trap door. Hearing voices and noise above, he once more fled back into the swamp to be discovered by the young dragon prowling for a meal.

Timmy's father changes his son back into a boy and is very happy to have him back. He offers the party a suitable reward (DM discretion). The town should also offer a reward of some type for killing or driving off the black dragon. One note: depending on the relative power of the party, the dragon's age and abilities can be adjusted to make the encounter more ... fulfilling :)



## **Temple of the Volcano God**

By DJ Mindermast

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **Courtyard/Front Door**

The face of the temple juts out from the side of a volcanic mountain. It is built of a bright white stone that can reflect sunlight almost strongly enough to blind onlookers. Reddish-orange geometric designs that evoke flames wrap around the building and line the open doorway. A line of Corinthian columns stands out in front of the building wall itself, made of the same white stone and with the same designs wrapped around them.

In front of the doorway stand four guards with spears. The volcano god's symbol is engraved in the spearheads. Unless the PCs have taken great pains to disguise themselves as locals, the guards will not allow them into the temple.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

**Outer Chapel** - This room is uninhabited at the moment. Unlike the exterior of the temple, it is carved straight from the mountainside, and the stone walls have a sandy color to them. An altar stands in the center near the back wall, with an unlit brazier in the middle of it. The only source of light is the large doorway.

The main thing for the PCs to notice here is that the entire back wall is a bas-relief depiction of the volcano god himself, with his commandments and words of wisdom inscribed here and there in the empty spaces. Closer inspection reveals that a door has been cut into the stone, although there is no obvious way to open it. Right over the doorway are the words "My fire shall be your guiding light."

The only way to open the door from this side is to hold do it a torch, candle, or other flaming object lit from the brazier on the altar. How the brazier is lit does not matter, as long as that becomes the source for the next flame. When the flame touches the door, it opens on its own, and stays open until someone closes it (a handle on the inside makes this task a little easier).

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

**Trapped Corridor** - The PCs are now winding their way inside the mountain. The corridor here is about 10 feet wide, with roughly carved walls and floors. Plain stone pillars stand in the center every so often, keeping the ceiling up. About two thirds of the way in, it starts to smell of sulphur. If the trap is not found first, someone (choose randomly) will step on a section of floor which rests on a central axle, allowing it to drop the victim into magma below it. The trap is only wide enough to catch one person, and the lava is not deep enough to drown anyone (not that that should be their major concern).

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

**Inner Sanctum** - The priest is in here, kneeling in front of a stream of magma that flows through the chamber. Although he is not right at the edge, he is closer than it seems anyone should be able to get to anything that hot. Six acolytes stand around him, several feet back. The acolytes are armed with short spears, although they are not particularly good fighters. However, the priest's powers are stronger when acolytes are present; the more that die or run away, the weaker he gets.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

**Inner Sanctum, part 2** - Across the river of magma (15 feet wide) stand three heat-resistant ceramic urns, filled with gold, gems, and anything else the PCs may have been seeking. There are no other exits from the room, so if they want the treasure, they'll have to figure out a way to get it across the river.



# The Necromancer's Cave

By Morpha

Setting: This dungeon is a short cave whose entrance sits where there USED to be a waterfall a while ago. The idea of this dungeon is that the occupant's KNOW the party is coming. Perhaps they set off an alarm spell or they were forewarned of the PCs impending arrival. It can be easily scaled for any CR.

The enemy consists of some undead orcs, dwarves or other low level humanoids and a boss necromancer.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The PCs must wade through the river to get to the entrance to the dungeon. The terrain provides no other means. The DM may choose to place piranha's or other annoying water dwelling creature here, a giant squid is not native to rivers but would have been placed here by the occupants of the cave as a 'guardian'. While wading towards the entrance concealed enemies are firing arrows at the party from within. Upon reaching the entrance they find that it has been walled off by barrels and footprints of at least 4 humanoid creatures lead off through a now closed (and locked) heavy reinforced door that has been set into the back of the cave.

The room had Orcs or Dwarves (any suitable low level Humanoid will do). They had waited concealed behind the barrels and sacks of sand (1/2 cover) to fire arrows at the intruding PC's. Once the PCs had made it to the entrance they retreat through the door, locking it behind them. If the party is of a high level these barrels may be filled with Napalm, Alchemists Fire, etc and explode (trip wire, alarm spell, etc). The sacks of sand serve as a wall to stop the cave flooding when the water level rises, though also as a nice bit of cover.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

After spending some time to get the door open (open lock, bashing it in, etc.) the first PC to enter needs to spot the caltrops that have been placed by the entrance to the door. If not, he gets a foot full of spikes. And the 'enemies' now crouch behind an upturned kitchen table (the bowls and cutlery all over the floor), and have readied their arrows at the now entering party. Surprise round, fire and then retreat through the door, closing it as they go through.

Depending on how this goes the enemy might press their advantage before retreating once again, throwing their flasks of Acid at the poor PC's now moving through the door one at a time over the caltrops. Well, so much for the fighters full plate armour (if they hit of course and do enough damage).

This room serves as the enemy's kitchen a table in the center has been turned over to provide cover. A cauldron and cooking utensils sits in the corner. Some crude wooden stools are placed around it.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The Cave appears to end in this room. This room is larger than the others and there are beds lying around the walls. A chest sits at the back of the room and the 'enemies' surround it, bows drawn and swords ready to be unsheathed. If there are hostages one or more of them may be in this room, behind the enemies.

They let loose their arrows, drop their bows and ready their weapons. The enemies fit here the party, hopefully worn down by the Squid, rain of arrows (or bullets), exploding barrels, caltrops and flasks of acid will find these low level enemies a bit of a challenge, especially when they come back from the dead numerous times after being killed.

They open the chest to find some goodies, take the equipment from the enemies...but whatever they are after (item or hostage etc.) is not in this room. The DM can be harsh or easy on the PC's depending on level..

There is a false wall at the back of the room carefully disguised in some way. It could be difficult to locate or one of the PC's could notice that part of a bed was knocked 'into' the wall during combat.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

A necromancer of some kind (evil cleric or sorcerer) sits in this room, viewing the other rooms of the cave and surrounding terrain (outside of the cave) on a crystal ball, pool of water, computer monitor etc. He has had time to cast his spells making him battle ready and has one minor magical item that makes him slightly more difficult. Perhaps one that makes it harder for arrows to hit him...

This room appears to be a study or personal quarters. A bed, much better quality than the cots that were in the previous room sits at the far end with a table of instruments in the center, and a small stack of library books. A vault-like door adorns the back wall.

The mage, necromancer, sorcerer makes it hard for the PC's to deal with him. He threatens to kill or destroy the quarry they seek in the last room. The enemies from the previous room rise once more to fight, the PC's trapped around the entrance to the room, enemies on both sides. The necromancer is desperate and knows he has been defeated. He will barter with the PC's for his life in exchange for the quarry they seek. But will attempt to backstab them at any chance.

The Vault door is magically sealed as well as being a foot thick of steal. It is trapped and it isn't going to be easy to get in there without the password. The Necromancer knows this and is the reason why the PC's SHOULDN'T kill him.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

What the PCs are after is in this room. The end of the cave has a smooth small rounded room, where the water from the waterfall has carved away the rock.

The mage may try to lock the PCs in this room... if they make him go in with them he will have his minions close the door behind them and then try to teleport out. He will then flee, leaving his minions outside to attempt to be rid of you when you finally get out.

**Conclusion** - This dungeon is a pain in the butt. The PCs HATE it when low level monsters hurt them so another good example of not needing high level creatures to give your party a challenge. They HATE it even more when the BBEG gets away. So this is a great quick little quest that the PC's can embark on to thwart their most hated NPC's evil plans. Of course the PC's can kill the Necromancer guy if they want since there's no reason to say he gets away. This may have been the location they finally track him down too after they usurp his

evil empire or undead legion. A once powerful enemy reduced to hiding in caves.

I have always ran this sort of dungeon in every system and setting I have ever GM'd. In my experience the fighter barbarian type character who is usually the first through the door is usually so angered by the end of this they destroy everything in sight including the Necromancer boss, before even giving him a chance to speak. This is why i give him the password to get into the vault. If they kill him, they then have to figure out how to get in there. For DND a good rogue, a wizard or sorcerer who can transmute rock or walk through walls is handy. If they can't do it themselves they will have to find someone who can or come back later and if there's a hostage in there then they have to be quick don't they.



## Merchant's Crypt

By Aki Halme

A wealthy merchant has died, and interred in a crypt, situated on a small cemetery at the middle of an affluent town. Much wealth was found missing after his demise, and rumours began to circulate; had the merchant taken his gold to the grave with him? Unfortunately the grave robbers came back from the grave as undead hungry for human flesh, and killed several before they were destroyed. Plant life above the crypt has begun to wither, including several big trees, and animals steer clear of that area of the otherwise peaceful cemetery. So do most people these days.

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

**Above the ground** - The town watch is taking no chances anymore. The crypt has been sealed by the order of the town council, and guardsmen stand watch over the entrance. There is also a barricade and an alarm system. Since the guards keep a constant vigil in addition to their other duties the guards are typically not very strong – a rotating shift of a few guards at a time, involving most or all of the town watch. There are also other patrols in town, and they occasionally walk past the cemetery and sometimes talk for a while with the guardsmen there, as the grave duty is the most disliked of all town watch tasks. The watchmen next to the crypt are well motivated, as they, like most people in the town, have lost friends, acquaintances, or family members in the undead grave robber attack, which makes them very difficult to bribe.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

**Antechamber** - This room is right past the barricade. It is a pleasant, rectangular room with stone seats and tables for up to a dozen people. The room is lined with marble plates, and has magical lighting. There's also a small fountain with clear, fresh water. All in all, the room is pleasant to be in, and it soothes aches and pains – even heals wounds. The longer a person stays in this room the harder it will be leave, as the pleasures the room gives are addictive. Walking right through is easy, but after a half an hour some will be hard-pressed to leave; a few hours that they may need to be dragged out against their will. Once a person leaves the room the addiction will ease without after-effects.

The healing magics that were placed in this room were minor to begin with – conveniences rather than major benefits – and have been warped by negative energy emanating from the depths of the crypt. The room provides all it has provided before, but takes its power from the life force of living inhabitants. The total health of the people in the room slowly diminishes in exchange for the pleasures and soothing and healing that takes place.

Those that spend too long in the room will find their life force totally sapped away, and eventually replaced with negative energy, which causes the person to rise as undead, hungry for positive energy to replace the coldness.

Leading onwards from this chamber is a heavy stone door at the bottom of a short flight of stairs. It is unlocked and its surface is clean and smooth, except for a large copper ring that makes it easy to pull the door open. Once open, it easily stays open (for now). The other side of the door is smooth, and the door only opens one way, deeper into the grave.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

**Catacomb** - Leading downwards from the entry hall is a winding corridor that gradually turns as it keeps descending. The walls are lined with shelves with corpses on them. Using fire here would be a singularly bad idea as the corpses as well as the shelves and some loose materials on them are flammable and the air supply finite. A significantly amount of fire would also cause the air to expand, causing the upper door to slam shut, and possibly bend so that prying it loose will be hard – especially as the door is smooth, with nothing to grab. The catacombs show traces of negative energy, but the corpses are just that – dead people. Should the party molest them and be later discovered having done so, the town officials would be unlikely to be pleased, unless very good reasons could be found.

The catacombs were uncharted, and opened by the workforce building the grave. As the work had already been begun, changing the plans would've been costly and mean admitting a mistake. Rather than risk the consequences, the work force sealed a section of the catacomb with an intentional cave-in at the lower end, and cleaned the passage to serve as a part of the crypt, and hushed up the findings. The bodies were left as they were. They did not know that the discovery was intentional, and the site chosen so that the merchant could acquire a powerful magical item. The merchant died soon after, and ended up buried with the item he had coveted.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

**Merchant's Crypt** - At the bottom of the winding passage is a rectangular room, quite similar to the entry level, except for a large stone coffin, writings of the life of the merchant, and some flowers, now dry enough to be almost dust as they were left here during the merchant's burial ceremony, a year before present time. This room is also magically lit when life is detected within, but fortunately lacks the amenities of the first room. The room reeks of negative energy, and counts as unholy despite its appearance – this due to the powerful evil magical item the merchant had sought. Its nature is chosen as fits the campaign, but it is located within the merchant's coffin (or is the coffin), and has over time drenched the merchant in negative energy, causing him to rise as a powerful undead monster; whether intelligent or not, is up to the GM. I'd leave him intelligent, but driven insane by the slow subversion to unlife and the containment that followed it, locked in his own coffin. He may have eventually become non-corporeal, as opening a coffin and getting attacked by what's inside is a bit of cliché. Still, the magic item binds the merchant to its defense, so he can't leave rooms 4-5.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

**The Grave Itself** - Uncovering the magical item – whether by opening or breaking the grave, removing an item from a container, or some other means that fit the campaign. I picture it as a huge sentient black sword.. floods areas 3-5 with negative energy. This makes the crypt even more unholy than it was, and also fills the catacomb area with negative energy, causing the corpses there to rise as undead. For a final quirk, the magic item that has

caused all the trouble weighs (or can weigh if it so chooses) a lot, enough that two people are needed to carry it, and has an unpleasant tendency to sink into stone if left alone. It is also too large to be effectively used in such small surroundings. This leaves the party with the unenviable task of fighting undead creatures in an unholy area while constantly carrying a heavy, hard to destroy magic item.. and if successful, still needing to explain its actions to the town watch.



## **The Temple Defiled**

By Tyler Turner

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

This dungeon takes place in a remote location, within some sort of ring of vision-obstructing land. The church could be in a ring of hills, at the bottom of a ravine, against the side of a rock-face, a wall, or even in the middle of a particularly dense forested area.

The only significant detail about the church is its simplicity (one to three rooms actually inside), and the fact that its original inhabitants have long abandoned it for its new dark master.

The guardians of the church appear as soon as the players cross into the ring of land into vision (and ideally close proximity) of the church. Many (5-10) imps emerge from the dilapidated statues, stoneworks, and other areas around the front of the church. However, every one the players kill merely causes another one to jump from out of sight to join the fray. Only when the players kill the alpha imp, identifiable by his slightly larger size and position in the back of the melee, will the fiends cease their relentless assault.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Now, with that out of the way, the players must actually make it inside the church, which is magically barred. A gargoyle animates and begins conversing with the players as soon as they discover the door locked. The gargoyle is jovial and amused, but also under orders from his master. The only way to unlock the door is for the gargoyle to speak its master's name.

Thus, as the gargoyle reacts amiably to the players, they must convince, or more likely, considering the gargoyle is only supposed to open the door for his master, trick him into saying his master's name. Killing the gargoyle is also an option, but if they do, the master of the church should enter the encounter significantly better prepared/buffed/etc etc.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

As the players enter the church, they notice both of the side walls lined with statues of the church's master in menacing positions, though each one very subtly different, as well as a stone podium in the center. On the podium is a piece of paper and a piece of flowing cloth. The paper details that the master can only be defeated by shrouding her exact likeness with the cloth.

Various clues should be situated around the room as far as which statue is the correct one. However, one or two

clues should point to the truth: The clues and statues are all fake and a trick by the master. If the players shroud any of the statues, the statue will crumble and consume the cloth, and the players will be cursed temporarily, and be much more susceptible to the master's magical threats.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Magically hidden, standing on the altar, is the master, watching the players struggle with her trick. If the players fall for it, she'll chuckle a bit, betraying a bit of her whereabouts to the players. Once she is discovered, she will scold the players for their rudeness and do battle with them.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The witch should have a key of some sort on her person, which would be used to open a chest directly behind the church altar. In this chest could be a sought after item, or perhaps a run-around to delay the acquisition of the item. Also there is a note, apparently from the `_true_` witch to her student or less powerful sister, warning that a few adventurers were coming, and that she needed a house sitter to exterminate the pests once they arrived.



## **The Haunting**

By Matthew Darcy (with a little help from Dad - Paul Darcy)

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The city you currently find yourself in has a problem. News and rumor abound concerning the disappearance of six children over the last several weeks. Some say they were eaten by wandering monsters. Others say they simply ran away. But, the majority of people believe they were kidnapped and taken to “The House”.

“The House” is said to be haunted. It is a large, two-story home, long abandoned, that some swear they hear screams from in the middle of the night. The ornate front doors are locked and all the windows boarded up. Some of the older people in the neighborhood remember a family once living there and a number of parties going on at the time, but they were never invited. In fact, the family generally kept to themselves around their neighbors. One dark night, a particularly loud event took place with wild screaming. The morning after, the house was found to be boarded up and the family apparently moved out.

Whether out of a desire to be heroes, to collect the reward money, or simple curiosity, you now find yourselves on the front steps of “The House”. Contrary to all the stories you’ve heard, the front door is unlocked! Inside is what must once have been a grand entryway, a wide stairway leads up to the second floor. Two doors, one on your left and the other on your right, are closed. As soon as you are all inside, the front door slams shut and locks tight. The door will not open—as if someone or something does not want you to leave.

To make matters worse, the door to the left creaks open and two zombies/skeletons/wraiths move forward to attack the party (DM should adjust the undead creatures, depending on party level and composition, to give the adventurers a good warm-up).

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Once the undead are defeated, the party members barely catch their breath (and hopefully do a little healing) before they hear a noise upstairs. If they investigate by going upstairs, they find themselves in a hallway with three doors to the left and three down the hall to the right. Suddenly, from behind the door at the end of the hall to the right, screams pierce the stillness. The door is locked, but may easily be broken in.

Inside the room is a large bed, the blankets old and dusty. There is also a nightstand next to the bed with a small painting on it, a dresser with a mirror, and another door. The small portrait on the nightstand shows two children standing with several adults, all garbed in black robes, in front of a doorway next to a fireplace that could be in "The House". The only window in here is boarded up and, standing next to it, appears to be a girl covering her face. If the party attempts to speak with her, she continues sobbing and demands they leave her alone. Persisting, they may be able to coax from her this information: she lives here and was killed by the Demon of Darkness below. If they approach, her true nature will become apparent: a very unfriendly spirit! Her face distorts and she lets out a horrible scream that will cause the party to have to pause to cover their ears for one round. During that time, the spirit will attack the strongest member of the party.

If the ghost is defeated or driven off and the room examined, they will find that the other door in the room leads to a large, walk-in closet. The children's clothes in here are old and moth-eaten. There are several sets of black robes hanging prominently in front of the other clothes.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The other rooms upstairs are all empty (at DM discretion, perhaps some minor undead or demonic creatures could be populated in a few of the other rooms to keep things interesting). They all appear to have been bedrooms. There is nothing of value in them.

On the Ground Floor Downstairs, the room that the undead came from is a parlour filled with rotting furniture and nothing apparently of value. The other door off the Main Entry leads into a large living room with a fireplace and a large, life-sized portrait on the wall next to the fireplace. The painting is similar to the one on the nightstand upstairs except that the people all wear typical clothing and not black robes. A dining room is next to that and a doorway there leads into the kitchen at the back of the house. Besides a locked and boarded up door leading outside from the kitchen, there is another door which leads into the parlour and one for a large, empty, walk-in pantry.

The large painting next to the fireplace conceals a hidden door with dark stairs leading down to a secret basement. Hopefully, the PC's will have paid attention to the description of the painting on the nightstand and be able to make the connection. The DM may need to provide additional clues.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The stairway down into the basement is very dark and filled with cobwebs. Torchlight, lanterns, even infravision do not seem to penetrate far into the inky black. The bottom of the stairway opens into a small room with an iron door opposite. When the party approaches the door, it creaks open loudly. The air becomes very cold as an expanding darkness begins creeping into the room. Occasionally, shapes can be seen writhing within the darkness, as if it were actually a fluid rather than an absence of light: long claws, a flash of glowing red eyes, the gleam of fangs, wisps of smoke and flame.

The darkness begins to move rapidly. If the party retreats, two smoking, black tentacles dart out from the dark near the floor to try to snare PC legs. If hits are successful, the PC's are pulled to the floor and dragged into the darkness to be attacked by the demonic creature within. The DM should use discretion and make sure the Demon of Darkness is both terrifying and difficult for the PC's to defeat—a monstrous evil that may well devour them all if they are not very, very careful.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

If the Demon of Darkness is defeated, the party will discover a large, circular chamber behind the iron door with six children manacled to the walls. There is a very thick tome on a table at the center of the room. Within this Book of Black Magic are various summoning spells, including the one that brought the Demon of Darkness. The creature was too powerful to control and killed several of those present at the time, including the girl whose ghost was encountered in her former bedroom.

The children are very weak as their life force was slowly being drained away by the creature just defeated. However, they will recover and the community leaders, in their gratitude, should offer a handsome reward. Of course, before they pay up, there's also the little problem they've been having with a haunted bakery down the street...



## **The Quest for the Rod of Spellius**

By Davide Quatrini

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

PCs are searching an ancient artifact: The Rod of Spellius, the powerful creation of a legendary wizard hero. They know that the object is hidden in an underground complex built by an unknown race millenniums ago. The entrance of the complex is a small natural cave located in an arid hill near a grassy plain. The guardian is a big velociraptor (a fast carnivorous dinosaur), that made the cave its personal nest. If PCs defeat it they can found the door for the next room.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The second room is an old library full of books and scrolls. PCs can realize that this was one of Spellius' secret libraries and then they can read the books (some of them are minor magical scrolls). The books contain a subtle psychological challenge: most of them say that the Rod can be found in the far Demiplane of Metal, not in the complex in which PCs are. This is one of the Spellius' tests for the PCs: if they believe the books they will leave the place; otherwise, if they are stubborn (just like Spellius!), they can find the secret door that leads to the following room.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

It's the time for Spellius' second test. This room is completely empty, made with smooth gray stone and with two identical exit doors made of shining strange metal (no inscriptions or signs can be found in this room). The door on the left is the real door for Room Four; the door on the right is protected by a trap, that activates if the

door itself is touched in any way (the trap is magical and it polymorphs PCs' belts into poisonous snakes). In this room spellcasters can cast spells only if they say the word "Please!" before casting them.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The fourth room is a large natural cave full of stalactites and stalagmites, with some fluorescent mushrooms and a muddy floor. When PCs enter here Spellius' last guardians, large zombies with black armors and slime-covered greatswords, erupt violently from the ground and attack. One of them can cast shadow/darkness spells, and another one can summon bats' swarms (these creatures have more-than-average intelligence). They'll defend the marble altar (see Room Five) at any cost.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

If PCs destroy the zombies they can reach the bottom of the cave, the place in which the Rod rests from the Old Age. It is positioned on a white altar made of precious marble, and it radiates a soft gray light. It can be removed from the altar only through magic, and only by a character that studied Spellius' books for at least 8 hours. The rod has several different powers, most of them based on necromantic effects.



## **The Plague Devil**

By Nik Palmer

Divination and dream visions have revealed that an entombed devil is gaining power and trying to break free of its ancient tomb. A range of mountains is known as the ancient kingdom of the plague demon, exploration points towards a valley, home of the cursed howling wolf as the likely site of the tomb. The Valley has shrivelled and twisted trees, barely clinging to life.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **Wolf Fiend Den**

Centuries of living in this hollow have chanced and twisted the Cerberus type beast.

The guardian is an ancient magical wolf with three heads. It can speak a growly howly voice, but has a limited capacity of conversation... Eat, Sleep, and keep others off its territory. (It does not care about birds in the trees). For weaker players, make the guardian old, diseased and weak enough to beat. For powerful players, make the guardian ancient and powerful with a breath weapon of disease and flame.

Secret door: The back of the cave den a 10x10 entryway has obviously been sealed with giant stones a long long time past. Not so secret, but definitely blocked. A warm foetid smell seeps out of a few of the holes. (place traps in/on the stones for additional challenge).

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

*Main Chamber, Altar in center of room on dais, metallic runes and script set into the ceiling radiate obvious magic and seem to glisten with a fresh wetness.*

**Rune Quote:** “Here the three essence shall not be reformed.”

As the player(s) finally enter the chamber, they witness the plague demon forming from the aether into a physical body, immediately the rune script along the ceiling detaches from the wall and beings to spin in a vortex, forming a cylinder of razor metal, that shreds the form of the demon. The metallic runes then return to their original position.

Anyone who witnesses this must save versus disease or suffer a debilitating penalty. Priests and paranormally sensitive characters will feel the wave of pestilence emerge from the tomb.... The process repeats nearly every hour. Sometimes the plague demon gets farther than other times, but it does not escape the main chamber of the tomb. Sometimes it is able to get to the left room and move it's skull a few inches (Below)

There are three side rooms.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Left Room**

**Rune Quote:** Demons mind sealed in gold sitting upon stone.

The head of the Demon rests in this room, but it is no longer on its pedestal, over the millennia, the pedestal cracked and crumbled, ultimately, the golden demon skull tumbled to the floor. Free of it's protected pedestal, the devil has been able to re-form its ethereal body in the main chamber, The runes are able to affect ghosts, spirits, and the astral plane, so they continue to shred the demon. It can not physically reform until all of its 3 parts are laid together on the altar. Sometimes the demon is able to drag its skull a few inches closer to the main room and altar.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Opposite Room**

**Rune Quote:** Buried body seals pestilence within

This room has a large stone sarcophagus covered in runes. To open the body sarcophagus, a puzzle must be solved (a riddle, brain teaser, or more active (tic tac toe, etc) challenge).

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Right Room**

**Rune Quote:** Soul closed in crystal, heart locked away.

The essence of the demon is in this room. It's heart, still beating, rests in a crystal urn, covered in dust. Actually the entire room is full of dust.... the still beating heart is pumping out dust of decay, which has eaten a crack in the crystal urn and allowed the dust of pestilence to begin to pile and fill the room. Which each slow heartbeat, another puff of deadly dust poofs out of the urn.



## **Villainous Cellar Pub**

By Aki Halme

The party has tracked a major villain to a pub and is out to capture. Their target is the playboy son of the leader of a crime family, perhaps, or a specialist criminal such as a hard-to-catch cat burglar. The person needs to be held for ransom, or interrogation, or prosecution; outright killing would therefore be counter-productive. As the

good news, there are no reports of the target having been violent, or having significant combat capacity.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **Bouncer and Cloak Room**

As the inn has a rough crowd in it, there is an appropriately powerful guardian at the door - a monster that is hard though not impossible for the party to defeat. As the party does not consist of regulars at the inn, they are viewed with suspicion, and that only through a tiny eye slit at the door. Breaking the door is difficult as the entrance is in a narrow blind alley which does not leave room for effective use of battering rams, or even combat tactics, and the door itself is barred and reinforced. Windows on the ground floor also have bars in them, and since the pub is underground other entries are not obvious. Should the party attempt to fight its way in, they will discover that the alley is a killing ground for the pub's defenders; since the clients are a rough crowd the establishment has prepared against forcing an entry. Sneaking in by less obvious ways, making another entrance from above, camouflage, and bribes might succeed where brute force might fail.

The cloak room is next to the entrance, and holds many of the heavier, more obvious weapons of the clients within. Should the party opt to fight, an alarm will sound and what happens depends on whether the party makes it to the cloak room before the weapons are distributed amongst those willing to fight against invaders; the pub rewards those who fight to defend the pub, and those inside are of the kind with few places where they can feel welcome and at ease, so they would be inclined to defend the pub as long as the odds are heavily stacked in their favour. Without their heavier weapons they would be more inclined to wait and see than fight it out.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Pub Main Room**

The main room of the pub is relatively crowded, and badly lit, except for the entertainment - a small stage with a few performers on it, a long bar with a nice supply of beverages, gambling, games of skill. Most tables are in various stages of twilight, and those near the walls are darker still, some blocked from sight by curtains. The entrance is well lit, however, so the party members, unless they take precautions, are well visible to everyone - including their target and his (her?) henchmen. The target will try to avoid contact, and tries to either destroy the party or at least get the PCs some new enemies. To this end, the henchmen / bodyguards / friends of the target will try to separate PCs from each other than get individual PCs in a brawl. Fighting in the shadows would involve opportunities to frame the party of breaking the pub's rules, of getting them to fight some of the heavier locals, or have an apparently bystander get an opportunity to backstab a PC or render him or her helpless by drugs, traps, force, magic, or a sap. Capturing a PC in process of capturing the target would be a major success for the bad guys, far better than killing anyone.

The challenges for PCs is to keep together, find the real threats, spot their mark or at least a henchman, and make it closer to their prey.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Burning Pub**

If the PCs manage to avoid tricks and temptations, the next plot is fire. A fair share of the furnishings are flammable, as are the beverages. The room will rapidly fill with flickering flames and thick smoke if a fire starts. The pub itself is largely stone, but tables, chairs, curtains, the bar, and the drinks can provide the makings

of an impressive display of fireworks.. if the target or a henchman has access to magics, illusions and actual fire or smoke magic could be used - if not, they can have supplies, either prepared or improvised, to accomplish the same. Either way, once the fire starts, the PCs will get a clue about where the fire was started from, and thus, where their prey is. Getting to him in a semi-lit, burning room full of panicking villains could be harder.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Escape Route**

The prey won't stay put in a burning room, but will try to escape through a back room; first behind the bar, then to the kitchens, and then upwards through a trap door, and finally out there an apartment to an adjoining street. The bar has plenty of flammable liquids and narrow confines; the kitchen has knives, a cook, an oven, storages of edible goods, appliances, open fire, hot grease, a service elevator, and, once the chaos has starts, surfaces that are difficult to stand on or see through such as peas on the floor, flour in the air or on the floor, spilled sauce etc. The trap door opens to a closet in an apartment, making the last part of the escape take place amongst sleeping civilians who won't be pleased if they wake up to find armed invaders fighting in their home. Naturally, the home is furnished, and since the inhabitants are asleep, dark. Henchmen won't escape this way, but make their stand in the kitchen; the prey that the party chases will try to flee instead for as long as possible.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Capture**

Capturing the villain will be hard as he or she has preparations in place for a escape, and tries to flee rather than escape. Capturing an associate of the target also works as a consolation prize, and eventually a new attempt. Holding the target captive also leads to another story where the villain's associates attempt a rescue, or to neutralise the captive villain, or to capture someone close to the PCs to coerce co-operation.



## **Ye Classic Wizard's House**

By Gillian Wiseman

The PCs are seeking a mcguffin of some sort, which they believe was last owned by a wizard who lived in the small square "tower" they are now standing before. The wizard died about 50 years ago, while traveling away from home. His heir attempted to enter the tower, but was slain by something in the tower, and his tower was sealed at that time. No one has entered it since. Rumors that the tower is filled with treasure and traps abound.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The PCs should have little problem opening the doors to the tower; they are locked and magically held in the ordinary fashion (arcane lock). However, the antechamber (2 stories high and quite beautifully decorated) is guarded by a chain golem (or any suitably tough construct with reach) who is initially located on a balcony overlooking the antechamber. This fight should be a tough one (chain golem is CR 5) but not overwhelming (suitable for a L3 or 4 party).

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The PCs are now free to move into the second area of the tower – the kitchen, dining room, pantries and stair hall. This cluster of rooms can be treated as one area, as there is only one encounter – the wizard used a dozen

or more unseen-servant-like creatures as servants. These things still work to keep the area clean and ready for dwelling in. The creatures are not able to communicate with the PCs, but will bustle about, barely visible, trying to relieve the PCs of cloaks, backpacks, muddy boots, etc... The PCs will be offered warm slippers, hot drinks (long since spoiled, of course and stinking or just empty cups), chairs to rest in, and more. This can be as lively and humorous as the DM desires. Once offered and given hospitality, the PCs are free to gather their things and ascend the stairs. PCs who refuse their hospitality will find the creatures dogging them during their further explorations, taking loose items away, trying to polish their boots in the middle of combat, and so on.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Upon reaching the stair landing, the PCs are overlooking the antechamber and are ready to enter the only door. Opening this door reveals a bare blank room. It has been stripped at some time of every possible valuable. This is an illusion. Interacting with the chamber in any way such as searching it, trying to remove the large stone-topped work tables, or moving other items into the room, should soon reveal the illusion for what it is.

The room is actually furnished with a full working wizard's lab. All the reagents and chemicals are pretty much spoiled, but the glassware, the equipment and the remaining materials are worth a sizeable amount to a young wizard. Unfortunately, they are quite bulky and would require several wagons to carry off. Note that there is one exit to this room – a door on the far side – and crossing the room to open this door without further actions in the room will not dispel the illusion.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

This door leads to the Wizard's bedchamber, a small but comfortably furnished room. It is now filthy and filled with the scent of damp and mildew. On the floor is the ancient and now skeletonized corpse of the wizard's heir, left here when his "loyal" servants fled after he died. This room is fully furnished with a bed, bedside table, a couple of chairs, a small washstand, a wardrobe and whatever else seems suitable. A couple doors lead out, one to a garderobe or bathing chamber, the other to the final room – the wizard's study.

The ceiling of this chamber shows some water stains, especially near the study door. Guarding this room are a suitably challenging number of animated objects. They are the furnishings of the room. There should be perhaps three large and a few small objects, and some may be partly damaged from beating off the previous "invaders". This battle should be stiffer than the one to enter the tower, but not overwhelming.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The final room – the wizard's study. Here the PCs find their reward for the job. If they were seeking a mcguffin, it may be here, securely locked in a chest or cabinet. It might be trapped at the DM's decision. The rest of the treasure is in plain sight, but unfortunately damaged. The last 50 years have not been kind to the tower's roof. It has leaked, allowing a great deal of moisture into the room.

The wizard's spellbooks, his notes on building animated objects, scrolls, and other interesting or valuable materials may be here, or may be ruined by the damp, as the DM determines is suitable for his campaign. A couple of potions, minor items or even a single more valuable item could also be found here – or notes that indicate what the wizard was doing before he left and was killed...



# The Sanctuary of Sumuho

By Dozus [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

The powerful wizard Sumuho styled himself as a god and was worshipped far and wide. After his fall, his vast temple sank into the desert long ago. What secrets lie in the Sanctuary of Sumuho?

## Prologue

Millennia ago, a powerful nomadic sorcerer of the Inhap Desert called Sumuho arose to become a figure of international renown. Founding an academy of magic, he drew away students of other famous schools. After a hundred years, the wizard made a pronouncement: he had discovered the secret of immortality, and was effectively a god. The school in the desert became a cathedral and worshippers flocked from around the world to see this new god.

This drew the ire of the Cult of Khunam, a fiercely monotheistic faith that worshipped the sun disc and the largest religious sect of the land. Offended by Sumuho's audacity and sacrilege, they summoned the Oth-Maares, warrior monks avowed to protect the faith until death - and beyond. After ceremoniously breaking contact forever from the high priests to free them from any sins the Oth-Maares might commit, they disappeared into the Inhap. Within a month, Sumuho too disappeared. His own priests either vanished or turned up dead, and his temple was abandoned and forgotten. After a few centuries, it disappeared under the sands of the Inhap. All but a few worshippers vanished, the remaining faithful waiting patiently for Divine Sumuho's return...

## Opening Hook

While visiting a city or large town, the party is approached by a trio who claim to be archaeologists. Their apparent spokesman, a young man of around 25, explains that they believe they know the location of the ancient Sanctuary of Sumuho. An excavation is in order, but they would like some physical protection as well as assistance in opening the temple. The temple itself may have a few ancient traps here and there, but the fame alone would make the party rich, not to mention their share of the treasures within. If the party accepts, the trio will lead them out into the desert.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

After two days of steady traveling, the archaeologists cheerfully announce that the Sanctuary is but a few miles away. As they top the next dune, however, there is a distressing sight: an encampment of nomadic lizardmen. Notorious bandits native to the Inhap, the lizardmen are no pushover, especially given their ability to dive into and "swim" through the sand, making them difficult to track. As one of the archaeologists - a slender woman with a heavy accent - unhelpfully points out, the encampment is directly over the site of the temple. Unless one of the party is lucky enough to speak Inhapi, the lizardmen will have to be removed by force. Expect strong resistance from the dozen of the tribe, led by a scarred lizard war boss with a disfigured and mutated (yet oddly functional) third arm sticking from her side. Their armament is varied, mostly with simple bronze-headed spears, but a few with steel cutlasses and flails purloined from trader caravans. After the lizardmen are dispersed, a search of their camp finds little of value: a few small gems, a decorative garland of gnome skulls, and a chest filled with desert garments such as turbans.

Following the extinguishing of the lizardmen, another of the archaeologists - an aged but spry man - begins pulling equipment from their packs while the other two explain that, according to their research, the Oth-Maares did not simply abandon the Sanctuary of Sumuho, but hid it. Using Khunamite magics, they caused the temple to sink into the golden sands and vanish. Their research also led them to Oth-Maares texts from which they

learned the spells and techniques needed to undo the spell. As they finish explaining, the elder archaeologist dons a white vestment with orange and red embroidery. In his hands is a very tall staff with a tiny relic encased in an orb at one end. The three nod to each other and the old archaeologist begins to chant in a strange tongue. For several minutes, nothing seems to happen. Then, suddenly, the archaeologist slams the base of the staff into the ground. A circular tunnel appears under the staff, spewing out a load of sand in a ripple on the dunes. The tunnel appears to lead down to some sort of structure fifty or so feet beneath the sand.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Down through the odd sand tunnel, the party comes across what appears to be a solid sandstone door leading into the underground structure. The door is completely smooth and jointless, about twelve feet tall and peaking into an angled arch at the top. The archaeologists seem a bit perplexed by the door and are open to suggestions on how they might enter. As the crew discusses possibilities and theories, at the mention of the word "Sumuho", narrow square slits crack open in the strange door. Pupil-like bits of stone bulge outwards, staring at the crew. Then below the eye-like structures breaks open a wide rectangle. Moving like a mouth, a creaking yet thunderous voice utters a phrase in an unknown language. If any of the party respond to it, the door will answer in the language it hears from the party (e.g., if an elf PC speaks High Elvish to the door, the door will reply in High Elvish). In its odd voice, the door asks: "Who are you that have come to seek enlightenment from Divine Sumuho?"

A conversation with the door reveals that this is indeed the lost Sanctuary of Sumuho. The door seems oblivious to the passage of time, unaware that the Sanctuary has been unopened for thousands of years. However, it is terribly stubborn and refuses to open the door. The crew must convince the door guardian that they are indeed worshippers of Sumuho and come to seek his wisdom. At the GM's discretion, the door may require some proof that they really know who Sumuho is; if only the archaeologists answer, the door guardian will refuse entrance of the "barbaric and heathen" PCs, so some knowledge of Sumuho's history would be valuable. Once the guardian is convinced, the eyes and mouth will recede and the door will crack from its hinges. The solid-looking sandstone will break into blocks, revealing a jointed and fully-articulated stone-jack. The golem will step aside to allow the party to enter the gate. Once all are inside, the -jack will reassume its form as a door. Attempts to speak to or activate it thereafter will be in vain.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Inside the Sanctuary, the party will find themselves in a cavernous room lavishly decorated. The sandstone walls look as though they were painted hours earlier, with bright frescoes depicting Sumuho's rise to power and his ascent into the realm of the gods. Holding the ceilings above them are dozens of massive marble pillars, each one covered from base to capital in hieroglyphs like a stele monument. The floors are sandstone inlaid with glass, with the center of the room a mosaic of Sumuho subduing an army of demons. Statues litter the edges of the room, mostly of Sumuho in various heroic, majestic, or divine poses. To the west lay two hallways, one ascending and one descending, and to the east is another wider passageway. Despite being underground and without windows, the room seems brightly lit by an unknown light source. The whole effect is a bit breathtaking. Incredible as it appears, however, the sanctuary does show some signs of decay, with piles of sand having leaked in through cracks in the walls, and some of the marble columns looking cracked and frail.

The archaeologists themselves are awestruck, but quickly go to task examining a corner of the room with a large statue of Sumuho holding a golden scepter. The woman speaks in a foreign language to the eldest, who nods approvingly. He smiles broadly, explaining that they were seeking proof of Sumuho's links to an obscure

Inhap culture and this statue may prove their findings. Carefully climbing the statue, the female archaeologist reaches for the scepter. As she pulls it from the statue's hand, she loses her balance and falls. Clinging to the scepter, her weight breaks the arm of the statue off. With a slow and ominous creak, the five meter tall statue tilts, and then falls. It shatters against a nearby column, which itself cracks in half. The ceiling emits a rumble, and soon, other pillars begin to break and smash into each other. Within seconds, chunks of the vaulted ceiling begin to crack and fall, shattering against the floor and letting down a flood of sand.

Archaeologists in tow, the party must rush into one of the adjoining corridors for safety: the ascending hallway or descending hallway to the west, or the wider passageway to the east. As they dive into the passageways, the once-beautiful temple atrium is filled by the sands of the Inhap. Now they must navigate through whichever passageway they stumbled upon.

**West ascending** - This dark hallway starts as a moderately sloping ramp, but after fifty feet or so it turns a corner and becomes a steep spiral staircase. It is quite a hike up the 200 stone stairs, which end in a narrow and low-ceilinged crawlspace. One of the archaeologists comments that this was probably a aqueduct or secret passageway when the temple was above ground. After a hundred feet of crawlspace, the bottom drops out of the floor in a square meter hole. If something is dropped into the hole, a splash can be heard after a long pause. The only way out seems to be through this hole. One can either drop down into the hole or lower a rope to climb. At the bottom of the hole is a seemingly bottomless pool, with steps leading into it. Climbing the steps leads into the hallway to the tabernacle room.

**West descending** - The descending pathway snakes in a sloped spiral down several stories. The path is dark, but torchlight reveals a few glyphs on the walls every few meters. The path suddenly ends into a thick, undecorated steel door. On close examination, although the door seems to be in perfect condition, its hinges seem to be corroded. Breaking the hinges will allow the door to fall forward, leading into a large chamber. In the center of the room is a large skeleton, a chain draped around what was once a massive neck. Even the archaeologists are unsure what this huge beast may have been. Beyond the skeleton of the creature is a door leading to the tabernacle hallway.

**East passageway** - The walls of this wide passageway are made of pure white marble, covered in runes and glyphs. The passageway continues for a hundred meters or so before ending in a series of three doors. Two of the doors are filled with collapsed debris and sand, leaving only the door on the left available to travel through. A short hallway leads into what appears to be a sacristy, filled with ancient vestments and liturgical items used to worship Sumuho in his heyday. The colors of the garments are still bright, but the material is weak and mostly threadbare. Most of the other liturgical items, however - braziers, censers, scepters, food dishes, et cetera - are in good shape. All are made from precious metals, and many are gemmed and otherwise decorated. The walls are plainly decorated with a broad purple band stretching across the room. An examination of the bar reveals a loose brick; removing it will reveal the bricks under it are unmortared as well. Behind them is a small crawlspace, wide enough for one person, leading into the hallway of the tabernacle room.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Finally the party makes it into the tabernacle room. The hallway leads into a very tall chamber. The far wall consists almost entirely of a huge door made of electrum. Intricately detailed, Sumuho's name is inscribed in several languages. The portal is dotted with gemstones, and in the center of the double doors is an embossment of (presumably) Sumuho's bearded foreign face. A large brazier sits on either side of the room, burning some unknown fuel and casting an eerie glow on the tabernacle. The archaeologists can hardly contain their excitement. "Finally, after all these years!" the eldest exclaims, "we have found the Tabernacle of Sumuho, which

contains the Sacrament!" The archaeologists revel and chatter among themselves until one of the party interrupts them. The archaeologists then get very dark looks on their faces. "The Sacrament is all that is left of Sumuho's glory," the young man says.

"And," adds the woman, "it is the one thing we must destroy."

Briefly, the archaeologists explain that they are Oth-Maares of the most ancient order. Apparently the destruction of Sumuho was not complete and he has been sensed carving out chaos from his ancient temple. They have been sent to finish the job their ancestors started. Unfortunately, as they are sworn to complete secrecy, the PCs cannot leave the sanctuary. Ever. The golden scepter taken from the statue begins to glow in the archaeologists' hands and, as though out of nowhere, they produce weapons and advance on the party. The golden scepter - apparently a relic of the old Oth-Maares left to guard the tomb - seems to have transformed the eccentric historians into paladins and clerics of Khunam\*. They use advanced levels of magic, both offensive and defensive. Breaking the scepter will greatly weaken their power, but it is enchanted and very durable. After the harrowing battle, the party is left with three dead Oth-Maares and the huge tabernacle.

\*For those using variants of d20 D&D rules, Khunam's domains are Sun and War.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The only place left to go now is the tabernacle. The large electrum doors open easily without so much as a creak from the ancient metal. Peering in the darkness behind them, the PCs can see that this is no ordinary tabernacle. The doors lead into a long, narrow, high-ceilinged room completely gilded in electrum. Embossed and engraved on the walls are row after row of hieroglyphs. The electrum surface reflects the party's lanterns down the hallway, creating an almost mystical glow. Thirty or so yards down the room ends into a large altar upon which sits another, smaller tabernacle. Opening this tabernacle will reveal a sort of marble thick frame, encased in platinum and marked with runes. From each corner of the square frame is a braided cable of silver; suspended from these cables is a mummified human head (looking something like this: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/mummy/images/ikra-01e-seti-l.jpg>).

As the PCs peer into the tabernacle, the eyes of the head flash open and the jaw creaks. The gray and shriveled orbs rotate about as the yellowed teeth grind against one another. Finally the head utters something: "So, you have come to hail I, Divine Sumuho!"

Apparently, the legendary wizard really was immortal. Sumuho prattles on, apparently seeing the PCs as worshippers who have come to remove him from this desert grave. The jealous Khunamites, he explains, attempted to murder him and placed his head in this magical case to prevent him from using his supernatural powers. They failed, clearly, as these "loyal clerics" have come to free him from the tomb. So long as Sumuho believes the PCs are his faithful, the wizard-god is happy. He may even reveal hidden rooms with extra treasure. If carried, he will peel away the tabernacle walls with his power and lead them back out into the desert, where he orders them to build a new church, summon the faithful, find a new body for him, and begin anew.

If there is any suggestion that the PCs are not, in fact, Sumuho worshippers, he will grow furious and launch an attack from his weird frame. Sumuho fights with high level magic spells, able to cast multiple spells at once if need be. If in the sanctuary still, Sumuho may attempt to destroy it and bring the Inhap down on their heads. Attacks on the head seem fruitless, with the dried torn flesh and broken skull reassembling itself after every blow. Shattering the marble box encasing Sumuho's head, however, will kill him. Oddly, killing Sumuho causes all the treasures of the sanctuary - the Oth-Maares scepter, the sacristy loot, the electrum walls of the tabernacle

- to turn to sand. If the PCs are truly witty, they might be able to trick Sumuho and stash him somewhere while they loot the tomb, leaving the wizard-god alive and content while they make off with the goods.



## Crossbones Island

By Chaosmark [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

Yar...I do indeed know of Crossbones Isle, stranger. But ye'd be better suited to avoid that place like a widowed wench.

A drink ye say? Why sure. What sailor won't talk over a drink? Siddown laddie, and I'll speak with ye until the rum runs low...

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

Crossbones Island is the fabled treasure trove of the fearsome pirate Gustaf, a small island far to the southwest of Iocappa Port. From coast to coast, it's one gigantic jungle, lad, filled with monsters and creatures of myth. Risin' out of the middle of the Island is a large mountain. Can't miss it for the world. In that remote, desolate patch of sea be Crossbones Island.

Crossbones Island is a medium-large island out in the middle of the sea. Obviously the coordinates are unknown to all but the rarest of sailors, but that doesn't prevent people from spreading around their speculations as fact. Assuming one actually gets the right coordinates to the island (or perhaps they're caught in a storm and randomly happen upon it), the entire island is a jungle, with the exception of the mountain in the middle.

Within the jungle, there is a large ecosystem, with any number of creatures, both familiar and unfamiliar to most adventurers. This ecosystem includes:

- \* Jaguars
- \* Panthers
- \* Gorillas
- \* Swarmsnakes
- \* Scrats
- \* Blood Spiders

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

If ye can get yerself to that desolate place, and past all the creatures that might take offense at yer trespassin' on their territory, ye'll still have to make your way to the mountain. The very ground itself will suck you up, leaving naught a trace. Saw three good men die that way before we figured out how to pull them out without getting pulled in ourselves. Poor lads. That's a death e'en Brownbeard hisself wouldn't use on a traitor. Then ye'll get to the mountain, and the trouble is just starting...

The forest on the island, being surrounded by an entire sea, is at points littered with bog-ish areas. The old sailor and his crew-mates encountered a patch of quicksand, and had to learn the hard way that if you get caught, you need to not struggle, and let your buddies pull you out from firm ground, preferably with a branch or rope of some sort.

The quicksand areas are scattered everywhere in a ring around the mountain, with only one or two safe paths that can be taken through the hazardous terrain.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

So there we were, covered in dirt and grime and all sorts of muck from our trek through that demon forest. When we finally got to the mountain, it was almost too easy to get to the fabled cave where Gustaf left his treasure. But when we got there, there wasn't nothin' there but an engravin' on the wall! Well, none of us could figer it out, so we had to go back with nothin'. Someone else must've stolen the treasure and left that nonsense scrawled on the wall to send everyone else on a wild goose chase. That be all I know laddie. Good luck in yer expedition, though I'm warnin' ye now, it's a worthless voyage.

If or when a party of adventurers has made their way past the many and diverse dangers of the island forest, they will find themselves close to the mountain that juts up from the center of the isle. If they happen to search around the base, they will quickly find a single cave-opening, with tool marks all along the walls as evidence of human-creation. The inside is completely empty, devoid of anything except for a few lines of a riddle still etched onto the wall of the cave.

"It runs smoother than most any rhyme, and loves to fall but cannot climb."

The answer is water, and thus the players need to splash water onto the wall. Any seaman worth his salt would have recognized the value of having fresh water around, and thus would have plenty to spare for the wall. Once they do, wherever the water touches will dissolve the wall, which was made of dried, compacted sand. Due to the dimness in the cave, it isn't obvious from plain sight that the back wall is made of compacted sand, but it is.

At any rate, once they have broken through the wall with various amounts of water and hard work, their next challenge begins in a room that quickly widens from the narrow hallway they were in before.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Once past the wall of sand, there remains just one challenge that the players must overcome. Themselves.

Where before all traps and challenges were mundane, Gustaf saved the magical defense as his last resort. The sand wall covers a line of magical glyphs that concentrate and contain magical energies within the area of the cave past the line. Once a PC steps across the line, there is no going back. The air itself becomes a solid wall to their flesh, impassible.

At the same time as they become trapped (whether one at a time, or all at once), shadowy versions of the characters form from the shadows of the room, animated by the magic contained and focused by the glyphs of the room. In order to survive and walk through the glyph-line again, the characters must defeat their counterparts, who will most definitely work together.

These 'shadow puppets' are more durable than the PCs are, but do not have the same abilities or powers. They are the same in appearance and size only. However, that size doesn't matter in the least, for they're all the same strength (above average strong). It should be a rough fight for the toughest of the PC party, and without teamwork the 'puppets' will divide and conquer.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Having gotten past the last of the treasure's protection, there are a few different options available, depending on what treasure you might wish to impose upon your characters.

The first, and easiest, to handle is to have the treasure be a huge stinkin' pile of gold, jewels, and other riches. This is probably what they've been expecting.

The second, is that there is a few nick-knacks here and there, the place having been cleaned out before by other adventurers (or perhaps by Gustaf himself, who would've left the traps active as he left, to keep the legend of his treasure alive and protected.

The third, and potentially most interesting, is that there is nothing there, but there is a map of some kind leading to another treasure trove of Gustaf's, perhaps the true one that no-one has ever heard of or found.



## Swamp Music

By Nik Palmer

The players must cross or get to a point inside or traverse a swamp or moor.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### Rat Hill

Rain comes. A downpour continues through the day. The swamp/moor begins to flood! The party seeks refuge on a hill above the flooding, but the hill is home to a den of evil giant rats. As the rain continues, the rats swarm the hill. Hundreds of tiny rats swarm over the hill, while the largest Rodents of Unusual Size attack the smallest party member.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### Thicket

The group rests in a clearing, but is set upon by a creeping carnivorous plant that uses the clearing as a trap area. It closes the exits with thick brambles and begins to attack the party with pollen gas attacks and strangling vines.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### Witches Hut

The Swamp hermit witches hut is a rare find. It's rumored you only find it if SHE wants you to... What does the swamp witch want from you? Everyone who has met her has walked out of the swamp cursed or worse!

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### Serpent Pond

A hydra lives in a swamp pond....you don't **think** it's spotted you..... yet.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### The Faerie Ring

The Faeries and Pixies have a stone circle and magic mound that you stumble across. In thanks for defeating one of the swamp dangers above, they offer the party various drinks and delicacies that with shape change the player or cause them to behave silly, but have no effect on fey creatures. The fey will play tricks and cavort with the players, If the faeries are happy with the players, they will let them pass without ill effect (all shape and behaviour changes are removed).

They may request a present from characters who are not deemed "good sports" and may force a quest or mission upon characters who are "bad sports" to their humor and games.



## The Windspire

By Nathan Meyer

Along the perimeter of the vast plains of Veshara there once stood a line of Windspires, towers meant to tame the fierce winds and rains of the wild lands. Placed almost a thousand years ago by a now crumbled empire to protect it's borders by buffering the realm with the same forces that assailed them, the spires have nearly disappeared from the edge of the plains. Torn down by neglect and time, creatures and weather.

Only one still stands, the last Windspire. It is rumored to house one of the great arcane treasures known as Spirestones, which empowered the towers to act as shields against the storms. The spires were rumored to have been sealed and protect by powerful Magi.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### The Entrance

The lands surrounding the Windspire are sparse, mostly dry shrubbery and tall grasses. The Windspire itself stands some ten stories tall above the plains. Entrance to the tower is normally gained through the iron bound white stone door at the base of the spire. While there are windows that might be entered, the ability to do so is hindered by the tornado like winds that cloak the upper portion of the spire due to the presence of the Spirestone.

The door is, of course, magically locked and a matched key is necessary to gain access. If the key is not available then access to the tower may be gained from the same window which the small murder of adolescent wyverns jet forth from, the creatures make their nests on the first floor of the tower which is 2 stories tall.

The small nest of wyverns likely becomes aware of the PCs outside the window due to the sounds they may make. The PCs should need to deal with them no matter their means of entry. Once dispatched however the room really contains nothing more than their nests and a flight of stairs that lead up to a well bound iron door that seals the entrance the inner flute of the tower.

The door is not locked but should require a good deal of strength to open, as there is a wind tunnel on the other side pressing against it.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Windvault**

For six stories up the inside of the tower is hollow, with thick fluted stone walls buttressed on the inside by octagonal beam supports that allow a fierce outer wind to scream down the flutes of the tower, and once they hit the bottom are funneled back up the center. This is meant to cause an equalization of air pressure from the inside to match the storms outside, and is a by-product of the Spirestone.

The downward wind through the flutes make it nearly impossible to climb the inside of the tower, however the fierce updraft in the center will allow clever PCs to use homemade parachutes, or a floating spell (i.e. Feather Fall) to take advantage of the wind and carry themselves to the top of the Windvault. This should cause the PCs to make balance based rolls to keep from crashing into the side of the walls and taking the damage of a long fall down.

The top of the Windvault ends in a walkway that should be reachable once they reach that height, where the force of the updraft dwindles to a degree insufficient to fly them up any higher. From the catwalk stairs will take them up to Saferoom directly under the stormdeck, the hatch up into the Saferoom is not locked.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The Saferoom**

The safe room is a contained lock-down area for the Spirestone, and as such is an Anti-magic zone inside the confines of the floor. It is 3/4 the diameter of the rest of the tower, positioned in the middle of the Windvault at the top of the shaft, allowing air to pass around it's outer edge from the Stormdeck above. The whole floor is a large circular room with an unlocked hatch on the floor that opens down onto the catwalk below.

The room is lined with lockers for mundane servicing equipment to keep the tower in an operational state. Ropes, locks, block & tackle, wind-shear suits, weighted boots, repelling harnesses, and other gear can be located here. The middle of the room has a large central platform that is flanked at it's four corners by a steel chained winching system. The winching system, when properly utilized, can lower the holster that contains the Spirestone onto this platform where it may undergo any manipulation required.

When the holster is lowered down from the Stormdeck the room, which is normally wind-free will be flooded with gale-like force and will likely knock about the unprepared. Once the holster, and the stone, are inside the room the wind ceases. To remove the Spirestone from the tower safely requires an anti-magic container of some kind, otherwise the stone's powers will return full-force once it leaves the room. From here the Stormdeck may be reached by climbing the winching system once the stone is lowered, or by a single ladder that leads up to a locked hatch that opens out onto the deck.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Stormdeck**

There are two non-magical means to reach the Stormdeck, one is to somehow traverse the tornado-esq winds cocooning the tower and land on the deck, where those same winds are originating. Unless the Spirestone is lowered into the Saferoom this is generally a monumental feat. The other method is to unlock the access hatch and open it onto the surface of the deck, a less monumental feat but if the stone has not been lowered into the Saferoom this could be deadly.

However the Stormdeck is accessed it is generally considered an unwise health choice not to have secured the stone first. If the stone has been contained then the deck shows itself to be a wide open surface, covered in vented steel grates that allow the domed steel peak to funnel part of the winds down into the Windvault. The grates are based on circular quadrants and the steel chains of the winching system are the only thing to decorate the deck... aside from the Tempest Elemental that makes it's home here.

The living storm was attracted to the presence of the Spirestone, and enjoys it's energy to the point of addiction. When the stone is lowered into the Saferoom the Tempest is momentarily confused, until the hatch opens and the PCs appear. Putting two and two together the Tempest promptly attacks those that have robbed it of it's treasure.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot twist**

### **The Spirestone**

In order to offer protection against the raging weather of the plains, the Spirestones were placed in the Windspires for the purpose of creating a stationary "buffer storm" that would counter the fierce weather of the region. When the stone is active on the deck it creates a huge weather signature that is controllable.

The stone itself is a little more than a foot in diameter, and made of a semi-transparent green stone that has many of the properties of quartz but is obviously not, due to both it's resiliency and it's weight. The stone, despite the power it generates, is quite heavy at 350 lbs. It's weight and the holster are also why the stone doesn't blow itself away.

The source of the stone's power is at your discretion, however it is a powerful item that could be used to generate force for any number of ambitious projects and nations would likely pay a great deal in lands or goods to obtain it. The true trouble with the stone is getting access to it, however immediately afterwards the act of transporting it out of the Windspire should present a large barrier to any group that doesn't have an extra dimensional space, or an anti-magic container handy.



## **The Message**

**By Morgan Joeck**

## **Room One: Entrance And Guardian**

Travel through a war zone can be tough, to say the least! The PCs have been tasked with bypassing the enemy base and delivering a vital message to the general commanding forces on the other side of the base. Going around the fray is impossible as the protagonists have been trapped in a valley. In order to get out, the party, as a small and unnoticed group has to sneak out the front past the sentries at the mouth. Should they be seen, the party will have to kill them quickly before they can return to the base and warn others. If they're not spotted, the party will have to face the roaming wildlife that inhabits the area. A fight would draw attention. Can the PCs defeat the animals and flee in time?

## **Room Two: Puzzle Or Roleplaying Challenge**

In all the commotion, the party has lost their bearings and stumbles into a kobold camp. The kobolds want nothing to do with the fight, content to clean up afterwards, but if a party of richly laden adventures just happen

to stumble into their heavily defended camp, they'd be more than happy to charge them a "toll" and send them on their way. They don't want to kill them lest they incur the wrath of whatever side they're on. Can the PCs negotiate down the demand so that they can continue on with what they need? No fighting allowed unless the party wants to attract the attention of the enemy camp nearby.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

As the PCs stumble down the Kobolds' mountainside lair, some loose rocks tumble downhill and into a minefield! The explosion doesn't startle the camp nearby – they're used to the occasional rabbit getting blown up. In order to go around the minefield (away from the enemy camp), they have to cross the very large river that curves around the mountain and borders the minefield. There are small islands in it, but the river is inhabited by foul monsters (that prevent the party from going up/downstream and provide a difficult challenge should the party not run from them.)

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle Or Conflict**

Across the river now, a few rabbits get blown up in the minefield. Three explosions that night arouse the suspicions of the camp nearby. A squad is sent out to investigate, and the party is detected. On their bank of the river, there is an impassible cliff face, and two groups of soldiers approach from either side (on the opposite bank still) to flank the party to keep them from fleeing. The party has to fight off at least two groups of soldiers, at a range, to flee.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The heroes reach the quiet camp and find the general in his tent. They attempt to deliver the vital information to him about their current position and state of affairs hopefully. The general is uneasy and tries to send them away before they tell him anything. He tries to convince them that they need to go tell the battalion even further back about this news and slips them a note. Before the party can read it/once they tell him the information, the enemy mastermind who had taken the camp and kept the general as bait to uncover the party's information reveals himself. He has folks nearby who rush to his aid when he makes his presence known. With the general on their side, the party has a fighting chance, and if they succeed, the general awards them with commendations and any appropriate rewards.



## **Spawn of the God-Egg**

By Wulfhere and EchoMirage [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

The Earth shifts, revealing a horror beyond time and reason...

BE ADVISED: THIS ADVENTURE CONTAINS DISTURBING SCENES AND IMAGES THAT MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS

### **Prologue: The Tremor**

*Derial Wainwright had no idea what had come over his oxen. A newcomer to the small mining village of Coelsford, he was hitching a team to his wagon when the normally-placid animals suddenly began to*

*struggle in their yokes, bellowing and rearing in unaccountable fear. The village's many dogs began barking as well, terrified by some unseen force.*

*That was when the ground began to shake. The tremor was not large, as those things go: A few of the village's more decrepit shanties collapsed, while the fine windows of the Colliers' Guildhouse shattered. Some rickety porches collapsed, and fires sprang up here and there, quickly put out by the villagers.*

*The damage seemed minor, and the villagers were soon smiling and thanking their patron saints that nothing worse had befallen.*

*They spoke too soon.*

Not far from Coelsford, a mere mile or two down the winding river, a massive landslide was triggered by the quake, unearthing an uncanny sight: A bulging, convex wall of antediluvian antiquity. This ancient formation remains from a time before the coming of even the Elder races, but it is not what it appears: It is the side of one of the God-Eggs of K'har, the unborn spawn of a titanic arachnoid horror that once roamed the earth. Destructive and malignant beyond human understanding, K'har and its foul kin were destroyed before the coming of man, yet signs of their evil linger in the hidden places of the earth.

Ancient beyond reckoning, ossified and cracked, the God-Egg failed to hatch long millennia ago, but not everything within it died. While the thing's hellish occupant, a monstrous spawn of K'har, may have been extinguished, lesser menaces yet remain, unearthly and bizarre. Horrors freed to sate their hungers after an eternity of waiting.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **Beyond The Torrent**

*A large pool of water has collected here, a newborn lake formed by the landslide. A steep slope apparently came crashing down during the recent tremor, choking the riverbed and barricading the valley with a massive wall of earth, stones, and shattered trees. Brown and murky, the swollen river forms an ominous pool, choked with tangled tree trunks and jumbled boulders. From the lake, water pours down a narrow river bed, a raging torrent of floodwaters, churning and rushing along their freshly eroded channel.*

*Beyond the river, a newly exposed wall of pale, translucent stone forms an imposing sight. Smoothly curved, this wall of unusual stone could be no natural formation: A stony face over thirty-five feet in height, the convex wall appears to be crafted of seamless, smooth stone, with moss-like blooms and whorls of darker mineral running through the variegated surface.*

*By the river, a few scattered tools and ropes suggest that others have passed this way recently, but no sign of these others is apparent.*

The material of the wall is no stone that the player characters can recognize: It is the partially-fossilized shell of a massive egg, nearly 120 feet from one end to the other. The egg rests at an angle, the majority of its bulk hidden beneath many tons of earth and stones. Cracks are visible in the translucent surface layers of the wall, and after crossing the river, characters may discover that a narrow fissure some two feet in height and about ten feet wide leads into the twilight depths beyond the mysterious wall.

Crossing the flood-swollen river may be quite a challenge: Those daring to swim in the frigid waters of the newborn lake will quickly discover that submerged tangles of uprooted trees and whirling currents make such schemes perilous, while leaping across the slippery stones of the streambed requires catlike agility. Some adventurers may come up with creative schemes involving the ropes and tools left on the riverbank by the previous group; this may be the easiest way across the river.

Those looking for signs of how the others crossed will find that the bark of two of the trees has been scored, presumably by a rope tied across the river. The rope itself is gone.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Beyond the Fissure: Defenders of the God-Egg**

*Beyond the wall of mysterious stone, an ominous, cyst-like chamber awaits, filled with structures that defy understanding. The curved interior walls are vaulted and ribbed, with incomprehensible tube-like protrusions that loop and curve out from the walls and ceiling, forming bizarre stalactites and columns. This nightmarish vista is dimly illuminated by greenish phosphorescence that creeps and dances along every exposed surface.*

*The strangely shifting phosphorescence reveals that much of the chamber is taken up by structures as grotesque as the rest of their surroundings. The nearest is a fluted cylindrical shape, with oblong openings, spikes and ridges jutting at odd angles. An irregular shape is heaped upon the cylinder, with projecting horns of grayish material reaching high above the irregular mass.*

The interior of the God-Egg is dominated by these large objects, the exoskeleton of the foetal chaos-thing whose egg this was. The beast's massive carapace makes up the nearest structure, while the oddly-shaped object above it once protected the titanic arachnoid's cephalic centers.

Underfoot, loose debris shifts, making movement uncertain. The floor is covered with thousands of cracked and shattered fragments of gleaming, rigid material. Some of this debris forms large cylinders or odd shield-like shapes covered with barbed projections; other pieces are shaped like massive, hollow claws or articulated tubes, cracked and distorted. Examination of the fragments reveals them to resemble battered pieces of horn or chitin more than anything else.

Unfortunately, careful examination of the area will have to wait, for this unearthly chamber is not untenanted. While the spawn of chaos that once grew within this egg was destroyed, some of its servitors survived. Fed by the ebbing life energies of the nearly immortal being they were intended to serve, parasitic creatures known as "Inkspydres" also grew within the egg. Dormant for millennia, these ancient minions were aroused from their quiescence when the God-Egg was disturbed. Eager guardians of a master that is long beyond their aid, they will attempt to capture or slay any intruders.

#### **Inkspydres, the Minions of K'har**

Inkspydres appear as bloated, midnight-black sacks of corruption, attached to a arachnid thorax with a dozen jointed legs. Able to cling to walls and ceilings, these disgusting creatures were once the hideous servitors of K'har and its vile progeny. Growing and developing within the titanic eggs of the chaos spawn, they are almost an extension of its alien will.

Inkspydres are related to more common types of dire vermin, such as giant ticks, monstrous spiders, and their ilk, but they have an uncanny ability to grow more intelligent when exposed to the essences of their hellish masters. Clinging to the flanks

of K'har and its spawn, they grew devastatingly intelligent: Indeed, some of these ancient creatures may still be encountered, beasts of frightening, inhuman intellect and magical prowess, lingering for thousands of years after their masters were destroyed.

Inkspydres closely resemble their more common kin in their diet, injecting a paralytic toxin to disable their victims. Later, they inject digestive enzymes that dissolve the internal organs of their prey and drink the resulting fluids. Like many other arachnids, they can spin webbing to form shelter or to trap prey: The webs of these creatures are generally a dull black color.

One way in which Inkspydres differ from arachnids is how they raise their young: Inkspydres place their eggs directly upon the bodies of paralyzed prey, then, when the eggs hatch, the spiderlings immediately burrow into the flesh of their new host. They remain there, slowly devouring their host from the inside out, until the host begins to die. Only then do the new-hatched inkspydres surface.

Growing aware of intruders, the minions of K'har stalk forward to attack those that disturb their master's remains. Appearing from among the pillars and fragments of alien chitin that litter the place, they will rush in a concerted assault. Those that think the arachnid menaces are mere vermin are in for an ugly surprise: These creatures are eerily intelligent (As described above) and will coordinate their attacks with unnerving precision. Those listening carefully may hear the rustles and clicks made by the parasites as they plan their attacks.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Into the Husk: The Victims**

Within the desiccated husk of the abdominal carapace, the Inkspydres have deposited their previous victims. A band of villagers had discovered the God-Egg before the player characters reached it: They were easy prey for the Inkspydres.

*In this space, sheets of black webbing make it impossible to see very far. A narrow circular tunnel winds through the resilient webbing, leading deeper into the darkness of the midnight-black webs. Faint noises are audible from within, sounds as of people in pain.*

The barely-recognizable bodies of some villagers may be found first, their empty skin draped loosely over their bones, their tissues drained and emptied. Beyond them lie additional victims, paralyzed by the Inkspydres' venom and entangled in webbing. Slowly recovering from the toxin, they hoarsely call for help.

If questioned, these fortunate souls will describe three more of their group that were dragged off to some other chamber, a man and two children. If the party explores further, they will soon discover one of the three missing villagers. They may wish that they hadn't.

*You find another of the villagers, apparently alive, but writhing in pain. His mouth is open as if he is silently screaming in terror and agony, but no sound emerges.*

This poor fellow has become a living feast for the Inkspydres' young. The pain of being devoured alive has caused his body to throw off the effects of the creatures' venom, but his vocal cords are still paralyzed. If his clothing is torn away, the spiderlings will be revealed, slowly tunneling through the man's flesh.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Chamber of the Mind Eaters**

*Past where the creatures' poor victims were found, a tunnel lined with heaped shell fragments climbs upward into the oddly-shaped chamber beyond. Black webbing binds the fragments together and forms an easily-climbed tube winding upward.*

The characters will not find it difficult to reach the next chamber.

*At the top of the shaft, an oddly-shaped chamber awaits. Glowing filaments dangle from the ceiling, filling the room with pale light. Within the chamber, two more of the vile Inkspydres lurk, larger and more hideous than the ones encountered before. Each leans its monstrous bulk against a young girl, who stumbles and lurches around the room, apparently doing the bidding of the revolting creature clinging to her. Even more disgusting, the Inkspydres have plunged their sucking fangs into bulbous creatures attached to each of the girls' heads. Resembling leprous starfish more than anything else, these grotesque creatures pulse and twitch with every movement of their unwilling hosts.*

The chamber at the top of the winding shaft is irregularly shaped, with tangles of glowing greenish filaments dangling from the ceiling. The strands are anchored to shapeless, pulsing globs of matter; sickly, pale light seems to flow along their length. These filaments contain portions of the supernatural essence of the long-dead spawn of K'har. Once part of the titanic creature's mind, they may be the last parts of the foetal thing to retain some of its original godlike power.

Unless the player characters immediately attack the room's inhabitants, they will witness one of the girls moving beneath a filament, which apparently attaches itself to the starfish parasite. The strand's phosphorescence changes to an urgent pulse and a look of agonized madness crosses the girl's face. Her hideous rider, slurping and chittering with apparent satisfaction, then draws forth the unnatural phosphorescence from the parasitic star.

Dozens of tiny parasites resembling starfish roam this chamber, drawn by the last vestiges of the thing's alien might. Originally symbiotes that aided the Inkspydres as they tapped into their monstrous host, they now attempt to bond with anything that enters the chamber, skittering across the floor in their race to be the first to reach potential host creatures.

Those who allow one of the things to latch itself onto them will barely feel its tendrils drilling through their skull and into their mind. Some slight pain may be noticed when the star creature contacts one of the hanging filaments, but even that is easily overcome. Then, the instincts and desires of the spawn of K'har come rushing into the mind. Madness, agony, and disorientation batter the sanity, as a rush of primitive, chaotic power overwhelms the host creature. Those with sorcerous abilities find them magnified beyond anything they've ever felt, while those sensitive to spiritual realms discover incomprehensible vistas filling their mind. Even those whose abilities and interests are purely physical find their strength and speed increased tremendously.

The power can be seductive, but the price is high: The overwhelmingly powerful thoughts and instincts of a long-dead alien godling will not be denied. Those who partake of the thing's power become, in effect, extensions of its malevolent will. Human sanity and reasoning are swept away, making room for alien logic and incomprehensible urges.

The inkspydre elders within the chamber have immeasurably increased their magical and intellectual abilities through the revolting communion that they have inflicted on their victims, "drinking" the alien magical power of the filaments while leaving their victims nothing but the overwhelming madness of the spawn. They have no intention of sharing the chamber's bounty, either: As soon as the preoccupied creatures become aware of intruders, they will immediately unleash magical attacks on the interlopers. The magical might of the inkspydre elders

is incredible, but their ability to fight is limited, as they want to minimize any damage to the chamber's contents from the fighting.

All the while that the battle rages, dozens of the star parasites will try to crawl up the combatants' bodies, seeking to "bond" with them. Strong negative emotions attract them, so the fury of battle draws them like a moth to the flame.

Just as the tide of battle shifts decisively against the Inkspydres, those battling in the chamber will make another terrifying discovery. Buried in the heaps of debris that cover the floors of the God-Egg, dozens of additional Inkspydres had lain, dormant for centuries or millennia. In a stasis near death, these things had not arisen earlier, but the fury of battle within the mind chamber of their true host had broken their torpor. Awake and filled with the hunger of centuries, dozens of the nauseating arachnoids begin flooding in through every orifice of the massive thoracic chamber. When it seems that the battle is won, the true battle begins. This horde is not nearly as deadly as the others in the area, however: Many are physically feeble, lingering remnants of what once were lethal horrors.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **The Aftermath**

After the battle is over, those that remain in the Chamber of the Mind Eaters will find a number of strange crystals embedded within the chamber's walls and scattered across its floor. These crystals resonate with powerful magical energy, and are clearly valuable. Sorcerers, especially, will find them useful for empowering their enchantments.

Some may be rash enough to sample the heady power to be gained from the dangling filaments. They will surely gain magical might beyond the dreams of most mortals, and all it will cost them is their humanity.

The girls' families will be glad to have them back, even if their grip on reality has been shattered. They may eventually become pawns in the power struggles of powerful magi, as each has primordial secrets of chaotic magic locked away within her maddened mind, accessible to one with the proper spells. Their madness may even be cured, once someone is able to remove the strange parasites clinging to their skulls, sending questing tendrils throughout their minds.

The tiny creature's tendrils probed the ground ahead of it, as its alien senses struggled to orient it on the forest floor. Unused to its surroundings, the star-shaped symbiote found itself circling back on its own trail repeatedly. Despite the setbacks, the little creature kept moving. It would find a suitable host eventually.

THE END...

OR IS IT?

### **Acknowledgements**

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# Foray into the Forest of the Frog King

By Thewizard63 [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

Enter the Kingdom of Frog King in search of Treasure. What deal will you have to strike to get out alive?

## Summary

Ah! So ye been to the top of Drugar's Ridge and ye wish to know more about what we call the beauty mark of the forbidden forest? Though the rumors will have you believe that it is a spot where the demons frolicked long ago and now only evil lurks. Tis true, but not how you think. My great grandfather was friends with the one who brought it into being.

In a time before the Frog king came to lord over the Forbidden forest, and the agreement was made, this town kept a scouting post there. My great grandfather said that he and an old greedy soldier turned up some treasure. Rather than turn it to the kingdom, the rightful owner, his friend's greed got the best of him.

Enter the Kingdom of Frog King in search of Treasure. What deal will you have to strike to get out alive?

## Background

Thick Jungle-like forest is marred a Barren Dark spot where nothing grows, ruins of the outpost at the center of the spot. The Forbidden forest near the city is known to be inhabited by a Cult of sentient frog people, living in the swampy end of the Forest. They guard the forest and keep humans from interfering with the balance. Rumors of a great and powerful item is said to hide in the ruins. No-one who has dared entered the forest to retrieve it have returned.

Long ago, when the city was just a trading town, Roger and his friend, Jaret, found a Powerful magic item while investigating a cave/hollow in the nearby cliff. Jaret, a budding wizard, was determined to figure out the items effects. Roger just wished to turn it over to the duke, and let the court magicians handle it, as it was truly property of the kingdom. After many failed attempts Jaret's greed took over and he decided to just pry some of the jewels out and sell them. Roger argued loudly against doing it eventually leaving to walk off some of his anger.

This argument is what caught Arronjus attention way up in the trees. Below him the human outpost was alive with after dinner reveries. He saw the flash of gold through the window and decided to see what happened. After Roger left, momentarily hushing the activity at the post, Jaret took out his dagger and began working. Arronju and Roger saw a staccato succession of great green and purple flashes. In that moment Arronju jumped for his life. Some of the outpost was disintegrated, and the rest was flung into the surrounding forest.

The magical energies dissipated through the forest, irrevocably scaring the outpost area, and altering many of the creatures, making it far more dangerous for the average traveler. It also magically changed him into the beast he is now.

When Arronju came to, the forest looked smaller, he felt unusual sensations from what felt like his ribs. As he righted himself he saw his longbow and quiver, now toy-like near his hand. As he straightened and stretched, he noticed wings protruding from his back. Realizing that he changed but was otherwise unharmed, he cautiously moved back to the outpost clearing. That's when he saw the devastation of both the forest and the outpost. Human bodies lay strewn and broken, all about the smoking ruins. He found and picked up the golden item from the ruins, strangely in perfect condition next to a marked chest.

When Roger came to, he ran back to the outpost to see the same ruined area Arronju saw. Crying for his lost friends and companions he walked towards the husk of a building. Only to find Arronju, now the monstrous Frog-Dragon beast, grab the golden item he and Jaret argued about. He pulled his sword to avenge his friend, thinking the beast has spawned from the item somehow. Arronju, startled, belched a plume of noxious gases, sending Roger reeling, coughing, and sputtering. Arronju used this moment to croak, Your people are no longer welcome. Roger, surprised and outmatched, ran from the clearing, still coughing and spitting up. He made his way out, reporting the incredible tale of the Inter-dimensional Monster guardians in the forest of evil.

Arronju decided to become the dragon-like guardian of the object and took the role of King. His view that humans are just a danger to the balance of life was solidified in the explosion event. He soon realized the strength of his position and created his kingdom dedicated to keeping balance in his forest. He used it to keep the forest and its changed denizens safe from the humans and their propensity to destroy what they don't understand and fear. Forest dwellers all love him for his service and protection.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **A Helpful Voice**

The party encounters a Dryad or other tree spirit. The spirit warns the party that they must turn back or catch the attention/wrath of Dragon King Arronju. She appears to be helpful, and will send them to the ruins they seek, but Via the Large Chasm. So the Frog King knows where to meet them. (if they survive getting there.) The spirits notify the Kings straight after the party leaves.

The Chasm is a long rope bridge. The ropes are actually Webbing created by the spiders that live beneath it on either side. They don't attack until the party is near the middle. And they typically move in underneath. As this bridge is actually part of their web the spiders are right at home. The spider dens are under the bridge in the cliff-side.

**Variants:** The PCs could also be attacked by the King while they cross the bridge. All the while being shot at from one or both sides by frogmen.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Beauty Mark**

When the PCs reach the black mark, they find numerous bodies in various states of decay. Some of which are undead who attack the PCs for disturbing their resting place. One of which is Jaret, the unfortunate soul who tried to pry the gem from the item, liberating some of the energy and thereby causing the destruction you see. As they fight, the undead spirit of Jaret accuses the party of trying stealing what's right-fully his. He laughs menacingly, that he's hidden it. That no one will find it. He thinks its of course hidden in a trapped chest in the outpost cellar. Jaret's journal is there too.

The journal is mostly destroyed. A couple entries are left. One entry (written entirely in an ancient tongue) describes that the chest is trapped and has a riddle-the answer is the original name of the oldest Tavern in the city. The last journal entry is about how he has yet to find the activation words for the item and is therefore only worth the gems in it, which he will try and pry out.

When they find the chest, they read the same riddle inscribed in the same ancient tongue on the chest. If spoken, the trap doesn't go off. In the chest they will find some items of interest. But not the item they are seeking.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### Looking for This?

When they climb from the cellar they are met by a force of frog people and Frog King Arronju. The king is a massive frogman with large membrane wings. He is encrusted in pond scum and routinely licking his eyeballs with his tongue. His breath is noxious, and his back is covered in poisonous puss filled warts. He uses an enormous bow and javelin size arrows which he has coated with the poison he secretes from his back. Strikingly on him is a beautifully crafted golden, jewel encrusted item. The King asks them if they are looking for this item, and he chortles in pleasure. He gives the group two choices. The first is to leave now in peace, or to make their way to his throne. At which point the party can make him a fair offer for the item. As he leaves, he laughs and says, If you can make it.

Some frog folk leave with him (hopping in the cover of the tree canopy), and some stay and attack. They are tree frog people and typically stay in the concealment of they trees, and use what magic they know to hinder the parties progress. Often they will wait until the party has run into something else, and at the in-opportune moment, attack. The frogmen always leave when they are about 50% health.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### The Duel

The village is up in the trees, however the throne is in the heart of the swamp on an island in a pond. When the party makes it to the village, they will be met with silence.

**They Fight:** The frogmen are instructed to take out the weakest of the party first, if they start fighting, they will be subdued and brought before the King.

**They Parley:** Otherwise they will detect a faint path to the Island. The party is offered, as an alternative to further bloodshed, they are asked to fight a duel with the tribes best warrior.

**The Duel:** The first to land 3 blows shall keep the item. The Warrior uses a neurotoxin that is secreted from its back to coat the blade. Each hit hinders the challenger. The fight is conducted in the bogs. There are variations of deep to shallow bogs and small islands of land. The frog warrior always uses terrain to his advantage (sinking below sight) also can use his tongue to trip the challenger. If the party wins, the history of the item and the tribe is explained when the given. The group is then asked to make help forge a treaty between the neighboring settlement and his people. If they lose he gives them another chance. They must trade an item of his choice and have them forge peace. If they get a peace agreement, then the party can have the item as payment. Lastly if the PCs get fed up and just starts attacking, then the king gets involved. If they succeed against him, before he is killed, He asks for mercy. He tells them of the events surrounding the item and how he just wishes to regain the peace they once had. He will gladly hand over the item for his life and those of his people. He begs them as a favor to help forge a treaty.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### Confession

If the King isn't dead, when the item is finally and reluctantly handed over, The King shows his relief at giving it up. If asked why, Arronju explains he would get impulses to protect the item which is one of the driving forc-

es behind creating his kingdom. And that lately he has had strong impulses to leave his kingdom. It was tearing him up, as he couldn't leave his people.

If the king isn't alive, the person holding the item will dream about traveling, as if to coming home to a loving family member, with this ache of longing to be there.



## **Troll Brothers Cove**

**By Nik Palmer**

An evil pair of trolls live on an jagged rocky island in the Hag Cove. The trolls can even cast magic! The trolls have something the players need or a local town hires them to remove the menace.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **Underwater Entrance: Amphibious Trolls!**

The younger Amphibious Troll lives in the water under the island. This troll is the physically larger and dumber one. During low tide, a flat bottom boat may be rowed into the Tunnel Passage. There are a group of Pirates who have a symbol on their boat bottom that the Troll will not attack. Otherwise, anyone or thing coming into the passage is attacked.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

#### **Underwater Tunnel passage.**

This passage is trapped. Unless you show the Secret Mark to the magical eyes, an alarm and trap will go off that is meant to kill.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **Troll Shaman's Chamber**

The Troll Shaman's chamber is a cave in the island, formed long ago by volcanic activity. There is a large vent that extends to the top of the jagged rocky island. The chamber is large, and floods to half full during high tide (there is always some dry ground). This troll is smarter and can cast magic spells and create traps.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **Old Vent chute**

The old vent is trapped with incapacitation and knocks out spells.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

#### **Harpy Aerie**

The top of the rock island has many harpies or Sirens living on it. They act as a scout and look out patrol, as well as protect the top entrance of the rock. The trolls provide them food and entertainment and a safe place to live.



# Black Fire Ruins

By Will Cartier

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The ruins are protected by a special barrier that the townsfolk call “black fire”. Unlike regular fire, this barrier can only be passed with a token or item made from the magic. At the foot of the entrance is a enormous skeleton guardian. It is aptly named “black bones”. Along with the black fire wall they protect the only entrance to the ruins. To bypass the wall, they need to defeat the black bones and take one of its appendages to pass the black fire barrier.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The first chamber opens up to find that the door which they came from has sealed shut. The room itself contains only one way out, a doorway some many, many feet high. With that, a massive bas-relief statue of a creature animates and tells the adventurer’s he will be judge to determine if they are worthy to advance. The creature conjures up a puzzle for the adventurer’s to solve.

Any effort to use magic or items not handed out from the challenge deems them unworthy to advance, the bas-relief then animates and attacks. If they are successful, the creature teleports them up to the next room.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

This area is a small treasury full of dusty tomes and small curios. The room has also partially collapsed, splintering the item the adventurer’s have sought for under rock! Those dusty tomes reveal a special way to repair the item, and lies in the next few rooms ahead. But among the rubble rises another black bones to harass our heroes.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Heading down a dark corridor leads to a large room with a massive pit, fracturing the room in half. There are three small wooden bridges covering the pit. In that pit is a massive fire! A mirror image of the bas-relief in the puzzle room appears on the other end of the room. It challenges them to a duel, that the first one to send it into the fire, are deemed worthy to enter the vault and uncover the secrets to repair the item.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

In this tranquil room rests a shimmering spring that resides in the back half of the room. In here the adventurer’s uncover the means to repair the item by a friendly resident of the spring. Gaining this information, they now have the means to repair the item.

There are also engravings of the names of the adventurer’s on the wall! Its headlines could send the adventurer’s to another place, reveal a “hit-list” from a mad wizard, or an urgent message to them.



# Shadow Vault

By William K. Wood

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The entrance is wreathed in shadows, actually a darkness that can't be seen through. There is an aura of fear that keeps all but the most desperate, stupid or stupidly brave from entering the darkness. The darkness, once entered, surrounds the individual with insane whispers of terror and death. The darkness fills a narrow entry way that goes for approximately 50 feet. The only sounds that can be heard are the whispers. It is possible for someone to yell to people adjacent to them but what they say is not comprehensible. All lights that enter are extinguished and must be relit outside the darkness. Magical light is suppressed for two rounds.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The PCs are trapped! This room is a twenty by twenty square room. When the last PC enters and light is struck, a door swings out of the darkness and seals shut, appearing to become part of a painting. The walls are covered with a variety of murals all of them featuring shadows and death. The direction from whence the party came shows a darker version of the surrounding area. One appears to show a temple of Shar, another, shows a thief stealing life force from the shadows. The last wall depicts a drow city. All of the paintings have a door in them (spot check). The party must figure out how to proceed as the door behind them closes and becomes part of the painting. One of them may notice that as their shadows flicker across the paintings, they seem to move and come to life. As the light returns they appear to be ordinary paintings once more. The party must eliminate all light on one of the doors to proceed. Three of them are magically sealed the only one that can open is in the thief painting. The lock must be picked in the dark; it is a simple lock though.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The door seals behind them. This room is 40 by 20. It is cut from stone. The ceiling is 15 feet high and covered in stalactites. The floor has a smattering of stalagmites. The largest stalagmite also has a large mound of rubble against it. As the characters enter the room they hear some skittering. If they have light, again, they see no creatures. This room contains a clan of skiurids. However, this clan does not attack in darkness; someone with darkvision should see the skiurids observing/ignoring them. If there is light and the party approaches the mound the skiurids attack, some may even drop from the shadows around the ceiling using their shadow jump ability to drive the PCs into their chill darkness spells. The PCs should assume that light does not help them in this dungeon. The PCs must exit through the door opposite of where they started, to do so they must pass by the skiurid nest. The skiurids numbers seem endless (DM decides if they are.) If the PCs keep the lights out, they may move across the room without being attacked.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The next room is a small underground beach. The water extends for 30 feet before the wall comes down to meet it. The shore slopes so that the water is five feet deep about ten feet in. There is no apparent exit except back into the last room. The water does not appear stagnant and actually laps at the sand. The sound of thunder can be heard depending on the tide (if it is going out, no, if it is coming in then, yes.) There is a large amount of bones and rotting clothing on the beach. There is also a small stack goods in the corner, a couple rugs and other things that don't swim well (you could toss a folding boat in there too.) As soon as all of the PCs start feeling

comfortable, hopefully with the lights off they are attacked by Klkkikk't't the Shade Sahuagin Rogue/Ranger ([from dnd fight club](#)). He is more powerful in the dark and unafraid of fighting on land. He can dim any light the PCs carry by 40%, if they have lights on when he attacks this happens immediately (hopefully the PCs see that light hurts him and not them, this time.) There is an underwater tunnel Klkkikk't't uses as an entrance to his lair. The tunnel is only underwater for ten feet before it has some air in it. There is also a small ledge that may be grabbed and "walked" along with a person's hands.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The tunnel is short and opens to a room that is not quite square. There is a pool about 20 by 20 with a staircase in the corner leading to a small platform about ten feet square. The platform has a tunnel leading upwards but it is filled with rubble. There is also a collection of treasure at the bottom of the pool. The pool is only 12 feet deep and has another tunnel leading out at the bottom of the pool on the opposite side. As the PCs move to the platform a large shark (monster manual) enters through the bottom tunnel. If Klkkikk't't ran the shark appears to have something hanging from his mouth to indicate Klkkikk't't has been eaten. This shark is actually Klkkikk't't's occasional companion and is doing Klkkikk't't a favor (Klkkikk't't used his Speak with Sharks ability to for this favor.) He thought the party was out to destroy him for his attacks on various villages. The party may Spot a small rodent hole emanating light in the rubble pile. If they dig they can exit the cave that way. Most of the rubble is small and easily moved. They could pile it into a corner or dump into the water, possibly damaging some of the treasure. If the characters use some ranged weapons it is possible to drive off the shark. It will only suffer a few hits before it circles the bottom or leaves. The characters can retrieve the treasure unmolested if they drive off the shark. They could opt to try again later to get the treasure. The treasure should be a random collection of objects gold and gems spread over the slightly sandy bottom. It should however be predominately seafaring treasures.



## Diamonds and the Deluge

By valadaar

[www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

A fantastic fortune in the remains of a drowned realm. This adventure is made for classic treasure hunters with few stiff fights. The rewards are high, and the traps lethal.

### Background

The Kingdom of Melethad was quite small, and nestled in a remote mountain valley. It boasted little natural resources apart from very rich diamond deposits. Its wealth and formidable natural defenses kept it aloof and safe from its enemies.

However, its location was also its doom. A vast glacial lake had been building up for centuries, and in one final catastrophic release, flooded the valley, washing away all virtually all of their works and drowning the people.

Not everything was lost, however, for beneath Castle Melethad was a strongly built dungeon, home to a massive vault used to contain the realm's treasures, including a massive store of diamonds.

Freed by the break, a river filled the valley, further hiding what once was a thriving kingdom.

Now, several generations have passed. Some still speak of the diamonds of Melethad, but many dismiss them as folk tales.

The river has diminished greatly in size, and some treasure hunters have come to the valley, seeking the vast treasure somewhere under the sludge. The PC's have come into the employ of an Astrologer who claims to have enough information to pinpoint the ruins. He needs muscle and skills at dungeoncraft, for the vault was well protected. The Astrologer in turn has been hired and is sponsored by a petty noble whose lands are somewhat downstream of the Drowned Realm. As a result this expedition will be reasonably well funded.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **The Drowned Realm**

The Astrologer has been carefully sighting the nearby mountains and has walked very deliberately into the middle of the muddy plain. He stops and reaches down into the muck. "Worked Stone! I've found it!"

A bit premature - he found part of the ruin, but it may take some time for the PC's to find the stone portal leading into the lost castle's dungeon. As much time as desired by the GM may be taken to find and excavate the entrance below.

The dungeon below the castle is large, but not a maze. The Astrologer knows the layout well enough to bring the PCs to the First Door easily enough.

**Complication:** Rival treasure hunters may seek to claim jump the PC's. The threat should be serious, but not overwhelming.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The First Door**

Meant to require many hands to open and thus rule out sneak-thieves and the like, the door weighs many tons and must be lifted. Several large metal eyelets for inserting beams are worked into the massive door.

No automatic mechanism exists - enough strength must be brought to bear to dead lift 5 tons. Back in the day, when the door was opened, pulleys were fitted into sockets in the ceiling (the sockets can be found upon searching, but the pulleys are absent) allowing fewer men to be used to open the door. The door does not lock in place, and so must be held up while other crawl underneath. 10000lbs will crush anyone unfortunate to be caught underneath should it be dropped.

**Complication:** The dungeon is still flooded in places. As a result, 2' of water covers the floor, making it even more difficult to lift, as the eyelets are underwater.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The Gauntlet**

A 40' hallway, 5' wide with 7' ceiling. Every 10', the ceiling lowers down 1' requiring stooping and crouching.

The hallway was once heavily trapped, but the length immersion has ruined many of them. The floor is littered with pressure plates that will click when stepped upon, but little will happen. The first and last pressure plates

are 4' long and the width of the floor, and form the only trap still working. If the last pressure plate is activated while no pressure exists on the first, a stone slab 4' long and as wide as the passageway will drop into the hallway. It is 6' thick and blocks the passageway completely when it falls. It weighs roughly 10 tons and does not automatically reset - it needs to be lifted back up into the ceiling manually.

**Complication:** Like the door, 1-2' of water covers the floor, making detection of the pressure plates difficult at best.

**Complication:** Other traps just might be still viable.

The PC's are not there yet! The last obstacle is a massive bronze door with 6 large keyholes. All must be picked or magically opened separately in order for the door to be opened. Even unlocked, the massive portal requires significant effort to open. What lies beyond?

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Vault**

The vault was not 100% watertight, and many of the valuables within the room have rotted away. All of the chests have been rendered useless, their traps defeated by time and water. A trove of diamonds and precious metals remain. But, they are not undefended. Bronze automations of various sizes and types have survived the immersion and will rise up and attack the pc's, for non save the long dead and drowned king can enter unmolested. The fight should be dire...

**Complication:** Again, this room could be partially flooded, putting most of the treasure below the murky waters, along with the guardians.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Betrayal!**

And it does not end with the mechanical foes.

The Petty Noble who sponsored the expedition is not interested in sharing the booty. It was his ancestor who engineered the flood that devastated the kingdom. They did not anticipate that the region would be under water for an extended period, so the plan bore no immediate fruit for its instigator.

He has followed the PCs to the location with a large force and will wait until the PC's emerge laden with treasure to attack. If the battle with the constructs was taxing, fighting the nobles troops should be even more so.

**Complication:** The spirits of the village have not rested. With the coming of the Petty Nobel to the valley, they have their chance at revenge. They will release a second flood into the valley while the fight is ongoing. The PCs might get some warning of this, either subtly - a rumbling, or explicitly from the spirits ("Run Mortals!", whispered unseen into their ears).

**Complication:** A third force of claim jumpers of any desired makeup turns the fight into a 3-way combat.

The desired end result is that the PCs barely survive and managed to obtain at least a reasonable amount of treasure before being forced to flee by a second flood. Now that the portal was open, the waters will destroy even

the dungeon, and the remaining treasure scattered down the river. Panning for gold and diamonds will become a popular pastime down this river.



## Bedizen's Traveling Dungeon

By Scrasamax      [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

A traveling dungeon of canvas and props...

### Canvas Town

Canvas town is mostly known for its springtime festival. While the village is quite small most of the year, it swells to a huge tent city in the spring. There are three roads that meet the main road in the center of the village, with six inns clustered around the resultant intersection and common green.

During the spring, merchants clog the roads, meeting at Canvas Town, turning the normally sleepy village into one of the largest free markets outside of the great port cities. This economic boom only lasts at most a month as merchants come and go, but the business attracts more than just merchants. Entertainers come to show off their skill and fatten their purses, as do mercenary companies looking for work, and the locals come from leagues in all directions. Few overlook this seasonal explosion of commerce and mirth. The Carnival of Forgotten Souls is no different than any other troop that rolls up onto the edge of the market green.

Like any other traveling Carnival, the Forgotten Souls have acrobats, beast wranglers, and a side show of freaks. A more recent addition comes in the form of the *Bedizen's Traveling Dungeon*.

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

A female mercenary is rare, a ravishing beauty as a mercenary is even rarer. Piwowar stands at the front of Bedizen's Traveling Dungeon, her blonde locks falling over brightly polished chain mail armor. Her voice is clear and strong as she challenges men and boys passing by to test their mettle in the depths of the traveling dungeon. Most of the younger boys are starry eyed at the notion of swinging a sword and clearing out a pit of evil like the heroes from the epics. The older boys and young men often take a notion to impress the steel clad warrior-woman who calls them to glory and battle.

The front room of the sprawling canvas tent is the armory, a place full of wooden racks stocked with stout wooden shields of all sizes, some small enough for a five year old, all the way to strapping tower shields large enough to stop a ballista bolt. Other racks hold wooden swords, some no larger than daggers, others as large as true greatswords. Braziers smolder and fill the room with a heady aroma of burning herbs and charcoal.

Those patrons old enough to do so are often encouraged to down a mug of liquid courage, *as it might be the last thing to cross their tongues before death*.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

#### The Knight and the Knave

Two suits of enchanted armor stand sentinel at the end of a canvas corridor, their visors are up and when they speak, their voices echo hollowly through their metal bodies.

Behold, courageous travelers  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Before you stand two warriors**  
One Knight, one Knave  
\_\_\_\_\_ **One speaks only Truth**  
One speaks only lies  
\_\_\_\_\_ **One question you may ask**

The Knight on the left hand side is the Knave, unable to speak the truth, the one to the right is the true Knight, only able to speak truth. Logic puzzle aside, both are suits of armor that were given the ability to speak by means of a common *Speaking Stone* charm. Each has a stone, marked with either Knight or Knave dropped into it's foot. One stone lies, one tells the truth and if a visor is closed said stone is muffled.

If the left-hand Knight is chosen, proceed to Room 3, if the right hand Knight is chosen, proceed to Room 4.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **The Shambling Beast**

The next room of the canvas dungeon is dark, only a single small brazier by the entrance flap offering a glimmer of light. The smell of rotting meat is strong, though this is really an herb added to the brazier. A beast bellows, it strides forth into the weak light of the brazier...a giant troll with savage teeth and bulging muscles. His legs and abdomen clad in steel plating, the beast growls a challenge at the would be heroes.

*Bedizen, the Half-Troll* - The owner and proprietor of the traveling dungeon, Bedizen joined the traveling carnival not too long ago and worked in the freak show until his act was ready to be put together. How a half human, half troll came into being is a question of some interest in the camp, one that Bedizen waves away with a calloused hand. When facing young children, he is hardly as scary as he could be, and it is rare that a child under the age of 9 doesn't 'slay' the mighty troll. Those who are older, or have a mind to actually hurt someone with their wooden swords are quick to find that there is truth to his trollish appearance and he doesn't take kindly to folks interested in causing pain. He will break swords and send such braggarts running in fear, much to the delight of children and the girlfriends of said braggarts.

Bedizen would not be a proper monster if he didn't have a proper treasure to be guarding. Older boys win a kiss from Piwowar when they leave, while the children generally snatch a piece of amber bright candy for their great deed.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

After passing down a canvas corridor, the travelers are assailed by the stink of brimstone, burning in a pair of braziers sitting in front of a heavy and macabre looking gate. The braziers sit a bit higher than the others and the smell of brimstone is much less noticeable closer to the ground. No need in sending the little ones running with burning eyes and sick stomachs. The gate is painted black and looks like it is slick with blood, distant moans and wails can be heard as the would be heroes push the heavy doors open and enter the largest of the divided sections of the Traveling Dungeon.

There is a great bellow as the patrons pass between the doors, really slat board painted cunningly and weighted with bricks or sandbags to make them heavy. There is a frightening figure standing in the middle of the chamber, a demon from myth and legend. Surrounding him are six braziers filled with blazing charcoal, making the

fourth chamber smoky and hot. There is a vent in the ceiling, but dark colored netting and baffles prevent outside light from penetrating the darkened room. The demon shouts in the ancient language of the damned, it's actually just some gibberish borrowed from an old book, and beckons for the patrons to try their skill.

Fighting the demon only takes heart and courage as with Bedizen, it is a man in costume. Wearing a suit of painted leather armor with a demon helm, *Sal Giantson* earns his modest living with the carnival. Named Giantson for standing nearly seven feet tall, he enjoys wearing the costume and getting the frightened shrieks from the children, and just as often is 'slain' by the valiant heroes.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Into the Light**

After slaying the demon, the patrons see a new passage, one that doesn't reek of brimstone and sweat, it is the way out. The last area of the tent is half open where the patrons return their shields and wooden swords and claim their prizes for what victories they accomplished. Younger children get pieces of hard candy and especially brave children are given their wooden swords to keep, often being knighted by Piwowar for service to the Crown and King. Older boys who play the game get to keep their swords and win a kiss on the cheek from the beautiful dungeon mistress.

Opposite from the end of *Bedizen's Traveling Dungeon* is generally a stand or a cart where a merchant associated with the carnival sells mugs of lukewarm ale. After the stifling heat of the canvas tent, even lukewarm is often good enough for a parched throat.

### **Plot Hooks**

*Half Troll Seeks Experienced Troop* - Bedizen has unexpectedly been called back to see his ailing mother on her deathbed. Obviously upset, the half-troll is looking for several trustworthy PCs to operate his attraction while he is away. Instead of monsters, the PCs get to be the monsters, and get whacked by five year olds with swords and by testosterone overdosing 14 year olds looking to show off. The real fun comes when they get to decide what their routine will be since none of them can really pull off being an ogre.

*Missing, 4 year old and pet* - A child has gone missing and no one can find where the little rascal has gotten off to. Unbeknownst to the operators of the Traveling Dungeon or the Carnival of Forgotten Souls, one of their numbers is a Cultist of Arrkrash. The portrayal of his demonic master as a thing to be bludgeoned by children has deeply offended the cultist. To avenge the ghost of Arrkrash, the cultist has enchanted one of the braziers in the canvas dungeon to teleport hapless victims at random, depositing them far from the carnival.

### **It's Carnival Time!**

Bedizen's Traveling Dungeon is much like a haunted house ride in a traveling carnival, it's not really that scary and once a rider passes the age of 10 or 12 it just gets to be a bit silly since the wires on the skeletons are a bit obvious, as is the press-board under the faux brick paint job. Young children can be frightened, while older boys can either go for the kiss, or to impress their teenage sweethearts with their mock courage. It's all just a game to be played for a little while and then back to reality.

### **Hazards**

The biggest hazard associated with the Traveling Dungeon, and indeed with almost any part of the carnival is that of fire. Many of the canvas tents are illuminated with braziers of wood or charcoal and if a stray bit of fabric catches fire, it only takes seconds for the rest of the heat dried material to catch flame. Aware of this risk, the braziers are carefully watched, and the canvas is inspected daily for frays and tears and spots where it gets too hot.

Another hazard comes in the form of people who don't play by the rules. Most of the performers who work in the tent are tougher individuals, and have on a degree of armor and padding. With wooden swords and the carnival outside, some take it upon themselves to really beat the crap out of a performer with their wooden sword. Rarely this is a problem since the performers are well trained, and Piwowar is an actual mercenary and no stranger to drawing real steel. Such individuals are escorted from the carnival and told not to return.

The Final hazard is children getting scared and lost. It is easy for a child to slip under a canvas wall and get lost into another room, or into a backstage area where the performers rest between runs. No harm has yet fallen on anyone as the performers almost as a rule like children, no matter how small and grubby they may be.



## **Thieves' Guild**

By Aki Halme

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **Invitation**

To break into the thieves guild, the PCs need to get an invitation. Contact can be made by entrapment, bribery, or tracking low-level thieves into safehouses. Regardless of the method, the challenge at this stage is the TG internal security.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

New members of the thieves' guild are not cleared for sensitive information - big crimes, major meetings, more important safehouses, crucial contacts, etc. Advancement is kept slow as a safeguard against infiltration; by the time a member advances to positions of access and responsibility the TG leadership will have accumulated a considerable file of information on him, and the new member has been implicated in enough heinous crimes that there is no easy turning back. Here the challenge is to defeat the catch-22, getting access without getting stuck in the TG web.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Digging deeper the PCs will get hints that not all is as they expected, not in the TG, the town, or their mission. Are the thieves truly a wicked force, or a heroic resistance to oppression from the ruling class, helping the weak with some portion of their funds? Are they the true patriots of the town, and the corrupt leadership under the influence of a foreign power? Are the ones who sent the PCs also on the employ of the thieves' guild, and the mission a part of a power struggle?

Maybe the PCs will get followers - adoring youngsters or a romantic interest, who sees a PC as an awesome robin hood style figure. In a situation like that it will be hard to betray the guild and invite a sweeper team to torture and maim or execute everybody. Intrigue, doubt, betrayal, and mixed motivations make it hard for the PCs to continue effectively.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The mission will involve a battle with a highly skilled thief, possibly an assassin, possibly with other capabilities and maybe a killer team of his (her?) own. This may be a security chief, another highly skilled thief - perhaps even the crime boss himself or family member thereof.

To get this far the team must have made the battle necessary - perhaps by shaming the boss into a duel that he needs to restore his grip on the guild, or perhaps this is a vengeance.

In any case, the battle ground and/or the time may be chosen to enhance the strengths of the NPCs and make them shine, giving the PCs a serious fight even if they in a fair fight would outgun their opposition. Shadows and traps and secret passages could well be a part of this. Further, the strengths of the PCs may be largely known to the enemy, whereas the enemy may have kept something (or everything) hidden from the PCs.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The PCs may have contributed to making the town a better place, and their patron may reward them for it. Or they may find themselves drawn into TG power struggles that tend to involve severed horse heads in the bed, garrotte attacks, poisoned food and mysterious accidents. If there is little monetary reward they will at least learn more about the place they live or work in.



## **'Ringed'**

By fadeaway1978

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

A kender rogue finds a ring, and offers to sell it to a group of adventurers sitting at a table at an inn. He sells it to another rogue, who tries to read the inscription on the inside of the ring.

The inscription on the inside of the ring, In elvish, says "Free Entrance!" When the rogue reads it aloud, everyone at the table and within 5 feet suddenly are transported into a room in a dungeon. There is 1 exit to the room, with a locked door. When one of them opens it, they are attacked by zombies.

The exit is actually a long ell-shaped hallway. When one unwise adventurer says he will check it out, without waiting to see if it's trapped or anything, steps on a pressure plate, which opens a door around the turn in the hallway, allowing the next set of monsters in, several dire rats. Once the adventurer steps off the pressure plate, the door closes. If he steps back on it, the door opens again.

Once they all kill the dire rats, they have to figure out how to keep the door open. The door itself slides up and down in a slot and has no keyhole or knob, and is extremely heavy.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

This room has 3 sections actually...one section has a pool in it, deep and murky, which seems to have a current in it. A dire rat jumps in and dives under, doesn't reappear. There are various rotting items in the room, barrels, rusty bits and pieces of armor, etc. There are 2 doors, one is locked. Near the left-hand door, which will NOT open, is a booby trapped and hidden trapdoor that falls into a pit.

The right-hand door is open leading to a bloody altar and a cell, blood stains litter the floor and altar. In the shadows lurks a black pudding, which attacks them. Anything metal that touches it dissolves. (My group fed the

pudding thing junk instead of fighting it, coaxed it over to the cell door and got it to melt the bars of the cell so they could go inside.)



### Room Three: Trick or Setback

In the locked cell they find a hidden journal that has a diary in it from one of the prisoners, saying this was the dungeon of an evil necromancer who turned all his captives into zombies. The journal was clasped with a jewelled clasp. They find a key ring on the floor of the cell. One of the keys on the ring fit the left-hand door, which opened to a treasure of loot, and had a stairway going down.

### Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Once down the stairs, the adventurers found a room with a pool of acid, with some small islands of stone, lots of junk around like barrels, benches, tables, chairs. In a far corner was a large statue of some creature. There is a door in the upper left of the room, but there's no keyhole or knob again. It also seems to

slide up into the ceiling. The statue isn't actually a statue, but is a basilisk, which wakes and starts fighting with the group.

There are trap doors in the islands inside the acid pool. Some lead to loot, some to booby traps, one to a room with only a lever...and a slow leak of acid in the wall of the pit. When the level is pulled, the door in the room above unlocks and raises.

### Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Room five is the wizard's library, with many rotting books, but a few books survive, including a spellbook or two, and the necromancer's journal. There is a chest of gold and gems, including some pearls and other possibly magical stones and artifacts, and a cursed ring of possession. Also in the room are some mundane items like weapons, and armor. In an alcove in the darkest corner is a portal...that drops all the adventurers back at their starting point...at the inn, only they arrive 10 feet above the floor instead of at their table.

The monsters can be adjusted per character levels. My group was low levels, so the basilisk was an elderly half blind one with spikes on its tail it could throw, like porcupine quills, but it was half blind so its aim was off slightly. It still did some major damage (and killed off a player who'd quit) and was hard to defeat for my lower level players.



# Tomb of a Cleric

By Uri Lifshitz

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### *The beast barring the entrance*

The location is a secluded mountain in a vast and empty country side, the mountain is reputed to be the burial place of a long dead high priest of the evil dragon god <insert\_name\_of\_dragon\_god> supposedly buried with his treasures but whose traps kept the loot intact for many years.

Indeed the underground passage is well hidden and barred by great metallic doors that leads to a series of very small and narrow passages barely wide enough for a person to walk through. A dreadful monster that can clone herself guards this place, she attacks the characters at every time simultaneously from both direction (front and back) and escape, continuing this hit and run tactics. Always attacking only two characters and making it hard for the character to attack her, the beast is murmuring, “one may enter, no one may leave” maybe hinting that her role is protecting something.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### *The gnome village*

Past the end of the labyrinth there is a small gnome village that maintain the great tome of the dead priest. The party must find someway to get to the inner hall of the tomb. In actuality the gnomes are very happy people who take delight in their daily work of tending the tomb, they have no religious feelings toward the inner hall. They are there to keep the dead quite and dignified inside the temple. They can be overcome by various ways: sneaking, magic or simple negotiation.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### *The undead priest*

Upon entering the inner hall of the tomb the party see a big sacrileges placed at an angel toward a big stone statue of a dragon and seven stone statues of smaller dragons. The sarcophagus is very richly decorated with the promise of great treasure inside. However once opened the priest inside the sarcophagus comes to life (of rather to unlife) and tell the party he was cursed to turn into an undead and that he is wiling to give them all the treasures in his sarcophaguses without a fight if they'll only leave him his phylactery which is a hidden diamond amulet behind the back of the big dragon statue. (Why is that a trick? Read on)

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

After that - No matter what the undead will provoke a fight and lose, prompting the party to destroy or take the diamond necklace to prevent the lich from hunting them, the trick here is that the body is just a regular body. The real priest was a dracolich that is entombed inside the big stone statue and the diamond necklace is the key to releasing him – he cant affect live people so he cast a spell on the priest dead body in the sarcophagus and trick the party into releasing him. The party will celebrate their easy victory but when they move the diamond necklace the dracolich will leave his tomb and be free.

The dracolich will mock the party for their arrogance, remind them that as a dracolich they can't kill him and he will regenerate and attack them.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

If this is a short adventure with no follow up – give the party their reward as the treasure and a nice scroll that tell of the brave good cleric who once defeated and entombed the evil dracolich in a stone tomb.

If you plan a continuation – that scroll could have a curse affixed on however release the dracolich until he is really destroyed. Or the dracolich could regenerate and hunt the party, forcing them to search and destroy his phylactery.



## Of Pines and Roses

By valadaar

[www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

A tough climb for a source of wondrous healing...

This adventure is more suitable for parties lacking both heavy magic and healing. Magic such as flight would make this one too easy, and powerful magic healing makes the reward of this adventure less desirable..

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### The Forest

Having found a manuscript indicating that some Crystal Roses can be found in the Grove of Marcharin, the PCs have mounted an expedition to harvest the nectar of these priceless flowers, a source of the magical liquid - [Tears of Ashaya](#) - a rare and wonderful source of magical healing. The Tree is located in a wood populated by large numbers of [The Green Ladies](#) which has led to it being shunned by most people.

The Green Ladies will do their best to slay any intruders into this area, using low cunning to set up ambushes, either with themselves or any pets lent them by their queen. In addition, they will have made natural traps (generally spiked pits) to further impede intruders. Finding the tree itself is not difficult - it is a immense pine tree which can be picked out for miles.

**Complication:** The [Queen of the Dark Wood](#) is aware of the special nature of this area and if the PCs are a strong threat will have sent some other [Pets](#) to aid her Ladies.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### Oaken Grove

The base of the tree is surrounded by a maze of [Broad Oaks](#) that contains lots of dead ends and the occasional dangerous plant. To add to the difficulty is that the tree was a [Trailbane Pine](#) before it was magically mutated to its current gargantuan size. The PCs will have a tough time navigating the relatively small maze, due to effects of the tree.

1. **Aura of uncertainty** Any divinations used within 300 feet of the tree will be wildly inaccurate due to an easily detectable aura of chaos.
2. **Confusion** The tree continually emits a cloud of fine pollen which serves as a minor neurosurpressent causing confusion and second-guessing making navigation and decision-making difficult.
3. **Attraction** Any within 300' of the tree will tend to come back to it. "Hey, haven't we seen this tree before." (groan). "Yep..."
4. **Magnetic Disruption** The tree will throw off compasses and will act as magnetic north. PCs could use this property to avoid the tree if they are aware of it.
5. **Discord** Each time the tree is encountered (due to the Attraction, for example), those encountering it will be subject to increasing levels of magically induced frustration which will fray their nerves. At some point it may explode into violence, especially if the social dynamics of the group were strained to start with.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

Climbing the tree is difficult - the massive branches are quite sparse - generally more than 10' apart. The PCs will either need some means to attach themselves to the tree, or use grappling hooks or similar tools to work their way from branch to branch. The 5th property of the Trailbane, Discord, will likely also impede the PCs.

The tree is about 300' high at the top, where the flowers located, requiring about 30 branch to branch transitions per PC, so dexterity, teamwork and climbing skills are essential. As for magical aids, the aura of chaos about the tree might lead to some undesirable side-effects.

**Complication:** The tree is occupied by [Selvaks](#) who will contest the climb.

**Complication:** The tree itself is occasionally dropping basket-sized pine-cones which might knock someone off the tree if struck.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### The Guardian Owl

Mutated through the combined effects of the chaotic Trailbane Pine, and the divine nature of the Crystal Roses, an owl which had roosted here has been transformed into a powerful guardian who will not take kindly to being disturbed. It is only indirectly guarding the Crystal Rose, as it is unaware of it's existence. It does, however, have a nest full of hatchlings which makes it highly territorial.

The owl, being able to fly, will engage in hit-and-run tactics. Its touch is electrified, causing significant extra damage and increasing the likelihood of a fall due to convulsion. Though not of the scale of a lighting bolt, the increased chance of a fall from this height is deadly.

The owl itself is now nearly 300 lbs and has a huge 15' wingspan. Its claws are razor sharp and have a crystal-line appearance.

**Complication:** Inclement weather could start, making holding on to the tree and conducting combat that much more difficult. The Owl will be reckless due to the perceived threat to it's brood.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### The Rose

The Tears of Ashala can be derived from the [holly-like plant](#) found at the top. If the PC's have slain the owl, they may also take the owlets as prizes as well, for they fully share their parent's mutation and will fetch a pretty penny.

**Complication:** The guardian Owl's mate, an even larger and now even more angry mutant owl can return - ideally at an awkward moment...

**Complication:** The Rose is not currently in bloom, but appear to be just about ready. The PC's might have to camp out at the top of this very high tree for some time waiting for them to bloom.

**Complication:** [Crystal Hornets](#) are just a perfect natural hazard to add here, if desired.



## The Tomb of Agellar

By Dragonlordmax

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4297>

This is the tomb of an ancient knight, later made politician. He fought in countless battles, and his fabled armour is said to have been buried with him.

### Background

Long ago, during the reign of Emperor Haius the Magnificently Obese, the name Agellar was spoken throughout the land. Some spoke of him reverently, others as if he were a sick joke played upon them by the emperor. But all agreed that he was one of their ruler's favorites. And perhaps even more so, they spoke of the Coat of Diamonds, an impenetrable suit of armour granted him as a gift from the emperor.

When he died, he was buried in a small tomb in the Plains of Aganderis, where he could watch over his wandering kin for eternity.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### The Shrine

The main portion of the tomb is a shrine built to honor Agellar. A small monument sits at the far end of a wide hall, depicting a rearing horse with a richly-clad rider. On the monument's bottom is a small inscription:

"To he who carried our army to more victories than any other, I, Emperor Haius III, offer a salute. Rest peacefully, my old friend."

The inscription is in the language of said long-dead empire, but it is not unreasonable that a PC may know it. Long troughs of water line both of the hall's edges, and an observant character notices that water cycles through them, apparently refilling from some sort of natural spring. Although the floor is quite dusty, a small, ever-present breeze wafts the dust slowly out the open exterior door.

The only obvious exits are the open door leaving the tomb, and a small door on the right hand wall, which leads to Room 2. However, the head of the horse on the monument twists slightly, opening a secret passage deeper into the tomb (Room 3).

Note that, as the door is always open, any sorts of wild animals could be used as guardians in this room. Perhaps hyenas or lions would work.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Caretaker's Office**

The small door from the shrine leads into this medium-sized office, which is considerably more dusty than the larger room, and which benefits from no breeze.

Although the room holds quite a bit of furniture - enough for two or three people to live comfortably - it's all old and rotting. Everything which would interest adventurers is gone from the room, including all valuables. Indeed, the PC's would be unlikely to benefit from entering this room but for a small twist of fate.

When a PC looks out through the door into the Shrine, he sees that what he previously thought was a breeze is, in fact, a ghost, sweeping the dust slowly out the door.

Once a PC has seen the ghost, he will not become unable to see it unless he deliberately stops looking at the spectre. Other PCs, however, will be unable to see the entity at all until they see it through the door from the office.

### **The Ghost**

The spectre is the ghost of a man known in life as Markian. One of Markian's ancestors swore an oath to the emperor that he and all his descendents would maintain the tomb of Agellar. For centuries, they did so, until one third-born son - Markian - left the tomb, to seek a life outside. This would have been acceptable, for his brothers could have maintained the gravesite, were it not for a band of tomb-robbers.

The plunderers murdered the two caretakers, and their wives and children, for refusing to reveal the entrance into the tomb. Markian never learned of the slaughter, nor did he have any children, and so when he died, his spirit was trapped in the material world by his ancestor's oath, and would be forever, for he had no offspring to pass the duty onto.

Once Markian is seen, he can be easily conversed with, and he is quite willing to do so, for he has had little human contact over the centuries. Indeed, he has grown tired of his duties, and seeks to end them, caring little for the sanctity of the grave.

He will tell the PCs how to open the secret door into Room Three in exchange for their help sweeping. He wants the entire room clean, and only for this is he willing to reveal his knowledge. If the PCs are particularly helpful - say, they summon something to help him clean forevermore - he may even tell them how to bypass the traps ahead.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The Hall of Death**

The secret door opens to a long, narrow, and dark staircase leading down. At the bottom lies a hallway, with a T-intersection. The stairs end at one of the two top-pieces, and a large iron door adorned with carvings and images of runes for curses and plagues and other such unpleasantry sits at the end of the other. Down the intersecting hallway is a lever, which, if pulled, opens the iron door.

Unfortunately, the hallway leading to the lever is full of traps - tripwires, pressure plates, etc. Unless the PCs are careful, they'll probably meet a messy end, or at least take a lot of damage. Indeed, the way is sufficiently dangerous that even the trip back isn't risk free, as there are more dangers than one could hope to set off on one trip.

Fortunately, there exists a way to disarm the traps all in one go. One of the stones on the wall beside the trapped hall can be pushed in slightly. This sets the mechanisms ajar, and the traps won't go off when the PCs descend the hall. The traps can be reset by pushing in a stone on the opposite side of the trapped hall. This realigns the mechanisms, arming the traps and pulling the other stone slowly back to its original position. Note that it doesn't matter which one is pushed first - each stone can set and disarm the traps.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Betrayal**

Once the lever has been pulled, and the door opened, Markian turns on the PCs. With the one obstacle he feared now removed (he worried that there might be a curse on the door), he believes that it is time to put into action a plan he devised long ago. Markian thinks that, should he destroy the corpse of Agellar, he will be free of his ancestor's oath. Uncertain whether the PCs would be willing to overlook tomb-desecration, he intends that they never find out.

Once the PCs pull the lever, Markian reactivates the traps, hoping to confront them in a flurry of dart volleys and fire traps. Markian needs to become semi-corporeal to push the stone, and will thus be visible to the PCs. After activating the traps, he rushes down the hall to attack them, hoping to force them to move hastily. As Markian is not fully corporeal, he cannot set off the traps, although some of them can probably affect him.

Because of the Oath, Markian cannot actually be killed, and will eventually rematerialize in the Shrine, assuming the PCs don't decide to destroy Agellar's corpse.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **A Cruel Surprise**

When the adventurers pass through the once-sealed door, they find themselves in the burial chamber. The room contains a fair number of coins, and perhaps some jewels and jewelry. More noticeably, an enormous sarcophagus sits in the room's center, and the PCs will likely be disappointed upon opening it.

The first thing they will likely realize is that Agellar is a horse. True to legend, he has been buried in his armour - a diamond studded suit of leather barding. Although certainly worth a large sum, and just as protective as is claimed, this is probably not what the PCs were looking for when they decided to sack the tomb.



## **Deserted Island**

By Nik Palmer

The players find themselves on a deserted island and must survive until they are rescued or can escape.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **The Giant Boar**

A Giant Boar has two sows and four piglets. It is protecting its territory, which has the only freshwater stream on the island.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The tallest stand of trees on the island is home to a giant poisonous spider. It is also the source of the freshwater stream on the island.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The crazy old shipwrecked pirate! Who holds a clue, item, or secret to the group escaping the island or finding their destiny?

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **Giant Wasp Nest**

A nest of giant wasps or bees is stirred up! These arm long bugs are angry and stinging!

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

#### **Giant Eagles**

On a high point with medium trees, rests a pair of giant golden eagles. They are raising a clutch of three chicks. The Eagles can provide advice on where land is at, where ships travel, what can be found on the island.



## **Henge of Ascension**

By Nik Palmer

When the players must meet a divine being, deity, or sage. Flavor the tone and type of conflicts to suit the sought entity.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

**Earth Wall:** Becomes a physical challenge the player must climb/overcome physically. The earth wall ring saps the strength and vigour from anyone who attempts to cross it.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

**Ditch Moat:** A gully that draws out the players most painful moment or weakness. Players must have the will to proceed.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

**Stone Circle:** Unless you touch the correct stone first, you can not enter (Riddle, puzzle, Question, debate).

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

**Eye of the Storm:** Floating balls of blue light send out shocks of electric blasts. A Storm's Eye for each player confronts them in the stone circle.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

**The celestial guardian:** After defeating the Celestial Guardian will appear and answer 1 question, offer 1 miracle, or discuss one topic of philosophy, history, or religion.



## Taking Sides

By Uri Lifshitz

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

#### The sheriff at the town

The sheriff is waiting for the party at the entrance to the crap hole of a city where they were planning to negotiate for a new job. The sheriff doesn't like there kind around here and will appreciate it if they'll leave. This encounter will determine the tone of the whole adventure – it could be blunt and bloody or subtle or sneaky.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

#### Offers

The local crime lord of the town while posing (but not too well) as a wealthy innocent merchant wants to hire the party to get rid of the opposing gang of criminals. Two streets later the leader of the opposite gang (posing as a leader of the poor people of the city) try to hire the party to save the city from the crime lord saying he is the real problem.

Since both meetings are in crowded location the result should be a role-playing game of wits where the party could maximize the offer or set the two groups against each other. Try to make it so that the party will not be able to kill both of the groups together.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### Reinforcement

The sheriff requested help from a nearby larger city; a group of skilled lawmen arrives to town and threaten the party to stop making troubles in the city. This makes both of the crime groups very annoyed and worried and they start to threaten the party into action by the next day or both of them (separately) will kill them.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### Battle

The party is forced into battle, they could either fight one of the crime groups or the other, or the lawman or to be creative (pit one group against the other or start an uprising of the citizens or rob all sides and skip town).

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### Outcome

The outcome depends very much on the actions of the party but no matter what – they will have between one and three new mortal enemies. If they defeated any of the groups they should get their cache of hidden valuables. Note that if any two groups are defeated then the third one takes over the town, making the party either heroes of the group or wanted outlaws.

Note: Some elements were taken from the general storyline of “Yujimbo”.



## To Sell a Gem

By David Hickman

This is a five room encounter, where the rooms are actually towns and or cities. This can be for any size party of any level. With a few changes it can also be used in any genre of RPG.

### Story Line:

Seaton Cheetock is a con man/thief extraordinaire, who often assumes various disguises. He is, for the most part, non-violent, and uses his charisma and talent of talk to avoid conflict. Often he will abandon the prize to avoid a fight or being captured.

Two days ago Seaton was in the City of Longview, and attended a showing of gems and jewelry. While there, he noted a very well cut and valuable gem which he made plans to steal that very night.

Seaton would never have stolen the gem had he been aware that most merchants and dealers have seen the gem and know who its rightful owner is. It wasn't until Seaton tried to sell the gem to Potsworth Addison, a secret dealer of stolen gems and jewelry that he found he could not sell the gem at any price. Potsworth explained that Seaton would do well to leave town quickly.

Seaton left right away. He made it as far as Hollow Brook, a small town about five days travel from Longview. Here his funds ran out and he was desperate to be rid of the gem. He also noted that the authorities seemed to know where to look for the gem but not who possessed it. It was at this time that his cohort in this saga began to

complain that he wanted his cut and would tell the authorities if Seaton wasn't forthcoming soon. Seaton disposed of him with a very rare, powerful, yet slow acting poison.

At this point Seaton devises a plan to find a suitable "mark" to pawn the gem to. His plan is simple, pass the gem off for a fraction of the value and make his way back to Longview where he could blend in with the crowds.

Enter the Party.

### **Primary Characters:**

1. **Seaton Cheetock**, a thief (con artist) wanted in several locations for a very long list of crimes. Not many months ago he took the name and title of Lord Roland Farthington. To give his new disguise credibility, he used the name of the real Lord Farthington because that particular Lord disdains visiting such drab locales.

Statistical data: Seaton should be 5 levels above average party level. His skills revolve more around stealth, slight of hand, and disguise. He will not fight unless no other option is available, trusting to his gift of talk and disguise. He will have two more disguises which he readily uses. Success rate for disguises is 90%.

2. **Magistrate Carlos Pemberton**: Government Official who will preside over the trial and pass judgment if the party fails in their defense. He has no special abilities, however, the GM should role play him as a no nonsense individual who takes his job very seriously. He will be fair and impartial.

3. **Captain Thomas Berman**: The High Sheriff of the surrounding county. His stats should be at least 5 levels above the highest level warrior/fighter PC. He commands a dozen deputies. They will fight if necessary and moral will be high. It would be wise for the party to get/be on Berman's good side, as he has sway with Magistrate Pemberton. If the party is honest and doesn't try anything silly, he should be an easy mark for help.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **Hollow Brook**

Hollow brook is where the PCs will encounter "Lord Farthington" the first time. The town is more village than actual town. Some 100 residents. Town watch consists of 10 common citizens with clubs or similar devises.

Unless the PCs do something to bring attention to themselves they should have no conflict with local law enforcement. Lord Farthington will approach the party at some time in the early morning, expressing the desire and problems of selling a very valuable gem. He states he is pressed for time and his footman has recently passed away from some unknown disease. He also states that he is unfamiliar with the sale of such drab trinkets. He offers a deal to the party that consists of them selling the gem for a given amount (3/4 of actual worth), all he asks is for 1/2 of the price up front as a good faith gesture, the remainder to be delivered to him in the town of New Hope in five days, however he states that he may be able to wait one additional day before going to the authorities. He also states that any price acquired over and above his asking price the party may keep as their own. He states that he will await the party at the town of New Hope farther to the south. If asked he will say that he has acquired transportation that leaves in a few hours leaving him no time to dispose of the gem. He will seem to the party to be distraught with events at the moment.

Once the party agrees Farthington will depart and the PCs may try to sell the gem in Hollow Brook. This will be their first encounter with economics. The merchant should express a great desire to purchase the gem, but alas,

there isn't enough gold/money in all of Hollow Brook to pay for such. He will state that given a week or more he could arrange for such funds to be available but it would be impossible today.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Windham**

Not much more than Hollow Brook but with only one merchant and a tinker will be there as well, neither of which can produce the required amount of gold. Windham is approximately one days travel from Hollow Brook.

Here the merchant will express a desire to purchase the gem but alas it will take about 5 days to acquire the necessary amount of gold. The tinker will shy away from the gem as if it had some kind of curse upon it and will not speak of it further.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Hook Latch**

Hook Latch is about one days travel from Windham and has 3 merchants but isn't much bigger. All three merchants express a desire for the gem but have the same problem it will take about 5 days to gather the funds.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Lands End**

Lands End is a small city, not as large as Longview but still in the city category (approx. 1000 inhabitants). Here the Party will find a merchant that tells them:

Merchant: "Aye lads, I can be gettin the coin you require. If you can come back in one hour, I'll be havin the price for ye."

Once the Party leaves he will close shop and hustle away to the High Sheriff Captain Thomas Berman, having recognized the gem for what it really was, and knowing it carried a hefty reward.

When the Party returns in one hour the merchant will be all smiles up until the Sheriff springs his trap and captures the party. (Note: The sheriff intends to capture the party while they have the gem. He will introduce himself and state that he is the High Sheriff and that they should give up their weapons and come with him. If the party fights the sheriff will not listen to anything they have to say later. If they cooperate the sheriff will listen with an open mind.)

Once captured the party is brought before the City Magistrate Carlos Pemberton. He will read the charge(s) against them and ask if they have anything to say on their behalf. This is a serious person, he will not abide obvious lies or half truths. If the party is honest, the Magistrate will allow all but the one who actually had the gem in his/her possession to bring Seaton to justice. The High Sheriff, Thomas Berman, will vouch for the party if they didn't fight him earlier. He will also offer to accompany the party in the hunt for Seaton.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### New Hope

If the party hurries they can actually make it to New Hope in time to meet Seaton as described. If they are late, Seaton will have changed disguises but will be within viewing distance of the meeting place in hopes of the PCs arriving although late.

(GM NOTE: From this point you may play it out as you see fit, Berman knows Seaton by sight from various descriptions and actually having almost caught him once. Remember Seaton will not fight to the death but will either try to runaway or surrender as the situation merits).

Flesh it out as needed but this can be inserted into any campaign map at any time. (Side quest anyone?).



## Place of the Embalmers

By Wulfhere [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com)

Before the honored dead are placed in their sarcophagi of alabaster, they are brought to the villa of the embalmers.

### Prologue: Outside the Halls of the Dead

*As the night winds gusted and howled, the iron-shod portal of the Minari family's villa rattled ominously. Hidden in the shadows of the doorway, a group of men furtively labored, hoping the weather's vagaries would conceal their stealthy entrance. Their dark cloaks billowed and whipped in the wind as they readied themselves for the grisly task ahead of them.*

*With a metallic click, the lock opened and the intruders stalked into the dark courtyard beyond. The frantic screams of the place's inhabitants could barely be made out over the mournful cry of the wind.*

Within the lands of the Free Cities, few groups are more reviled than those who do the unpleasant labor of embalming the dead. Considered pariahs, defiled by their contact with the deceased, their unclean company is feared by the superstitious commoners and avoided by the fastidious nobles. Cast out from society, the embalmers dwell apart from the folk of the city, dwelling in the shunned hamlet known as the Place of the Outcasts.

Despite the disgust and superstitious fear that surrounds these folk, no one evades the embalmers' company forever. Only the truly destitute are buried without any preparation whatsoever, and the burghers and gentry all eventually come to the dreaded halls of the embalmers. Despite the stigma of their trade, some embalmers become quite prosperous: Catering to the city's nobility, the Minaris are such a family.

Opening: "Bad Men are Killing Everyone!"

The player characters are returning to town, delayed long past nightfall by unusually foul weather or similar troubles, when a small child suddenly darts out of the darkness. The frightened lad, filthy and clad in torn night-robes, desperately pleads for their aid: His family has been attacked by "bad men"!

Those questioning the frantic boy may learn that "bad men" broke into his family's villa and began "killing everyone!" None of the bad men saw him, so he climbed over the wall and got away. He will beg the player char-

acters to come and save his family. If the characters are willing to help, the child runs toward the villa, worry for his family lending speed to his steps.

Those calming the child somehow may learn more: He is named Davyth Minari, the youngest child of the Minari family of embalmers. They have a villa in the Place of the Outcasts, where their home and workshops are.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **The Minari Villa**

The Minari family's villa is surrounded by a stout wall, with a good lock on the door and shards of pottery on top to discourage intruders. Within the walls, a large structure houses their business, with their family housed above. Although the villa is rather large, years of weather and decay have cracked and damaged its wood and pried at its stonework: The Minari are successful embalmers, but they are not wealthy.

Approaching the villa, the player characters are likely to notice that the villa's outer gate is ajar: The lock was damaged when the intruders broke in. Within the courtyard, a group of the Roekill Bandits wait in ambush, tasked to ensure that no one interrupts the brigands in their murderous raid. Armed with a motley assortment of cast-off gear and weapons looted from previous victims, no two of these men match.

The Roekill Bandits are ruthless highwaymen known to prey on travelers near the city, each one a vicious killer. They generally avoid coming so close to town, however: Only a truly remarkable prize could tempt them to risk capture that way.

If brought down alive, these brigands may be intimidated into revealing their group's true goal: A wealthy (and secretive) patron hired them to seize a corpse from the embalmer's workshop. The remains in question are those of Lord Lockeburn, a favored counselor to the Crown. After they are embalmed, his remains will be interred in the great cathedral on [Regency Boulevard](#), far beyond the reach of mere bandits. While Lockeburn's corpse is being embalmed, however, it is vulnerable.

It is possible to get the upper hand over the bandits by asking Davyth about where he climbed the wall: The cracked stonework there makes it an easy climb, and the pottery shards warding the top broke off long years ago. Characters using this route to secretly enter the villa may sneak past the Roekill sentries. Alternatively, the bandits are more easily spotted from the inside of the courtyard, so the player characters may wish to mount an ambush of their own.

Unfortunately, Davyth is likely to flee into the darkness while the player characters duel with the brigands. He will not be found again if this occurs.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Chamber of Preparation**

After entering the workshop of the embalmers, the characters will find a cool workroom, filled with tables. Within, several small braziers burn aromatic woods, filling the chamber with a pungent odor and flickering reddish illumination. The wood's scent is vaguely irritating, like burning cedar chips, but the nauseating stench of death proves even more potent.

Many of the bloodstained tables hold bodies, each shrouded to keep insects off. Undeterred by the braziers' pungent smoke, hundreds of flies buzz back and forth, making concentration almost impossible for anyone in the room. They are especially drawn to large vessels that stand by each table. These sealed containers hold entrails and other tissues removed from the corpses as part of the embalming process. These containers are emptied regularly, the material within treated as wastes, but several filled jars await removal.

This chamber of death holds more than remains. One of the Minari family members, a girl named Evena, hid from the vicious bandits and concealed herself among the corpses here. If the player characters discover her hiding place beneath a shroud, they will need to quickly convince the outcast girl that they aren't with the highwaymen, or the terrified maiden may tear into them with a gore-encrusted knife.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The Ablution of the Departed**

Several large ceramic tanks dominate this room, each approximately the size of a bathtub or sarcophagus. Each contains a mixture of preservative oils, herbs, and alcohol used in the embalming process, and a few hold partially prepared corpses. Large storage jars and barrels hold various herbs and unguents used to anoint the dead.

One of the bandits has ransacked this room. A hideously-scarred rogue named Evrard One-Ear, he was told that precious spices and golden amulets lay hidden here, treasures meant for the burial of Lord Lockeburn. In his search, the brigand has dumped out jars of distilled alcohol, torn through stacks of linen shrouds, and shattered barrels of fragrant oils, leaving the chamber a jumbled mess. Spilled liquids, shredded cloth, tumbled corpses, upended furniture and shattered crockery make the footing treacherous and movement difficult.

Unfortunately for the foolish One-Ear (along with anyone nearby), he is likely to drop the torch he's holding and reach for his sword the moment that someone confronts him. The fool's reflexes are far faster than his ability to reason, for flammable liquids cover much of the floor and have even run into adjacent hallways. In seconds, the area will become a raging conflagration: One-Ear is likely to be the first victim of his unwitting booby-trap. Aggressive characters who rush in to offer battle may share One-Ear's doom, sliding and tripping on the slippery floors and trapping themselves in a chamber of raging flame.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Only a Fool Fights in a Burning House**

The remaining Roekill Brigands had taken the other family members hostage and were torturing them to extort the locations of any additional valuables that are hidden in the embalmers' home and work areas. The stubborn family of embalmers refused to yield, even as they broke Master Embalmer Gralden Minari's legs and beat his wife Doela unconscious. Even Master Minari's loyal apprentice has been savagely beaten, but refused to talk.

The bandits' cruelty was cut short when they discovered the building was on fire. Grabbing the treasures that they had already found, they abandon their hostages and began searching for an escape. Unfortunately, they are likely to encounter the player characters first. Throwing down their loot, they draw their weapons and furiously attack those who interfered with their plans.

These men are not haphazardly armed minions, like the bandits in the courtyard. Instead, they are well-equipped leaders among their bloodthirsty gang. Their leader, Thulhok, is a vicious half-breed, a short, ferret-like barbar-

ian raised in the lowest gutters in the land. He boldly risks attacks from his enemies' front line in attempts to get behind them and tear into their leaders with his jagged-edged falchion.

Thulhok's followers are little better. To a man, they are hateful predators without honor or compassion. Their word means nothing to them, and they would gladly surrender if it gave them a chance to slip a hidden blade into their enemy's back.

(Of course, this encounter will be very different if the player characters flee the site immediately when the fire breaks out, or if they avoid letting the fire catch in the first place. Characters who stop the fire entirely may surprise the bandits while they are still tormenting their victims, while those who flee are likely to miss the bandits altogether.)

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **"Save My Family!"**

The Minari family is tied up upstairs, battered and broken. They will plaintively call for help, coughing and choking as waves of heat and billowing smoke slowly fill their chambers. Only heroes of true mettle will dare face the spreading fire to save them. Master Minari is too injured to walk, while his wife is unconscious from her beating. Their apprentice embalmer, Berent, is feeble, but can help player characters trying to haul his master and mistress from the smoke-filled villa.

(If abandoned by the player characters, the Minaris will certainly perish as the inferno spreads to engulf the entire villa.)

As they try to escape, his voice filled with pain, Master Minari will beg his rescuers to save his son, Davyth. If they try to assure him that his son escaped, he will argue that they are wrong, his son is in a hidden strong room in the villa, where they keep their valuables. He is quite adamant about this, and will beg his rescuers to at least look. The secret room is off of the villa's solar, below the family's chambers, in the only part of the villa not yet engulfed by the flames. The hidden door is part of a wooden wall painted with images of various saints; it can be opened by pushing hard at the top of the wall.

### **The Secret Room**

Those that dare reenter the burning structure should easily find the secret room, where Davyth is hidden, along with the family's valuables. Those expecting the boy that summoned them to save his family may be in for a shock, however: Davyth is dead, and has been for years. After he fell from the villa's wall, his remains were preserved with all of the embalmer's skill and lovingly placed in a tiny coffin, kept in the family's strong room. A small coffin sits in the hidden chamber, Davyth's image painted on its lid.

When the invaders stormed the villa, the boy's spirit arose and climbed over the wall to get help: What the characters encountered was merely Davyth's ghost.

The remains of Lord Lockeburn have also been hidden here, secured against would-be thieves. Those rescuing his corpse from an unwanted cremation will earn the gratitude of his powerful noble family.

The leader of the bandits, the vile Thulhok, has correspondence incriminating his patron, Sir Kareth Sherewin, the "gentleman" that instigated the bandits' raid. Long suspected of associating with necromancers and heretics, the notes are grim evidence that Sir Kareth planned to use necromantic arts to draw the deepest secrets of the realm from the dead lips of Lord Lockeburn. Thulhok was expected to destroy these letters, but he kept them

against betrayal by his "noble" patron. If Thulhok somehow survives the scenario, he is likely to face an unpleasant fate, for a wise man doesn't betray those who dabble in the dark arts.

If the player characters were enterprising enough to grab other valuables from the strong room, Master Minari will reward them handsomely. Despite the loss of his family's livelihood, he knows what is truly important, and will richly reward those who rescued his family from the flames.

### **Embalming in Ancient Times**

While many people are familiar with the ancient Egyptian practices of mummification, later funerary practice is largely ignored. In reality, most cultures practice some sort of preservation of the dead, even if it's only intended to keep the remains presentable through the funeral rites and burial (or cremation).

In the Middle Ages, embalmers were not ordinarily vilified as this presented, but in some other parts of the world, they have always been seen with revulsion. The average European was not embalmed, being placed in the churchyard to decay: After a few years, their bones were sometimes exhumed to make room for new bodies. This practice led to the construction of massive ossuaries and catacombs, such as the ones beneath Paris, France.

Prior to the use of preservative chemical injections (in the late 1700's) in Europe, bodies were preserved by removal of some of the internal organs (evisceration), after which they were bathed in alcohol or oils and the tissues were packed with moisture-absorbing herbs. The bodies were then wrapped in tarred or waxed shrouds, which sealed them against corruption. Those remains that were undisturbed by tomb robbers or other vandals have often been found well preserved centuries later. (This means of preservation is what was represented by the details of the Minari family's business.)

Of course, other cultures had even more sophisticated means of preserving their dead. The Chinese, for example, have produced preserved bodies that remain intact and pliable over 2,000 years after they were first interred.



## **The Nobleman's Daughter**

**By Dragon Lord** <http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4317>

When a young noblewoman goes missing the real cause may not at first be apparent.

### **Background**

Almost six weeks ago Lady Calindy, the sixteen-year-old daughter of Lord Cazalet, disappeared while out on a shopping expedition. She has not been heard from since.

Lord Cazalet is beside himself with worry. In the six weeks since Calindy's disappearance he has had communication from her or from her abductors (and he is increasing convinced that she has been abducted).

No note. No ransom demand. Nothing.

This is all the more worrying because Calindy should be able to make contact herself. She is, after all, studying the magical arts and, although only a trainee mage, she is quite capable of casting a simple message spell.

His Lordship feels that this can mean only one thing: whoever has his daughter is powerful enough to block magical communications, or else rich enough to hire somebody who can.

The fact that such powerful villains seem not to be motivated by greed (if they were they would have demanded a ransom by now) does little to calm his fears.

## **Where the PCs come in**

Lord Cazalet's people have done the best they can, and to fair to them they have discovered some of the pertinent facts. However they have been unable to learn who is holding Lady Calindy or why she is being held.

Even if they could find the kidnappers hideout, confronting villains powerful enough to block magical communications is well beyond their abilities. They have however learned that Lady Calindy was seen boarding the ferry to the Dragon Isles along with a young man by the name of Sycol Namara (whom His Lordship believes to be the criminal responsible) not more than one week after her disappearance.

What Lord Cazalet needs are people who are experienced in tracking down elusive hiding places and able to confront powerful villains when they get there. In other words, he needs professional adventurers.

He is prepared to offer a substantial reward for his daughter's safe return as well as covering any reasonable expenses (and in this case he is prepared to be quite flexible on that). He also would not be at all upset if Sycol Namara were to end up dead but he will not actually mention this since he is not a killer (and besides to ask it would be illegal).

If the PCs agree to help he will provide them with a formal letter, complete with his personal seal, stating that they search for the Lady Calindy, that they mean her no harm, and that are acting on his behalf.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

Reaching the Dragon Isles is simple enough; all the PCs need do is board the ferry. Alternately, if the PCs seamanship skills they could hire a boat. The real problem is finding out which of the thirty or so islands the villains taken Calindy to.

Even the most cursory investigation at Fisherman's Cove will establish that neither Namara nor Calindy is there, nor indeed has anybody by these names been there in living memory. However more detailed questioning will reveal that a couple matching their description was in the village about a month ago but that they stayed for only a few days. The villagers got the impression that they were a rich couple on their honeymoon. (Note that if the PCs make the connection this is their first clue that the situation may not be exactly as described to them by Lord Cazalet.)

Eventually it will become apparent that the PCs must systematically search every island in the chain, for which purpose they will need to hire a boat (if they have not done so already) and probably a pilot as well, especially if they lack seamanship skills.

Alternatively clever PCs might realize that if the villains are hiding on one of the uninhabited islands they will need regular supplies brought in from outside. If, and only if, the PCs realize this allow them to locate a local fisherman who does the supply run. They could then bribe, or force, him to reveal the correct island, or maybe even to take them there.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Sycol Namara and Lady Calindy are on Maxon's Island, located some five miles off Dragon Home. Since the only safe landed place is the cove this is where the PCs go, after which the only viable option is to investigate the cave. *{Note to GM: Feel free to have a little fun with Maxon's ghost here if you wish.}*

Exploring the cave will reveal an old, but perfectly safe, tunnel cut into the rear wall. About fifty yards down the tunnel is a recently installed and very sturdy looking, door. Solid oak, iron bound and barred on the inside, there is no way (short of several hours hard labor with heavy cutting tools) to open the door from the outside.

There is neither latch nor handle on the outside, nor is there any evidence of a locking mechanism. This is a door clearly designed to keep people out rather than to keep them in, which seems a curious choice for a prison door (another clue that all is not quite as described).

A thin brass chain hangs from ceiling just outside the door. If this is pulled a bell will ring, followed closely by an irate voice bemoaning the inconsideration of visitors (along with a little inventive cursing for good measure) and a six-inch square panel will slide to one side.

Behind the panel is a servitor imp in a particularly grumpy mood (aren't they always), who will take one look at the PCs and announce, in his best surly doorman voice, "*You ain't da mistress and you ain't 'er man, so show me ya invite or bugger off*". (Another subtle clue that the PCs may have been misled. Only a wizard can bind a servitor imp and this one clearly refers to his master in the feminine. Although be no means conclusive this does suggest Lady Calindy. Strange that she would bind an imp to imprison herself.)

The imp is of course the doorkeeper and the PCs must convince him to open the door for them. This is by no means an easy task since, like all of his kind he is rude, surly and generally augmentative.

Alternately they could try to trick him. The imp demanded to see an invitation but the PCs do not have one. What they do have is the Lord Cazalet's letter, complete with his personal seal, and the imp (not being particularly bright) cannot read so it just might be possible to convince the imp that it is in fact an invitation. This, along with a little fast-talking, just might be enough to convince him to open the door.

Of course they could simple kill the imp and bash the door down but that, considering that the imp (like all of his kind) is very tough and the door is very strong, would be going it the hard way (or would it?).

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Beyond the door the tunnel continues for another thirty yards or so before ending in three separate staircases, each of which leads up in a different direction. This is the beginning of a complex labyrinth that leads, after countless junctions, dead ends, switchbacks and loop passages in all three dimensions, to the top of the cliffs.

The PCs are in no real danger here (unless of course the GM wants to have a little fun with them) and they should reach the top safely enough, albeit after a long and tiring climb.

On the cliff tops they will encounter another party similar to themselves (professional adventurers hired by a respectable person for a perfectly legal job). This group is professional, well equipped and clearly the equal of the PCs. *{Note to GM: This is important. It should be apparent from the outset that a fight could easily go either way and would, in any event, likely result in casualties on both sides.}*

Coincidentally (or possibly not) this group is here on similar business to the PCs: they were hired by Gerrard Namara, a wealthy and well respected merchant, to rescue his son Sycol from the clutches of the Lady Calindy, whom Gerrard Namara believes to be an evil sorceress.

The adventurers will initially be very wary of the PCs, thinking them to be minions of Calindy. They do not want a fight if it can be avoided but they are both willing and able to defend themselves if attacked.

What happens next is largely dependant on how the PCs respond. If they elect to talk both groups will, by comparing stories, learn enough to guess the truth. If instead they choose to attack there will be an extremely bloody battle.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

At the top of the cliffs the PCs will find, somewhat incongruously, a neat little stone-built cottage, complete with a slate roof and wooden shutters on the windows. Here Sycol Namara and Lady Calindy have chosen to live in quite self-imposed exile with only a couple of servitor imps to tend to their needs.

The couple well aware of the PCs' presence (Calindy is quite capable of setting up a few alarms and detection spells) but there is not really anything they can do about it. If given the option they are perfectly happy to talk to the PCs (after all, there really isn't much else they can do).

The truth is that they are lovers who eloped together because their respect parents disapproved of their relationship. They had the village priest a Fisherman's Cove married them as soon as they arrived on the island and they have the marriage certificate to prove it (the priests' discretion, and therefore their own privacy, was secured with a sizable donation to the church restoration fund).

They absolutely refuse to return unless and until both of their fathers accept the match. Furthermore, they threaten to kill themselves, should the PCs attempt to force them to do so (and they mean it to).

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The PCs now have the problem of getting paid, and this is by no means as easy as it sounds.

According to their contract with Lord Cazalet they must return Calindy to him safely in order to collect the reward. The key word here is safely; if the girl kills herself before they get back the PCs will get nothing. Therefore they must some way of reconciling Calindy with her father.

Their counterparts (if they were not all killed in scene 3) have a similar deal with Gerrard Namara in respect of Sycol and therefore face much the same dilemma. Actually the young lovers have already suggested a possible solution. If both fathers will accept their relationship they will gladly return home. Looks like the PCs may have play arbitrator.



## **The Great Gate**

By Davide Quatrini

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

PCs are searching a portal for the far Demiplane of Barimol. The portal (called the Gray Gate) was built milleniums ago by an alien race, and it can be found in a ruined tower in the large Forest of Barim. Nobody knows

the exact position of the tower, and PCs must explore the forest extensively before finding it (or they can use magical means). After finding it they must also defeat the guardians: three mechanical chimeras (white, black and blue respectively).

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The iron door of the tower can be opened only pronouncing the correct alphanumeric sequence in front of it. PCs can discover it if they carefully analyze the inscriptions engraved on the door itself. In fact the following incomplete sequence can be found among the inscriptions: A55 C46 E37 ... (the missing part is, obviously, G28).

Brute force/magical attempts will cause the explosion of the door. If PCs survive, they'll find another door, identical to the first, exactly in the same place (if they cause the explosion of it, then they'll found a third door, and so on).

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

In the tower there is a square room that contains a large oval arc made of wood and silver: the Gray Gate. PCs can discover how to activate it reading the ancient runes that cover the room's walls: they must start a fire in front of the portal, using wood taken from the Forest of Barim. The problem is the trap that defends the Gate. In fact the floor is unstable, and it will take fire rapidly (possibly destroying the Gate) if PCs start their fire directly on it. They can avoid the trap using a brazier, for example.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

After activating the portal PCs must defeat its last guardian: the Gate itself! In fact, after the activation, it will polymorph into a wooden golem that uses two huge silver swords as weapons. Defeating it is simple: PCs must only survive for half an hour without hurting the golem (if they destroy it they'll must find another portal for Barimol ^\_^). After that time it will return to its original form (activated portal).

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Just before entering the portal a powerful but gentle incorporeal voice will ask the PCs the following question: "Do you want to become members of the Old Race?". If PCs agree they will be transformed into elvish beings made of solid light and will be teleported in the Demiplane of Barimol for training. Otherwise they'll use the portal for their personal purposes, and the voice will also cast a special blessing on them.



## **Heart of the Dwarves**

By Paul Darcy

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

Deep within Mt. Burundushar lie the Ancient Mithril Mines of Gabilgathol. Abandoned by the Dwarves in an age long past, it is rumored that the fabled Heart of the Dwarves still remains hidden there. Dismissed by the locals as legend, strange occurrences have caused some of the old-timers to insist that the Heart is indeed the

culprit. Perhaps the odd events are strange lights in the sky surrounding the tall, snow-covered mountain or bizarre weather such as a snow storm in mid-summer or dark happenings in the surrounding towns (hauntings, deaths, etc). Regardless, there is only one sure way to find out: start up an expedition and hire adventurers for the task.

The mountain is very tall and snow-covered year-round. The entrance to Gabilgathol is a door hidden deep within a permanently open crevice in a glacier. The door is difficult to locate and the path extremely treacherous. If the physical barriers to the entrance are overcome, there is also the ice elemental guardian to contend with. The elemental may be bargained with for safe passage into the large, columned entrance room and the tunnel beyond. Otherwise, it will attack any who attempt to pass.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The main living area, accessed from the large tunnel off the entrance chamber, is a huge room with a dozen or more tunnels from which living quarters are reached. Only one of these tunnels also leads to the next area of the city. All but that single tunnel are trapped: some with concealed pits, others may use simple trip wires to activate rock slides, and most have multiple traps along their length. The Goblins from the next level make regular forays into this area to check the traps (perhaps another way to find that correct tunnel).

There is an intelligent earth elemental on this level who knows the correct tunnel and also the path to the secret door on the following level that leads into the catacombs. Once again, this elemental may be bargained with, but at a definite cost. There may be a certain earthen treasure, perhaps a sack of ancient, mithril coins or another object hidden down one of the trapped tunnels that the elemental requests in exchange for the information. Or, the creature may want revenge against one of the other denizens of the ancient mining city. The elemental won't attack first, but will defend itself ferociously if attacked by the party. And, if destroyed, the party will have to do its best to figure out the right path.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The next level is an enormous cavern that twists its way eventually to the very summit of the mountain. On this huge level are several Goblin factions. The Goblins war amongst themselves, fighting primarily over scarce resources needed to survive. Located within the treasure chamber of one of the factions is a secret door that leads to the catacombs--the easiest path once the party figures out which Goblin tribe is the correct one. Otherwise, there are dozens of tunnels on this level, many leading into the mines, but not the correct tunnel to find the Heart. The party could get lost in the mines for a very long time.

It is possible that the PC's could ally themselves with one of the Goblin tribes and assist it to reach the secret door. Such a deal with Goblins, however, should come at a price--possibly all of the treasure in said treasure room in exchange for safe passage.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The catacombs are the resting place of king and commoner alike. There is a large statue on the tomb of the last great Dwarven King. The epitaph may provide a clue as to what awaits and the fate of those unworthy of the Heart. There is a secret door behind the statue which leads into a long, deep mining tunnel with no other entrance. The tunnel opens into a large chamber with a glowing pedestal in its center.

The demon within this mine chamber is a hideous creature. It should be powerful and difficult to defeat. It will not bargain or speak with the PC's and will attack immediately. If defeated, it explodes in a great flash of light.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The Heart of the Dwarves sits upon the pedestal in the center of the demon chamber. It is a huge gem, roughly the size and shape of a Dwarven heart which glows brightly, pulsing like a beating heart, and radiates a great aura of good when picked up. The possessor is immediately restored to perfect health, including the restoration of any lost limbs, organs, etc. The Heart may have other abilities, but its one great power is to grant the possessor one (or more) major miracle/wish(es).

While the Heart was intended be used for great good, it also inspires great envy and greed among others. The demon guardian of the Heart was the last person consumed by lust for it, forever bound (until released by unnatural death) to guard that which it could not in the end possess. There should be a clue to this, perhaps a note or journal left behind by the unfortunate creature chronicling its fate. Indeed, if the possessor attempts to use it for an act deemed unworthy (GM Discretion) then the possessor may begin transforming into its next guardian. After a predetermined time period or its miracle/wish power has been used up, the Heart of the Dwarves should vanish and reappear on its pedestal to be guarded by one or more of those corrupted by lust for it.



## Skanda Biologicals

By Siren no Orakio

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4316>

Skanda Biologicals is one of the world's premier producers of Awakened Biological Systems. Now, the party has been asked to penetrate their fortress, and destroy their research. But, can they find the force of will to do so?

*This is a Shadowrun Setting Specific Plot / Dungeon, as originally intended to be run. As always, cyber-punk or magical elements may be removed or masqued at will for your own game.*

### The Setup

The runners are contacted by a fixer who has used their services relatively regularly - This fixer should have a solid rep with the runners, and vice versa. He has a meet with a new Johnson for them. That is, someone new wishes to buy their services. Should they take this meeting, they will be given the address and a time-slot at an upscale restaurant, an Italian steakhouse.

Upon arrival, the maitre'de of the steakhouse will, indeed, verify their reservation, but not before he takes the time to insult any elves that happen to be among the PCs. "Daisy-eaters" is among the most gentle of the epithets he is likely to use, though they will focus on the "traditional" elven dietary habits.

When seated, Mr. Johnson will appear roughly a minute after the party has had enough time to start to get nervous about the meet going sour. He is a tall, and imposing gentleman, of eastern European descent, sporting no obvious cyberware. He does, however, to those who are able to look, radiate magic, though it will be difficult in the extreme to determine the nature of it. He is well disciplined, and well masked. He is powerful, that much is obvious, but is is uncertain exactly what he is. Not even his accent is much clue, for it will bear only the faintest traces. A particularly talented ear may determine the accent to be Magyar.

He will explain that Skanda Biologicals has begun to walk down a research path that he and his compatriots do not particularly care to have them complete, and that he would like the results of their research eliminated. For this, he will pay them the sum of 30,000 nuyen - A princely amount. He explains to them that Skanda will have buttressed their security with paranormals, but that he has full confidence in their ability to handle the job. Few real details will be forthcoming from him, however.

### **The Job**

Skanda's primary R&D facility is set up in a relatively decent area of the city, and the surrounding area is mostly mixed commercial and residential area, of varying individual security. Police can be expected to respond to a disturbance in the area within 6 minutes, and openly carrying firepower will probably count as a disturbance, if reported. The building itself is very large in footprint, and surrounded by a fence and over twenty meters of 'green space' between the fence and walls, a raw display of wealth in the tightly packed city. There is, however, a reason for this.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **"Challenge 1 - The Guardians"**

On-site security begins at the fence. The yard is rigged with a variety of motion sensors and infrared cameras, the eyes and ears of the security rigger, and wired as he is, he is able to see and hear through these far more effectively and attentively than any joe at a simple bank of security cameras. Should he take note of late night intruders on the grounds, they will be ordered to display their security pass, or face the consequences. Should they not be able to display these passes, refuse to display them, or not match the ids on file, he will unleash the first line of defense: The hounds. Specifically, seven hell hounds. Well engineered, trained, and appropriately drugged, the hell hounds are a hundred kilos of pure, lupine muscle and pack instincts, with a six meter jet of raw flame to add to their punch. They're hungry, and the drugs in their system prevent them from feeling pain or fear. Runners attempting to cross the green space will find it an interesting time. The roof, meanwhile, is covered by the simple expedient of heavy machine gun turrets mounted atop the HVAC equipment.

Similar, retractable, turrets also cover both the front lobby and the loading docks, and the rigger is capable of aiming and firing all of them simultaneously, with the assistance of the building automatic systems. Throughout the building, he is also capable of deploying a handful of well armed and armored drone units. Finally, on site magical security is provided by a free spirit, who has a personal stake in several of the company's research projects. A creature of quicksilver and shadow, with the ability to duck into the astral and return at will, he will be difficult to pin down and defeat, though he is unlikely to show himself in the first stages of the run.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **"Challenge 2 - The Vaults"**

In order to complete their mission, the runners will need to first enter the company vaults, in order to destroy the hard copy of the data, as well as to obtain the required equipment to pass the third challenge - clean room suits. Entering the proprietary knowledge vaults, however, will take one of a few things; The PCs may use central security to generate the necessary RFID card for the maglock system, and add one of the PCs to the list of permitted retinal patterns, they may attempt to hack the system open at the door, which is extremely difficult, they may attempt social engineering before the run in order to obtain the RFID card and even ocular pattern of a person with proper access, or if all else fails, shaped charges will turn the trick... and qualify as a police disturbance, if they haven't already been summoned as backup by the rigger after the death or evasion of the hell hounds.

A general smash and burn of the offline data storage area will do the trick. The runners may attempt to decode the filing system and steal other media, or limit destruction to just the required media, but this will take time that they do not have. A side trip to the main server room may be required.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **"Challenge 3 - Entering the Clean Room"**

Entering the clean room is a simple matter, if the runners have had the foresight to grab chem suits from storage. One runner must remain outside to operate the airlock, while the others enter into the 'lock, with the suits on. There is a two minute timer on the doors of the airlock, where each door may only be opened in sequence two minutes after the close of the opposite door, during which the airlock is filled with first a variety of noxious chemicals designed to kill biologicals, then secondly, a 'rinse' cycle of acetone, followed by a quick, heated blow dry. While this is no particular problem for a properly suited individual, an unsuited individual will probably be severely chemical burned, and possibly blinded by the procedure. Furthermore, any caseless ammunition exposed to the process - spare clips, revolvers - will be ruined by the process, and will not fire, and jam the weapon until such time as the goop is cleaned from the gun.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **"Challenge 4 - The Warrior"**

Having entered the main laboratory space, the runners will be confronted with a broad array of dead chimeras and other engineered creatures, however, one is alive, and will be able to slip his bonds and fight with the party. It is, or rather was, a human being. Now, he bears so many bio-implants that he has forgotten that humanity. He fights like a savage predator would, a flurry of powerful limbs and swift strikes, using the shadows and stealth to the best of his ability. He is also quite hungry, and is likely to take a chunk out of the runners if not dealt with quickly. Victorious, it will be a simple matter for the runners to enter the sample containment area.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

#### **"Challenge 5 - "We're here to kill that?"**

By now, all on site data has been summarily disposed of, all that's left is to destroy the experiment. Thanks to the Johnson, the runners should be prepared to destroy whatever's in a particular cage number. That cage is in the back of the chimera storage area, and rather than the pet-store like stacks that the others are stowed in, this is one of three glass-walled partitions that are, quite clearly, set up to be children's bedrooms and play rooms, and only one is occupied, by what seems to be a sleeping, five year old girl. Her only sin? That would seem to be slit eyes, and a few small patches of scales at a joint or two. If her room is entered, she will most likely awaken, and have a brief moment of panicked terror, before she looks at the runner team with wide, open eyes, and asks in a trembling voice, "Mama said someone would come to take me away from the bad men. Is it you?" Options exist.

The runners can execute her, as the contract calls for. This will result in the runner team hired to break the girl out the next night being reassigned for vengeance. They may attempt to kidnap her, and either provide succor, or sell her to the highest bidder - She is a half-dragon, and having her to exploit her power when she matures is worth a pretty penny. Any runners who keep her, however, will have to deal with the corporation who wants her back and their agents, in addition to the dragon who wants her dead. In any case, escaping the building is only the beginning of their problems...



# The Spirit Never Dies

By Ria Hawk

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4322>

Parties have a habit of getting out of hand, especially when it's the young and wild generation. Sometimes, parties get a little more than out of hand, if the spirit moves the guests.

## Plot Description

The Meyer family is looking to hire someone. Their nine year old son Czeslaw has gone missing. The last time he was seen was when he was going to a party an older cousin had invited him to, a haunted house party. He had gone to other parties with the same cousin before, and had sometimes stayed with his cousin's family for a few days to a week after, but something is different this time.

Not only Czeslaw, but his cousin, and several of his cousin's friends failed to return from their party. Details about the location of the party were sketchy, but there is only one house generally thought to be haunted, and was the likely location of the party. Servants were sent to check out the house, of course. But they didn't come back, and when one of them was found later, dead, the Meyer family decided to send in someone tougher.

The haunted house isn't hard to find. It's an old mansion on the edge of town, which has been abandoned for years. The story is that it was the home of the wealthy Isaac family, who all perished in some unexplained disastrous manner. Information gathered from various sources indicates that the party guests were planning to hold a séance, which was the reason they decided to hold the party at this house.

The objective is to return Czeslaw Meyer to his very worried parents. The households of the other missing party guests are also adding to the reward offered. While they would like to know what happened, they're more worried about getting their friends and family back safely.

Upon reaching the house, it becomes obvious that someone is here: the house is full of lights.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### The Entrance Hall

The easiest way to get in is the front door. If one knocks, it is opened by a surly butler who will rudely tell the party to leave, and then slam the door in their faces. If they decide to just open the door and go in, the butler will attack them. He's a clumsy fighter, but has a certain ferocity that makes him very dangerous. He will earnestly try to kill any intruders. (Indeed, he is the one who killed the previous people sent to investigate.) If the fight goes on for more than five or ten minutes or if he is overwhelmed, he will summon another crazed servant to assist him.

If the PCs break in elsewhere, there's a chance that the butler will be in the area when they do. If he isn't, he or the other servant will arrive within a couple of minutes to discipline the intruders. They cannot be reasoned with in this state.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### The Sitting Room

Here the PCs will find a semi-well known medium, who was apparently performing the séance. However, something is wrong. She seems quite dazed and frightened, and thinks she is someone else. (If the PCs ever met

her before in different circumstances, she does not recognize them.) She will introduce herself as Miria Isaac, and ask that they leave "her family" in peace. If threatened, she will flee upstairs.

Miria was the name of the lady of the house, when the Isaac family still lived there. However, the Isaacs have been dead for at least fifty years. Anyone with any knowledge of the occult or ghosts can guess that she's possessed by the ghost of the unfortunate woman.

Miria knows what's really going on and will admit as much if approached properly. She knows that she and the rest of her family are ghosts, and will tell the PCs that "Ennis" found a way to bring the family back. During the séance, each family member possessed a different party guest. While the medium was necessary to for this to happen, Miria (in the medium's body) either can't or won't undo what's been done. However, if convinced, she will agree to take them to Ennis.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Upstairs Bedroom**

Miria will lead them upstairs to a small bedroom on the second floor. (If they go upstairs by themselves, they are likely to be attacked, either by the crazed servants if they weren't disabled earlier, or by other family members. If they are with Miria, they can go up unmolested.) She tells them that Ennis is inside, and that they will have to deal with him.

If the party researched the Isaacs before actually coming to the house, they would have found mention that Ennis Isaac was the name of the man who owned the house. However, the available records omit one very important fact.

The only person in the room is the boy Czeslaw Meyer, whom they were hired to rescue. He seems relatively unharmed, but the problem is that he's also possessed, by the ghost of Ennis Isaac, Jr. He is the one who arranged the whole mess, as an attempt to bring his family back to life, and he doesn't have any intention of relinquishing his second life. Of course, the difficulty is, the PCs can't kill him.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Upstairs Parlor**

Ennis/Czeslaw is small and fast, and has no problem with fighting dirty. At the earliest opportunity, he will run out of the room, into a larger parlor nearby. (Easier to fight, more weapons at hand, and easier access to the rest of the family.)

If the PCs decide on a physical approach, they'll have to subdue him without killing him (preferably without injuring him). The other possessed party guests (all but Miria) will arrive to help Ennis out. (Depending on power levels, they might also have poltergeist-type powers as well.) However, once the boy is subdued, the other "Isaacs" will stop attacking. If he is knocked out, all of the others will either collapse or look very confused.

If the PCs decide to try to talk to Ennis, he'll essentially throw a tantrum, yelling, screaming, and possibly attacking. Eventually, however, assuming that they say the right things, Ennis will eventually just give up and start crying about how he just wanted things to go back to the way they were. When this happens, Miria will enter and say that something to the effect of "It's time to stop."

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### Resolution

Either way, once Ennis has been subdued one way or another, ghostly images will emerge from each of the party guests and vanish. A few minutes after, the party guests will wake up, back in their right minds and with very little memory of the past few days for the most part. (If the PCs did not kill the servants who attacked them earlier, the same will happen with them.) If the PCs elected to handle the situation diplomatically, the guests will be found in various rooms in the house.

Czeslaw remembers most of what happened, and if asked, can tell the whole story. A few weeks before the party, he'd been exploring the haunted house, as young boys are wont to do. He'd tripped on the stairs and fallen, knocking himself out temporarily. The ghost of Ennis had leaped at the opportunity it presented, possessing Czeslaw. Then he'd set about arranging for it to be possible for the rest of his family to do the same.

He'd suggested the séance party to his cousin, and hinted that the house was the perfect place to have it. The older people had thought it a splendid idea, and one thing had led to another. During the séance, his plan had worked perfectly.

The rest of the ghosts in the house managed to possess various people; when the servants were sent to investigate, two of them were possessed as well (either by family members who hadn't been fast enough to get one of the party guests, or by the ghosts of actual servants who also haunted the place, as the case may be).

Once everything is straightened out, all that is left is to ensure that all the befuddled guests get home and return Czeslaw Meyer to his grateful parents, and collecting their (undoubtedly substantial) reward. If the PCs ended up hurting the boy, the reward will be less, and if they killed him, they won't be given much, if any at all (and may actually find themselves wanted by the law).



### Saving Plaque

By Strolen

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4326>

The players have a chance to cure the plague that has sprouted up upon their travels. Will they choose to do the right thing and help bring health back to the region?

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

They meet a small child upon the road near sunset. She is perhaps 9 years old wearing a burlap sack as clothes and her face is darkened in the growing shadows of the setting sun behind her. As they get close enough to make out features they see obvious signs of a rash and purple spots covering her exposed body. She is walking in a trance and doesn't acknowledge anybody.

If anybody tries to heal her, whether physical or spell, her eyes will dilate as she looks towards the now visible moon, her arms will swing parallel with the ground and a otherworldly wind will blow her hair and clothes in a dramatic way as she recites the following:

*Of the fifth the fourth the third  
Alight the skies will the birds in flight*

*Follow it you may  
Follow it you might  
You must choose to go  
You must choose to do right*

The child will then slump and pass away peacefully. About a minute after she dies a deep exhale will leave her body and a black mist will roll from her mouth and swirl towards the forest. It is quickly out of site in the darkness. The players may do whatever to the body, it doesn't do anything else.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Once they continue on they will soon see a wagon off the road with two horses still hitched to it. When they investigate they will find two adults that have the same disease the child had. They are slumped in their seats as if they both died simultaneously and just slumped over. Searching the wagon they will find little of use but they will discover some small articles that would belong to a small child.

As they are investigating a flock of birds will be disturbed not too far in the forest and fly directly overhead. As they look up to follow the trail of birds they will see a faint glow in the low clouds as if emanating from something deeper in the woods.

The light is coming out of the top of a mound. If they go to the top it is a circular rock that is throwing the light upwards. If any of this group touch it, it instantly goes out and a portion of the ground sinks in the shape of a square. They must dig to reveal the door.

On the door, once cleaned, will be eight runes. If anybody can read them they are:

anger death sadness hope life happiness love fate

From what was recited by the child they should choose life hope sadness and the door will open. Possibilities:

1. There could be others at the site already. The glow may have attracted those within site of it. They may have to fight their way through them. Some may be diseased people looking for a sign. As they will see, actions against these people may have negative effects later on.
2. The person that attempted to heal the child must be the one to do all the tasks or magical traps would be set off.
3. The runes must be chosen in the correct order or magical traps could be set off.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

As they start exploring the series of rooms one of the players finds that they are getting a rash that really itches. As they continue it starts to bruise and perhaps bleed and is getting painful. No healing does anything to it.

The kind of cave system doesn't matter. Could be natural, man made, a labyrinth, whatever but it should just take enough time for the symptoms described to start taking good effect. If they try and go back out the way they came the exit is closed and impossible to open.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

They will begin to hear a lot of shuffling and groaning echoing down the passageway. They will see a light at the end of the current passageway and shadowy forms passing back and forth in front of it. None moving quick, a shuffling limping movement. The corridor opens into a huge open room with a ceiling that goes beyond the light. The light source seems to be coming from something at the other end.

The moving shadows are men, women, and children at the last stages of the illness that they watched the child die of and the same symptoms that the one player is developing rapidly. None of the people are carrying weapons, but as soon as the players enter the room the nearest plague victims pivot awkwardly and start walking towards them with arms outstretched. The wounds are dripping and livid with puss dripping from them. It would seem any contact from them would get this liquid on them.

If they resist purposely hurting anybody as they move towards the glow they will find a goblet of liquid.

If they fight their way through or hurt anybody maliciously they will meet the black mist that saw come out of the girl's mouth. It will question them on their intentions and why they would hurt defenseless people. If they answer good enough or show regret at their actions, the shadow spirit will allow them to continue to the goblet. Else the spirit and the people in the room will disappear and they will have to return to the entrance that is now open. They will have to deal with the disease as the DM sees fit.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The goblet of liquid can be drunk by anybody. If drunk by the person with the growing disease then he can watch as the disease disappears and he returns to normal. They may offer the drink to those in the cave but they will also find that anybody who drinks from the goblet has a healing touch for the next 2 minutes. Anybody they touch retains the healing power for 1 minute. Once any of the diseased figures in there drinks or is touched, they touch the next one behind them and they spin into a golden mist and disappear into the darkness above. The room will be empty within moments with a sparkling display of golden, lighted mist flying into the darkness.

The dark shadow at some point will tell them that the goblet will work as long as the players seek no personal gain, heal for selfless reasons, and do not allow anybody know they have it unless they decide to turn it over to another person who will fall under the same rules. If at any point they are selfish, sell the healing power, or if somebody catches them using it the goblet will turn into a useless tin cup.

The goblet never empties (you can't just pour it out though, that will empty it and the poured liquid acts as normal water) and they are able to remove it from the tunnels. They will leave the same way they entered.

The plague can then be used as a tool of the DM as they wish.



# Barrow of the Bored Berserker

By DeeCee

This 5-room dungeon involves the player characters stumbling upon a barrow, or hill-crypt. Long ago a powerful berserker warrior was laid to rest there, and the world moved on. The grasslands the berserker had known well were transformed slowly over the centuries, and the hill overtaken with new foliage. His people moved on, and the barrow was forgotten, until now.

The PCs find the barrow accidentally, as it is in fact the lair of a local legendary maneater bear. Either they come upon it unknowingly, or they are on the track of the beast in order to slay it and make the local area a bit safer.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

Its lair is a raw gash in the side of an otherwise verdant hill. It dug into the hill because it smelled a charnel feast, and has been busy digging around for weeks.

The lair itself is a plain dirt sphere, like a bear's den only a magnitude larger. All of the walls are of packed earth, scarred with haphazard claw marks. The roof is mainly earth, but the bear was able to claw upward enough to hit the bottom of the "dungeon", which is comprised mostly of worked flagstone. Enough earthy material has been removed to show worked stones - the floor of the chamber above.

The challenge of this room lies not just in somehow defeating the terrible maneater (which is naturally famished from working, and will see the PCs as a treat), but also in determining that the dungeon lies above, and finding a way to break through the floor to ascend into it.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

What would have been the true entrance of the barrow was in fact sealed off when the interment ceremony was complete. It is now small, plain chamber with flagstone floors and crude mortared stone and brick walls. Only one "door" in the room leads back to the other chambers, and it takes the form of a circular hole in the masonry wall, covered by a sturdy shield. It will take either strength or wits to move the shield, as it was fastened securely and not meant to ever be moved once the lord was laid to rest on the other side.

The only other objects in the room are huge fired clay jars full of powder. The contents have been disintegrating over the years, and if opened or broken, they will have an effect on the trespassers. There are three 4' high jars. The first contains what was a simple ointment for battle wounds, but which has degraded into a foul-smelling lump of grease that will nauseate anyone breathing the fumes. The second jar was, and still is, clean water. It had been sealed well against the ravages of time. The final jar was a powdered drug that has also remained effective, and its effect is to induce a berserk state in those prone to such things.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

This is a mid-sized room of worked stone, with an open doorway covered by a cloth divider, on the far wall. The room itself has a sunken floor, with a stone pillar erected in the middle. The floor is covered with dozens or hundreds of sets of humanoid and animal bones, but only a few of these stick out above the surface of an inky liquid pool.

The pool is just that – ink. The skeletons are many trophies from the lord's career, considered to be worthy to keep but not as important as what lies on the pillar. Therefore, the floor was filled up somewhat with a substance that at one time looked like fresh liquid blood. Unfortunately, that illusion has been ruined by the passage of time, and the "blood" has now turned to a dark almost black ink which only appears red if thinned out accordingly.

The pillar is a trophy showcase of sorts. It rises from the other trophies to a height of perhaps five feet, and holds only one item: the bleached skull of a humanoid, obviously far larger than a normal man. While it does not appear monstrous, it is at least twice the size of a human skull.

The challenge of this room is that PCs will probably assume that the ink is some terrible trap, or houses some beastie. Not to mention the strange allure of a possibly trapped trophy skull. In fact, nothing in this room is in any way harmful.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

This was once the burial site of the berserker lord. His body is propped upon a simple nomad-style chair, his weapons lovingly placed in his hands for all eternity.

Disturbing this chamber results in the spirit of the lord coming back to inhabit his body, to see what is happening. He's been living the good death in whatever afterlife awaits a berserker, but is curious as to what's happening in his crypt.

At first he'll address the PCs and ask them their business in his crypt, in as jovial a manner as possible. Eventually excitement will get the better of him though, and he'll want to do battle again for old times' sake. He'll rise to his bony feet, weapons ready, and demand that the PCs do battle for some reason or other. If they are reluctant, he'll call it a test to see if they're worthy to take his treasure. If they offer to leave without any further harm, he'll call them cowardly dogs. Either way, he intends to get some battling done before he returns to the afterlife. The battle itself should hit upon a few things:

- 1) He's a berserker lord, from a historic warrior culture. He glories in battle, and seeks to prolong it as long as possible.
- 2) He moves about. A lot. He'll go from target to target, showing his prowess and keeping the battle moving through this and the previous room.
- 3) If battle extends into the trophy room, the bone-covered floor mixed with the slick concentrated ink makes for unsteady footing.
- 4) Being a corpse animated by his berserk spirit, he will not tire. In the stuffy crypt though, the PCs will slowly become more sweaty and exhausted. Oxygen is also likely going to become a factor.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The lord is not such a bad sort, but he IS a berserker, and he does revel in battle. He can be defeated though. When he is close to being downed, the characters should notice the phantom images of women slowly starting

to appear from the corners of their eyes. These women are watchers who would choose the honoured dead in battle, but they are out of place in this world and this time.

Still, if the PCs are triumphant, they could very well be approached by these women. Fates, Valkyries, whatever they are, they've just witnessed a very battle hardened veteran be taken down, and they would have words with those who managed to do it.

This could lead to a Viking-themed story later on, or simply be the "treasure" of the foray; having your battle skills acknowledged by the folks who really know these things is bound to bring some glory in this world. Alternately, the watcher spirits might reward the characters with gold rings, or some other tribute. This could also lead to further adventures down the line.



## **The Stone Labyrinth**

By Daniel Burrage

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The entry to this temple is well hidden by simply being a narrow ditch at the bottom of a hillock, and the entry is a narrow rectangular stonework going downward about 25 feet. Not a difficult climb, but certainly nothing to attempt under attack. In side there is a large stone door inscribed with runes written in a long dead form of dwarven. There is a dim, yet ambient, light in the area, but little of this is noticed. Standing before the group is what resembles an eight headed hydra, but is crafted entirely out of stone and each face holds an expression of utter tranquility. The hydra has but three legs in a tripod formation and it will battle until it is little more than so much stone.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

In the next room is a great labyrinth of stone, enchanted stone which exists both on the material and ethereal planes. Just outside, quickly scampering just inside, is a half stone golem kobold. If negotiated with he will explain that the labyrinth is a perpetual maze, ever shifting and ever beguiling, and that he intuitively knows the way. If he is not negotiated with he will scamper inward due to the threat, and will only be spotted with a mix of extreme luck and scouting. There could be roaming creatures of stone, which also know the way, at the GM's discretion. The kobold hybrid, named Ithril, would more than gladly show the PCs the way for a small fee and promise for protection. However, he will not leave his beloved maze.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The next room, or rather hallway, is rather drab and holds the same ambient light as every other room in the temple. It's long, longer than they can see, and seems to sap their very energy. In truth it is a magical trap of the simplest variety, essentially a magical treadmill combined with an illusion. It also has an incorporation where it saps their energy giving them ranks of tiredness over a period of time based on their average level. The solution is simple, turn around, and then walk backwards. You will arrive at the end of the hall in about 40 steps.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The fourth room has a large altar, and the room emulates, or perhaps is, the night sky. There are epic depictions of the creation of the dwarven race by Moradin, the temptation of a few by an unnamed dark god, and the transformation to Duergar. In the middle of the room is a small undead, presumably dwarven, dressed in rich attire with a sceptre or staff, and a crown of an obsidian material. He is either a Cleric with the Death, Construct, and Magi domains, or a specialist wizard who chose necromancy and has some sort of dark familiar. He is a lich, he is powerful, and they do have to battle him.

If they read the walls with a successful decipher script check they will read of Moradin's creation of dwarves, and how he told them to cherish the sun and live in its warmth. A god known only as Child of Night comes and promises the dwarves power and wealth beyond measure, if only they would renounce Moradin and follow her. A select few do, and as such a mixing of Moradin's curse and Child of Night's blessing, the Duergars were made. She erected this temple of emotionless creations, and had her creations spawn from there. This was one of the first Duergar's great-grandchildren, twenty and one thousand years old.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

In the final grand chamber lay many things. For one, a big ol' pile of loot of all sorts, and another thing is a large sarcophagus. An inscription on the lid explains rather explicitly that any of Moradin's chosen placed within alive and left for 24 hours would be reborn to serve the Night Children's purposes. On the bottom of the lid are trace amounts of that same black material of the crown. If they're lucky enough to tick the Lich of badly enough he will activate that crown and burn it to enhance a spell. This material basically aids Duergars or evil dwarves in the casting of spells when burned.



## Revenge of the Urn Beast

By Cheka Man <http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4371>

A rare form of Undead seeks the help of a band of PCs. Will they be up to the challenge?

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The PCs are walking home from a tavern when a cloud of dust and bone, with claws of bone jutting from it, jumps in front of them. Rather than attacking them, it seems to be trying to communicate with them. What happens next depends on two things. If the PCs do not attack it and try and speak with it, a simple communication spell will enable it to speak with the PCs inside their heads and it will pour out its sad tale of woe.

Of course, many (perhaps most) PCs tend to be of the hack and slash type, and faced with such a creature will lash out with weapons and spells. If that happens the angry creature will latch onto one of their faces, resisting all attempts to peel it away. After a short time it will crumble into dust and then the possessed PC will speak in a different voice. It will tell the PCs that they have three days to help it before it kills the possessed PC's soul and takes him or her over for good, and warns that force or magic used against it will only harm the host body.

Either way, it reveals to the PCs that it is an Urn Beast a rare form of undead formed when somebody who in life truly hated the idea of cremation after death was cremated anyway. In life it was Amalric, a close friend of one of the PC's, and a high ranking and devoted priest of the goddess Ulmania. Due to a centuries old religious

schism the worshippers of the God Jove and the Goddess Ulmania follow totally different religious rules, which includes funerals. Jovian worshippers are always cremated on a pyre after death, whilst Ulmanian worshippers, due to an acute lack of burial space, are buried on a large island owned by their church, The Isle of the Dead .

Amalric was a close friend of the respected and powerful mage, Sir Edmund Verney and they helped each other and trusted each other totally. Unfortunately, one evening Amalric made a terrible discovery that his friend was a member of the secret and illegal cult of The Children of Ma-O when Sir Edmund, trusting him totally, revealed his secret and tried to get him to join the cult. Amalric was horrified at the idea and refused point-blank, promising to remain silent about Sir Edmunds membership. Furious with him, Sir Edward used his darker spells to murder him. As his soul sped away towards its life in the Otherworld, a life that would have been a happy one in Heaven as Amalric had done no evil when alive, it suddenly convulsed in agonising pain and was sucked back into the body.

A body that was burning on a pyre. Knowing of his friends deep desire not to be cremated after death, Sir Edmund had decided not only to murder him but also to burn the body until it was ashes. No burial in his family vault on the Isle of the Dead, with a decent funeral. Instead his body was to be destroyed by fire in the Jovian way. Trapped in the dead body, the spirit felt it burn and silently screamed in agony. When the fire finally died and his ashes and burnt bones were scraped up into an urn and sent overseas his anger grew and grew until it was all consuming. By treating his body in this way Sir Edmund had prevented his soul from reaching Heaven. When the urn was dropped by mistake Amalric escaped but knew he needed help to take on Sir Edmund and win.

As well as telling the PCs that it wants their help for revenge, the Urn Beast will also tell them about the treasures of Sir Edmund. If it has not possessed any of the PCs and they refuse to help it, it will possess one of them to force the rest to help it. Once one way or the other the Beast has secured their aid, they have three ways to get to the island town of De Maddenville where Sir Edmund lives. If they pay for passage on a ship of the De Madden Company, it will be expensive but there should be no problems.

They can also work their way across as one of the crew, or secretly stow away (stowaways however could end up in a lot of trouble.)

Or they could buy a smallish boat and sail across, but the seas of Acqua are perilous for small boats and they should roll two dice on an encounter table before they reach the island they are looking for.

2-No encounter

3-A Dunkleoustous looking for something or someone to eat. If they can wound this formidable armoured fish it will swim away looking for easier prey.

4-An ocean going Wrapper If they don't attack it then it will be curious rather than hostile.

5-The PCs see the mighty Kraken Big Red swim by. Fortunately for them he does not see them as food and is too busy to notice them.

6-A storm blows up and it will take all their strength to keep the boat from sinking. Anything of theirs that would be ruined by heavy rain is made soaked and useless.

7-A waterspout bears down on their boat. It is nowhere near as strong as a tornado on land but it still picks their boat up and throws it several feet.

8-A Giant Mussel bed in shallow water-the PCs should be careful not to get trapped.

9-A boatload of The Regulators show up (two Regulators per PC) and attack the PCs to try and rob and kill them.

10-A Giant Urchin tries to impale and eat the PCs

11-Some friendly dolphins swim by.

12-A coastal cutter of the De Madden Company shows up to ask where they are going. Providing they are polite they should avoid any trouble. Should they get into a fight and kill the crew it could cause them severe trouble in the future.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Once they get onto the island it is easy to find Sir Edmunds luxury villa by the sea. A spell cast upon it keeps unwanted Undead out. If the Urn Beast is inside a PC this will not affect him, otherwise he must wait outside. The doors and windows are securely locked and barred but the Urn Beast knows a way in via the sewers. Once they get in they soon find themselves in a room with an grid of random letters on the floor and the words on the wall What is the most important thing in the world? Against the walls are several ornate suits of armour clutching rusty halberds. Sir Edmund was selfish in the extreme, and the correct answer is MYSELF. Stepping on the tiles in such a way as to spell out that word will get the PCs through the room with no trouble at all and will also open the steel door.

Stepping on the wrong tile or tiles will mean they break, releasing Myrie Bugs, Trapper Ants, Silverspiders and other foul insects that will attack the PCs. Casting any kind of magic is even worse, as it will cause the suits of armour to lurch to the attack, and they can only be destroyed with magical weapons, or if the PCs lack magical weapons (spells on their own will not have much effect) by pulling them apart into their individual pieces of armour. If the bugs are defeated the puzzle must be solved to open the door. Of course the more tiles are broken the more bugs will attack the PCs.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

If the PCs have got through the door without setting off the traps, they will be met by a dozen or so of The Children of Ma-O If the PCs are careful they can avoid a fight just be pretending to be fellow members of the dammed cult and will learn from them that a sacrifice is planned. The cultists will happily let the PCs walk past if they can come up with a suitable excuse.

If on the other hand the PCs have got bitten by the insects and/or got into a huge noisy fight with the suits of animated armour the Children of Ma-O will yell a warning and leap to the attack. They are very well armed, with the Firebow and sharp swords and are expert fighters, the personal bodyguards of Sir Edmund. They also have fifty or so Pocket Ironbones to help them.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

If the PCs avoided getting into a fight with the cultists they will descend into a cavern open to the sea. A rope bridge links a small island in the sea to the rest of the villa. On that island stands Sir Edmund, next to a large solid chunk of amethyst. Chained to the amethyst, a gag firmly in her mouth, is a young girl, and Sir Edmund is preparing to sacrifice her to Ma-O with an amethyst dagger and a drawn sword. If the PCs are clever enough, they can impersonate cultists and gain permission to come over to the island, close enough to jump to the attack.

Sir Edmund is no pushover. His sword is the Sword of the Ocean and here on the coast he can use it to summon large waves, dangerous sea-creatures, and even minor water elementals to attack the PCs. When attacked he will at once put the dagger down and draw a metal wand. A bright blade of light will emerge from the wand, which can cut through non-magical weapons, all but the toughest armour, and can even, if the PC is not careful, lop off a hand.

If they got into a fight Sir Edmund will have had time to cut the rope bridge and summon large waves and a Dunkleoustous or two. There is a boat that the PCs can launch into the waves, but it will be almost impossible to prevent the sacrifice. It might be possible to hit Sir Edmund with a shot from a Firebow if they took one from

the cultists; the shot would not be fatal but would stop him in his tracks, enabling the PCs to reach the island with the girl still alive. If the shot misses (and it will not be easy to hit the target from a boat on the waves) the girl will be killed with the dagger.

If the PCs kill Sir Edmund and one of them is possessed, the Urn Beast will thank the PCs for their help, leave the PC and vanish into the body of Sir Edmund, which will jerk once and then remain dead upon the ground. If none of the PCs were possessed then the Urn Beast will fly in from the sea when he dies, his magic having died with him, thank the PCs and possess the body as before.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The dungeon is complete but what is it about this dungeon that made it different or memorable. What kind of mystery have they discovered, what kind of reward have they won, and what kind of information have they recovered?

If the girl is still alive, when ungagged and untied she will thank the PCs over and over again and then reveal herself to be a daughter of a Company Admiral. To avoid fighting their way back the PCs can use the nearby boat to leave and row along the coast a little. The girl will lead them to her house, one of the marble mansions in the richest areas of town. The grateful Admiral will send the De Madden Company Police to round up the cultists for trial. The PCs will be rewarded with a third of the amethyst altar, divided up between them. In Acqua this will make them hugely rich, rich enough if they desire never to go adventuring again. If they took the amethyst dagger they can keep it too, otherwise it becomes a trial exhibit in the case against the cultists along with the Sword of the Ocean.

The news will spread and they will become celebrities for having rescued the girl, unmasked the evil of Sir Edmund and uncovered a cell of the hated cult of Ma-O. Shopkeepers will sell stuff to them cheaply.

If they killed the De Madden Company people in the cutter, they will be pardoned but their reward will be greatly reduced to a small chunk of amethyst each (which is still the Acquan equivalent of a thousand dollars each.)

If the girl has been killed, then the De Madden Company Police, summoned by one of the cultists who faked his death in the battle earlier, will appear in numbers too great for them to fight their way out, and the PCs will be accused by the cultists, who have no identifying marks that can link them to the cult they are a part of, of themselves being Children of Ma-O, who broke in, murdered several innocent people, sacrificed the girl and killed Sir Edmund when he tried to stop them.

If they row back and surrender to the police, they will go on trial for their lives on multiple capital charges and the odds of an acquittal will not be good, and will be even lower if they killed the men from the Company cutter encounter earlier. Sir Edmund had an impeccable reputation as a man on the side of Good. If the PCs have sense, they will take the amethyst dagger and a chunk or two of amethyst that they have had time to chip from the altar, so that at least they have some reward for their efforts, and row away, land on a nearby beach, and go into hiding until they can leave the area.

If they choose to take the Sword of the Ocean with them then they can use its powers in future adventures, but every time they use it they must make a willpower check/ spend a willpower point to avoid being converted to the evil cause of Ma-O.



# Raid on Tantalus IV

By dark\_dragon <http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4357>

You have to infiltrate a warzone, get engineering data, and get out. Simple. The twist: The data is on the large moon Tantalus IV. Better known as "Hell" by its inhabitants. Good luck...

## Raid On The Testing Ground

*Notes: This post was mainly inspired by Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs series of novel, with the mimints and sleeving technology being ideas found in them. The idea that a small state such as that of Liberty could have such a large sphere of influence is from Asimov's foundation series, where the first foundation, being one of the sole retainers of human knowledge, is protected with very little military might of its own simply due to geopolitical forces. In my interpretation, the state of Liberty keeps a small contingent of elite soldiers, called Guardians, to protect the sanctity of the system itself, and they rarely venture beyond the solar system of Liberty's capital world unless to defend Liberty's technology.*

### Your Mission

The mission with which you have been tasked is to infiltrate Tantalus IV (which is a training world for the liberty military) and recover blueprints and sample of sleeving technology from an abandoned facility. You will be dropped from orbit on Tantalus IV several hundred miles away from your target, avoiding the planetary defense grid active in the sector. From your LZ you will have to make your way to the facility and gather the required data and specimens. Once this is done, you will have to deactivate the local planetary defense grid around the facility for your pickup to arrive. The deactivation console should be in the same building as the data you require. Your employee does not wish to reveal his identity, but should you succeed, you will be very well remunerated. Your employee predicts a 15% probability of survival. Good luck.

## Setting primer

As everybody in the human sectors know, the solar system-state of Liberty, with a ridiculously small population on the galactic scale, exerts a huge influence on other governments. This is mainly due to their technological advancement and in one in particular: resleeving technology and human digital freight. This allows them to fully digitize human consciousness (human digital freight or HDF), and download it into either a virtual reality, or transmit it using quantum entanglement relays to far flung corners of the galaxy, where it can be downloaded into a new body (a so called sleeve). They keep a stranglehold on this technology, and will defend it ruthlessly, although they are happy to let people use the relays in a controlled environment, and for a fee. Sleeving, however, they keep for themselves. It effectively allows immortality as the mind is uploaded and re-inserted into a younger body, either cloned, or engineered.

The consciousness is constantly recorded in a small device implanted at the base of the neck, behind the spinal cord. If the person is killed, it is simply a matter of plugging this 'cortical stack' into a computer and download the DHF.

This effectively allows for disposable soldiers if used in conjunction with a large army, but because of the small size of the Liberty forces, they prefer to use this technology during training rather than in combat, leading to more-than lethal training.

The repercussion of this technology is exponential population growth, so the government has created a tax on civilian resleeving which grows exponentially with the number of sleeveings, and after a few new sleeves (excluding accidents, in which case the body is recreated at the same age as before the accident), the tax reaches unaffordable amounts, forcing the people to either go into virtual reality, or into voluntary storage. (a side business in staging accidents is a constant thorn in a Liberty insurer's side)

## The Liberty Testing Grounds

The Government of liberty controls only one system in the local sector, and is known throughout the galaxy for a string of technological innovations, often decades ahead of their rivals. This reputation often overshadows that of their military. In term of men power, they number little more than a local planetary militia. In term of effectiveness, every Liberty Guardian fielded is the effective equivalent of half a dozen battalions of elite special operators.

Living in a strict martial society, citizens are engineered from biological conceptions to be the pinnacle of human evolution. Strong, smart, tough, even the artists and philosophers of this system can kill you effortlessly with their bare hands. The Guardians are hand picked amongst the very elite. These are men who could jump into a never-before-piloted starfighter, attack a capitol ship by crashing head on into it, Survive, breach the hull from the outside without a vacc-suite, and take control of the enemy ship. On their own. A hand tied behind their back.

After their seven years of training, they are dropped into the smallest habitable world in the liberty system, where they spend one year in constant planetary war. This is not an exercise. Real ammunitions are used, and they aim to kill. Survivors who let themselves be killed less than twelve times during the year are accepted into the service.

As an aside, the Temporary-Death rate for Guardians is 98% in the first week. Although out of all intakes, only 2.9% suffer from Permanent-Death from a destroyed cortical stack, and are returned to their family from the pre-enlistment DHF backup, while approximately 29% suffer from permanent psychological damage and must be erased. It must be noted, however, that the average stack recovery time is two month, which can sometimes really throw the patient off. The record for the longest period to recover a cortical stack is 342 years. The Guardian in question is now the head of the Tantalus IV facility. His stack was recovered inside the guts of a swamp panther, doubtlessly having gone through a long chain of carnivorous hosts before being found.

The Guardian high command refer to Tantalus IV simply as 'The Testing Grounds'. Guardians more accurately call it Hell.

Having never been there, I wouldn't know. But from what we do know, they seem pretty close to the mark.

The Testing Grounds is an entire world dedicated to every mode of personal warfare imaginable. Form the orbiting space station, where space fighting in cramped stations is tested in live scenarios, right through to the mud-soaked trenches, where guardians have to fight meter by bloody meter, war is everywhere.

If the bullets and bombs don't kill you here, there are many other surprises in store.

### The Mimints

The Mimints are self-constructing mechanical lifeform, created as a weapon system and deemed too dangerous due to their extremely quick evolution, they were instead released on Tantalus IV to test the mettle of would-be Guardians. They have since invaded the entire planet, although their presence is stronger in some sectors than in others. There is no such thing as a typical mimint, but all have some characteristics in common.

1. They are always found in packs. This means that if you ever see a lone mimint, you are inevitably walking into a trap. The smallest group observed contained no less than five member. Usually, packs are a diverse affair, with a command hierarchy and many different classes and size of mimints.
2. Most packs are controlled by a very smart AI which resides in one of the unit, allowing very complex, intricate tactics, such as counter ambush and diversions, flanking and trapping. Usually, the unit is medium sized, well armoured, lightly armed and rarely engages, preferring to direct other, lesser units. Beware. This commander unit, once disabled does not stop the rest of the group. Mimints are perfectly capable of acting on their own, and some groups use a redundantly distributed AI inside each of the units.
3. They are made up of scavenged vehicle and equipment parts, although some mimints have recently started to use naturally occurring resources such as ore. This means that any piece of equipment humans carry into tantalus IV eventually ends up as part of a mimint. They are especially fond of processor components and microelectronics, which they can use to increase their cognitive function, multiplying their efficiency. A group of a dozen mid-size mimint will take apart the equivalent of a challenger/Abrams tank in under 15 minutes. then again, some devices are left to rust in the harsh Tantalian weather.
4. They are completely unpredictable. Faced with a vastly superior group of mimints, many soldiers have been completely surprised when they cowered away. Packs of mimints have been know to engage in fierce fighting only to stop for no reason, and simply move off to somewhere else.

5. Their physical appearance and characteristics are as unpredictable as their behavior. Mimints have been known to build themselves into machines as small as a scarab and as large as a fishing trawler. With weapons ranging from thrown rocks to particle beams. Their methods of propulsion ranges from threads to spider-like legs, and includes such outlandish design as long range artillery which moves by frog leaping the length of a football field.
6. All, without exception, will learn during combat, and will be able to resist a particular type of weapon better when they have already been attacked with it. their learning also includes active modifications to their design during the heat of combat. A very unsettling experience when the spider-like, biting mimints that you where fighting suddenly turn into crab-like opponents using ranged weaponry.

From a GM's perspective, mimints allow careful balancing of the opponents to make interesting encounters.

### Flora & Fauna

The Ecosystem on Tantalus IV is a combination of the most dangerous and vile lifeforms encountered by the widespread Liberty exploration effort. Alien plants and creatures better at home in nightmares are brought together and dispersed over the surface of the planet, resulting in a horrible, man consuming combination which forces the Guardians to fight as much against themselves as against nature. Some interesting specimens have been recorded on the surface are: The devouring Ahoi Worms which is joined by a long list of similarly antagonistic creatures: Urghuls, Black Leaf Bugs, Blood Spiders, Trapper Ants, Giant Ticks, as well as Giant Solitaire Spiders and more. The Plants of the planets are no better, and most are either poisonous or adorned with a plethora of spikes, needles and thorns. Some, however, are even worse: Chokesprout, or perhaps Corpse Flowers and their cousins, Dire Vines. Very little can prepare the soldiers for such things as Devil's Thorns or the revolting Necrosia Animensis, and even less can be done for them if they fall in the frequent grasp of an Ocadian pit Fiend who will consume unlucky soldiers, leaving only their cortical stack.

The different Sectors of the world are separated by deep, ocean filled valleys, etched on the planet's surface by the blinding lights of countless nuclear blasts. Each section hold a particular challenge for prospective defenders of Liberty. Linked by large viaducts, they form little pockets of fighting. Each section has several bases, and all are linked to an extremely fast underground maglev network, to allow for great flexibility of scenarios by moving troops and equipment. Some notable Sectors are:

### Sector 043-Falling sky

This Sector is under constant, unending orbital bombardment. Life expectancy here is brutally short, and the sounds of the dropped shells echo for hundreds of miles. Smaller ordinance is also fired, originating from the many gatling cannons geosynchronously orbiting this forsaken piece of land. Nuclear weapons are sometimes thrown in for good measure, although the coordinators never actually attack the troops directly, preferring to steel their souls through the long and drawn out death from radiation poisoning or burns.

### Sector 877-Clockwork beasts

This Sector (except for the maglev stations) is completely controlled by a single AI, which resides in the centrally located "temple", which it guards ferociously. The 'Temple' is actually amongst the remnant of the very first city on the planet, which was abandoned when the planet was given over to its current use. In this sector, hundreds of thousands of mimints are coordinated into one of the deadliest force on the planet, and few squads remain for very long. Bringing the attention of the AI on yourself is possibly one of the most assured way to die on Tantalus IV.

### Sector 097-Return to the stone

In this sector, Guardians are separated from their high tech weapons, and have to survive, thrive and fight without any modern technology. Needless to say that otherwise annoying, yet harmless beasts return to their rightful place at the top of the food chain when this happens. A particular dread of the Guardians is the swamp panther, as large as a rhinoceros, and as muscular as a gorilla, this engineered predator is the undisputed king of the local food chain, and will snap a human in half with a single bite.

### Sector 666-Little Long Sleep. The Devil's own

This ironically numbered section is one of only a handful which is free from war. Here, we can find the largest hospital and re-sleeving facility of the planet, where soldiers rest and recover from the intense fighting elsewhere, as well as the coordinating center, which organizes the chaos and destruction of this world on a day to day measure. It is also the location of the only spaceport of the planet, and where every successful trainee receives the small medallion which defines them as fully fledged Guardians before boarding a shuttle to their first true tour of duty.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### Act 1: Entrance, Maestro

*As the definitive "thuck thuck thuck thuck thuck" of bullet ripping at the hull echos in the cramped confines of the drop-pod, the retroburners fire on, wrenching your guts and entrails to a place you never expected they could go. Slowly blacking out, pain spreading along your spine, harness digging into your shoulders and chest, you land. The great Crashing noise of the crumpling drop-pod awakens your senses and sends adrenalin surging through you body, ready for the fight of your life. As the pod opening sequence begins, you hear the ominous sound of screeching steel on steel as the mimints begin their unstoppable deconstruction of the pod, before the doors have even unlocked. You knew this was going to be a hot LZ. You knew the risks. You're being paid for this, aren't you? Lucky you...*

As the players crash land in their orbital drop-pod, they arrive smack bang in the middle of a swarm of mimints. Incredibly lucky, the swarm had been engaged against some Guardians prior to the PC's planetfall, and the main AI had just been knocked out by the last standing Guardian. Out of the original swarm, two dozen medium sized (around the size of a very big dog.) biting mimint remain, who will attack with their claws and mouth appendages. They look vaguely insectoid, resembling a very large ant/spider cross. Further off, three medium sized ranged mimints stand back, afraid of injuring the spider mimints. they resemble large crabs, with twin autocannon of a strange design on their back, which was probably the source of the "Thuck thuck thuck" on the drop-pod hull. A large mimint stands a little way off too. about the size of a car with thick, plodding legs, it sports no weapons. Indeed, it is a gathering and transport mimint, and all others would cling onto its back. Littered around are the remains of a well equipped patrol, as well as at least as many mimints, including some very exotically designed ones. From first impressions, it seems that the majority of the mimints were waiting for the patrol buried in the soft earth, and took them totally by surprise.

The tone and mood here should be absolutely frantic, with checks to see if they can get out of the pod by literally shooting the biting mimints point-blank as they open the door: "*As the door opens you are faced with an angry array of gleaming metallic pincers, inches from your face*" Once outside, the swarm will redirect its attention to them, and the PCs should have to make checks to avoid shooting each other in the crossfire. With enemies coming from all direction, the best tactics is to throw a EMP grenade in the middle, and clean up the ones outside the blast radius afterwards. Good inspiration are swarm scenes from the starship trooper movies or a pack of rabid wolves. This is survivable, just. If a mimint actually manages to bite, the wounds are shredding wounds and will be very painful, and very bloody, but not quite life-threatening, although they will require access to good medical facility soon. Make this a tough surprise fight, and don't slow down the action until the last crab mimint is dead. The locale is a clearing inside a temperate forest.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### Act 2: The Guardians are coming

*Holy Jesus, Mary, and motherf\*\*\*ing Joseph! That was close. What the Hell were those things? Patrick, the Techie, is still trying to crack them. Managed to salvage a couple of chips, could turn up trumps if we get some wireless access code. Sure as hell haven't seen them before, anyway. Luc, the Demo guy, has half of his arm hanging in bloody rags from one that got too close. Now those pincers were unforgiving. He'll need microsurgery in the next few days, before the nerves heal, or he'll have to go cybernetic. Good thing Doc Johnson managed to patch him up. Luc'll hold till we get to the target. Supposedly, It's a medical facility, so they should at least have an autosurgeon lying around. Thank the*

*gods for Doc Johnson, he'll be able to jack in and use it. Without him, Luc would have had to leave this hellhole minus an arm.*

### ***Beep beep beep beeeeeeeep***

*"Crap, natives...Doc, get Luc under cover...Logan...Logan...LOGAN. Fire up the frigging Plasrail...Everybody...Suresight pattern. Hold...Now...Let's see who's crashing the party."*

After having had a little time to recover from their ordeal, the player character's location will be approached by a sixteen man squad of Liberty Guardian Keepers. These men will approach the PCs with no outwards hostile intentions. Should the PCs fire on the new arrival, the shimmering shapes will raise their weapons and fire non-lethal projectiles. These projectiles feel like "An explosion of ice spreading beneath your skin from the point of impact" and are energy-based, so they leave no marks and will pass through ballistic armour. Should the PCs be protected from this, the Keepers will do their utmost not to harm the party, but one way or another, the entire party will be disabled. Should the PCs choose not to attack the Keepers, or after they have all been disabled, then the Keepers will simply approach, and look intently at the apparent leader.

### **The Guardian Keepers**

The Guardian Keepers are a special battalion of guardians, with a very specific role on Tantalus IV. Their mission is to contain and control the warfare on the planet. They also act as the cortical stack recovery unit, and guard the planet's infrastructure (especially its underground maglev network) from the ravages of war. Not taking part in the Warfare themselves, they set up perimeters and hold the mimints at bay. Each carries Radio IDs, which makes them immune to attack from most of the automated systems and warns the smart shrapnel and ammunition to deviate course if headed in their direction. They will avoid interference with what happens on the planet, and are a very stoic lot, in both the modern and ancient sense, even amongst the Guardians. Their exoskeleton allows them to simply shrug off most attacks, while their advanced and extremely versatile XKH-71 infantry rifle system allows them to neutralize most threats effortlessly.

*As the Keeper squadron approaches, the only things you see are large shapeless forms. Easily eight feet tall, the adaptive camouflage of the exoskeletons shimmer like heat rising off a desert floor. As they approach, their outline become more distinct, until, about five meters in front of you, the point man disengages the adaptive system, and you are stood facing a humanoid behemoth of camouflaged steel. lacking shoulders and instead having a rounded dome where the head should be, you can see that the range of movement of these Keeper still remains completely unaltered. There are no slot for vision, and, as the point man lifts the head cover like a hatch, you can see that it is fully transparent from the inside. Glowing display dance on its inner surface, providing highly complex and integrated tactical information to the man inside. The very man, who with blond hair and piercing, ethereal turquoise eyes, looks at you intently. His perfectly symmetrical lips tightly pressed; alabaster face revealing nothing of his thoughts or intentions. Only now your brain begins to register the tactical information in this scene. Each of the Keepers would at least be seven an a half feet tall underneath the exosuite. Their weapons, unnoticed until now, radiate the clean lines of ruthlessly efficient killing tools. Everything screams total and complete cool, calm and collected control. Be it the way the point man casually holds his rifle, the familiarity betraying countless years of daily usage. Or the way the other Keepers slowly, one by one, disengage the camouflage system, and, one by one, look at you with the same intent turquoise eyes. Fighting now... is not an option.*

In fact The Keepers are rather indifferent to the fate of the trainees, and will mistake you for Guardians. (The gene therapy which leads to the turquoise eyes and increased bulk comes after Tantalus IV). They will not actually begin conversation with the PCs, but will stare at them and stop them from leaving the area until the PCs start talking. They are actually curious as to why a group is in the area, as they were informed otherwise. However, they will not begin to speak due to the very intricate etiquette and customs attached to warfare within the Guardians. Indeed, it is seen as very improper to speak to an unknown force when in a superior position. The PCs will have to get the ball going. The Keepers all speak excellent Galactic Standard, and most speak at least five other languages besides that, so it is almost sure that one of them will understand the PCs. Once conversa-

tion has been started, they will speak freely, in even tones, although any answer that can be monosyllabic will be.

This can go several ways, depending on how the characters handle it:

1. If the PCs are rude, obnoxious or boastful, and try to intimidate or insult the Keepers, their helmets will close, and they will simply shimmer back to their patrol, but not before wishing the PCs a courteous, if somewhat short "Good luck". This leaves the PCs to fight through many more mimint groups on foot before getting to the nearest abandoned bunker, where they will be able to join the underground maglev network. In fact, this was the original plan, but the presence of mimints will make this a very dangerous and tiresome journey, and they will arrive at the bunker exhausted and running very low on ammo, not a good thing in the middle of what is basically a war zone. This is also the ideal spot to use some of the dangerous flora and fauna discussed in the setting primer. They still have to get inside the bunker/station by disabling the turrets and cracking the door. Thankfully, the station they go to is currently uninhabited, and they manage to get to the underground maglev without any further incident, although they will have no luck at finding supplies or ammo.
2. If the PCs are cagey about what they are doing, but remain polite and make no overt threatening gestures, The Keepers will simply leave them to be, pointing them in the direction of the nearest road, where, they say, will be two abandoned land buggy, which would probably help them wherever they are going. Before driving them away, however, the party will have the rather unpleasant task of clearing out the rotting corpses still in the seats. From observation, it seems that the two buggies were attacked by an aircraft, and although the buggies are damaged, they should be simple enough to repair. Using their maps, the party will be able to navigate to the original waypoint, and find the same small bunker as in the previous option. En route, however, they will be ambushed by three trainee Guardians, who are themselves after the buggies. being only three, the damage they can do is minimal, but the element of surprise might just work in their favour. Unfortunately, they only carry conventional weapons, but this will at least allow the PCs to replenish some of their ammo.
3. If the PCs tell them where they are going honestly and in a friendly manner, saying that their destination is the medical facility in another sector, then the keepers will offer to give them a lift in their combat shuttle to a medium sized station and bunker complex. After a twenty minute walk, the party will arrive at the shuttle in a clearing (protected from mimints by autoturrets) and be airlifted to the Bunker, where they will be shown the restrooms and the medical wing, where an autosurgeon will take care of their wounded. After freshening up, or perhaps using the cots in the barrack section of the bunker, They will be free to take the lift down to the Maglev station, and go on their merry way. If they ask nicely, they might even be able to scrounge supplies from the armoury. The XKH-71 rifle is pretty big for the unmodified PCs, but a very strong man or a two man fire team should be able to wield it pretty effectively. This will be a definite boost when facing the rest of the raid. (All this happens whether the PCs chose to attack or not. The Keeper's exosuite is more than a match for any weapon that the PCs might have, and they don't get offended from warfare. Indeed, if the PCs fought well, by all means have them praised over a meal back at the barrack.)

Regardless of whether they managed to get to the large bunker with the blessing of the Keepers, or had to fight their ways through hordes of mimints, the result is that they arrive at a deep underground maglev station where a three wagon train will be waiting for them. These trains are standard for squad movement. Although they are rather bare, the navigation system more than makes up for that. On a great wall-screen in the forward compartment, the entire network can be called up. The intuitive interface (similar to Google maps) allow them to

simply click on their destination to begin the journey. Having selected the distant medical facility, a countdown timer will appear, giving them exactly 2 hours 12 minutes to reach their destination. Just enough to have a little nap if they haven't yet, or get complacent if they have...

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### Act 3: Railroad Mayhem

*As we finally managed to settle down for a bit, something went wrong, didn't it. Everybody was dozing off, when suddenly there was a jolt, the cabin went dark, and the train started scraping the maglev tracks. Sparks flew in a shower of light on either side of the cabin, eerie glow diffused through the dark window, and the ethereal shriek of steel against steel deafening. Of course, someone or something had tampered with the local power substation, cutting off the local section of track. Of course, what else could go wrong now?*

The PCs train has stopped due to a local power outage. When it finally stops, the doors are closed, and the party has to exit through the roof escape hatch. It might also be interesting to play the darkness element to the full, filling every shadow with noise and unseen dangers. (Adaptive camouflage is completely invisible in these conditions.) with their torchlight cutting through the oppressive underground black.

Finding the electrical substation and restoring the power is the primary objective. This section is designed to give the characters that have not yet had a big part a place in the spotlight. For example, if the stealth character of the party has not had his say, twist the adventure so that this section has to be carried out by stealth, with lots of dark ventilation ducts, alert cameras and dark overhanging catwalks. If your techie hasn't had a chance to shine, let the doors be closed, and requiring hacking at every step. Or let him have a battle of wit with the local AI to regain control of the substation. The actual reasons for the power outage are far less important than letting your under-appreciated character have his moment.

Possible reason for the power outage:

1. A group of special operative has been sent to terminate the PCs, following the report of the Keepers, it was clear that they did not belong here. The group is holding an ambush at the next station and the one just passed. Fighting through will be tough, and the track will have to be reactivated from the control center so that they can carry on with their journey
2. The mimints are at it again! They managed to get past the next station's defenses and are taking the generator and electronics apart. Your Keeper friends are on their way to sanitize the station from mimints, so if The PCs can stay alive for a while, they'll be alright.
3. Boooooom! A nuclear blast has ripped the station's upper levels apart, causing massive disruptions in the electrical networks. Remaining here too long is really not good for your health, and if the PCs don't reactivate the tracks in a jiffy, they'll get radiation poisoning.
4. There is a bug in the electrical system! native wildlife has managed to get through the airlock... dangerous animals and plants have invaded the station, and the PCs are going to have to clear it all up. This is the GM's opportunity to include bizarre and fantastic lifeform.
5. Friends and mimints! Mimints have overrun the station, but this time, a small squad of Guardians is barely able to hold them off. Coming to their rescue might earn you their trust and respect. Or then again, they could think you're part of the wrong side and turn against you as soon as the mimints are cleared.

Once the power back on it will be a simple matter to access the control room for this station and call the train. Once back 'on track', the journey will be fairly uneventful until they reach their destination...

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### Act 4: The Mimints are here!

*Ok, now something doesn't smell right. So far so bad. So why on this godforsaken planet is there nothing wrong right now. We've had semi sentient machines clawing at us, trains breaking down, genengineered giving us a lift, so now what? Arrived at destination, not a hostile in sight. This underground facility is huge. What's really spooky though, is the fact that everything is in perfect working condition. At every corner, you expect a guy in a lab coat to bump into you. Gleaming white tiles reflect the lumox ceiling. LED shine besides active doorpanels. And yet, not a single human soul. We knew this was going to be deserted, but who's keeping it clean like this?*

Once arrived at the target, the PCs must then proceed to do three things:

1. Gather samples and specimens of Cortical stack technology
2. Gather all data from the datavault
3. Disable the local defense grid to allow for a pickup

And surprisingly, the first part of the plan goes without a hitch. Once the door panel has been hacked, the various cybernetic hardware required for the cortical implant procedure can be recovered from the cleanrooms. And although the PCs will have to go through airlocks and decontamination procedures, it will be a welcome change from the mission so far. If they did not manage to get patched up before now, the medical wing will have several fully automated surgery rooms, as well as plentiful medical supplies. In the emergency supply of the medical room, the PCs will also find an emergency stack reader, commonly used for identification. This portable unit is about the size of a large textbook, and has a plug to fit the stack into. If recovered, reverse engineering this device will be very helpful.

The Datavault, however, is another matter entirely. Located at the bottom of the building, it is accessible by a long access corridor. As soon as the PCs engage down the corridor, the door through which they have entered will close, trapping them inside the mainframe complex. The lights will dim, and the ceiling tiles down the corridor will fall down, only to reveal dozens of spider-like mimints that will begin to crawl towards the now-terrified PCs, walking indifferently on walls, ceiling or floor. These gleaming metallic horrors are intent on consuming the intruders, and The team will have to fight through them to reach the main server room.

In the main server room, an amazing sight awaits them. A large (13 ft+) mimint, bloated by many addition of circuitry and chips stands in the middle of the illuminated space. Clearly, it is far too big to have entered through the door, and it can be suspected that it was build in situ. Its morphology is vaguely reminiscent of an insect queen, eggsack bloated, while the atrophied limbs do not even reach the floor. However, instead of laying eggs, the distorted metallic abdomen is connected to the servers behind it by thick cables. Cables that pulse with the same rhythmic light pattern as the rows of glass-protected electronics behind this final foe.

Barely having had the time to take the sight of this beast in, another waves of mimints will pour in through the ceiling and floor vents, reinforcement called by the fearful queen attempting in vain to protect itself. In reality, rather than being a queen in the biological sense, this is the brain mimint for the entire region. Having interfaced with the databanks of the medical building when it was abandoned, the mimint took over the local populace, and used their limbs to improve his physical shape, until a point was reached where only his cognitive function remained active. It does, however, possess the ability to remote control other mimints, and it will flood the room with waves after waves of exotic creations.

The Brain is incredibly well armoured by layers of strong interlocking plates. To kill it, The party will have to call on all the resources gathered so far. The Liberty rifle would make a great asset, and could easily be used to provide cover fire for a brave soul who would place explosive charges on the brain itself. This would kill it pretty effectively. The mimint wireless access codes (which could have been gathered shortly after planetfall) could also be used to turn the brain's minions against itself, although the Techie will have to be protected for a long time before a successful hack is achieved. If all else fails, the cables can also be attacked between waves of assailants. Severing the cables, while not actually killing the brain, will remove its ability to call for backup. In any case, once the brain is disabled, the waves of killer mimints will stop, and the PCs will be free to begin extracting data from the datavaults behind the leviathan.

Some interesting facts can be gathered from the datavault beyond the mission data. As it turns out, the Mimint AI had merged itself with the building's original AI, which is why the building was not taken apart, as it was seen as an extension of the brain's body. It is also from here that the PCs will find the transmission codes required to disable the defense grid, and allow the long awaited pickup home. While browsing the main datacore, several references also come up on a hidden wing inside the medical facility. Isolated on an independent electrical and Security system, the equipment codes are obviously alien to the PCs, but The security seems to indicate something pretty juicy.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Act 5: The Light of day**

*We came, we saw, and we barely made it out alive. The insectoid abomination now stood dead amongst the funeral sacrifices of its own peers. The Datacore now ours, Patrick dove into the numbers. And that was when we finally understood the mission objectives.*

*We blew a hole in the toilet wall to access the secret section. Turns out we didn't come here in vain after all. Rows upon rows of incubation tanks were filled with human bodies. The perfect shapes were bathed in soft green light, just enough not to trip on the wires connecting the tanks to the blinking consoles at their foot. Totally deadwalled, you couldn't access this section without High Explosives. Even the computer systems were deadwalled, and without Patrick, we would have never figured out what on earth they were doing here. As it turns out, this was a storage facility for part of their old prototypes. Yes, the biological kind of prototypes...*

This is the motherlode. Although not physically vast (approximately as big as a medium highschool), this section is the centerpiece of the mission. The technology amassed here is varied and decades ahead of the rest of the other races. Early prototypes for gene enhancement are stored here, and the samples that the PCs may take will be worth a very generous reward when they get back. Possibly more interesting, the technology is there for them to take and use for themselves. Early models of the Keeper exosuite will be amongst the small armoury, as will recombinant rifles and electro-transparent camouflage samples. The frozen storage will hold such a diverse array of engineered biological samples that their cold cans will not be big enough for all. In Fantasy terms, this is the treasure room, the dragon's loot. It is up to the GM to regulate what is in here, so choose wisely.

Now, equipped with all the data and specimens they could ever need, the PCs are free to deactivate the local defense grid, and transmit the pickup message to their recovery craft. It is simply a matter of making it to the surface and boarding the shuttle, to be once and for all off this terrible place.

Here, GMs could always throw a few curveballs to the players for some final fun:

1. As they await their shuttle on an open field outside, a large number (100+) of mimints attack. The pickup is going to have to be hot too!
2. A Keeper squad awaits them outside. Fast talking is needed to justify the character's presence inside the facility.
3. The pilot has received orders from high command, he is to go only if the entire brain mimint is brought on board too, as well as a couple of the sarcophagus.
4. The pilot doesn't turn up. You're a mean GM.
5. The shuttle brings with it a nuclear bomb. You have to bring it back inside and set it to detonate once you are gone.
6. While they were inside, the frontline moved right on top of them. Will they be able to rendezvous at the new waypoint?



## **Sewer Lair**

**By Daniel Burrage**

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

A typical manhole is all you will find as for entrances. Upon entry the first thing you notice is the water is deeper than it should be in the sewers here, about 6 feet higher than it should be. There is a high archway over a valve opening door, a flood door. There is a disturbance in the water, and a giant crocodile bursts from the water with what can only be described as a bellow. Its face is thicker than it should be, and upon the first bite it becomes evident that it is by no means natural. Teeth greater than any one creature should have and glistening, almost prismatic scales. What's more, a normal crocodile has neither venom nor a sewer hang out.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Through the door, this drains the previous room, and leads to a great barrier. It is about 14 feet around with 28 half foot wide sliding rings. When spun and turned correctly it creates a great depiction of two snakes. It will roll over to the left revealing the next room. I suggest you actually print something from the Internet and assemble a paper version of this puzzle, actually forcing players to complete it or not move on. The PCs can simply step through the doorway three or four abreast, but sliding the middle ring (actually a circle) may be a problem for vertically challenged groups.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

This room is utterly devoid of water, and actually seems drier than it should be. This probably won't work for a party with knock, but otherwise it's cool. The door simply re-locks behind them, and they are unable to spin anything from this side. A pit opens in the middle of the room, at first about 6 inches across, but it grows 2 inches a round. Inside is about 30 feet deep with 15 of it being water. Going for the cliché the pit is full of piranhas and continues to grow. The door to the next room is simply a chamber door, with a masterful adamantite lock, the door itself built of ironwood. If the rogue can pick it or the fighter can break the lock in

time, then that's good for all. If not, you better hope you have either a sorcerer with a piranha familiar (unlikely) or a druid that truly loves you.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

This next room is an actual room, reminding you more of the local pub than the sewers. It has a warm, cozy feeling with a fire in the hearth and dinner in the oven. Out of place, it would seem, is the Mind Flayer monk working the kitchen and dozens of lizards with yuan-ti blood. The lizards immediately begin making a noise akin to a bark, and the monk looks up from his cooking. Good thing he needs no equipment and few magic items, and battle begins.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

In the next room there is a sort of twisted laboratory, betraying the homeliness of the previous room. There are implements of demon-surgery and blood mixing, as well as several yuan-ti in great containers. Beakers, concoctions, and tools, and all of them foul. Every tool has a limited malevolent sentience, able to only express feelings. Every potion in the room has a horrible effect on sentient, good, not green skinned creatures. Not destroying everything is a questionable act, and may force an alignment check. Using any of them is definitely an alignment check. All is not lost for our money grubbing fellows, as the sociopathic mind flayer was testing an experimental form of alchemy to turn gold into lead, creating the philosopher's stone out of it, as well as misbalancing the local economy. He has pounds and pounds of raw gold lying around in different, perhaps harmful perhaps harmless, solutions. He also has a journal which is so garbled it requires a minor decipher script check. It details gruesome procedures and tasty recipes, clearly pointing toward a split personality. He explains political conspiracy theories and his alternate opinions on the gnomish pantheon. Carting out the loot will be a ride, but it will be worth it, as well as checking out that diary. It's a good read.



## **Orcish Olympics**

By Aki Halme

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The Orcish Olympics (or those of some other monster race, as suits the campaign world; Monster Mash, Goblinoid Games, Troll Rumble..) is a recurring challenge in honor of a monstrous deity. The coveted prize is a unique item, title, or privilege ( e.g. Eye-Eye Bowl, or writ of passage through Orcish lands). It is held by the champion of the games for a year, after which it is up for grabs once more. Now it's time once more.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The games are for monsters only, but only by tradition. The challenge for the PCs is to get the prize. A full-scale assault on the monsters would fail, and stealing the prize would be counter-productive as it would lead to retaliations against nearby human settlements, so some other way needs to be found - such as participating and winning the prize for a year.

The games typically have monster contestants only, and the PCs are not of monstrous races, so participating in the first place is not a simple matter. On the other hand, there are no strict rules against non-monstrous

participants, it just has never been done before. Masquerading as an orc, or finding a sponsor would be ways to get in.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The preliminaries are rather harsh, and involve co-existing with monsters for a while. This is likely to be an uneasy arrangement for PCs and NPCs alike, and might well lead to conflicts, accidents, moral dilemmas, or blown cover, even if the PCs are able to speak and understand the local language fluently.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Or in this case, the games themselves. While PCs may take pride in being much stronger than an average monster, their fellow competitors are under no standards average. Further, the games are designed to with monstrous participants in mind, so some challenges could put a human participant at a disadvantage right from the start whereas others might give a human an edge. However, such an edge would most likely be nullified by disgruntled competitors, as well as their better preparation from experience from previous games.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Being crowned the champion of the games is the obvious prize, but even if the party does not succeed at that, they could find new understanding with, and possibly new allies amongst, the monsters - and learn the lay of the land should they need to participate in an attack later on.



## **Pitfall Castle**

By Nathan Wells

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The heroes are traveling to an important castle or stronghold in response to a summons. Upon reaching the location where the castle should be, they find that all that stands there are a few broken towers sticking up from the landscape. An evil wizard has plunged the majority of the castle deep underground. At first this would seem to block all access to the castle, but actually there are numerous entrances in the form of pitfall traps. Sooner than later, the heroes will find one of these, either intentionally or by accident.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The heroes can not exit the castle through the pitfall trap that they entered by. Once inside the castle, the heroes discover that it is a massive labyrinth of corridors and chambers. Furthermore, it is crawling with guards who were once loyal to the castles' owner, but are now under the control of the wizard. Individually, each guard is weak enough so as not to pose a serious challenge to the heroes, but if an alarm is raised then the guards will come swarming in on the heroes in such numbers that they may be overwhelmed. The heroes' main objective will be to avoid getting caught while they search for an exit. To make this more of a roleplaying challenge, allow the heroes to find a few sets of guard uniforms left unattended. The heroes could then try to impersonate guards, even trying to ask for directions through the labyrinth without drawing too much attention to themselves.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

As the heroes search the castle for a way out, they'll discover that the princess of the castle is being held captive in the castle's prison (alternatively, this could be some other important NPC, or valuable treasure). This information could be gleaned by overhearing a conversation among the guards. The heroes must choose if they'll find a way to free the princess or just focus on escaping with their own lives. If the heroes decide to free the princess they will doubtlessly alert the castle guards to their presence and intentions, if they haven't already. The heroes may be glad that the princess knows a secret way out of the prison through the sewers. Due to the castle's being plunged underground, the sewers will no longer lead the heroes outside of the castle, but it will allow them to escape temporarily to another part of the castle.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The heroes have finally found an exit to the castle, but one of the wizard's lieutenants stands in the way. The lieutenant is a formidable warrior, and will put up quite a fight. Ultimately, the lieutenant's objective isn't to prevent the heroes', or the princess's, escape. For that reason he'll focus his attacks on just one hero who he considers the biggest threat and let the other heroes slip by with the princess if they want.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The princess is grateful for the rescue and will offer the heroes a monetary reward, if that is what they want. She'll also ask them to take her to a nearby location where there are people who will offer her support in fighting the wizard and his evil plans. This location could be a neighboring allied kingdom or a secret base where some of her servants and soldiers have taken refuge. The catch is that the wizard's lieutenant hid a magical stone on the princess's person that will allow the wizard to track her, revealing who and where her allies are.



## The Mercenary Shrine

By Ancient Gamer

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4380>

In the ramshackle town of Spear Malice only a single building still stands. It has defied the Great War and its spears of light; nuclear blasts that devastated the entire state, and ever since then it has defied the onslaught of time. Its halls have not yet been breached, and a wealth of technological treasure await, ripe for plunder! But there are others who crave this treasure; others that will do anything to claim it.

### Mercenary Shrine

During the Great War the border town now known as Spear Malice was hit hard. Caught within the blast radius of a nuke, most buildings came toppling down. Of course, the century and a half since that time has not helped either, and today Malice is a truly ramshackle place where the Divine Spear Tribe holds sway, and their Warlock King, John One-Eye, is the undisputed master of the nearby wastes.

It is in this town, on the intersection between Wolf Path and the Path of the Ancients, that the Mercenary Shrine stands; a circular building, like a silo on four pillars, apparently unharmed by the blast that tore down the rest of the town.

*There was something solemn about the only building that still stood unharmed, a certain virtue or innocence. A square logo with a dot inside was painted on both north and south side of the edifice. It seemed the tribals used it for throwing contests, for the southern side logo was dotted with splashes, dents and marks. For a moment it seemed like someone was moving on the top of the huge tower, but it must have been a trick of the eye, for no rungs or ladders were visible. Brushing the dust and sand from the beige flak jacket he had found in an abandoned military depot, Kendall Bruise-Bone ran crouched towards the rusted wreckage of trucks he spotted beneath the edifice. It would not do to be spotted by the natives, for they were hostile and their preferred meat was that of men.*

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The silo shaped edifice has been placed on four massive pillars of steel and concrete, so the entrance is actually in the open air below the building. Bricks from the collapsed neighboring buildings seem to have blasted into this region, and several ancient trucks that are parked here have fist sized holes in them, and are partially covered in earth and bricks. Gangs of tribal savages often walk the streets near this area, so PCs must either keep quiet, have considerable diplomatic skills or be ready to fight.

An elevator is visible inside one of the steel support pillars, and its doors are wide open. Inside they will find cracked mirrors on the walls and the ceiling. The control panel has been destroyed, the remains bent and broken on the floor, and now a wide array of wires emerge where it was once placed. The wires still carry an electric current, which will be clear from the jolts they will get if they touch two wires at once. Also there is a hatch in the ceiling, but it is locked. Marks suggest that someone has tried to break open the lock, but obviously they failed.

To get up the PCs must either use their electrical skill and send the elevator up, or they must pick the difficult lock and climb up to the floors above. Note that a certain code has to be entered to access the upper levels, and at the moment the PCs have neither the codes nor the interface required to enter the codes. Therefore the elevator doors will only open on the first room inside the facility (the second "room" of the dungeon).

Note:

- There are three digits on the panel: 0, 1 and 2.
- 0 would be the entrance, i.e. here. 1 is the control room and 2 is the Mercenary shrine.

### **Setting the mood for the remainder of the "dungeon":**

- The nuclear power supply of the Mercenary Shrine is fully operational, and a hatch down to it can be found under one of the collapsed trucks, but the wires carrying the power to the building above was slightly damaged during the nuclear blast. This means that the power is almost stable, but on random intervals the power goes down, stopping the elevator and covering the rooms in a blanket of utter darkness. Only the implants of Luc - the cybernetic ghost, the space craft and the sentry drone will remain powered on during these short periods of no electricity.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Control Room**

Projections are shown on the walls of this rotund chamber. Several projections show the devastated areas of the surrounding town, while one shows some sort of armoured bipedal robot pacing back and forth in another rotund chamber, where red banners hang on black walls, a huge, oval table dominate the room and skeletons litter the floor. If the PCs change active cameras with the control panel (described below), more rooms can be seen:

- 1) A circular hangar with black walls and a brown military space craft (if they open the hangar roof while watching the camera feed from the room, they will notice tribals entering the hangar from above, prodding the space craft with their spears and screaming jubilant).
- 2) The entrance, now overrun by tribals pointing at the elevator and screaming.
- 3) The room the PCs currently occupy.

In a large chair, its leather black and comfortable in spite of the years, a skeleton is seated. Its spine has been reinforced with black metal alloys from the neck and up, and the unmistakable soft whirring of awaking machinery can be heard from within its skull. On a closer look the PCs realize that the skeleton had cybernetic implants in life and the left side of the skull is covered by the same black metallic alloys as the neck; light emitting diodes bathe the inside of the skull in nuances of green and red. The back of the skull, and the chair behind it, has been blown away, a shotgun still in the hands of the skeleton. The skeleton will move its neck and seem to follow the PCs, its vision enhancement implant pinpointed on the face of the closest PC. The rest of the skeleton is quite dead and unmoving. In front of the skeleton is a huge control panel, briefly described above, and the locks barring the elevator doors from opening at the upper levels can be opened with it (successful computer skill use).

Any PC with devices that can communicate via short wave radio, or has a wire with the RJ2001 jack needed to connect to the machinery, may converse with the deceased mercenary, or what remains of it. It seems the mercenary had invested in major optical enhancements, targeting systems as well as memory storage implants. This means the dead cyborg remembers who it was and what has happened. Unfortunately there is a small malfunction in the hardware, caused by the suicide, and this makes the cybernetic ghost (as beings such as this are called) quite difficult to communicate with. Any eloquent and diplomatic PC can persuade the cyborg to provide much info however:

- 1) The cyborg knows how to unlock the lock on the upper levels.
- 2) The cyborg knows that the sentry drone upstairs can be hacked, and that it is vulnerable in the rear of its neck.
- 3) The cybernetic ghost remembers how to power up the space craft on the uppermost level.
- 4) The ghost also remembers how to open the retractable roof panels, to make the space craft's take off a little more convenient.

The PCs can also choose to rob the skeleton of its implants. The skull can also be separated from the rest of the skeleton and, if so, it might turn out a reluctant and difficult, but valuable, ally. The cybernetic ghost still refers to itself as Luc, a 44 year old mercenary. (Its correct age would be 195 years, given the time it has been trapped here, but that is something it will not acknowledge).

Note:

- Luc committed suicide after he realized what had happened. Half of his skull has been blown away and the shotgun is still in his skeletal grip.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Mercenary Shrine**

This room is the mercenary shrine, or the contract room, in which potential employers discussed with the leaders of the mercenary clan. The room is basically a meeting room, with a huge, black oval table at the center and many luxurious chairs surrounding it. At the far end of the chamber is an altar of sorts, the altar of contracts, in which agreements are kept. The rule is to honour the contract, religiously, or break the contract at your peril. Nowadays the PCs might find that the old, rotting contracts disintegrate at touch. A dog tag on a chain with two teeth lies discarded among the contracts. "Cole 'Durmenthir' Anderson" is the name printed on it.

Of note in this chamber are the number of skeletons strewn on the floor, the assault rifles hung on the walls or scattered amongst the fallen and the fully operational sentry bot that stands astride the meeting table, in battle position, waiting for the PCs to exit the elevator. The robot is well armoured and well powered. It has kept vigil for the last century and a half, never failing and never pausing. When the nuke hit, the electromagnetic pulse did not penetrate the solid walls of the shrine, but the sentry bot assumed an attack was underway and in the resulting chaos it started killing the potential employers that had attended a meeting. As the shocked and dazed mercenaries tried to stop the sentry bot, it categorized them as enemies too and ultimately killed the twenty people attending the meeting. This compelled Luc, the former mercenary with cybernetic implants, to shut down the elevator from the control room.

The exact details of the robot is left up to the GM in question, but Luc, the cybernetic ghost, will inform the PCs that its frontal armour is formidable, requiring heavy guns to breach, but some essential neck cables are vulnerable to attack. This information can also be gleaned by PCs using the surveillance cameras to their full advantage. Also, if possible, the sentry bot will not use projectiles (it has been programmed to keep the facility as intact as the situation allows).

The elevator stops on this level. A ladder leads up to a hatch in the ceiling, and the hangar above.

Note:

- Extremely skilled hacker PCs can connect wirelessly to the bot and hack it, preferably from behind shelter. Its firewalls and passwords are rather good, but not impossible.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Hangar**

The hangar has walls and floor painted black, with a thick, yellow H painted on the floor, a circle surrounding the H. On this letter, H, a flat, broad spacecraft stands. Its hull has been painted military brown. Its gangplank has been lowered and entrance is possible. For the space shuttle to take off, the roof doors should be opened, but it is possible to crash through them if they put the thrusters on full. (It is likely that this will damage the rudder and hull).

If the roof doors have been opened, the room will be occupied by eight tribals wielding spears and knives and crossbows. They will squat atop the space vessel, some even having gone inside to study this ancient piece of wonder. The tribals have no skill at electronics and computers, so they are limited to poking and punching random buttons. If the GM thinks a military space shuttle is too great a reward, he should have them push the wrong buttons and crash the shuttle half way through the wall. It will still contain much desired spare parts and can eventually be repaired by the stalwart PCs.

Additionally the tribals, already having found the tracks of the PCs, have realized the elevator is now functional and will be approaching from behind too. The PCs should find some choke points, and quick, for this battle is about to become hot.

### **Combat Set Up:**

If the roof panel has been opened: The two sentinels atop the tower were quite surprised when the roof began to slide beneath their feet. To their wonder they discovered the hangar beneath and whistled to six fellow tribals on the ground, who promptly climbed the tower using the ropes that were dropped from above. These eight are exploring the hangar even as the PCs emerge from the hatch. They will remain in hiding, but the two ropes hanging from above should warn the PCs that they are not alone.

Regardless whether any tribals are in the hangar: The PCs did not ascend the elevator shaft unnoticed, regardless whether they ascended by using the elevator or by climbing. Several tribals followed their footsteps and, unless the PCs were cunning

and sealed the elevator doors programmatically, they will assault the PCs from behind. Any assault rifles left in the Mercenary Shrine will be picked up. Though of little or no technical skill, there are tribals who know how to operate these. There seems to be no end to the savages, and the PCs must stem the flow themselves, either by sealing off the hatch, sealing the elevator or leaving (using the shuttle). If the shuttle is disabled it should prove quite a task to escape, but diplomacy, stealth or brute force might win the day.

If the PCs hacked the sentry bot: The sentry bot is online and will defend the PCs to the best of its abilities. It uses its hands to choke, punch and disable and, just to invoke fear, it sometimes rips throats and hearts out of the bodies of its opponents. It will employ firearms if the going gets too tough.

#### **About the tribals:**

The tribals attack like hunters would, using cover then throwing, or shooting, spears and bolts at the PCs. Some tribals have Molotov cocktails and will not hesitate to throw these. In melee they will use spears and knives.

#### **John One-Eye, the Warlock King of Spear Malice:**

A huge individual, one eye torn from its socket, will eventually come into view, pushing his minions forward. This is John One-Eye, the Warlock King. To these tribals, John's advanced tech is nothing short of magic and they fear and dread the veteran soldier, handing him their daughters and part of their loot. John is a tough nut to crack, wearing full body armour and wielding two Beretta 9mm handguns. John also has three hand grenades that he does not hesitate to use, even should one of the tribals be caught in the blast. At the end of the day he prefers watching from a distance, but if enough of his men are slain he will come, for he has sought the contents of the tower for a long time and is not about to let the PCs get away with it all. (John's status as Warlock King hails from his guns, his grenades, his body armour and the laptop in his backpack). Note that John has no skill with pick locks and electricity, but should he gain access to the control panel he will be able to open and close doors as he see fit.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Spacecraft**

The space craft, or space shuttle, has room for ten passengers and their gear. Its cockpit has room for one pilot, but it can be flown fully automated. Its currently plotted course is to the earth orbit space station, Tellus 1, but that space station was blown up in the initial days of the Great War. The three other destinations also seem to be dead ends, though the PCs must travel there to discover this. In the end the shuttle is fast, has enough fuel to fly for two days, but is limited in matters of available space. If the PCs have other vehicles or animals, or a great deal of cargo, it will not be able to transport it.

For the GM that is not ready to just hand out a fully functional space craft, the tribals could disable it (as explained above), or it could be in a state of disrepair. In any case: It will fetch a decent price anywhere, and most potential buyers will not be able to cash out even a fraction of its worth, though the PCs will still prosper. The truly devious GM will let the space craft have a serious malfunction, but this will not be revealed until after take off, when the systems begin to report one critical malfunction after another. Centuries of no service and maintenance just can't be healthy...



## **The Cursed Keep of the Wastelands**

By Captain Penguin

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4383>

The Great King long ago ceased attempting to police the wastelands of his Border Marches, and these debatable lands fell into the hands of petty counts, retired generals, and warlords, who constructed and then abandoned many keeps ripe for plunder.

Beyond the green hills lining the Vayoron River lies the desolate wasteland known as the Border Marches. These lands, subject to the Great King only in name, have long been un-policed and untaxed by any official Im-

perial force. Control of swathes of this dusty, chilly land thence fell into the hands of opportunistic counts, retired Imperial generals, warlords, and bandits. In some places in the craggy hills above the dustwallowing valleys of the Marches, the ancient black towers of sorcerers (once driven out by Imperial might) were seen once again lit with glowing windows.

But many of the tenants of this land, who taxed the land and patrolled it with their own hired men (with the Great King's tacit approval) found the wastelands, quite obviously, to be barren, poor, and difficult to make a sustenance of. Many landlords simply abandoned with their retinues the ancient, crumbling keeps into which they had tenanted, after struggling to establish any kind of power or wealth in a land of blowing dust, starving cattle, nomad herdsmen, and the curses of black-eyed wizards. Others were done in by the struggle, or slain by bandits and raiders, or by foul magic, leaving their holds wasted and empty, and stuffed full of unwatched treasure.

Most enticing to bold adventurers, the Border Marches are so thinly populated and so barren, and the reputation of some of the forts so fearsome, that many have never been plundered! Surely, the riches and wealth of this baron or that must remain in a keep in the wastelands.

One such keep is this place, a crumbling conical pile atop a windy scarp. The populace of the village below, who grow a pitiful plot of maize in the shadow of the hills, claim that the fort is haunted and that none ever return from its dark walls. It has been untenanted for over a hundred years; village legend states that it was the keep of the Count Jjun of Irgoz, a cruel and bloodthirsty individual.

It is said that Jjun of Irgoz offended the God of Gods by trapping and murdering a guest in his home, and for his misdeed, his entire household was struck down by a plague in a single night. His retinue mouldered away before his eyes, his advisers and friends thrashed screaming in the blood of their own sick lungs, and his great guard-hounds feasted on the bodies of his family. But Jjun of Irgoz did not die, the villagers say, but remains eternally pox-stricken and in terrible pain, alone in the dark with his sorrow. And that, conclude the warty village wives in their cord skirts and painted arms, is why one must please the Gods by honoring guests with a cup of water and safe passage (but as the heroes will find, not much more than that).

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **The High Door And The Hounds**

The heroes, drawn by promise of treasure, seek the door of the keep through a narrow, high stair hacked out of the craggy face of the cliff. This stair, not wide enough for two men to walk abreast, and steep enough that hand holds (some of which house nests of yellow-banded wasteland scorpions) were hacked into the rock at intervals, is buffeted by dangerous winds and random gusts. Further up the stair, a rusty chain has been bolted to the steps to aid as a handhold, and stretches up to a metal post by the doors. The post is loose and weathered by age, and if two many of the heroes throw their weight against the chain, they will unknowingly pull it loose, with disastrous consequences.

The doors are slotted deeply into the scarp walls down a slight defile carved out of the bare rock; windows in this rock were probably arrow slits for the defense of the keep, but looking into them now reveals only what appears to be a partially-collapsed chamber filled with rubble and broken wood.

The doors swing open with a rusty squeal. It has been quite some time since anybody entered here- a layer of wasteland dust, blown in over time, lies spread thickly across the pavement. The heroes stand in a tall central room. They can just make out the brick walls of the conical structure in which they stand in the gloom; a shaft

of golden sunlight spears down through the center of the room through a window high above and behind their heads. As their eyes adjust to the dimness, they recognize the pale shapes of scattered bones spread in patches across the floor.

In this chamber, the heroes meet their first test. Out of the darkness, the heroes sense a presence, shuffling silently just beyond the edge of the visible. Lurking in this chamber are the gigantic guard-hounds Vvikush and Vvoralg, who have become huge, immortal, and terribly ravenous from feeding on the cursed flesh of Jjun of Irgoz's stricken family. Their bristling, silvery fur is crusted with filthy brown and black from the seeping blood of numerous infected sores, and their enormous drooping-lipped jaws peel back in demonic snarls to reveal shattered and bleeding teeth and diseased gums. These creatures have lurked in this chamber for over a hundred years, gorging their cursed hunger on the foolish ones who trespass within the unholy fort, and a century of undying fear and rage has stripped them of any previous allegiance they might have held to mankind. These beast-dogs provide the heroes with a terrible battle.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Mechanical Door And The Tragic Family**

Having laid out the hounds Vvikush and Vvoralg to rest, the heroes descend one of several small stairways that exits the dusty, bone-strewn entrance hall (there are four; three of them lead to deserted dusty servants' quarters, barracks, and kitchens with little loot to speak of besides rust-eaten pieces of iron and the scattered bones of the baron's stricken retinue and vassals). They find themselves in what appears to be a throne chamber. A moth-eaten rug and dusty tapestries hang from the walls, depicting the victories of the hero Nastra of the Lightning Hair. Behind the throne is heavy bronze door with an intricate mechanical lock on it.

In this room lie the gruesome remains of Jjun of Irgoz's tragic family, who died from the horrible disease inflicted by Jjun's curse and whose bodies were fed upon by the devilish hounds- three age-blackened and dog-savaged mummified bodies in the faded tatters of ancient gowns, their limbs and faces unnaturally twisted in disturbing ways by rigor mortis. The corpses of the cursed count's two daughters lie in each others' arms at the foot of the throne, their legs separated from their bodies and their stomachs ruptured by the corpse-eating hounds. Their shriveled eyes are small black pits and their teeth shine very whitely. Across the room, the body of the lady countess Tleyeson lies on her back, surrounded by a black coating of some flaky black substance, actually the rotten material that the countess wretched up before she died. Her body, too, was savaged and eaten of by the dogs, her face is twisted in a horrible shriek.

This sight, while tragic, seems irrelevant to the heroes. They must be more concerned with opening the mechanism which seals the door, a contraption obviously constructed by a sorcerer learned in mechanical arts. It is a combination lock, and in order to open the door, four ivory wheels (each marked with a number symbol) must be rotated to form the correct code. But what could the code be?

Clues lie on the door itself. It is a great, heavy, bronze relic, worked with symbols of the traditional birth-to-death cycle of the Sun Dog (from young pup, to angry warrior pierced by arrows, to one-eyed leader, to emaciated dying elder). If the heroes look closely, they can see indicated in the relief the phrases: "Let answers spring forth as lightning" and "A hair is the breadth between the open door and the closed", old proverbs. The words "lightning" and "hair" are juxtaposed. If the heroes are very good at inference, they will know that the numbers of the combination are hidden in sequence on the tapestries of Nastra of the Lightning Hair, worked into scenes therein.

There is a simpler solution, though it is likewise obscured by time and age. All three corpses of Jjun's family know the combination, if the heroes can convince them to divulge it. After a few minutes of inevitable frustration in which the heroes cannot devise the solution, the body of the youngest daughter will speak in a low, hissing whisper:

"Father is inside. He doesn't want us to see him."

A startling interjection from a hundred-year-old mummy! The youngest daughter is the most forthcoming, and will divulge the combination to the door if it is promised that she will see her daddy and that she will marry the handsome Prince of the Kingdom someday (she is a bratty and fickle little child who wants her dreams fulfilled, even in the grip of undeath). The other two corpses are angry and bitter, having dwelt a century beyond the veil of death, and are very mistrustful of the heroes (recognizing them as the treasure seekers that they are), and will not speak unless the heroes can prove that they will see be allowed to see Jjun of Irgoz one last time.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **The Hall Of Dust And The Giant**

The great bronze portal opens with a sigh of old musty air. Within, the heroes perceive a long hallway lined with thick Kaitakian carpets. At the far end, a short stair is elevated into the baronial bedroom.

The heroes pace up the carpet, their footsteps raising puffs of heavy dust. Thick cobwebs tear apart as they brush through them. Approaching the stairway, they discern a large dark figure, seated on the steps and slumped against the wall.

This figure is Xaggarrng, the count's personal bodyguard. Loyal to his death, this huge man died puking out his rotten innards into his lap (like the countess), and his shriveled corpse is encrusted with the gruesome dried remnants.

The heroes should know by now that the dead do not rest well in this cursed keep. As they near the doors to the bedroom, Xaggarrng releases a thick sound like a deep sigh, and a cloud of black dust pours forth from his distended jaw. Flickering green embers awaken in the wrinkled pits of his eyes as he lifts himself heavily from the steps. Despite the withering of age and mummification, which has made his grey-black skin peel away from his bones and crack apart at his gruesomely-twisted teeth, he remains a giant among men, 7 feet tall, with long arms and hands that have become claws through the action of rigor mortis. He fills the narrow hall and attempts to smother the heroes in a horrible embrace. An unholy strength fills him, and driven by a loyalty to Jjun of Irgoz that lives beyond death, he will not die until hacked into pieces.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **Jjun Of Irgoz**

The heroes ascend the staircase, spattered with the congealed guts and caked dust of the terrible fort. This is the count's bedroom, the family abode buried deep beneath the keep, and (hopefully) just above the coffers.

As the heroes push open the bronze doors to the bedroom, they are driven back by an overwhelming, sick stench of rot and foulness. They feel an unfamiliar wetness as the dust that cakes their sandals is washed away by a thin, warm fluid.

The heroes are standing in a dark chamber, filled with a noxious moisture and humidity not present in the rest of the dust-choked fort. The blackness of the chamber is complete- their torches gutter and flicker in it. The fluid that rushes across their toes lies in slicks and pools across the stone floor of the chamber, and has reduced a once-fine Kaitakian bed-rug into a soggy rotten mat of mushy fibers. Along the walls, several ancient divans have collapsed into wet piles of splinters and rotten silk. In an alcove in the left wall, there is a step upward into the private family shrine, containing statues of Tlonos, the Mother Goddess, One-Eyed War, and a small altar to the God of Gods. However, examining this altar will show that the sacrifice bowls of these altars have been defiled with some kind of stinking filth, and the statue of Tlonos (the goddess who preserves from harm) has been strewn with what appear to be human entrails.

The heroes move slowly through the defiled room, until coming upon the great platform of the count's bed. Lying in the center of the denuded slab of the bed is the cursed lord himself, Jjun of Irgoz.

Cursed never to die, but to live eternally, cancerously stricken by the hideous curse of disease which slew his entire household. Over the course of a century, the endless pain has driven him beyond insanity, and all semblance of what it is to be human has been lost to his rotten brain. He appears to the heroes now in a form that could only be vaguely described as human- composed of rot-blackened organs that swell and split, clustered around his crumbling bones like sacks of stinking awful, with his intestines hanging in ropey coils from his belly. His arms hang long and loose and end in twisted skeletal claws. His skull seems to have collapsed into a mass of hideous tentacular cancers that writhe and whip about in a medusa-like fashion. All that remains of his skull are the bridge of his nose and his eye-sockets, nested mask-like and eerie amidst the pulsing, rotten flesh. Out of a mouth-like cavity, filthy grey-black puke, filled with shredded, bloody organs, dribbles and splashes about on the floor. This is the horror that was once Jjun of Irgoz, lord of the keep.

The horror-that-was-Jjun will not die easily. With a disturbing howl, the creature reverses its joints and crawls up the wall and ceiling of the chamber like a cockroach. The creature attacks with its flesh-tearing claws, and spits hideous plague-bearing fluid at the heroes, a substance so filled with the curse that it raises festering sores on their arms and causes them to bleed from their noses and mouths. The creature also attacks them with its intestines, which animate like arms to strangle and slap at the heroes.

This disturbing atrocity seems impervious to pain, and only after it has been hacked apart into tiny fragments (or burned) will the creature die. With the end of its life, there is a huge sighing throughout the keep, and a wave of putrescent air sweeps out from the bedroom throughout the whole tower.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **The Treasure Chamber**

There is a small door at the back of the bedroom. It opens upon a narrow stairway that descends deeply into the bedrock. The heroes descend the shadowed stairway with trepidation- the bottom is illimitable inky blackness.

When they reach the landing of the stairway, they find themselves in a low-roofed long slot chamber. At the far end they find, finally, the coffers of Jjun of Irgoz.

The heroes have worked striven hard for this moment, and crack their knuckles in anticipation. The lid of the stone box is slowly pried away to reveal...

Nothing.

What is this? No gold bars stamped with old Imperial seals? No jewels? No silver goblets, jade rings? What have they been fighting for?

None of these things remain the box. Some of the count's unscrupulous guards and his vizier broke into this chamber and stole away with the gold, escaping the plagued household with the treasure, before dying of the disease somewhere out in the badlands.

Left over at the bottom of the cask, however, is something that might highly interest the heroes- it is a document, on vellum, marked with the gold-leaf seal of the Great King himself (of a hundred years ago). It is a deed of debt, redeemable to the Great King at any time, for a tract of land to the bearer- a gift to Jjun of Irgoz for taking on a command in a Godforsaken wasteland and giving up his ancestral tracts. This document bears the seal of a Great King, and is written in the most proper of High Sorgic. Should the heroes present this document to an Imperial governor, they are fully within their power to demand a tract of Imperially-sponsored land be given over to their lordship as their manor, with accompanying serfs and servants.



## **The Well**

**By Bert Isla**

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **Entrance**

Jagged high mountains rise above this little town. It is the last supply outpost that can be found for many miles before a dangerous trek across the mountains will lead travelers to the next kingdom. Escaped slaves are often ran to ground here, desperate to flee into the free kingdoms they find this outpost to be their only chance at freedom. The populace, sympathetic to the escaped slaves, had opened their long abandoned mines that stretch from beneath the town and end on the opposite side of the mountain range. The dried up town well acts as the hidden entrance to this escape route. Perhaps the PC's are escaped slaves or slavers themselves. Perhaps there are rumors that escaping slaves eager to make better speed hid valuables and wealth along the many miles of passages.

The wood covering the well is old and brittle, easily broken. The stone making up the walls are large and uneven making easy handholds to the dry bottom. Unless the keystone is discovered by bribing a towns person or threatening one, a detailed search will reveal a section of the well that is fake. The entrance beyond is dark, musty and slightly damp.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

#### **The long tunnel**

The tunnel stretches east into darkness. The walls are shored up with timber and clay. Every 20 feet or so unlit torches lie in brackets attached to support beams. The PC's will need to provide some illumination. If they use the torches along the walls, when lit they produce a sickly sweet smell along with a dim light. The smell will attract the shades of dead slaves. There are 5 of them haunting this length of tunnel, they will only attack those holding the scent producing torches.

If PC's continue down this passage they will run into a collapsed area of tunnel the will provide no further passage. If the PC's were informed or produce a good search score they will notice that there are many scratches

and glyphs on the supporting timbers. At the glyph that represents “freedom” there is a hidden passage with a downward slope. If the PC’s are misled and search the glyph “tyranny” it will lead to a different passage.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **Freedom**

This downward sloping passage is lit by clusters of luminous fungi. If PC’s disturb the fungus, they will feel slightly ill within the hour and develop an irritating rash within a day. Careful searching of this area will reveal several caches of food, water, clothing and maps to the kingdom beyond the mountain. Helpful town folk would have warned the PC’s about the fungus. This tunnel is long but several hours of walking will lead to the mountainside exit.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **Tyranny**

This passage leads to a seemingly empty circular room. When the last PC has stepped out of the tunnel and into this room, the room will quickly drop fifteen feet. At this new height, another chamber is accessible, but the walls leading back up to the previous room are smooth and offer no hand holds. The smell of rotting meat comes from the new room. This area was once used as an elevator shaft to move ore from one level to another, now this new revealed cavern is the home of many under dark dwelling monsters. This deadly destination is given by the townsfolk to those following the escaped slaves in the hopes of ridding themselves of pestering slavers.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

#### **Escape**

At the end of the long tunnel followed in “Freedom” the PC’s will again feel the movement of air and the chill of the frosty mountains. The end of their trek however leads to a recently installed iron gate covering the exit of the tunnels. Apparently the much sought after kingdom of freedom has gotten tired of letting in escapees! The iron gate can be overcome with enough combined strength from the PC’s or magical help.



## **The Governor's House**

**By Anthony Hart-Jones**

Originally written for D&D, this 'dungeon' sees a governor's house taken over by pirates. The governor and his daughter are held inside as hostages, making the pirates inside rather bold.

They fight a little like Tucker's Kobolds in some ways, using tactics, cover and the (altered) design of the house to make up for lack of power and numbers.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The pirates have barricaded all of the doors and have a cannon or two on the roof, which they are using to harass the players. They also have some ranged weapons. Once the party are inside, they are safe, but if they get too close, the pirates will drop bombs on them.

There is also the issue of 50 ft. of open gardens between the gates and the mansion. Low hedges block line of sight, but not projectiles; they are not good cover.

Bashing down the doors leaves them vulnerable, but there are a number of large windows which can be broken and entered by a character with any talent for climbing.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Fight!**

Most of the pirates who survived the attack on the mansion are now waiting on the other side of the main door. If the party try to break it down, they will be faced with a barrage of arrows / bullets / spells. If they creep in through a window, they might be able to get the drop on the pirates.

A smaller group of pirates with ranged weapons are waiting on a balcony above the main group, where they can see the main doors, but not any side doors. These are weak, but numerous adversaries.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The large sweeping staircase, the only direct means of getting to the second level, is destroyed. Climbing might be possible, but the conditions are not favourable and it is a 20 ft. drop if they fall.

The ground floor of this mansion will reveal dead servants, dead pirates and a typical house. The servants did fight back and many pirates lie dead in other rooms. There might come a woman's scream from upstairs if the party need to be hurried. The only way is up, as they say...

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Jack, the pirate captain is waiting outside the master bedroom. He will have set up the arena to give himself the advantage, but he is not hiding. Unlike the crew, he should be more of a challenge for the party.

What the players do not see is that the first mate is also around, but he *is* hiding. He will join when the party are focused on Jack, going for anyone who is hanging back. While not as proficient as the captain, he does have the element of surprise and knows how best to aid Jack.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

A key around Jack's neck will open the door to the master bedroom, though the party might want to kick the door down or pick the lock. It is a good lock and a rather sturdy door, so the key is actually a good idea.

Inside, the governor and a young woman lie dead. There is also a terrified-looking servant hiding in a wardrobe, whose sobbing will be easily noticed. She will use any excuse to get away, including trying to incapacitate anyone left alone with her.

The pirates have a chest of typical treasure - gold, gems, small ivory statues - appropriate to the party-level. Any pirates left on the roof will surrender once they learn that Jack is dead.

The Twist: the 'servant' was actually the pirate captain. Until now, she has been letting Jack pretend, reasoning that the crew would rather follow a man. Now, without any choice, she take command of the ship, "Revenge", and sails off to get some more crew.

The party will recognise her face on a poster or other document soon, since she will be busy pillaging to replenish her crew and money.



## **Blind Pack**

By Jean-Christophe Pelletier

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

An old druid and his apprentice have been blessing the crops of the villagers of a small agricultural community every year. Using a precious stone, called the Heart of the Forest, the druid helped plants grow strong within the valley. But this year, the druid is nowhere to be found and the villagers ask for help.

In the forest on the wooded slope of the druid's mountain, strange animals have been spotted. These wood animals have turned livid and blind after drinking from the chalky white water of the surrounding streams. They roam freely and attack any suspect source of noise. Anyone who touches the waters can suffer the same fate. Players will have to fight a few of them to go up the mountain or find a way to slip by unnoticed.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

#### **Beating Around the Bush**

Further up the wooded slopes of the mountain, players face a huge dome formed by living thicket. The thicket climbs high in the air and forms a huge dome that continues up the mountain to a rock cliff a few thousand feet higher. The tops of old trees are seen poking out of the dome as well as the spire of a ruined guard tower. Streams and small pools of chalky water exit at different spots around its walls.

The dome is 30 feet thick and cannot be crossed normally. Normal fire cannot harm the thicket and magical fire can burn through slowly. Hacking through the wall is possible with much effort, but vibration on or in the wall rapidly attracts thousands of tiny spiders that cover the victim and bite relentlessly. Prolonged shaking attracts all of the spiders in a 15 feet area, thus clearing the surrounding area. The spiders can only be removed using effect actions such as wind, fire, cold or immersion in water.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **Down Memory Lane**

Inside the thicket dome, the forest is enveloped in humid darkness. Higher up the slope, the silhouette of the ruined guard tower can be seen. The entrance to the tower is a 100 feet tunnel that leads under it. Light can be seen shining at its end. The tower is completely empty, only rocks and moss can be found inside.

Within the tunnel lives a colony of Memory Moss (Obliviax). Any who enter 20 feet in the tunnel are attacked by the moss which tries to steal memories of the last 24 hours of any living being, starting with spell casters.

Players who succumb to the attack are confused for a few hours. Only by eating the moss can characters regain their memories.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Druid's Heart**

Higher up the slope, near the rock wall, lies a huge tree near a big pool of chalky water. As players advance, they are met by a man wearing a muddied robe. He explains that he is the old druid's son and apprentice and that his father has been killed by a huge plant monster. He begs the players to help him kill the monster to avenge his father.

Near the big tree sits a huge Shambling Mound monster. The monster attacks anyone on sight. The young druid attacks the monster but anytime he hits, the monster lets out an anguished cry. The monster also refrains from attacking the young druid.

If players kill the monster, its vegetable body withers away revealing the body of the old druid. A green glow can be seen inside his chest. The monster's death also makes the thicket dome wither and the waters of the streams become pure again. A cavern leading inside the rock wall is revealed.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Heritage**

After the fight, the young druid approaches his father's body and digs deep within its chest to pull out a green glowing gem, the Heart of the Forest. He then tries to escape inside the cavern.

If players stop him, he reveals how he feels he should have been ordained a druid by his father but was refused the honour. The apprentice tricked his father in showing the location of the gem in hope of stealing it, but the old druid saw the trap and swallowed the gem. The gem's power transformed him into the monster and mutated the forest around. The young druid then prepared his revenge, setting the trap inside the tower and waiting for adventurers to help him kill his father.

If the young druid manages to escape, the players are left with the task of figuring out what has happened and letting the villagers know of the old druid's fate. Of course, following him down the dark cavern is always an option.



## **Stranger Than Fiction**

By Uri Lifshitz

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **Down the rabbit hole...**

A large rabbit that run past them perplexes the party, learning only too late that the creature stole some valuable item from them. As the party runs after the creature they discover that he ran into a cave shaped like a rabbit hole, once inside the cave they discover it to be guarded by a group of people in red colored

overalls, they all have a hat with strange runes on it and hold weapons fitting for the genre. This can be settled by a fight or a few sturdy words as the men in overalls will respond to authority.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Puzzle!**

The party moved into the to a small room, on one side of the room there is a pile of bricks with drawing on them, the drawing make a picture puzzle of the continuation of the tunnel and once assembled against the wall they magically create a tunnel. But the twist is in what direction the character builds the picture puzzle, if the puzzle is build directly across the original room entrance (to the north) then it leads into an infinite of stars, if it builds leading to the west it open into a Gail cell with hungry miniatures inside but build on the east wall it lead on to the continuation of the tunnel.

A remorseful DM may add hints in the form of horns, star and chessboard marked on the walls.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The chess game**

The party moved into the magical tunnel to discover that it is opening into a large room with tiled floor (black and white tiles). The party could also see a group of monsters coming toward them from the other side of the tiled area from the direction of a large throne set on a dais.

This area is in actuality a chessboard, once one of the character step on the board he is only able to move on the board as the corresponding chess piece that should be in that location (if someone doesn't specify, roll randomly).

Then a battle begins between the monsters and the party with the movement restriction – this battle promise to be amusing. The party could step off the boards only after all of their opponents are neutralized.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The big boss**

The party approach the dais to discover a giant golem of some sort, he is surrounded by plush velvet curtains and thanks the heroes for taking the time to come to him and ask for their wanted reward. As they state their wish (whatever it maybe) he gets angry and tells them to leave, a battle ensues where the golem will eventually perish and a squeak will sounds behind the curtains.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Deus ex machina**

The squeak belong to the hobbit that operated the golem using a device hidden behind the curtains and consisted mainly from a big red lever ad a big red ring. Once the character confronts him he burst into tears and promise not to misbehave again. The party can claim his treasures and return home through a flaming hoop.

This adventure can be ended as waking up from a confused dream or as a really bad dimensional shift.

Tribute: The rabbit is a tribute to “Alice in wonderland”, the men in red overalls are troubleshooters from the “Paranoia” game system, the golem is obviously a homage to “The Wizard of oz”, the chess battle is original.



## **Aboleth**

**By Andrew Anderson**

Think Le Morte d'Artur, by H.P. Lovecraft

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **The Mystic Lake**

The entrance to the aboleth's lair is a beautiful clear lake that appears to be bottomless. On the shores of this lake stands a monastery, and around this monastery has grown up a village.

The guardian is the village around the "mystic lake" and the monastery at its heart. The monks and villagers sincerely believe a benevolent spirit lives in the lake, protecting them from marauding humanoids and taking criminals into its depths to purify them. The villagers will be reluctant to let heavily armed adventurers jump in the lake and go after their protector, nor will they ask it to appear for the sake of proving a point, showing off, or luring out to where it may be attacked.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

#### **The Bottom of the Lake**

The lake is real, and really full of water, but it is not bottomless. The aboleth lives in a partially air-filled cave hidden by the illusion of the bottomless lake. The party must enter the water and find their way through the aboleth's mirage arcane. Oh, and breathe.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **The Entry Cave**

Upon entering the airfilled cave, the party will be met by a band of six celestials of various sorts who will command them to "turn back and leave this holy place".

These celestials are actually skum concealed by a veil spell from the aboleth. Aboleth do have a knowledge skill of the DM's choice. If the DM chooses to make this knowledge skill be Knowledge (Planes) the aboleth may make subtle errors in its veil.

If the DM chooses to make this skill be something different, the aboleth may make serious errors that confuse the players. The skum inside the illusions, of course, have no ranks in Bluff or in Knowledge (Religion). This is far more likely to reveal the deception, as well as the fact the skum detect as evil, even veiled.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **The Aboleth's Lair**

Defeating the skum allows the party to penetrate farther into a narrow passage where the aboleth lives and confront it.

The aboleth will hide behind a projected image. The aboleth has been observing the party while they spoke with the "celestials" and has likely identified individuals with poor Will saves. It will use its enslave powers on those individuals and set them against the rest of the party.

The aboleth has also had time to prepare several programmed image traps that will activate whenever a party member. These would include illusionary cave-ins (to force the party members out of good cover positions) and illusionary bands of skum (to draw attention and area attacks).

If enslaved party members and illusionary traps fail to drive the party off, the aboleth will stage the death of its projected image, hide under an image or mirage arcane, and let the party move on to the treasure room while it slithers away through an escape tunnel or canal.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The aboleth's treasure room is full of orcish and ogrish wargear, neatly catalogued with an anthropologists sensibilities. The aboleth has recorded transcripts of interrogations of orcish scouts as well, disclosing their war plans. Apparently five separate orcish hordes have been scouting the village in preparation for a raid. The aboleth has been capturing each of their scouts, stripping them of their gear, interviewing them to find out about their tribal cultures, and then converting them to skum.



## **Dragon's Lair**

By Aki Halme

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

Dragons tend to make their lairs inaccessible, and the one that the party hunts is no exception. The lair is hard to find, and at a location that is difficult to access - amongst indigenous monsters with a healthy respect (or worship?) for the dragon, natural hazards such as ice and cold and winds and heights, or possibly underwater in a swamp in one bog amongst hundreds.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Access to the lair, especially an unannounced one, could depend on PCs' skills, but also on the goodwill of the locals; hiring locals to pinpoint the exact location could be required, but how to do this without having some other local inform the dragon? Whether the locals are friendly or foes, an intelligent beast such a dragon will find a way to use them as an early warning system. Should there be advance notice, the lair will become that much harder to penetrate.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

While some of the information that the party has is more or less correct, some of it will be unreliable. Perhaps the dragon they seek was not white after all, but merely appears as such in public. Perhaps the lair has hidden sections and fake loot for thieves to take instead of the real thing. The dragon could have a taste for human company - servants and captives that could become collateral damage or hostages. Until then they are in the way, and possible liabilities with indeterminate loyalties.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

In a dragon's lair, the obvious fight is against a dragon - whether that will be the case here is less clear. Intelligent monsters are likely to seek ways to improve the odds, and possibly avoid the fight altogether and have the threat that the party poses ended by other means - from having the PCs tried, arrested, and executed by other humans to bribery to collapsing the lair on top of the PCs, or simply escaping when the situation begins to look grim. The true threat could be non-dragonoid.. and for a real challenge, the lair could have more than one dragon, such as a pair with hatchlings, where one of the parents always stays at the nest; as a result, the lair is the only place to see them both. When the party attacks the dragon defending the nest, they are likely to get hit by the other parent as well, either right after a won fight, or during the fight. Alternatively, in an area where dragons are hunted, several youngs from one nest may have decided to stay together for mutual defense, and when in public buff up their appearance by magics that change their size, or at least appear to do so. The party expects to fight one dragon, fights it to retreat with surprising ease, pursues it to its lair, and suddenly finds itself facing five dragons.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

A dragon's lair classically has a treasure in it, which is actually rather odd. But even without treasure clearing the nest ends a threat to the nearby human settlements, adds to the reputation of the party, and provides a location that is likely to be highly defensible and probably for a long while shunned by many of those who have not been informed of the dragon's demise. A resourceful party could even decide not to inform anyone of their success, and have the locals keep delivering gold and goods and beautiful virgins to what used to be the dragon's lair.



### Lord and Killer

By Drackler

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4385>

A five room dungeon with the appropriate clashes of steel, smooth talking, and betrayal. To begin this five room dungeon, the players receive a missive requesting them to meet a petty lord, named Arront Seliverous, and to tell no one what they were doing. Seliverous does not tell the PCs what he is hiring them to do.

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### The Outer Courtyard and the House Guards

There are about half a dozen guards lounging around on crates in an open courtyard. The remains of dinner, some bread and mutton, are lying on a barrel, and a few of them are actively involved in a game of dice, where no one seems to be the winner. The guards are extremely ill-tempered for several reasons, including a recent cut in pay, and therefore are actively looking for a good scruff.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### The House Steward

The house steward, named Kendtal, is a small, weasely man in grand, nearly gaudy, robes with dark hair and pale skin, he also has the habit of wringing his many-ringed hands. Kendtal is dedicated, and a little overzealous, and will, at first, simply not allow the PCs in to see his master and he can, at a word, call threescore guards

to aid him in repelling intruders. He also has a strong penchant for wine, so much so that, for the right amount of wine, he may suddenly remember much more important things to do elsewhere. (Note: In room one several guards can be heard to speak of "Master Jangle-Keys" and his latest drinking binge).

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **Lord...**

When the PCs reach the door to Lord Seliverouss private rooms, it opens and a worried face, with dark eyes and hair, and a slightly crooked nose, connected to a richly robed body, appears. With many a word of gratitude Seliverous pulls the PCs into his outer chambers, but before he will explain his problem, the lord insists on them taking refreshment with him. The drinks are laced with a fairly powerful sleeping draught that should safely put the PCs out for a few hours.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **...And Killer**

The PCs wake to find that all their weapons and more valuable items have been removed, and that they have been moved to a deep pit. Scattered among the rocks are numerous, if rusty, weapons ready to grab up, if necessary. Standing on the edge of the pit is Lord Seliverous, after the appropriate gloating and monologuing, he reveals that he was hired by (insert name of appropriate villain here) to knock off the PCs, with that he leaves. Next, a gate opens in the wall and a manticore (or other beastie of appropriate power) comes out to feed on the helpless adventurers. A battle ensues with the manticore and, hopefully the PCs win.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

#### **Plot Twist**

After defeating said beastie if the PCs look around, they will find the body of (insert name of good NPC the PCs thought was important, but wasn't) apparently killed by the same big bad beastie.



## **Upshi Rises**

By Cheka Man

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4387>

Do the PCs dare to go and raid the tomb of the Pharaoh Upshi?

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The PCs are in a bar on the edge of the polar regions of your world when they hear the babbling of a man, his skin slightly damaged by the cold, begging for them to help find his only son, who was part of an expedition to uncover the tomb of the Pharaoh Upshi. A thousand years ago when Upshi ruled with a rod of iron, as the texts said, the weather was much warmer and what is now ice-covered tundra that barely rises above zero was a pleasant and powerful land, the centre of an ancient empire. His son went on an expedition with half a dozen others and was due pack days ago. As well as pleading for them to find his son he will hint of the treasures to be found within the tomb.

Assuming the PCs agree to help him find his son then they will face the dangers of the Katorga Wastes, as the icecap is known. The winds are horrible, capable of splitting lips, freezing exposed flesh and making even those well wrapped in furs shudder. They should roll on an encounter table to see if they encounter anything unpleasant.

2-no encounter, they reach their destination safely.

3-the wind grows even colder, harming the PCs (roll a die and take that off each PCs vitality stats)

4-A frozen body, lying dead in the snow near a pile of wood that it clearly set up for a fire. Any money or weapons it may have had in life has been stolen by whoever murdered it. If the PCs bury the body in the snow or set it on top of the wood and cremate it, they will hear a whisper of thanks in their head and will get a good feeling.

If they leave the body where it is, unburied and un-cremated, an [Ice Ghoul](#) will rise from the body and attack the PCs. If they have magic/ magical weapons then they can slay it, otherwise they must burn the body, which will make the Ghoul hiss, smile and vanish.

5-1 to 6 Polar Bears which depending on the PCs reaction may or may not attack them.

6-A whiteout (if the PCs pitch a tent they should escape harm, otherwise treat as #2 and roll the dice again when the whiteout clears.

7-A Crevasse! If the PCs are roped together, then nothing too serious happens; otherwise one falls in and can suffer anything from a small wound to death (great for getting rid of a PC who is god-modding and annoying everyone else.)

8-A region of geysers resembling the [Sorcery Springs Geyser Basin](#) comes into view. The GM should decide if these geysers have any magical properties and how dangerous they are to the PCs. The ground around them will be very unstable.

9- A [Polar Horror](#) surges to the attack.

10-A mirage is seen (the GM decides what it is.)

11-A number of [Blue Fires](#) take an interest in the PCs

12-An attack by one or more [Glacier Fins](#) Run!

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The PCs come across a great Step Pyramid embedded in ice, the resting place of Pharaoh Upshi. A grid of stones are set in the door in front of them and if any of the PCs are able to decipher the runes, they will see that they are letters of the alphabet. The right code to make the door raise is UPSHI RISES. They have to reach into holes to press the runes and if they press the wrong button two stones will slide down. If they did it with a weapon or a stick this will not be much of a problem, but if the PC used his or her hand it will be trapped and getting it out should be very hard indeed. The NPC with them may be able to give valuable information about it.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The PCs find that the expedition has been captured by a band of tomb robbers, which by chance happened to be robbing the tomb at the same time that they entered. (Think two robbers for every PC.) They are well armed and doughty fighters from another kingdom, and have killed three of the expedition and tied up two more whilst they decide if they should ransom them or not. Along the walls are tomb paintings and should one of these be brushed against, one of The Few will arise from it. Should they have the NPC with them, he will be able to

speaking the language of [The Few](#) and maybe be able to convince them that they should aid the PCs, otherwise The Few will lash out at everyone who is not dead or tied up. In the fight in the narrow passage many more of them might be summoned.

The tomb robbers have a mage and one low-grade (but none the less magical) weapon between them. Whilst the Few can only be harmed by magic or magical weapons, if they can somehow be disarmed then they will be helpless to cause harm and will vanish. If they were on the PCs side then the NPC can persuade them that they are the Pharaohs servants and they will vanish back to the afterlife. The people tied up will tell the PCs once untied that the one they are looking for ran deeper into the tomb to escape the robbers.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The PCs go through several tunnels and come into the main burial chamber, which is painted in all the colours of the rainbow. Atop a pile of what seem like glittering diamonds is the mummified body of Pharaoh Upshi. A golden crown and a necklace of amber is around his neck, a golden ring is upon his finger, and his bony hands clutch a golden rod and a black spear. The one that the PCs are looking for is gazing in awe at the scene.

PCs being PCs, they are sure to want to loot. If they just take the diamonds nothing will happen. If they should try and take the rod or the staff, or any of the other treasures, then a red glow will appear in the eyes of the mummy and Upshi will rise. The staff will glow briefly and the PCs will find themselves unable to speak, as the staff is in fact [The Staff of Silence](#). Fortunately for them, as they will not be able to cast spells, the mummy is jerky and not that good a fighter, and non-magical weapons will hit it (but will only do half the normal damage.) The spear however is [The Black Spear](#) and if it does hit a PC in the wrong place it will kill him or her, so the mummy is much more dangerous than it seems and should not be underestimated.

Should they touch the walls during the fight, then one of [The Color-Wraiths of Gor-Kashesh](#) will attack the PCs and will only be vulnerable to magical weapons or fire. Should it be killed it will vanish back to its own dimension.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The dungeon is complete but what is it about this dungeon that made it different or memorable. What kind of mystery have they discovered, what kind of reward have they won, and what kind of information have they recovered?

If the NPC's son survived the PCs can feel good about themselves and the father will give them his gratitude and whatever small reward he can afford to give them.

If they took the diamonds they will be very disappointed later, as the diamonds are just chunks of ice that will melt as soon as they are brought into a warm place. The amber necklace has no magical powers other than to keep its wearer warm in the coldest of conditions. The crown is [The Crown of the Storm](#) and can control the weather but at a severe cost. The Staff of Silence has three \*uses\* left in it before it becomes just a staff of gold. When the mummy is killed the PCs will be able to speak again.

The biggest prize is [The Black Spear](#), a weapon that can kill even dragons, a truly mighty weapon.



# The Wizard's Challenge

By Thewizard63

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4389>

A local Wizard, rumored to have lost his mind, like he has his hand, Has issued a Challenge and a prize for all. Simple-Enter his tower and find him to claim your prize.

## Background

The eccentric wizard Xarn is a recluse. Almost comically dress in clashing reds and purples. His most notable feature is in fact a lack of one. His hand, missing from some terrible accident, is still a living visible stump. His Tower is visible from town. And his rare visitations to town always cause quite a stir. The rumors have it, that he is tinkering with the fabric of life. Others say his is looking for his lost hand. Others say his is ripping through the fabric of Reality. Most figure that he's stark raving mad, others suspect incredible genius. A month ago he walked into Luckys tavern, and bewitched the inn-keeper, Lucky, to tell all new-comers of the challenge Xarn issued.

## The Challenge:

"Those who dare, and have the prowess may enter my Tower unmolested. Or, for those whose curiosity might just kill them, for I will tell you the truth of my stump. Enter with only a word of Truth. After, you will face a series of Challenges. In my years and travels I have amassed great treasures which I am willing to share with those proven to be worthy individuals. These will test your faculties so the weak need not apply. Once begun your acceptance is binding, for there is no way out save for success. Good Luck."

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### Shaft of Light

To approach the dark foreboding tower you must enter a twisted forest, filled with a clinging mist and unusual noises. A feeling of being not right overcomes you. Every time you glimpse something you look again, to see if you're seeing right. your mind questions, Did that Bird have two heads? Did that squirrel have spiders eyes? Did that Fox have bee markings? Did you hear Humming from that tree? There is an almost understandable muttering surrounding you. You feel eyes staring at you. The players fear builds as they walk. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, they most conquer that fear or risk running away. (Mind-effecting, easy)

Background: This forest was planted from modified seed; the plants radiate an aura of fear. It resonates with humanoids. The creatures, in the woods are early moderately successful experiments that are primarily harmless. Their oddity only reinforces the weird feelings already radiating from the plants.

When you finally exit the forest near the base of the tower, you stand in front of large thick wooden door. A mouth forms in the door and booms. "Tell me, what it is you truly desire, and you shall enter and your challenge will begin." (this is a great way for characters to share history, and plot hooks for their characters)

There's a chance an observant character will see that the tower has no mortar and the stone seems to almost breathe.

If answered truthfully a hole the shape of the character will materialize, closing after they pass. This is done with each party member. PCs on both of sides of the door can hear the answer. When all are present the door booms, Now the challenge begins. The room they stand in is plain cut stone and round with thin windows allowing some light in. An ornate circular rug from a far off land is the only decoration. A bright beam of purple

light shines down a center hole in the ceiling. At the top of the shaft is what you seek. Your success depends on how this problem is - resolved

The party must get to the top to reach the next room up the shaft. This can be achieved in any manner that works. It should be set up 2 steps back for every 3 steps forward. The harder the group pushes and works together to succeed, the easier it will be.

General Note: the stones that make up the shaft walls are alive and they serve Xarn. They are hive-minded creatures (like ants) and work as one entity to change the tower itself to his needs. They will shift as needed to make the climbing harder or easier. They were developed with an oil like defense which works in two ways. Oil is secreted to make them slippery, resisting willing relocation. The same oil can be forced out violently, much like a skunk used when being attacked. This oil when atomized, and breathed causes nausea. These can also become easier to grip, by roughing its feathers They have even been know to move in and out like a snail.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### The Choice

Once at the top of the hole. An image materializes. "Congratulations. Not in succeeding, but in passing the initial challenge. Behind you is a door for each of you. Beyond those doors is your next challenge. It's simple enough. All you need to do is Choose."

Each PC encounters nearly the same thing. When they grab the handle to open the door, they are pricked with a needle. When the door opens, an unpleasant odor hits as the character enters. In this small bare room a loved one is bound and tied to a wall. Next to the opposite wall, out of reach of the loved one is a table with a flask holding a yellow translucent liquid, and a note. The loved one looks very ill. Bloody vomit is seen in one corner.

### The Note Reads:

*My challenge I offered, you took,  
and so you shall be challenged and shook.  
Disease afflicts your loved one. This potion is the cure.  
You have been infected upon entering. So, your choice it should be sure.  
Fibers of character are sure to show.  
So drink it up, or pass the swallow?  
Make a choice and make it quick. Your time is as a standard wick  
Will you win or will you lose, Leave the room when you chose.*

**Background:** The loved ones in truth, are normal tower denizens bewitched to look, talk and act like the PCs loved ones. (almost literally reacting to how the player pictures their loved ones would in their mind) the denizens are really infected, and told that they will only be cured if they succeed in fooling the PCs. This is a very strong enchantment and incredibly hard to see through. Once they choose who, if anyone drinks, the challenge is over.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### A-maze-ing

When the PCs enter the round room again, they see an archway and a hallway beyond. The disembodied voice of Xarn speaks, "At the end of this hallway is the ladder up. There you will find what you seek." Past the archway is a long hallway. (Impossibly long for the tower's size) The 10' high hallway has no ceiling. A ladder leads

up the ceiling of this cavernous room. The top 3' of the walls are made the living bricks. (They attempt to stop anyone trying to climb on the walls. Or fly out.)

About halfway between the archway and the ladder, the environment changes before the PC's eyes. Either side hallways appear, or walls do, or disappear. In essence a second maze phases in, while the current one phases out. This change stays for a number of minutes and switches to yet another one, and to a fourth and back to the first. Then it cycles through them repeatedly. Some of the walls are living brick and can move, the walls move at 60 per appearance cycle. (Thanks Treasure Tables for the idea!) They phase in for one of the 4 cycles. (DM note: make four(4) identically sized mazes. Have a ladder near the center in the same spot for all. Do whatever you want with them, put a letter-number grid so when you switch, you know where they are)

To make matters worse for the PCs there are numerous half-breed minotaur's (experiments) who have been given a home here. They love this maze as it gives them something to do and purpose in life. They are constantly looking for what changes. There are a few cleaning oozes. All the players need to do is get to the ladder, which everyone can see from anywhere in the Maze.

If a party member Phases (example: blink spell), they see all 4 mazes at once and are probably going to wind up trapped, except they can walk through the current real walls, with normal dangers.

### **Special Notes:**

\* The ladder has an anti-magic field emanating from it. (approximately 10')

\* Remember the PC who gave the disease cure potion to the loved ones will start being effected by the disease-most likely in this room.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **Allow myself to introduce... myself**

**Environment effects:** The anti-magic from the ladder suppresses all magic light. Until the hatch is closed the breeze is strong enough to put out lantern (50% for hooded lanterns) when the group arrives it should be dark. When they close the heavy hatch any magic light will no longer be suppressed. They've now enter a maze-like Hall of Mirrors.

"It's finally time to take a GOOD look at yourself. Oh, and there is a door here somewhere... Bwahahahahaaa..." Booms the wizard's familiar voice.

As the hatch slams shut and torches and lights are re-lit, the party will find themselves in a standard hall of mirror. Only one of each party member's multitude of reflections is an evil-half. They are really malicious spirit trapped in the mirror. The only way for them to escape is to take someone in. These reflections are exact copies of the PCs, except without the disease.

As one might expect, the reflections will try and confuse the PCs as to who to help attack. (The spirits can sense each other.) In a Hall of weirdly angled mirrors, It is very difficult to detect, enemy. The party must first decide who is real or false. The spirits have no such difficulty. The spirits also read surface thoughts and will use them against the party.

If the PCs survive, one of the mirrors will have a hard to find handle. Through this door is what they set on this challenge for.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Xarn awaits the PCs with his goblin assistant Rumi. Xarn is a slight man dressed in Red flowing Wizard robes, with purple trim. He has a similarly appointed hat. And smaller square spectacles. His crow's feet wrinkles disappear into shoulder length salt and pepper hair.

He and his assistant stand behind a low pedestal with a large mirror mounted on top. They are grinning widely when they enter.

In a whispery voice, He greets everyone, "Welcome brave souls. You have passed the challenge I have put before you. And I am proud of you all. You have spoken your desires, and I know why you are here. I have also watched your actions, and they too speak of your wishes."

"Before I answer any questions, we will get to the heart of it. I shall put a last choice before you individually."

Xarn will then address each PC and re-cap their choices and actions, and their stated desires. He will present them each with two items. Each will aid in one of the two paths, Desire vs. Deed. For those that are afflicted with the disease, he also offers them the cure. If they choose the potion, after everyone has made their choice, he will offer them to pick between the remaining to items and accuse the PC of thinking him a cruel heartless man. The Goblin-Gumi will always mimic the expressions Xarn has, and will agree with his master.

If asked, Xarn will explain that the challenge was to find suitable characters to venture forth to reclaim his hand. When asked, he explains that his hand was lost during an unfortunately desperate situation involving casting a Djinni bottle into a Bag of Holding. This caused a dimensional rift to rip open, fold back on itself, and capture his hand before repairing itself. His hand is alive and technically attached. It is floating in-where he thinks-is the realm of forgotten creatures. He asks the party if they wish to travel with him to this dimension, and assist him. Otherwise the challenge is over and the PCs can return to town unmolested.



### Drop of Blood in the Bucket

By mrcelophane <http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4391>

The setting a Necromancer's lair. This short scenario works best if the Necromancer has appeared before and this is the final battle between the two. It should appear early on in the Adventurers questing history, and they should think this is the hardest thing they will face.

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

There is an obvious entrance to the cave, with satanic markings and all. However, if the adventurers search, they will find an alternate entrance. It is hard to find and behind Shrubbery. It is a small wooden door that the Necromancy uses. If you try to go through this, a magic force field will keep you out. It can be dispelled, but it should be hard to do.

The main entrance has a bunch of Zombies, led by the Necromancer's assistant. You could make him as strong as you like, whatever race you like, but he should be a recurring villain, like the Necromancer. The main entrance itself is locked by a arcane lock that you cannot unlock unless you have the key that the assistant holds.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Brain Dead**

As you walk in, a rather large inscription should tell adventurers a riddle:

We cannot think, yet we know what you do not  
We don't have brains, yet in our heads we form words  
These words we have can help you out  
To bad our Tongues were the first to rot!

After a few minutes pass to allow the adventurers to ponder this, Skeletons will drop from the ceiling, each wielding weapons. These should not be made to tough, but serve as a tiny challenge. If the players smash their heads, they should find a tiny scroll in side each one. The scroll should have one letter on it, really big.

All the letters combined should make the word:

"Death"

This is the password. The letters should be scrambled in not come in the order of the appearance of the Skeletons. If you are to say the password to the door, they will hear a loud click. The door will now swing open easily if pushed,, but swing back once let go.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **Turn Around**

There should be a short narrow hall way to another door. Above it should be another inscription:

Sorry but to the password there is more  
Return from where you came to open this door.

The Travelers than have to go back to the room they just left and kill(?) more skeletons and take the letters out. However, the Skeletons fall at greater rates, with three skeletons to a party and only one having a letter. The letters should read

"Is Only The Beginning"

So the complete password is "Death is only the Beginning"

Again, scramble the letter. The password has to be said to the door at the end of the hall again, with the same results.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Necromancer**

The Necromancer sits upon his thrown of bones, applauding the Travelers for getting that far. But as always, he has to try and kill them anyway.

Five or so bulky men wielding Battle Axes should come out somehow and attack the Adventurers. Should you kill one of them, The Necromancer will resurrect them. One will always stay in front of the Necromancer and take all the hits for him, getting healed instantly by the Necromancer. The only way to finally kill these guys is to separate either their hearts or head from their body, or wait until the Necromancer runs out of Magic. After that, you can kill the Necromancer. The last room is behind his thrown, which his concubine, who hid behind it after the fight broke out, will tell you.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **This is going to be a long day...**

As you enter the final room, you will here bells ringing everywhere. Torches immediately light themselves to reveal the Necromancers spellbook and other personal things on a large round table. After about ten seconds, Men will begin to appear in puffs of smoke. Each of them is wearing the same clothes as the necromancer. As they appear, they will say things such as:

"You called a meeti-, GASP, you're not ~~~~!"

And such. Also, make it evident that they are Necromancers, for they are. You have a loooong way ahead of you...



## **Temple of the Four Elements**

By Nathan Wells

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The temple is guarded by a priest of the four elements. They must judge the heroes worthy of entering the temple through trial by combat. The priest is a proficient magic user and will cast spells associated with each of the four elements. The heroes need not destroy the priest. Once it becomes obvious that the priest will not win against the heroes he will admit defeat, and grant the heroes access.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The temple houses an air elemental, an earth elemental, a fire elemental, and a water elemental. Each is extremely jealous of the others and resides in a separate room of the temple. Each can be convinced to offer the heroes their favor through clever roleplaying, along with expressions of honor and respect. Each elemental is aware of how friendly the heroes are with the other elementals, and will get offended if the heroes show just as much, or more, attention to another elemental.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Once the heroes have won over an elemental, the elemental will offer them its favor. There is, however, a catch. The heroes must first perform a few duties for them. Depending on the power level of the heroes, these duties may be extremely simple tasks that don't even require them to leave the temple, or they may be small quests in themselves. The other elementals, out of jealousy, will also send minor minions to hinder the heroes' efforts.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Once the heroes have performed a number of tasks for a specific elemental, that elemental will have one last favor to ask before it will bestow its favor on the heroes. Each elemental has an intense rivalry with one of the others. The air and earth elementals are rivals, and the fire and water elementals are rivals. The final task will be to defeat the elemental's rival in combat.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The elemental finally bestows its favor on the heroes. This may come in the form of magical weapons, armor, or other items. It could be access to new powers associated with the specific element. Perhaps the heroes have freed the elemental from its station at the temple and it is now free to accompany the heroes for an important, and particularly challenging, quest. Maybe the elemental reveals that it can now grant an inordinate amount of power to one of the heroes, but in return the hero must agree to become the next guardian of the temple. For an even more dramatic reward, one of the heroes is transformed into an elemental of the same type as their patron!



## Random 5 Rooms Dungeon Generator

By Davide Quatrini

You need only a d6 for using the following tables (roll it once for each room). In diceless games simply choose the result you like most.

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

1-2. The dungeon is an ancient dwarven stronghold. The entrance is a magically sealed stone door, and the guardian is a clockwork dwarf fighter.

3-4. The dungeon is an orcish mine. The entrance is a small trapped cave, and the guardian is a domesticated grizzly bear.

5-6. The dungeon is an illusion. The entrance is a phantom bridge made of fire, and the guardian is an illusory dragon.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

1-2. In Room Two PCs find the ghost of a dwarven hero. If they want to give peace to him they'll must find his corpse and bury it (using a complex dwarven ritual).

3-4. In Room Two PCs find a magical scroll. If they solve the puzzle contained in it (Q: 1, 2, 5, ... A: 26) they'll receive a magic item from a far demiplane.

5-6. In Room Two PCs find a madman entrapped in the dungeon. If they cure him (using spells, for example) he will reveal vital information about the place.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

- 1-2. This place is trapped: if PCs try to open or break the lock of the exit door a sphere made of solid force will entrap them.
- 3-4. This place is trapped: if PCs remain in the room for a minute or longer the walls will release poisonous gas.
- 5-6. This place is trapped: if PCs touch the illusory chest contained in the room the ceiling will collapse on them.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

- 1-2. The final boss is a terrible dragon. It will accept treasures in exchange for PCs lives.
- 3-4. The final boss is a little humanoid army: a lot of orcs, trolls and ogres. They will accept food and prisoners in exchange for PCs lives.
- 5-6. The final boss is a powerful illusionist. She will accept magic items and new spells in exchange for PCs lives.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

- 1-2. PCs find an ancient and powerful dwarven artifact in the dungeon. They must pay attention: the Dwarf King is searching for it.
- 3-4. PCs find NPCs prisoners in the dungeon. They must pay attention: one of them is a polymorphed demon.
- 5-6. PCs find a large amount of gold, silver or platinum in the dungeon. They must pay attention: the metal is cursed.



## Promised Aid

By Jonas Dorn

Background: Centuries ago, the empire was in great danger. One evening, a messenger from a so far unknown power came to the emperor, and offered him a deal: He would get the assistance of X heroes, but he had to pledge that he would send his best X heroes of his own once the other power was in need. Of course the emperor agreed, and within a week, X heroes appeared and saved the empire. They were given great honors and large amounts of gold and expensive items.

Now, the time has come to for the empire to reciprocate. Optional: I would place the other power underground, and have a tower appear in the garden of the emperor's castle, whose door is a replica of the old contract. Once the PCs enter the tower, it starts to tremble and slowly, then faster and faster sinks into the ground.

Of course, there are plenty of other methods to transport the PCs, such as by teleporting them somewhere, or have them board a spaceship which is on autopilot.

## **Room One: Entrance And Guardian**

The players arrive among ruins – are they too late? Worse, there is a "welcome committee": A horde of strange enemies who attack them immediately, and some kind of commander with two aides another figure next to him. The PCs dispatch of the horde with ease (2 rounds of combat at most, e.g. 1 fireball). When they approach the commander, he breaks out laughing and turns to the figure beside him.

"Is that hope I see in your eyes? So sweet. I sent my weakest troops against your saviours, now you can spend the last moments of your life seeing how I destroy them".

The commander stabs the other through the heart, and starts attacking the PCs, while ordering the aides to not let anyone get to the dying prisoner. He turns out to be a significant challenge for the PCs, and if they can't kill him quickly, the prisoner dies.

When the commander dies, the aides fall apart – it seems that they were some sort of animated armor (or maybe undead), whose existence depended on the life of the commander.

## **Room Two: Puzzle Or Roleplaying Challenge**

If the prisoner died, the challenge is to figure out what is going on (easy: there is a battle; the PCs observe troops being moved towards it), how to get there (for example, they can disguise themselves as troops), and how to possibly stop the army (the fact that the aides fell apart should give the PCs the idea that they have to attack the commanders).

If the prisoner survives, he can tell the PCs what is going on, and that they need to eliminate the 3-5 commanders of the invading army. He leads them through a secret passage (if underground: through stunningly beautiful caves), though they find that they have to cross the entire camp of the enemy army to get to the commanders. The former prisoner is no help in that, because he is frozen with fear, or because he died right after giving all important info to the PCs.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Setback: The disguised PCs are ordered somewhere away from the commanders' tents, they are discovered and have to bluff their way out of the tricky situation, or when they arrive, the commanders have already left for the battle against the last holdout of the good side's forces.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle Or Conflict**

The PCs finally make it to the commanders, who are at least as strong as the commander they battled before, but now there are multiples. There may be interference from enemy aides if the commanders alone are not challenging enough.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The PCs save the day and all is well. Or they learn that they just helped the wrong side (room 1 was a set-up), in which case the DM should drop lots of hints so that the PCs have a chance to figure it out during the big battle. As another twist, 1-2 of the PCs may have been ordered by their local lords to kill everyone else and pretend it was their local kingdom, not the empire that sent the help and should get the reward ("These others? Yeah, they were lieges of my duke, too, but they all died in battle").



# Caravan of Courage

By Nathan Wells

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

A young priestess is setting out on a pilgrimage and is looking for a few people to serve as guides and guards during the journey. She is offering to pay anyone who qualifies. In order to join her caravan, the heroes will have to prove that they are both competent and trustworthy.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The caravan is stopping at a number of towns along its path. After visiting a few towns the heroes will notice a suspicious trend. At each town where they stop, the priestess ignores any religious buildings or holy sites, but instead has secretive visits with shady looking people under the cover of night. The heroes may try to figure out what's going on through clever roleplaying or espionage. Or, the heroes may simply try to win the priestess's trust and then ask her directly.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The priestess is really a member of a secret order with a political agenda. The king of the realm is on his deathbed, and his wicked son is about to inherit the throne. The king has another, illegitimate son whom the kingdom as a whole knows of only in rumors. This bastard son is actually far more qualified to be a good and noble ruler. The secret order that the priestess works for aims to put the bastard son on the throne instead of his half brother. This may pose an interesting challenge to the heroes depending on their own personal, political, and moral viewpoints.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The priestess has been traveling across the realm informing various cells of the order about the order's plans. On the day of the prince's coronation as king, the order will rally all of its members to the royal palace for a grand coup. During the ensuing battle, the priestess leads the heroes through secret passages into the interior of the palace where they will face the wicked prince. The final battle may be with the prince himself, or with one of his lieutenants, pets, or wizardly advisors.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

After the wicked prince is defeated the king's bastard son can be crowned king. The heroes will have to decide what to do with the wicked prince and his supporters, if they did not die in the coup. The new king will reward the heroes suitably with tracks of land, lordships, or whatever seems appropriate. If you're looking for a twist, add the revelation that the new king is in fact not related to the old king at all. Perhaps he was just a good man chosen by the secret order, or maybe he was the leader and originator of that order. In a tragic betrayal, the new king may attempt to have the heroes executed so that they can not reveal such knowledge to the masses.



# Escape From Slavers' Isle

By Jason Kemp

The storm was fierce. For three days, your ship battled against the winds and the waves. The crew worked tirelessly, never giving up hope. However, after three days fighting against the storm, she couldn't take it any more. Driven against the reef, the hull struck against the unyielding coral, and the ship was scuttled. Many drowned in the wind-tossed seas under the dim light of the waning moon, but you were among the few that survived to make it ashore, only to collapse in the wet sands of this unknown haven.

When you woke up, however, you were dismayed to discover that your situation had simply gotten worse, for now you have found yourself trapped in a cage, as your ship had the misfortune to sink off the rocky shore of Slavers' Isle...

## Room One: Entrance And Guardian

PCs awaken in what amounts to be little more than a jail cell, stone on two sides and bars on two sides, the last cell in a small corridor of cells. Prisoners rest in some of the other cells, a few from the PCs' ship and others who have obviously been here longer. The challenge here is to escape the cell (thus entering the rest of the cell). Escape may be accomplished by a number of means: brute force, trickery, stealing the keys, etc. The prisoners are fed twice a day, by three slavers. (For this scenario, they are hobgoblins, but they could be of any particular race.) If the PCs do not escape, they will eventually be led away to slaving ships to be sold as slaves. While there are other opportunities to escape either en route or once the characters are sold, this adventure assumes the PCs escape at some point before they are led off to be branded and sold.

When the party escapes, they may want to free other prisoners to go with them. This offers the GM opportunities to throw more stuff at the group overall, but otherwise, it shouldn't impact the adventure. After all, the party are heroes and the rest of the prisoners represent the common man that must be saved.

The corridor of cells empties into a central room that serves as the junction for other corridors. A few more guards are here, unless they've already been drawn to the party by sounds of combat earlier. In this room, the party can find some basic equipment and load up on weapons, light armor, shields, and other stuff.

## Room Two: Puzzle Or Roleplaying Challenge

Leaving the central room down the exit corridor, the party should come to the entrance to the caves, and a steep drop-off. A wooden drawbridge connects the caves of the cliff-face with the slaver stronghold, but it is raised and located on the other side. The PCs must figure some way to handle the situation, or wait for the bridge to be lowered. Combat taking place on the bridge runs significant risks.

The party, now in the stronghold, may suffer a few "nearly caught" moments as they work their way through the stronghold (which isn't that big, all things considered), at least until they have to hide in a room off the main hallway to avoid guards. Here, the PCs meet a trapped lesser demon that is waiting to be sold into slavery. He claims to be invulnerable to the slavers' weapons and was caught by magic. He offers his assistance in exchange for his freedom. The PCs may come to an accord with the demon, or may bypass its offer and leave it chained up. If the PCs make a deal with the demon, the demon will follow the letter of the deal, looking for a way to pervert it should an opportunity arise.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

As the PCs make their way out of the stronghold and into a position overlooking the bay, they hear a horn announcing that there's been an escape. As they watch, several hobgoblins remove some dire rats from a small pen and take them into the stronghold, with the dire rats eagerly sniffing the ground and air, pulling at their chains. The PCs should get the message that the dire rats will be used to track the PCs, in much the same way that dogs are used back in their own homelands. The PCs must make their way as quickly as possible from their hiding place, across the beach and on board one of the ships setting in the bay. The closest one also appears to be the fastest, and seems to be prepared to sail soon.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle Or Conflict

The ship the party has chosen is the Lord Slaver's vessel, and he's currently inside the stronghold, investigating the disturbance. If the PCs are quick, they can swarm the boat, take it over and set sail before a large body of slavers can come out of the stronghold after them. Alternately, the PCs could try to sneak onboard, but will be discovered once the vessel is out to sea, and the same fight, with more crew, will be fought. The party must face the crew onboard the vessel, plus a spellcasting first mate, Mistress Talyn. If the Captain is onboard, such as if the vessel is out to sea, he is an accomplished fighter and should give the PCs a good fight as well. If the PCs succeed, the ship becomes theirs.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

In the cargo hold, the PCs will find a beautiful red-headed woman lying in a red crystal casket. The captain's log indicates that he is the middle man in a deal to deliver this casket unopened to a secretive cabal in one of the more populated ports of call. If the PCs open the casket, the woman will revive. Identifying herself only as a servant of the Crimson Magus, she will offer to aid the party in exchange for passage back to civilization. If the PCs are being pursued, she will use her magics to burn the enemy ships, to show her value. When the party arrives in civilization, she will part company with them, after promising them a favor that she will grant at her discretion in the future. If the party decides not to open the casket, they can choose to deliver it to the cabal using the captain's log, and will receive a lot of coin, to be followed later by assassination attempts as the cabal tries to clean up loose ends.



## Vault of the Wiglord

By Ken McCutchen

A Five Room Dungeon for Four 4th Level Characters

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

### Entrance to the Tomb (EL 4)

The crumbling tomb is almost indistinguishable from the Cliffside that it is carved into. The 15ft. wide entrance is dark and uninviting, and the thunder of an approaching storm seems to warn of the danger lurking inside the forbidden tomb.

Steep pitched stairs lead to a 30' by 30' chamber with a vaulted ceiling that is nearly 30' above the floor. A large bronze door is inscribed with strange runes and is guarded by a green dragon!!!

The tomb entrance is now home to a very young green dragon, which is drawn here by the evil dwelling inside. The dragon has massed only a small treasure trove thus far, but is eager to add the adventurers' gear to his pile!

Vortrus the Green Dragon (use the stats from the D&D miniatures Green Dragon from the Aberrations set)

A DC20 decipher script check or a read magic spell will reveal that the true nature of the runes with the exception of the last word being scratched beyond recognition.

Nevermore will dark dragons threaten the realm  
A great time of kindness will bless all men ...tcmbrfqw...

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

### Crypt of the Fallen

The bronze double doors open into a 20' x 20' room that is dominated by a stone statue of a fallen knight. Dirt and dust cover the room and the act of opening the door had filled the room with dust. The knight holds his sword by the hilt and the blade covers the knight's face. The statue is inscribed with a series of words, which read:

*Often talked of, never seen,  
Ever coming, never been.  
Daily looked for, never here,  
Still approaching, coming near.  
Thousands for my visit wait,  
But alas, for their fate,  
Though they expect me to appear,  
They will never find me here.*

The answer to the riddle is: Tomorrow. Speaking the word aloud will unlock the secret door. Otherwise the door is locked. A DC20 search check is required to find the secret door.

Secret Stone Door: Hardness 8; HP 60; Break DC Stuck 28; Break DC Locked 28; DC 22 Open Lock.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### The Portcullis and the Ooze (EL5)

The secret door opens to reveal a long hallway 30' wide by 90' long. As you step into the room, the secret door slams shut behind you with an enormous BOOM! As you peer down the hallway, you can make out a 10' wide iron portcullis blocking the room's exit. The rest of the hallway is clean and free of dust and debris.

The portcullis is locked and trapped. A gelatinous cube is hiding in the room. Gelatinous cubes are hard to see, even under ideal conditions, and it takes a DC 15 Spot check to notice one. Creatures who fail to notice a cube and walk into it are automatically engulfed.

Portcullis: Hardness 10; HP 60; Break DC Stuck 28; Break DC Locked 28; DC 22 Open Lock.  
Burning Hands Trap: CR 3; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (burning hands, 5th-level wizard, 5d4 fire, DC 11 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.  
Gelatinous Cube (see Monster Manual 1 page 201)

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### Minions Of The Wiglord

With the portcullis open, you can inspect the sarcophagus closer. As you approach, the two torch sconces erupt into flame, however the flame is cold blue. The light from torches casts an eerie glow throughout the room. The marble lid of the sarcophagus has a knight holding his sword over his face, much like the statue you've seen before. Only this time the attention to detail and craftsmanship are remarkable.

The sarcophagus hides a secret tunnel into the chamber of the great evil one. Three swarms of rats have crowded into the tunnel in an attempt to escape the dark lord below. When the adventures open the lid they need to make a DC15 reflex save or be surprised by a rat swarm.

(3) Rat Swarms (use the D&D miniatures stats from the Unhallowed set)

Swarms are extremely difficult to fight with physical attacks. However, they have a few special vulnerabilities, as follows:

A lit torch swung as an improvised weapon deals 1d3 points of fire damage per hit.

A weapon with a special ability such as flaming or frost deals its full energy damage with each hit, even if the weapon's normal damage can't affect the swarm.

A lit lantern can be used as a thrown weapon, dealing 1d4 points of fire damage to all creatures in squares adjacent to where it breaks.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### The Wiglord's Guardian

The tunnel below the sarcophagus descends steeply 50' into a dank cavern. Water has formed strange limestone deposits throughout the room and several columns obstruct your view of the chamber. Stalactites and stalagmites in the room threaten your approach and the uneven floor is slick and wet.

Characters attempting to run across the cavern need to make a DC15 balance check or fall, leaving the prone for the remainder of the round.

Stalking in the back of the cave is a Gauth, the evil Wiglord's guardian. It will wait for the characters to enter the room before blasting away with its powerful eye rays.

Iksus the Menace, Gauth-lord of the Deep (see Monster Manual 1 page 26 for stats)



## The Towers of Wisdom

By manfred

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4392>

It is said wizards don't work well with others of their kind. Once they have a tower, woe to anyone not recognizing their superiority that is the rule. But to every rule is an exception. Once, there were three wizards, on friendly terms, that built their towers closer than anyone before. The towers are lost, the knowledge therein may be yet reclaimed.

The heroes will be agents in the never-ending striving for the advancement of knowledge. It might be their own personal interest, seeking favour of the powerful wizard that sponsors their expedition, or it's just the money.

In the ages past, a great magical catastrophe has despoiled the world, and very few liked the wielders of said magic afterwards. In fact, they were actively hunted down by a magic-hostile cult, that grew into a massive movement for a time. Those days are gone, but so are most reminders of a greater age, and much of its wisdom. But perhaps a little remains.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The wizard employing the PCs will relay the story of three masters of the magical arts, that lived quite near to this town. Each of them had a tower, but they built it on one property, to coordinate their research. Their towers were destroyed in those turbulent times, and no one was able to find the remains. But then he found a vital clue in the city's chronicles: the destruction was not caused by a random mob, as was often the case, but it was organized by the Cult itself. And the Cult liked to record its conquests in detail, so they might have the crucial information all other resources failed to preserve!

The Cult is an enlightened order, that protects society from the abuses of magic, so speaks its gospel. To the public, they are a harmless group of grumblers; the users of supernatural but know, that they are always eager to burn a few witches, so it's better to not provoke them. One of them has the records of that period. The ideal way would be to get the book, and return it without anyone noticing - *no matter how the PCs get it, there must not be a connection to the wizard hiring them; or to any wizard for that matter*. Simply beating them all up and looting the place without witnesses could prove hard in this city, and murdering is out of question. Skilled thievery or impersonating other cultists could do the trick.

The book describes in vivid detail, where the towers were located, how they were destroyed and razed to the ground. Whoever wrote the bombastic sentences wasn't the smartest tool in the shed, but noted several siege engines were 'borrowed' from a nearby fort, and fully employed against the towers.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The location is thickly overgrown, and the ruins are nigh to invisible under the shrubs; there are three of them, in a triangle, in the middle the remains of a fountain, all as it should be. It will take some work to clear the place, and sifting through the mess will produce little evidence of a wizard ever living here, even the amount of rubble does not hint at a large tower. Maybe this was just a peasant settlement.

What happened here? The wizards have chosen a place with numerous caves for convenience, and thought their designs were sturdy enough to withstand anything. True, their towers held during the siege, the other buildings around didn't. As the supporting structures crushed, all the weight of a tall tower concentrated on a small space... until it spectacularly fell right into the earth, seemingly collapsing. The elated mob destroyed the other buildings, and at last could celebrate victory, hanging and burning one of the wizards that managed to get out.

The heroes will have to dig deep, until they uncover the roof of a tower. Breaking through it, they can access the interior, and make their way in somewhat reversed order, from the top to the bottom. The inside is damaged by the fall and the years, but there are mechanical creations (so-called "-Jacks"), active even today. After hundreds of years, even those, that are not aggressive, may have misaligned processing units (a technical term for insane constructs).

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Each of the three towers will be different, individually suited for the wizard that inhabited it. Examples:

- this wizard was particularly good with levitation spells. With the occasional niche is the tower completely open, and there are no stairs or ladders. To slip here, and fall, hitting furniture on the way down can be lethal. Any mountaineers among you?
- this wizard specialized in enchanted mechanical life-forms, so his tower is full of various constructs, some never finished, some quite unusual.
- this wizard was a master of defensive spells, and his tower contains the most locks and traps. Have fun.

Among all the digging, climbing, and fighting or negotiating with weird constructs, there will be found items of some value, and even the treasure they came here for: books and scrolls, anything even remotely arcane they shall take and deliver. But that is not everything.

A large library is hidden deep beneath the fountain, and subterranean corridors, that were once accessible, lead to it. It is not accessible from above, in fact, the the rock is here hardest, the library well protected. Perhaps they find out themselves, or talk it out of a friendly construct. Without it, their journey will be of little value.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

It was a beautiful library with many tomes of great value, built to withstand any danger. It did not withstand centuries of neglect, however. The stream leading into the fountain, once so carefully directed, has found its way inside, and now is the place completely wet, and most books destroyed.

But the last guardian remains. A large human-like construct, some might say golem, created with the utmost precision and the full mobility of a human body, a master warrior was its example of movement. Once, it might have easily killed such a party, now it is feeling the effects of moisture, and even the best impregnation can't seem to halt its slow degeneration. It will attack.

It will be obvious, that it can't fight at its full potential, it will be slow, and sometimes clumsy. But it is strong, and each hit will be dangerous, with a weapon, or without it. During the fight, it can easily destroy the few still preserved tomes, and many of the tables and shelves will be overturn or broken. It's not easy to kill, smart parties may just keep it occupied, until they pick the more valuable tomes, and run away.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The true gain of this place is knowledge - what exactly it will be, how accessible, and how useful, depends on the Game Master. New schools of magic or spells can be introduced and new problems along them.

The wizard will claim all the materials for himself, but will require help with the research. A PC may be employed, but also other colleagues and dangerous knowledge may slip into the world, generating more plots.

The Cult won't be friendly with this old magic in the world again, and quite angry with the PCs, if they learn of their involvement.

## Additional resources:

For the various constructs, I suggest [X-Jacks](#), but they may be replaced with other suitable critters. [Loster](#) is the cultist that keeps the books on the history of his order.



## Through the Maze

By Margaret Coffey

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The PCs are seeking a macguffin – a mushroom that can cure any disease, a powerful and rare spell component, a quest item. They learn that the macguffin lies in a secret cave behind a waterfall.

PCs must cross to the other side of a waterfall. The waterfall creates a dangerous current and undertow in the pool, but giant, smooth rocks lead to the waterfall itself. PCs must cross by jumping and balancing on the wet, slippery rocks to avoid falling into the water and risk drowning (or at least being moved away from the waterfall). Once the PCs reach the waterfall, they must jump through it to get to the other side.

Once on the other side, the PCs land (face first?) in a hip-deep pool of still water, where they must battle or escape a giant constrictor snake.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The PCs escape from the pool and encounter a ring of statues of princely appearance. Behind each statue is a door. There is one statue/door combo for each PC, plus one extra set. The statues say in unison: "Only one door leads to that which you seek. The other paths lead to sacrifice. True balance will allow you to find the one true path." The GM comes up with some test or challenge for each PC that does not rely on that PC's primary ability. For example, the first statue speaks: "Who among you is the strongest?" That PC steps forward and must answer a riddle. The smartest must dance a jig (feel free to LARP that). The most agile must lift a heavy stone above their head. And so on, testing each player in one of their non-primary skills. Perhaps there are materials that may help these PCs in these tasks – a rope and pulley may help someone lift a heavy stone, depending on the nature of the challenge the GM sets. For each challenge successfully overcome, one door closes.

### Room Three: Trick or Setback

If the PCs overcome all of the challenges, then only one door is open to them, and they may continue on. In this case, the final statue says: "You have proven yourselves worthy, but there are challenges still to overcome." For each failed attempt, one additional door remains open. In this case, the final statue says: "Now you must choose your path. One path leads to peril and that which you seek. If you choose the wrong path, you may still reach your destination, but you will be called upon to make a sacrifice." The statue may also give a clue as to which is the correct door. As the PCs choose a door and enter, that door closes behind them.

If the PCs choose the correct path, they go to the big battle. If the PCs choose one of the other paths, they encounter a long winding maze that after some time eventually leads to a rickety rope bridge that crosses a deep chasm. The PCs must leave behind some/all/their most precious possession/GM's choice in order to safely cross. If the PCs cross safely, then they enter the big battle.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The final battle takes place in a large and very particular room. The floor and walls are smooth and the floor is slightly slick. The floor seems as if it is balanced on a ball centered below the floor. As the PCs enter the room, the floor on that side descends. In order to maintain a level, the PCs must find some way to balance their collective weight. If not, eventually the floor tilts far enough that the PCs begin to slide towards an edge, and may fall into the chasm that is beneath this room. The macguffin is in the center of this room, perhaps on a pedestal. The PCs must reach the center, without causing the room to tilt so far that they ... or the macguffin... fall into the chasm below. Once the PCs reach the center, doors open in the center of each of the four walls and out step four large brutes – guardians of the macguffin. The guardians approach the PCs at the center, and the PCs must battle them - again without tilting the floor too far.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

As the battle ends and the PCs claim the macguffin, the room begins to shake, and the floor begins to tilt, rising on the side of the only exit left open – opposite of where they entered, and rising much faster than it did when the PCs were exploring this room. The PCs must scramble uphill to reach the exit, or else they will slide into the chasm below. Moving towards the rising side does not balance the floor – unless the macguffin is returned to its place in the center of the room. If the PCs exit safely, a corridor leads them uneventfully to the surface at the top of the waterfall, where they find....



## **Prison Break**

By Nathan Wells

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The heroes are infiltrating a high security prison in order to free one of its inmates. Getting in will be easy. All that the heroes need to do is perform an appropriately heinous crime, or at least frame themselves for one. Depending on the details of the setting, the crime could even be something the heroes would consider a noble act, such as treason against a corrupt government.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

After making contact with the inmate they aim to free, the heroes must spend some time planning their escape. They'll want to get a clear idea of the prison's layout and floor plan. They'll also want to note warden patrol patterns and at what times the guards change shifts. They'll also need to take stock of what resources they may have at their disposal.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

As the heroes make their plans, and then put them into action, they'll no doubt draw the attention of other inmates. Some of these may inform the wardens or raise an alarm, hoping to win some favor with the authorities and earn an early parole. Other inmates may wish to participate in the jail break. In fact, it may become obvious to the heroes that they won't be able to pull off their escape without the help of a few key prisoners. However,

this creates a moral dilemma, because some of the inmates are hardened criminals and completely deserving of their place behind bars.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The climax takes place in the final stages of the jail break. At this point the wardens are alerted to the heroes attempted escape and will do everything possible to prevent it. The heroes may have to fight wardens directly, or they may have to attempt daring stunts to reach safety. Depending on the setting, the wardens may release the prison's ultimate warden on the heroes. This could be a magical beast, ferocious guard dogs, or a robotic sentinel.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The most obvious reward is the freedom of the heroes and the person they went in to rescue. Depending on the circumstances the reward may be greater than that. Perhaps the inmate they rescued can now provide information or resources that will further the heroes' overall goal. Of course, freedom may also be short lived, as the heroes are now wanted fugitives. Unless they can clear their names, or bring down the corrupt government that condemned them, they will continue to be hunted.



## **The Company**

By Nathan Wells

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The heroes infiltrate the company by submitting job applications and getting hired. The company is always hiring grunts, and might consider the heroes for the lowest level management positions if they're especially accomplished.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

After working at the company for a while the heroes will notice that not everything is as it should be. The most obvious problem is the maintenance hallways. No one seems to mention these except the lowest level employees, and only then in whispered conversation. Those who venture into these corridors face horrors that challenge their very sanity. The maintenance hallways are home to zombies and other creatures that lurk in the shadows and wait for unsuspecting prey to come by. They are timid creatures, however, and will not attack employees who brave the maintenance hallways in groups.

A second, less obvious dilemma is the company's upper management. All of them are cold and aloof. Their gaze can freeze a person in their tracks. All of their proceedings take place behind closed doors. When management decides to fire an individual, or downsize an entire department, those employees are never heard from again.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Heroes who try to find other work so that they can quit the company will have no luck. It's as if once you work for the company you can never leave. Also, for every week that they work there they feel as if they are growing weaker and weaker, both physically and mentally.

Heroes who try to investigate the company further will face "disciplinary action" or "termination" if they are caught. Those who are truly persistent and resourceful may eventually discover the terrible secret behind the company.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The company is actually the tool of a group of necromancer cultists. The company building is built on geomantic principles that gradually suck the life force out of those who work there. Those who have worked there the longest have turned into the zombies that now haunt the maintenance halls. The life force that gets sucked from the employees is being channeled into the basement where the cultists use it to power their evil rituals. The heroes will have to defeat the cultists if they want to free themselves and their fellow employees.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

If the heroes can defeat the cultists then they will bring down the company. This releases all of the employees from an eventual fate worse than death, and prevents the outworking of the cultists' ultimate goals for world domination. The heroes probably won't be praised for doing this, but they can rest a little more easily at night knowing they've put down a horrible evil.



## **Catching the Traitor**

By Amy

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **It's Where?**

Our mighty heroes have learned that a traitor that they have been tracking for some time will be making his escape from the country tonight. It helps add impetus if the traitor has also leveled personal accusations against the team, damaging their reputation.

A note found in his hastily abandoned quarters states that he will be leaving via the Zeppelin "Dauntless" tonight at 9:30 pm from the Empire Spire Docks. The players will have to locate the Docks and make a discreet arrival so as not to startle their quarry into flight before the time of departure. The time is now 8:10 pm. They only have just over an hour in which to do it.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Tickets, Please.**

The Empire Spire Docks are no longer as popular since the high rises in the centre of town started installing Airship Docks on their own roofs. This shows in the general faded grandeur of the facility, a gradually decaying

Eiffel Tower type construction. The exposed struts and once ornate ironworks are starting to rust. However, the Empire Spire is still busy with general freight, economy class travelers and staff, even this late at night. A central elevator and back up spiral staircase grants access to the different levels which include public, private and commercial docking points. Gas lamps are used to light the areas in current use.

At the gates to the tower, barring entry into the central elevator is the Customs and Ticketing Officer, Edward Bottomley. Bottomley is a pompous official with nothing to look forward to but tormenting passengers via official channels.

By this time, players may be only minutes from missing the rendezvous.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

#### **The Traitor**

This would be a very bad time for it to start raining, so go ahead. Add some lightning. Players can just make out the shape of the Zeppelin Dauntless coming in to dock.

Having arrived on the correct platform, passing a couple of levels of milling crowds awaiting their boarding calls, our intrepid adventurers spy their quarry, the nefarious traitor. He will, of course, refuse to come with the heroes, crawling out onto a docking arm if necessary and threatening to jump.

Players should prefer to take the traitor alive to clear their names and learn more about the Big Bad.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

#### **Dauntless**

The Zeppelin Dauntless should be just closing with the tower. Anyone with piloting skills will note that it is coming in broadside, not sternwise as is normal. The reason for this becomes clear as they open the side ports and start shooting - the traitor's associates have decided that he has outlived his usefulness, and they don't mind destroying the Docks and everyone on it to terminate his employment.

The Dauntless finally readies and fires her big guns - the mortars. This destroys part of the structure of the Empire Spire Docks.

Player options include - attempting to board the Dauntless (do they recognise someone aboard?), fleeing, rescuing the people below from falling debris, clearing the docks before they start to collapse, returning fire and protecting the traitor.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Depending on how things work out and the game goals, there's a few different options here :

- If the traitor is still alive and caught, he should be more than willing to sell out his former employers for any leniency he can get.

- If the traitor dies or escapes, his briefcase might be discovered.

- The traitor could be wearing a disguise that reveals him to be someone the team trusted. What else has he revealed about them to the Big Bad?

Other side effects:

- Heroes could further enhance or degrade their public profile depending on how they act during the fight above. Have the press turn up and try to interview them or catch a few photos. People in the area over the next few days may recognise them from the newspaper.

- One of the rescued passengers could be an influential ally in further games, providing shelter, food or information.



## The Wizard's Land

By Dr SciFi

[www.hobbysonline.com](http://www.hobbysonline.com)

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

In a green northern forest resides a stark and barren desert of extreme heat, sand and dunes. This is one league across in any direction with a sun that always remains at the mid day point. In the center is a hedge of stone man high. Beneath this is said to be the wizards' tower hidden and protected here for many years since his demise or disappearance. You have found what you believe are the spell to raise the tower and the key to the door.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Role Playing Challenge

“You must best the heat and sun by raising the tower and quickly enter the doorway found. And marching order best forward thrust and flee to standing company.” This is a faded message carved in on of the standing stones.

If you fail to interpret this message you might come across a skeleton one of many littering the area but unique in that it has a drawing clutched to its chest. It shows figures standing inside the stone hedge and one standing out with an arrow pointing back to the group of figures.

As the tower rises up so too does a door come up from the now floor of the tower topmost level. You try the key and it allows you access to the tower innards.

### Room Three: Trick or Setback

At the bottom of the stairs leading down from the doorway you light torches that reveal a room of stone devoid of anything but the stair leading back up to the door. But you do find another faded message at eye level just above the bottom step. “The revealing torch you need to seek at topmost height, a watchful eye will find.”

A faintly carved eye is found at the base of one of the stones beneath this burred by sand and set in a cavity is the torch you seek. Back in the room having lit the torch you see another close by. And as you light each upon the wall you see another to light nearby. When all are lit several closed chests, bookcases, cabinets appear around the room and a fountain in the center. The water is quite cool and refreshing. Letters appear in the side of the stairs. “Leave fit tight these lids and closings lest yea be brought to be burned to death in light and heat.” you surmise that the tower will sink back to the sands stranding you die in the desert heat.

There also appears a door on the floor along the wall obviously covering a stair down to the next level. But when examined it is painting not a real door. Looking around for a key or spell or hinting rhyme you finally notice two torches on either side of the fountain. When lit they reveal lettering apparently metal set in the front of the fountain. The first torch brought near makes them alive with flame almost molten but very readable. "He who quenches the door with liquid of flames shall see the real tree sawn wrought." You grab a bucket from the side of the fountain, fill it and dash the water upon the door. The door becomes very real and lifts easily.

Subsequent levels are easily accessed. And revealed to you are a library on the next level and then a laboratory.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle or Conflict**

Descending from the laboratory to what must be the ground floor you see a door apparently to the outside. After lighting the torches on this level the only object to be seen situated in the center of the room is a full length dressing mirror standing in its frame.

As you look around the room for another of the Wizards' rhymes you realize the mirror is always facing you. Walking up to the mirror and examining it you find a socket that will hold the torch from the top level.

After placing the torch in the socket a change happens to the mirror. The surface darkens to black, then seems to become enveloped in smoke and finally clears. The image of what must be the wizard that once owned this tower and land is now in the mirror. He appears to be standing right behind you but as you look around you see only your fellow adventurers staring with disbelief at the mirror.

The Wizards' reflection begins to speak. "I have a question of 3 answers for you to amaze or disappoint me with." "Of the following choose only 1 and be not hasty for the wrong saying is twice pain and death in the fire and the right saying is a gift to you."

"A land of plenty to help all about."

"A tower of strength to rule all about."

"A cauldron of fire to sap the strength and grow to powerful heights."

The question you will find is, "What would you have me do with it?" The Wizard pauses almost thinking and then says, "Which of the answers do you think is the more rightful?"

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

If you select, 'A land of plenty to help all about.' then you receive the tower, its treasure and the land about restored to green and fertile fields. And the mirror will remain active to guide and instruct you in the years to come. If you select either of the other answers you will be cast out of the tower post haste and the tower will sink back to sands leaving you to wither and bleach in the blazing sun.



## **St. Nathaniel - Harbinger of Doom**

By Thewizard63

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4390>

A sickness is destroying the crops. A town, wishing to avoid past horrors, seeks out daring folk to try and stop this trouble at its source. Can they find who's to blame?

### **Summary**

*A sickness is destroying the crops. A town, wishing to avoid past horrors, seeks out daring folk to try and stop this trouble at its source. Can they find who's to blame?*

### **Background**

The prosperous town before you has not always been so. A generation or two ago, it was a troubled place. Under frequent attack from the nearby long-tooth tribe, a tribe of savage monsters, resting in the nearby hills, looking to carve a better life.

Just when things seemed they couldn't get any worse, a plague flourished through town due to an inability to properly tend and clean the crops from the frequent interruptions and fear from the raids. Fields grew fallow. Entire sections of the population became afflicted and ill.

Then came Nathaniel of the god of light. He had come to see if he could help end the suffering in the town. After a short while he climbed to the top of a nearby small rocky ridge, and knelt in prayer. He prayed for a week straight. Without food or water he knelt. The town worsened. Dozens died. He knelt, unmoving until the dawn of the eighth day. As if possessed of some grim purpose, he strode into town. He proclaimed before all.

"I am Nathaniel, tool of the God of light. I have been chosen in his wisdom, to cleanse you. Praise His name a when I pass, and you will be cleansed"

He began to walk his way through town speaking his gods name. With each breath he took in their illness unto himself.

At First light, He stood up on the ridge looking into town. Nathaniel bade unto all, "Those who are able, come with me and cleanse the plague of the monsters!" He cries as he holds his weapon aloft, bringing cheers from the towns folk. Within an hour they have driven the monsters into the hills who retreat to more defensible ground. Nathaniel spurs the townsfolk on, only to be beset by and ambush. The townsfolk flee as Nathaniel buys them the freedom and time to do so. His battle cries were heard as they fled. He never returned, but neither have the monsters.

A church has been founded on the ridgeline where he prayed.

Over time the location where Nathaniel fell had fallen to a corruption and plague. A few brave souls managed to retrieve some of Nathaniel's body, it has been entombed in a statue dedicated to him, the gilded statue is of him eternally praying for the town, always the first to catch the light. To remind the flourishing town of the great deed and goodness for which he is an example.

Lately, the plague has returned, and animals are missing.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The Long-toothed monsters have used the spreading of decay and plague to ward off most enemies, the party must try and locate the tribe. A skilled tracker can follow the signs of the disease through the valley, and up to the mountain bog. Another method is to ask around, if there is an area of rot and decay. Most townsfolk just look horrified and turn away. If they ask around in the bar, they find Jurex of the northern wood. He is a recluse that lives on the outskirts of town. His leathery skin, and tobacco stained teeth. His clothes are well worn, thin

and dirty. He speaks with a rattling and hoarse breath. If asked, it's explained that he comes in for a drink from time to time... When he gets really drunk, He tells the tale of his childhood kidnapping. If asked he laughs crazily, and tells of how the monster came to his parents home and took him into the hill. He describes them as putrid malformed and misshapen humanoids. The took Jurex in to a rotten dark swampy nook partway in the mountains. He describes the vile things of terror hidden in their decaying lair. He managed to wriggle free and escape, but not without catching something. If they ask the priests of the sun god about the abductors, they relay the tale of St. Nathaniel curing the plague and beating off the hostile tribes.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The PCs run into a slight and whiley monster his face is covered with puss covered boils. His skin looks partially melted. His breathing is ragged. He speaks to the PCs from Drumgridder the sly. I have been charged with telling you to leave now, before you are destroyed by our affliction. He tries to figure out where and why the PCs are there. He tells them that he is showing them a shortcut either in or away. Whichever he thinks they PCs wish to hear. If asked about the disease, he spits out of how Nathaniel, Harbinger of Doom brought decimation to his people. There are only a few left. He conveys they only wish to live a life untouched by rot and disease. He tries to get the PCs to see and agree with his perspective. And have pity on him. If they attack he leads them in a chase through the ambush.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

If allowed, he leads them into an ambush of diseased plants. The grass and roots slow the Party, tripping them up, while nearby flowers burst with their sleep spores. (effecting ALL characters alike) while White Rose bushes wrap around the PCs. Thorns cutting their skin, turning pink then blood red as they feed, each threatening to affect the PCs with their deadly plague.

Drumgridder bolts in the direction of the village. After getting the party tied up. He is warning the others.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The environment is rotting all around them, and smells of advanced decay. There are spore and juices oozing from nearly everything. Even the rock is damp and spongy.

The entire clan attacks the party. They notice the symbol of the God of Light on the weapon wielded by the sad leader Harngrum of the surviving clan members. The PCs shall note that not every clan member was riddled with disease, nearly 60% of the population is not afflicted.

Every attack has a chance of imparting the rot and disease to the PCs. This is the Clans home turf, and use it to their advantage. They will fight to the death for their home.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Once dispatched, The PCs will find that the weapon Harngrum was wielding is the original weapon wielded by Nathaniel during the battle. It is melted slightly and has a little give when held tight. The weapon is the cause of the corruption and plague that is killing the region. It is a concentrated amount of the original poison/disease afflicting the town. You find a journal of the head chief which describes in detail how the savage attack forced them to this inhospitable land, and then when the warrior fell most became sick, and the land and his people

changed for the worse. It describes the hardship of his friend and tribe fall and become misshapen and how some would mercifully die, and the less fortunate wouldn't. They revile Nathaniel and all he brought, but now they don't have the strength or health to fight back. As everything they love is dead/dying/or corrupting. His only hope is that the one immune survive to rebuild and exact revenge.

The weapon will cause disease in all who it strikes.



## **The Sledge**

By Dragonlordmax

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4393>

The TheoRgs are known for being amongst the biggest, toughest, and most generally unpleasant sentients in the galaxy. And this is their nightclub.

### **Backstory**

Coran Van, galactic drug-dealer, smuggler, and general pain to the authorities has been spotted near the TheoRgan nightclub The Sledge. Since TheoRgs don't have much use for illegal substances - they'd need enormous quantities of the stuff - it can be certain that Van's contacting them for the only reason anyone would - he needs bodyguards.

The enormous bounty on the crook's head, preferably still attached to the body, is high enough to tempt every bounty hunter in the sector, but not enough to risk a TheoRg nightclub. This is where the PCs come in. Can they slip in and steal Van out from right under the noses of the aliens he's trying to hire, or will The Sledge prove to be too much for them?

### **The Building**

The Sledge is a large rectangular building with no windows and only two sets of doors - the main entrance and a way in at the back, which is kept locked. Big, neon lights spell out 'The Sledge', for the d is in a state of perpetual flickering.

Despite the lack of an interior view, the building almost seems to glow, and when open (i.e. at night), the loud techno booms from the doors.

Inside, the building is primarily one really big room, with a bar, stage, and dance floor, packed with gyrating TheoRgs. One will note that TheoRg dances tend towards the bizarre - some involve turning down the gravity, some activate the floor's anti-friction covering, others involve spurts of fire or explosive gases. In general, the dance floor should never be boring, and the PCs should hear continual yelps and roars from singing TheoRgs - but never anything that sounds too painful, for TheoRgs are too big to be seriously injured by such minor happenings.

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **Getting Past the Bouncers**

In a culture of big, tough humanoids, it seems that the bouncers at the Sledge are among the biggest and toughest. Fortunately for our intrepid bounty hunters, they're not too bright. Still, they know their orders, and don't intend to let anyone (except the various TheoRgs and bands who consistently wander in and out) in without a specific invite from the boss. And since he's inside, there ain't nobody gettin in that way.

Still, there are a number of ways the PCs could sneak in. They could try to unlock the rear door, which is unguarded by well-secured. They could try to bribe the bouncers, disguise themselves as TheoRgs, or just attempt to kill/render unconscious the guards. All of these options are possible, but unlikely to succeed. The TheoRgs make good enough salaries that they aren't overly interested in risking them for a small bribe, and it would prove almost impossible for any normal humanoid to disguise himself as a TheoRg - they're just too big. Similarly, the guns-blazing approach is not going to be particularly effective because the bouncers can probably squash the PCs in any form of combat with one hand behind their back. Not to mention that this would give Van enough warning to escape.

No, what the PCs really want to do is disguise themselves as a band, and a casual inspection will reveal that all the players wandering in and out carry variations of the Whikok, a bizarre combination of a flute and an electric guitar. The simplest ways to get some instruments would be to either go buy them or to mug some musicians. Either method is valid, but Whikoks are sufficiently difficult to manufacture that they carry a hefty price tag.

Still, the bouncers will let any musicians go in, so once the PCs get some flute-guitars, they can move to Room 2.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **Information-Gathering**

Once inside, the PC's can ditch their instruments (or hang onto them, it's their choice), and try to locate their target. He's much smaller than the TheoRgs, so spotting him will be very difficult. As he's been hanging about for the past few nights, however, many of the TheoRgs know where he is.

Unfortunately, TheoRgs tend to be a bit condescending towards smaller people, and are unlikely to simply tell the PCs where Van can be found. Therefore, the PCs need to try to impress them. Since the primary method of gaining respect in TheoRg culture - wild Mangacar wrestling - is not available here, the secondary method will have to do - dancing.

As mentioned above, TheoRg dancing can be quite involved, and the first dance that begins after the PCs decide that they're going to participate is a friction-less dance. Such dances are performed on repulser-boards - essentially ice skates with jets instead of skates. Boards will be provided.

I leave it up to the PCs to come up with an impressive way of dancing on repulser-boards - they're usually more creative than I am at that sort of thing, anyway.

If the TheoRgs are suitably impressed, they'll point the PCs towards Van, who happens to be in the middle of the dance floor. If they're not impressed, then the PCs will have to find a different group of TheoRgs and try to impress them with a different dance, which I leave up to the GM - I'll try to make a table at the bottom.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

As the PCs make their way across the dance floor towards their target, a new dance starts up, and I do mean up - the gravity is turned off. Suddenly, the air is full of flying TheoRgs, who take up a surprising amount of space. This dance is a long one, and lasts until the PCs get near the center of the dance floor.

While floating, the PCs need to weave their way through the other dancers to get to the center. Of course, some of the TheoRgs are a bit rowdy at this point, and will object to being crashed into. Essentially, this is a 3-D, shifting maze where the walls will try to throttle you if you run into them. Fortunately, there are other ways through. If the PCs can stay near the floor or ceiling, they'll find it relatively clear. Alternatively, the PCs could try to get the band which is currently playing to slow down the tempo, making the 'maze' simple to solve.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **A Dance with Death**

As the PCs near the floor's center, the music dies down and the gravity turns back on. It's not long before the PCs find themselves face-to-face with their target. Unless the PCs are extraordinarily persuasive, Van suspects them to be bounty hunters - he hasn't become one of the most wanted men in the galaxy by being careless.

Van is a clever man, however, and sees in these intruders an opportunity to impress those he hopes to employ, so he loudly accuses them of being bounty hunters, hoping to gather attention. Once he has it, several bouncers come over, waiting to see if there's going to be a fight ('cause if there is, they're gonna be a part of it!).

Van does not, however, challenge the PCs to a fight, but rather to a dance. If the PCs refuse the challenge, the surrounding TheoRgs will jeer, and there will be no way to bring Van in. Should they accept, they must nominate one of themselves to face off with the smuggler - the others must watch. The TheoRgs form a circle about the adversaries and start the music.

For this dance, bolts of electricity flicker about at high speeds, but at a definable pattern (imagine DDR, but with pain if you screw up). The electricity is strong enough to blast a PC (or Van) off his feet, or knock him unconscious if he's messed up too many times. The last man standing wins the challenge.

Unfortunately, Van proves to be an able dancer, and the PC will probably have a hard time beating him fairly. Fortunately, in TheoRg culture, sticking out a leg to trip an adversary is just considered good form. The dancing itself is somewhat turn-based - one person dances, the other tries to outdo him, and so forth.

An observant observer, however, may notice what is generating the sparks - a large machine rose from the floor when the dance started. A PC with some hacking or electrical skills may be able to alter the rhythms of the machine, speeding up or slowing down the electricity almost at will, which could prove just the advantage the dancer needs. Fortunately, the TheoRgs are too busy watching the dance to notice, as long as no big fuss is made.

Should Van win, he takes a few moments to bask in adulation, and it all goes straight to his head, so if another PC challenges him to a second match, he's liable to accept, although it will be a different dance. If all the PCs are knocked out, they're thrown from the club into the gutter (probably after being robbed), and Van gets some new bodyguards. If Van goes down, then the PCs can bring him in.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **Here he is, sir**

Actually taking Van to a Federation (or whatever) outpost could prove difficult, as he'll try to escape / convince locals he's being kidnapped / be a jerk.

Nonetheless, should the PCs get him back, they receive a hefty bounty, as well as the knowledge that they've made the galaxy a cleaner place. And of course, they may even be able to negotiate a larger reward.

In addition, should the PCs ever desire to go back to The Sledge, they may be treated to a free drink. Maybe.



## **The Pyramid**

By Jeremy Coffey

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The sides of the pyramid can be inclined like an Egyptian style pyramid, or stepped like a Ziggurat. Either way, there is no easy way for the PCs to enter the pyramid as the entrance is halfway up on one side. Any steps have long since crumbled into rubble, and the PC's must climb to reach the entrance. For extra fun, they must also battle creatures relevant to the environment along the way (in the desert, several dog-sized scorpions skitter and clack their pincers; in the jungle, an overgrown plant creature blocks the entranceway; on the plains, giant crows or eagles; in a polar region, a snowy leopard prowls on a ledge).

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The PCs reach the entrance, but must now get inside. A guardian spirit resides here. Two glowing red eyes shine forth to challenge the PCs before they can continue. The PCs must convince the guardian of their worthiness to enter (offering proof of their faith, making a sacrifice, answering a riddle). Alternately, the guardian gives the PCs a clue as to how to enter, or how to avoid the trap. For example, the guardian tells the PCs that only those who would dare bring fire to the sun may pass. A secret door opens only if smoke enters a small crack in the ceiling above a mural of the sun shining on the surrounding area. Hopefully, the PCs have a torch or can start a fire.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The PCs enter and walk down an inclined tunnel. Add descriptions to indicate that no one had walked this hallway for ages. Add side rooms and encounters as required (the PCs probably expect mummies or undead in the pyramid, so the GM may wish to avoid using those creatures for these encounters). The hallway ends at a door. The PCs enter a room that appears to have been a burial room. A sarcophagus is present, but the tomb has been raided. Thieves had been here and ransacked this room—no treasure left for the PCs. Evidence of some struggle is here, perhaps the corpse of a giant scarab beetle or one of the thieves. A shaft had been dug from the opposite side of the pyramid (or from another entrance higher up on the pyramid), and the rope and tack that the thieves used is still there. Perhaps the thieves are just leaving, perhaps they left long ago. Do the PCs follow that trail? A secret door behind the sarcophagus leads to the real treasure room.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The real treasure room is guarded by two (or as many as needed) living statues or golems. They are similar to Anubis, the Egyptian jackal-headed god of the dead. However, the animal head for each is environmentally correct (the plains could have bison-head guardians, the polar region, walrus heads, and so on). The statues can be made from stone or ice or other material as appropriate.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

If PCs survive, they claim the treasure – an artifact, lots of gold and jewels, or secret knowledge. Perhaps they must fight the tomb raiders from the false treasure room as they exit the pyramid, or perhaps they are now cursed for having violated this inner sanctum.



### The Masters of Evil

By David J Rowe

#### Usage

The Masters of Evil is designed to provide a generic crypt location with a background story that GMs can drop into a campaign at anytime to meet the need for an adventure, to lengthen and adventure, or to provide a reason for a strange ambush in the middle of the wilderness. GMs can also recycle maps because the back story supports that these crypts are fairly standard in design and scattered throughout the land. The back story is rich enough that a GM could even use the crypts as a significant game arc or even a full campaign.

#### Overall GM Backstory

The crypts were constructed by a group of necromancers for a number of purposes. They serve as small forts or bases where the necromancers have various collections of undead. The undead are ferried between these holding locations. They serve as laboratories where the necromancers set up various long term experiments. They serve as traps to lure adventures because adventures are usually a source of good material for making more powerful undead and often have valuable magical items. They serve as repositories of information and secret meeting houses. Often a collection of the crypts were created in an area prior to the launching of a battle to allow the numbers of undead to secretly build up.

#### Reason for Adventurers to Encounter

The crypts were built all over the place in basements of homes and churches. They were built in the wilderness and they were constructed inside of existing dungeons and monster lairs. If a GM needs a location for a treasure map or to extend an existing adventure then the crypts serve a perfect purpose. If adventurers follow a wrong lead (like a merchant that the players think is too shifty) then the crypt can provide an instant excuse for the behaviour. It also allows GMs to explain why players might find a group of ghouls guarding a bridge when the Ranger decides to track where the ghouls came from. When players have encountered a couple of the crypts and ask questions, the back story is provided to allow the GM with enough information to keep the players seeking the answers for mysteries throughout much their adventuring life including the possibility of a major boss at the end of the arc or campaign. Evil villains have been known to also try to deal with pesky adventurers by leaking information of the existence of a crypt to try and weaken or rid them of the adventurers.

#### General Description

The crypts were constructed mostly over the last 150 years of the campaign world. During that time some have been discovered and raided. Some have had new owners take up residence and some have been cleared and refurbished by the original masters. One of the trade marks of the crypts is a large round sealing stone or capstone that is usually 12 feet (4m) in diameter. The sealing stone radiates a mild form of abjuration magic. The area beyond is usually an entrance area with a guardian force. After this there is usually some form of puzzle or trap based around the usage of undead and illusions or facades. The next section is usually some form of environmental barrier mixed with some more fierce guardians. The next area is usually the burial crypt where

various corpses or powerful undead are stored. The last area is usually a laboratory or storage area of various items and lore.

## Rumours and Knowledge

The following is a list of bits of information in order from the most general and widely known to the most obscure bits of information that will often involve some adventuring and effort to gain. GMs will notice that the term 'The Masters of Evil' goes through a variety of different names. This reflects the various sources using their personal choice of name for the group. It also helps sow some confusion among players when they learn something if the information they are learning is connected to same group that they are originally investigating. It will also be noted that the later pieces of information may change or be different from earlier pieces of information. Again, this is intended to reflect that what the common person might know or think they know may be considerably different from the truth. The information that is at the bottom of the list should be considered the most accurate information.

- 'The Masters of Evil'? I think they died out a long time ago back when my grandpa was alive.
- 'The Masters of Evil'? No one has seen or heard from them in at least thirty years. I think some adventures killed them.
- 'The Lords of Evil'? Sure, some adventures keep running into their old crypts but no one has been attacked by any of them for ten years. There was a big battle and some paladins took care of it.
- 'The Lords of Evil'? Yeah, some of them attacked a castle around a decade ago and some clerics and paladins took care of it. I doubt there are any left after that except for some scattered crypts.
- 'The Masters of Death'? They were a group of necromancers with desire to rule the world. Never succeeded much though they have been a constant nuisance over the last 100 years.
- 'The Five Masters of Death'? They were a group of five necromancers that were loosely affiliated. They had some plan to raise up an army of undead and rule the world. They built a number of crypts as homes for themselves and their minions.
- 'The Five Masters of Evil'? There were five of them necromancers and they all worked together at one point building undead and building crypts. You can find the things scattered all over the place. I have reports of them showing up in the basements of merchants, temples, castles, and inside the lairs of monsters. No one really knows for sure how many their might be.
- 'The Five'? Sure, I know of them. Though my studies suggest that there were really six. I think they use the number five to confuse people. The crypts? Sure, you can find some valuable stuff in them but many are just plain traps. Unhallowed ground with booby traps for the foolish. If you want to live a long life then you will stay away from those things.
- 'The Five'? Sure there is speculation of a sixth. Same as there is speculation that the group is more than a hundred years old. It is just speculation. I have heard though that one of the five is a vampire and another is lich. The five were known for taking common undead and rigging them with all sorts of traps.
- 'The Masters'? Sure, I have heard of them. They are a constant problem though they are pretty quiet on their business. My studies show there were five of them but nothing I have seen shows they used the number five in reference to who they were. Evidently, they were originally friends but something changed them. They now are often at odds with each other.
- 'The Apprentices'? Sure, people might call them masters or lords but everything shows that they are apprentices of another. I don't know that persons name but that person was evidently the one that taught the apprentices how to use traps, illusions, and other things to make undead into walking bombs. The real master must have been some genius.
- 'The Apprentices'? Yeah, they once all were together as a group of five apprentices serving a powerful necromancer. Then the necromancer died and the apprentices started to have a falling out. That was around a hundred years ago and the apprentices have been fighting since.

- 'The Masters'? Yeah, they were a group of apprentices but after they killed their teacher, they started calling themselves 'The Masters'. It seems that the apprentices' teacher made some deal with them to give them eternal life after the teacher died. Well, the apprentices decided not to wait and choose to hurry up the process and kill their teacher.
- 'The Masters'? Yeah, around a hundred years ago the apprentices were offered a deal of eternal life after their teacher died. The apprentices after signing the contract granting them the eternal life then decided to band together and kill their teacher. Not only did they kill their master, they cut him into five pieces. At least that is how the story goes.
- 'The Masters'? Of course, they use the <abyssal or game equivalent> when they say the name. I think they make it sounds better but it translates well enough to 'The Masters' though I have heard others translate it as 'The Lords'. Unfortunately, it results in some confusion when people discuss the subject that don't know the source of the word. Hell, yeah the apprentices killed their teacher. They had a contract promising them an extra hundred years of life after their teacher died. I guess that the teacher thought the apprentices would be motivated to thus keep their teacher alive for as long as possible because the hundred years did not start till after the teacher died. Yeah, the apprentices cut their teacher into five sections. They were afraid of letting any one of them have the full body and possibly turning their former teacher into some form of powerful undead.
- 'The Masters'? Of course you should use <abyssal or game equivalent> to pronounce the name. The sections of their teacher were a head with upper torso, a right arm, a left arm, a right leg, and a left with lower torso. The teacher evidently had the apprentices agree to sell something in exchange for the hundred years.

The following can be learned only from one of the apprentices/masters.

- The contract agreed to give apprentice a hundred years of life after their master died. The contract was in exchange for each apprentices soul. The contract also had a clause that prevents any of the apprentices from directly harming another. This has not stopped the apprentices from using various minions and followers to attempt to harm or thwart the plans of others.

The following can only be learned from one of the various lords that were connected to the teacher or the teacher.

- The master necromancer made a Faustian pact with five different lords of the planes. The teacher sold their soul to five different lords (one Demon, one Devil, one Fire Elemental, one Water Elemental, and one Ancient Planar Dragon). The teacher further sold the soul the five apprentices in a secondary agreement to satisfy the first debt. When the teacher died, the five lords of planes came to collect and realized the problem of deciding which one would collect. They were not pleased but decided to wait the hundred years to collect on the bargain of the apprentices. The teacher has thus been kept in a limbo watched by the five along with the lords watching the apprentices. The lords have thus worked to make sure that none of the apprentices succeed well enough to damage their eventual collection. When the apprentices have been collected, the teacher will return with the powers of a full lich. This though can only occur if the five pieces of the teacher can be brought together. A person could choose to replace a loss limb with any body portion of the teacher and gain in magical power but suffer the problems of intelligent ego battling their will and trying to get all the pieces back together.
- The teacher's true name is Vi'der'owed. Some of the apprentices will refer to the teacher as Vi and most manuscripts will use the term The Teacher.

## Sample Crypt

### Room One: The Entrance and Guardian

The entrance is usually designed as an open area into which several waves of undead can be released. One of the lessons that Vi taught the apprentices was that clerics and paladins only have so many charges of turning ability at a time. Sending a few undead at a time encourages the expenditure of these turning attempts or the adventures usually face the problem of the undead getting into close combat. Another lesson that Vi taught was that undead serve as great delivery vehicles for various weapons and concoctions. Vi also taught that a wire attached to bone like a skull or backbone with a counter weight was a great 'dead man' switch to activate a trap if a particular undead were killed. Often, some of all of these ideas are found in different variations in the guardians of the crypt.

The following is a sample description of a few groups of skeletons that might form different waves. The different waves are triggered and released from stone housings or caskets set into the walls of the entrance. The first wave is likely plain skeletons or zombies because most clerics and paladins will use their turning ability on the first undead that moves against the party. The second wave will have jars of oil in their chests and flasks of alchemist fire in the heads. When the second wave skeletons die, they usually spread oil over anyone in five to ten feet range and then the alchemist fire (incendiary chemicals) ignites the oil. The next wave usually has jars with acid in the skeletons chests; so, that people who use melee weapons will splash acid on the weapons and armour which should degrade their value and function.

Other possibilities for waves and things that can be used. One wave can have jars with a quick hardening glue (tanglefoot bags in DnD) with the following wave having something like scorpions in the jars that spread out on the attackers. Other types of insects and poisonous snakes can also be put in a suspended animation that is triggered when the jars are shattered. The 'dead man' switch attached to skeletons can trigger crossbow bolts to fire or various items from rocks to spears to fall from the ceiling. A zombie could be covered in poisonous needles (just below the skin surface) that are revealed if someone touches it with a bare hand (like a monk punching it) or if the zombie attempts to hug the person forcing the needles to the surface. A skeleton might have a chunk of wood with rot grubs in its chest so that they leap out at the person killing the skeleton.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

The puzzle area is usually a form of trap that often takes advantage of undead to be living gears to make the trap function. Skeletons are given simple instructions that they are able to handle. Undead are not affected by illusions which makes the usage of illusions an effective extra layer of defense or disguises the situation to adventures. Usually, after the entrance area, there is a section of corridors in the crypts where the puzzle trap is located. Vi taught the apprentices that if people mis-read a situation then they will often make mistakes that can give advantage to the undead. Stage dressing is often important in the way things are presented.

The following is one example of what can be done. The corridor is presented with a door at one end and another door is where the adventurers enter. The adventurers enter the corridor and then see dark robed figures with burning eyes marching up through the floor towards them. When the players go forward to deal with the black robed figures, spears come thrusting through the ceiling to attack the adventurers. The black robed figures are skeletons with continual fire spell placed inside the head. The floor has a stairwell in it that the skeletons are walking up. The floor and ceiling are covered with illusionary walls. On a ledge above the 'ceiling' are skeletons with spears that thrust them down to attack the adventurers. Similar ideas to this are to have the skeletons lining the walls behind illusionary walls and then step out to attack when people are part way down the corridor.

Another possibility is the usage of skeletons with bows, crossbows, or footbows hidden behind a thin veneer of wood with a few spy holes. Skeletons are happy to wait decades for the right moment to draw their weapons and fire making it appear that the attack is being triggered by some form of trap. The truth is that the skeletons fire based on what they see. Often, it is again good to have some stage setting like a pattern of colourful stones in the floor or a tangle of wires stretched across the corridor to make the players think that something other than a few undead are attacking them.

One thing Vi did point out to the apprentices that spells like Invisibility Undead could be powerful for avoiding troubles (like guardians and the puzzle section); so, he often encouraged that there should in some crypts be traps where things like the painted tile floor or the wires stretched across the hallway were attached to actual mechanical traps.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

This section usually feature some form of environmental hazard to the living. This is often referred by Vi as the sealing room. It is sometimes straight like a corridor and sometimes it is larger like a room so it is not as easy to locate where the exit might be. The simplest example of this form of room is a room filled entirely with water. Other examples include the room filled with choking smoke or poisonous vapours. The undead require no air to breath so they are immune to such problems. All the apprentices usually have magics that allow them to survive in such environments for extended periods of time. The sealing rooms are also very effective against spell caster who normally need to speak words which is hard to do without opening your mouth. There is also the additional problem of things like scrolls getting soaked in water or precious books and food supplies getting damaged. A further note is that often the water is often stagnant and may be a breeding ground for various diseases which could trouble adventurers after they leave the crypt. Usually inside the sealing area are more undead that are designed to maximize the threat of the environment.

The following is an example of what can be done. Inside the water filled corridor are a number of zombies. Each zombie has a chain with handcuff/clasp that it will attempt to latch onto any adventurers that should brave the waters. It is recommended that the iron chains be in 3e DnD terms a DC 18 (20% chance) to break if a full round action is spent. In 3e DnD a person with a Constitution of 10 can hold their breath for 20 rounds which means that even with a strength of 10 that the person should have a good chance of breaking the chains or another person of breaking the chains. The idea is to make the encounter seem scarier to the players as the idea of being chained underwater will sound terrifying. I would further suggest that at no point could a player have more than two chains attached to them by the zombies (the chains are not long enough for more than that).

Other creatures in the water could be ghouls with paralyzing touch. Large zombified sharks, octopus, and squids can be fearsome creatures to include. More dangerous undead that are non-corporeal could also make an appearance depending on the challenge desired.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

This section is often the most dangerous. The previous sections have been designed to wear away at the player's equipment by getting scrolls soaked, damaging weapons and armour with acid, attacks with poisonous scorpions, using turning attacks at lesser undead, and having attacks from directions that the players might not have expected. This is usually the main crypt where there are potential hordes of undead. Usually, looking into this area people should see potentially twenty to a hundred corpses on shelves dug into the walls or laid out on stone caskets. The potential for trouble should encourage players to almost immediately use their big room clearing magics initially to try and reduce the threat (note: despite the number of corpses, the GM should only use a number at any time to serve as a suitable challenge. The sight of the corpses should power the scene not the actual usage of them). Adventurers should be allowed to go on a bit of a rampage to kill as many of the corpses as they can. This area should be considered unhallowed ground making turning attempts more difficult.

If the players try to ignore the corpses then the GM should start to have a few come to life in a couple of weak waves to get the players to take action in fear that more corpses will come to life. When the players have suitably expended some more of their power and toys, the GM should then reveal what this crypts big villain might be. The threat should be related to the strength of the party with the corpses still popping out of stone coffins or caskets to cause additional headaches for the adventurers. Wraiths, Vampires, Mummies, and other undead make good choices here along with necromancers. Additional things that could be released to increase

the scene would be various swarms of insects that will make vision difficult and provide problems of concentration for people attempting to use spells.

If the adventurers have been hunting the mystery of the Masters of Evil and are of a suitable level, then they may encounter and battle one of the masters in this area. A master of evil should have one or two powerful guardian undead of the vampire or mummy type. Defeat of a master of evil should bring significant rewards to the party in knowledge of the mystery.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

This section is usually a laboratory, storage area, or an archive. The GM may place some particularly strange and hideous creature here like a brain in a jar or a Frankenstein style experiment. Usually these experiments are partially completed but not without risk. If the area is a storage facility then it will contain various body parts of undead (hands of ghouls, fangs of vampires, bandages from mummies) that are meant for transplant into some creature.

Sometimes there are magical items that are meant to be given to the more intelligent undead like magical swords to be given to ghouls or mummies that have been harvested from past adventurers. Sometimes this room may have a former adventurer that is half alive and half undead with portions of their body spliced to various undead or supported by strange magics. Players may face the dilemma of killing the former adventurer or bringing the monster back to civilization.

If there is a library of information and scrolls here, it may contain hints of or maps to the location of other crypts. It may contain plans for launching attacks against other members of the Masters of Evil. There may be plot hints of how the Masters of Evil are providing aid to the current problem that the players are facing (a good way to redirect the players back onto the planned adventure path).

The information may also be time sensitive requiring the players to need to decide to act on it now or miss an opportunity to meet with possible other members in the organization or stop a possible event (like an assassination or kidnapping) from occurring. Some of these events may clearly be attacks by one group of the apprentices against the other giving the players the moral problem of should they get in the middle of events between various masters of evil. Should the players even aid one of the masters of evil.

Last, is the big prize which is the possibility of gaining a piece of Vi. This will present new problems as players may need to question if it is wise to try and attach this body part to themselves (note: do to the five faustian deal Vi made, the body parts can only be destroyed by the most unusual and most powerful of means. They should be treated almost as artifacts for attempts to destroy as simple things like fire will do little to the limbs as will repeated attempts to hack or use acid on them).

If the adventurers gain possession of a limb there will almost certainly be consequences of various groups (from the master that lost the limb, the other masters trying to collect and extra limb, to various kings, clerics, and paladin organizations getting involved if they find out). Each additional limb that the adventurers acquire should increase the situation as the body parts should aim to try and assemble each other. The various lords may also lend a hand in getting the assembly to occur and the apprentices killed (usually in indirect means through intermediaries providing possible information) so they can hurry up the soul collection process.



## Retreat

By Aki Halme

Another 5-room dungeon: manhunt. Rather than have the PCs take the initiative, have the dungeon come after them.

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

**Initial Clash.** - The PCs break away from the enemy and make their getaway. Whether they have been prisoners, or have to get away from an ambush, depends on the campaign.

### Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The path that the PCs take to get away from superior enemy forces determines what they need to do elude their pursuers. Finding a safe place to rest in the wilderness, or perhaps having the people at an inn refrain from turning them in.

### Room Three: Trick or Setback

The rest of the PCs ends abruptly - perhaps a little too early for the spellcasters to have regained their strength, so melee types need to keep the magic types alive so the latter can save the day. Perhaps the PCs were betrayed by their hosts, perhaps the opposition used other tricks to find where the PCs rest.

### Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Fortunately for the PCs, the main force of the enemy is absent, but a sizable group remains for the PCs to fight.

### Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The enemy force includes important targets such as spell casters or nobles, the ones who managed to track the PCs to their resting place. As such, there are good news - a victory against this foe is both feasible and likely to have a lasting effect. Also, the enemy has pursued the PCs for quite some time so they won't be as fresh as the PCs will. The bad news of course are that such targets are likely to fight smart and have useful equipment to hurt the PCs with, and the PCs will be wounded to begin with, barring massive investment in expensive and immediate limited-number-of-uses healing.



## Tomb of the Colossus

By Bryan Smart

### Room One: Entrance and Guardian

Trekking into a sandstorm-ridden desert following a map that leads them to the legendary Tomb of the Colossus, the players must deal with a desert storm that can scour flesh from bone. The storm forces players to work together to construct a shelter despite winds blowing materials away and the biting desert sand getting in their eyes. Failure could result in exhaustion, sickness, blindness, wounds, and even death.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The adventurers arrive at the location of the tomb designated on the map to find a partially weathered obelisk. Language specialists will be able to make out hieroglyphics symbolizing life, earth, height, death, depth, and sky carved on the length of the obelisk. You may want to give them these hieroglyphics in a mixed-up order, as touching the glyphs (or runes, if you prefer) in the order listed here opens the tomb. Failures could result in the summoning of a desert monster or pest of the gamemaster's choice – a burrowing scorpion (giant or small) would be a good option.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

When the hieroglyphs are pushed in the correct order, a tremor shakes the desert and a crack opens in the top of the buried tomb upon which the adventurers are standing. The sands shift, pouring into the tomb below, and the adventurers may very well be taken with them. Only quick thinking or quick reflexes (grabbing onto the obelisk, jumping or running away from the area where terrain is being affected) can save players from plummeting into the depths of the tomb below. The drop to the floor of the tomb is over 120 feet. Gamemasters who have characters who fall, but don't want them dying, can have them drop onto the hand of the colossus statue that is a mere 40 feet below the opening.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle or Conflict

The opening reveals the tomb below. Standing at the head of a huge (60 feet long and 20 feet wide) sarcophagus is a standing statue of a giant that rises 100 feet above the floor. Approximately 40 feet below the opening, the statue's hand is extended, palm upward. This hand-platform allows adventurers to climb from the hole in the ceiling to the platform of the extended hand, then down onto the top of the sarcophagus below. When the first adventurer alights on the lid of the sarcophagus, a tremor shakes the tomb as the lid slides open, revealing the mummified colossus himself. A climactic battle ensues.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The greatest treasure here is the colossus's ankh signet ring. The ring is made from gold and jade, and measures a good three feet in diameter. An evil djinni enslaved within the ring makes this not only an item of great monetary worth, but also of great magical power. The characters' current antagonist will stop at nothing to gain possession of this artifact. The ring itself brings other dangers as well – the master could become the slave if the djinni's influence upon the possessor's mind becomes too strong. The ring could also have political or cultural significance to the surrounding tribes or countries, causing upheaval or other ramifications across the land.

Many colossus-sized treasures may be found in the tomb aside from the ring. Unfortunately, removal of other large treasure could be a challenge unto itself in such a remote area and over such difficult terrain.



## Too Many in the Tomb

By John Moseman

The player characters have discovered the location of an old lord's tomb that holds some item that interests them. This might be a magical item, a book that contains knowledge that the PCs need, or a necessary component for some important spell or ritual. They have discovered the location of the tomb, a cryptic message, and a warning that any who disturb the treasures in the tomb will have the dead rise up against them.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The entrance to Room 1, and therefore the rest of the tomb, is a thick stone door with various creatures and symbols carved into the stone. Closer examination will reveal that each carving can be pressed into the door slightly, although it will only stay depressed as long as it is held down. Three of these carvings match elements mentioned in the cryptic message that was found along with the location. (“The moon shall shine upon the lion and the lamb.”) Alternatively, a difficult search can determine that these three carvings seem different from the rest. If all three carvings are held down, the heavy stone door will slowly open. After one minute, the door will close again unless blocked; the door can be opened from inside simply by pressing the sole engraving on the inside of the door, a carving of the lord’s crest. Beyond the door is a room with faded murals on the wall depicting the heroic deeds of the entombed lord. Another doorway, at the far end of one of the side walls, leads on to Room 2.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Room 2 is a long hall; there is a single door visible on the far side, with what looks like a large stone statue standing near it. When anyone enters the room, the statue raises its head and declares in a loud booming voice, “Speak the word or meet your doom!” Unfortunately for the party, they have no way of knowing the password. The stone guardian then attacks all intruders in the room until it is destroyed or all intruders are gone. The guardian will not leave the room that it guards, so if the characters retreat into the first room, they will be safe until they reenter. Likewise, if the characters manage to get past the guardian somehow, it will not pursue into the next room. After one minute passes with no intruders in the room, the guardian will return to its original place and wait until activated again.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Room 3 holds several stone pedestals, each adorned with a metal plaque; on the other side of the room is a sturdy wooden door, which is locked. The plaques identify each pedestal as the place for an important object; the plaque on the central pedestal has the name of the item the PCs are seeking. Unfortunately for them, all of the pedestals are empty. A careful examination will reveal that the items were removed recently, and a search of moderate difficulty will find tracks leading up to the locked door. Any additional information the tracker can gain about number, size, etc. of the individuals who made the tracks will match the occupants of the next room.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

A short hallway leads to Room 4, which holds the opened stone casket of the person who was buried here. Dismembered pieces of what were once undead warriors lie on the floor, and behind the stone casket are the tomb robbers who the PCs have seen evidence of, looking very much alive and pointing weapons at the party. When the rival party heard the sound of the stone guardian in Room 2, they knew that someone might be coming. One of them snuck back and closed and locked the door to Room 3, and then all of them set in to wait. If the party was noisy in Room 3, such as by breaking down the door, the rival party will have made preparations for immediate combat. If the party was quiet enough, on the other hand, the rival party may be unsure of the exact position of the PCs, causing them to wait on using any effects with short duration until combat begins. .

As for the rivals themselves, if the PCs have any rivals from previous adventures, they can be used as the occupants of Room 4. The rivals can be either previously encountered individuals or members of a group that

the party has fought or competed against before. If the party doesn't have any appropriate rivals, then the occupants can simply be treasure hunters who picked a bad time to try robbing this particular tomb. Established rivals will either attack immediately or attempt to parlay depending on their history with the party. If they have no history with the party, they will at first assume that the party is hostile, but may be open to negotiations if the party proposes a cease-fire. The treasure hunters won't let the party just take the treasure that they've "acquired" from the tomb, but may be willing to trade for the item the party came looking for. In addition to appropriate equipment (including whatever thieving or magical means the rivals used to open the locked door) the rivals also have sacks containing the treasures from Room 3, an ornate sword and suit of armor taken from the body in the stone casket, and a set of notes that include the password for the stone guardian in Room 2. (The notes may also include an explanation of how the rivals got the password when the PCs didn't.)

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Room 5 is actually a return to the first room in the tomb. As soon as anyone takes any treasures from Room 3 or Room 4 into the first room, undead emerge from the mural-covered walls to attack any living creatures they can find, giving preference to those who are carrying treasures from the tomb. (On the bright side, any characters who came prepared to fight undead will finally get their chance.) Although the characters can try to escape through the door to the outside, the slow opening of the heavy stone door will give the undead at least some time to attack. If the rivals from Room 4 are still alive at this point, their reaction will depend on their current attitude towards the party. The rivals may fight alongside the party, they may try to escape, or they may attempt to stay out of the way and let the undead and the party fight it out, hoping that whoever wins is weak enough that the rivals can finish the winners off. Of course, if the rivals leave with some of the treasure first, they will trigger the attack of undead, and the party will have to choose how to intervene.



## **Minaret of the Smoking Tankard**

By Michael Sinclair

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

#### **The Courtyard**

Approaching the Minaret of the Smoking Tankard, players find themselves in a seemingly empty and desolate courtyard. Ahead of them is the Minaret, a path encircling its base. No discernible entrance can be found. Scaling the structure is not an option; it is built in such a way that the feat is virtually impossible and is also protected by enchantments. Gaining entrance requires knowledge of the door's exact location. This knowledge is contained within the Ruby Orb of Memories. The Orb's physical presence is also required.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

#### **Outer Ring Room**

Once inside the Minaret, players are confronted by a second wall. This time the doors are visible. In fact, there are as many doors as there are party members, plus one extra. The problem is that each door must be opened simultaneously. If one remains closed, the Minaret becomes "locked down"; outer exit is sealed preventing escape, inner chambers are literally filled with sand, effectively trapping players inside indefinitely. To proceed, the players are going to need to find a local to cooperate and open the final door.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

### Inner Chamber Room

After passing through the doors, the players will find themselves at the base of a spiral staircase. Unlucky for them, the local they found actually turns out to be a protector of the Ruby Orb of Memories and so recognizes the players as trespassers. Acting as though he knows nothing of this, the local attempts to trigger a silent alarm of sorts. If successful, the journey may not be as easy as they would have hoped....

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

### Stairway up the Shaft

Regardless of whether or not the local was successful in their attempt to trigger the alarm, the party will find themselves facing a colony of bats looking to escape the tower. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, these bats will be very likely to knock the players from the staircase several stories up. A mage with fiery spells would come in handy here, or perhaps enough swords can cut these flying mammals from their path.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

### Upper Chamber Room

If the local was successful in triggering the alarm, the chamber they find themselves in at the top of the stairs will be alive with ghastly beasts, summoned from the depths of time. They may be without souls, but they are not without wit. Should the local not have made an escape already, they can be used as cannon fodder for the attack. Defeat is easiest achieved through proper use of the Ruby Orb. Perhaps it can be used to recall the beasts, or maybe used to focus arcane magic offensively.

After defeating the last of the guards, the players find themselves standing before a pedestal. Upon the pedestal and protected by a glass dome is an elegantly designed tankard. Myths speak of its bottomlessness, but its true power lies in its ability to infuse any common ale with powers any ruler would kill for. To keep it for their gain, or to sell it for limitless wealth, that is the question.



## The Witchwood

By H L

A somewhat stereotypical medieval fantasy adventure, with a bit of a twist. If the name Witchwood is too cheesy for your group, Morichthonius Wood is a suggested alternative. (Latin-derived name meaning 'death from under the ground.')

Everything isn't in exactly the same order as in the guidelines, but it's all there.

Magic forests are common in fantasy, but where do they get their magic? Legend goes that the potent magic of the Witchwood stems from a bound demon, trapped below the earth long ago. This demon was bound along with a great treasure horde, sacrificed as part of an elaborate ritual to ensure that the demon would remain forever sealed in its prison.

Many centuries later, but still very long ago, an altar was built over the demon's cage, where creatures greedy for some of the demon's power could offer sacrifices. The dark magic from the many sacrifices seeped into the surrounding woods, and now the trees in the center of the forest grow so tightly together that they form a maze.

Stories say that, on the dark and the full of the moon, a path can be opened through the maze by those who know the proper spell.

## **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

### **The Witchwood**

The Witchwood is a vast, sprawling forest. Nearby villagers have many superstitions about it; one particularly strong one is that it is very unlucky to enter the forest on the full or the new moon. Villagers lock their doors on such nights, rarely even venturing from their homes. Odd creatures are often sighted on the fringes of the forest; the deeper one ventures, the more powerful and more dangerous the inhabitants become. Some creatures within the forest are friendly, but most are indifferent or hostile. Even to those unafraid of a fight, the forest is a spooky place, glimmering with a perpetual twilight, and filled with the song of strange birds. Even at midnight, the birdsong does not cease - however, no birds are visible in the forest, nor are any other typical woodland creatures. Many stories abound about the source of the eerie songs - who knows if any are true?

The maze in the center of the forest is not difficult to find. However, it is nearly impossible to enter it without the proper spell. This spell may be inscribed on a stone somewhere in the forest in the form of a riddle, or perhaps the party already knows the spell. If not, some of the friendly creatures within the forest know the spell, and will help, for a suitable reward. An unfriendly creature might even be tricked into revealing the spell.

If the spell is performed at the entrance to the maze, during the middle third of the night on a full or dark moon, a pathway will open straight through the maze.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

### **The Glade**

At the center of the maze is a glade, in which is a large, elaborate, bloodstained altar. Surrounding the altar are strange, warped creatures who attack the party. These creatures appear humanoid, and are dressed in human clothing, but possess some demonic features. There may also be a large wolf or bear. When a fight takes place near the altar, any blood spilled directly on the altar enhances the creatures in a way that is associated with the character or creature whose blood was spilled. The creatures can be lured away from the altar - in fact, some may try to escape the glade altogether.

Upon closer examination of the bodies, the creatures will be revealed to be carrying things usually associated with adventurers, such as a map, gold, spell scrolls, a holy symbol, and maybe even enchanted weapons. Some of the items and clothes possessed by the creatures seem to be very, very old. If one of the creatures was a bear or wolf, the body will transform back into a humanoid after death.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

### **The Guardian**

Once the glade has been cleared of enemies, the guardian spirit of the altar will appear. It will demand to know why the party is worthy to brave the might of the demon and win the treasures concealed beneath the altar. Depending on the party make-up, they may prove this via righteousness, cleverness, wisdom, skill, musical talent, or other relevant means. There may even be an individual challenge for each party member depending on class.

If the party fails to satisfy the guardian, it can resurrect any dead creature whose blood is upon the altar, no matter how old that blood may be (and including any possible dead party members). If the party defeats several of the guardian's creatures, the guardian may change its mind; alternately, it may decide that the party is not worth continuing to expend its resources, and vanish.

Once the guardian is convinced that the party is worthy, the altar will split into several parts, which move aside to reveal a ladder into a hidden cave. If the party cannot get the guardian to cooperate, this same effect can be achieved by sacrificing the bodies of the slain creatures, and possibly some of the treasure, on the altar. This can be discovered by reading these instructions in any one of several ancient, arcane languages inscribed on the altar.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

### **The Cavern**

In the very center of the cavern is the demon, who actually turns out to be a demoness. She is bound in magical chains, and will plead with the party to free her. This can be done simply by touching the chains and willing them to vanish. If the party does intentionally free the demoness, the guardian of the altar will appear, enraged, and the battle will become a three-way melee with the demoness and guardian attacking both each other and the party. The guardian cannot resurrect creatures while in the demoness' domain, but it itself is a formidable opponent. If the party defeats the demoness in this way, all of the treasure will be available - however, some of the treasure may be destroyed during the battle, as it will not be protected.

If the party tries to attack the demoness while she is chained, portions of the treasure will be destroyed, commensurate with how much of the chains are destroyed. The chains will be completely destroyed before the demoness is slain; however, she will be significantly weakened.

If the party ignores the demoness, they will quickly notice the treasure stacked about the room, in piles marking the cardinal points of concentric circles. Each stack is covered with a translucent magical 'bubble.' These bubbles can be destroyed simply by touching them, but may deal a very small amount of the damage to the creature who does so. Each bubble that is broken weakens the binding on the demoness; the more treasure the party removes, the stronger the demoness will be. The demoness will probably not mention this fact. The demoness may elect to pretend to still be trapped until a significant amount of the binding is broken, or she may attack as soon as she is able. If any unbroken bubbles are bumped into by the party in the course of the fight, they will break, further strengthening the demoness. The demoness herself cannot harm the bubbles, and because of this, they make adequate shields against any area attacks she may employ.

If the party discovers that they are unable to overcome the demoness, there may be a method to re-dedicate the treasure and strengthen the seal. This will weaken the demoness. However, any treasure that remains sealed when the demoness is slain will vanish. The difficulty of the encounter is thus dependent on the party's greed.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

### **The Aftermath**

The pathway through the maze is only open while the moon, shadowed or full, is high in the sky. The party must quickly haul the treasure out of the cavern and escape the maze before the path closes, or else face the fate of the former adventurers they slew on the way in. To complicate things, the altar guardian is actually bound, not to the altar, but to the demoness - and now, to the treasure.

Depending on the party's previous actions, this may be a help or a hindrance in leaving the woods. Perhaps the party will be sympathetic to the guardian, and vow to help free it from the treasure. Alternately, the angry guardian may act as a curse on the treasure, which must be removed before any of the items can safely be used. The guardian may even impede the party's attempts to make it safely out of the maze. If there is an interesting or surprising story behind the demoness's original imprisonment, the guardian may reveal it, prompting further questing on the part of the party.

Now that the demoness is gone, the Witchwood may begin to change. Perhaps the magic fades, or perhaps it simply becomes friendlier. Or maybe the demoness was never actually the source of the magic in the first place, and there are other magical treasures to be found in the woods.



## **The Tomb of Three Brothers**

By Jake Sorensen

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

This is the entrance to the tomb of three brothers, princes who all killed each other before any could inherit the throne of their kingdom, which quickly fell apart afterward. The solid stone door will open if the names of the three brothers are said in order from oldest to youngest, or by using a key found in the lair of a nearby monster, such as a giant bear.

The names of the brothers could have been learned through research in a large-sized library, or the recovery of a history book from a treasure trove the characters recently plundered. If desired, the relative ages can be designated in a puzzle such as "Oren poisoned his younger brother Kelleth, and Jarthal only ever attempted to kill his older brother." Maybe the one stating the names stands to receive an electric shock if he or she gets the order wrong.

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

When the characters enter the tomb, the three brothers appear to them. They are cursed to remain in the tomb as spirits until someone chooses one of them to be king and coronates their skeleton in the burial chamber. They promise that the characters can have the treasure buried with the brothers if they will just coronate one and release them all from undeath. Each one makes a pitch why the characters should coronate him:

Oren did attempt to kill his brothers, but he was oldest and should have had the crown by right. Kelleth was his father's favorite son and claims he was meant to be heir. Jarthal claims to have led the kingdom in successful wars and trade missions and claims the crown by right of his effectiveness at ruling.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

Assuming the characters have chosen one of the brothers already (or the brothers think they know who the characters have chosen), the other two will attempt to prevent the characters from reaching the burial chamber. One will spring a trap on or just ahead of the characters, blocking them from reaching the chamber (or alternatively attempting to kill them by springing the trap on them). The other will activate guardian golems to capture the characters and try to convince them to coronate him.

If the characters can evade the golems, they can make a break for the burial chamber ahead.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Here each of the brothers' corpses sits on a throne, with the crown on a plinth in front of them. Each controls undead servants they employ to hinder (by fighting them) or help (by fighting the other undead servants) the character's attempt to coronate a corpse, depending on whether the characters are trying to coronate them or their brother. If the characters don't even agree on which brother to coronate, this could be even more of a free for all.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

Coronating a corpse only puts two brothers to rest; the one with the crown becomes even more powerful (maybe changed into a vampire – the crown itself could be an artifact called The Crown of the Vampire Kings) and escapes the tomb. What's worse, it's not the brother the characters chose; it's another brother, who had his undead servants swap his corpse with his brothers' while the other two brothers weren't watching.



## **The Wizard's Retreat**

By Jake Sorensen

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The Wizard's Retreat is an extradimensional space kept by a wizard long ago. The space is rumored to contain unimaginable wealth and knowledge, but no one can find it. The players may finally get word that the entrance is the hearth in the wizard's great room. A key command word causes a portal to form in the front of the hearth. Maybe an old friend of the wizard's knows the word and will reveal it if the players chase off a local bandit gang.

Just inside the entrance, there is an anteroom with the walls, floor, and ceiling made from some slightly spongy black material (tire rubber?). A plaque on the wall reads "Enter as ye were born".

### **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Rooms two through four of the extradimensional space are in a strong magnetic field. Any ferrous metal will be strongly attracted to the material that forms the floor and ceiling of the space. It requires great strength to keep hold of any metal, and the players have next to no chance if they are wearing metal armor.

Generally, they'll have to leave their metal weapons and armor to continue.

### **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

The floor and ceiling of this room are matching sets of tiles, mostly gray metal tiles with lots of black onyx or obsidian tiles interspersed. The tiles only cover half the room, and the far half contains what looks like a library.

An old man is sitting in a chair on the far side, staring at something no one sees and not moving at all, even to breathe.

The gray metal tiles are trapped – if someone makes contact with one, a lightning bolt will arc between the tile and its corresponding one on the ceiling, using the player as a channel and causing electrical damage. The players must either fly between the floor and ceiling without touching the metal tiles, or jump from one obsidian/onyx tile to the next.

### **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

The old man is the wizard whose retreat this is, who has been placed in stasis until an electrical discharge happens in the vicinity. When one does (usually with the trapped tiles in the first half of the room), the stasis will end and the wizard, having no knowledge of the condition he was in, will be quite annoyed at having invaders. He will activate two guardian golems (non-metal ones) who will seek to grab players that make it past the tiles and throw them back onto the metal ones. The wizard will also seek to cast spells to destroy the players.

Keep in mind that the players may not have their metal weapons and other combat-valuable metal devices with them, so they may not be able to handle as much of a challenge as normal.

### **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

The room beyond the tiles, and the next room are not in the magnetic field. The treasure should include numerous gold pieces which are actually gold-plated with a ferrous metal inside. Any player carrying a significant number of them into the tiled area to leave the space will be drawn to the floor (or ceiling, if they are closer to it because they are flying). It will be hard not to make contact with the floor or ceiling, thereby touching a metal tile and causing a discharge (and possibly awakening the wizard at this point if they managed to avoid it before).



## **The Shifter** By The Shifter

### **Room One: Entrance and Guardian**

The PCs become aware.. possibly by arcane means, an earlier plot, or maybe they're tipped off.. that a village has been infiltrated by one or more monsters that are able to appear as a villager; maybe a shapeshifter, maybe a creature capable of possessing, perhaps an illusionist or a renegade mage with transmutation powers, perhaps a parasite that is taking over a person, perhaps a person with a magical scroll that permits a single use of a spell to be used for hiding.

Most in the village do not know about the threat. Unfortunately, the PCs lack obvious means to pinpoint the threat. To make this feasible, the monster should lack shapeshift-at-will; whether due to the nature of a natural ability or a lack of suitable components.

## **Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge**

Should the monster learn that it is hunted, it might for example try to isolate and murder a PC, go on a vengeful rampage, cause damage and confusion by arson, poison wells and defile stockpiles - or simply leave the village and start over somewhere else. Since none of those scenarios are in the best interests of the PCs or the village, a discreet search is called for.

## **Room Three: Trick or Setback**

How exactly to monkey-wrench the search depends on the means the PCs use to find the monster, who or what the monster pretends to be, the abilities of the monster, and its nature.

The trick could be that the monster hunt ties into a larger plot, or it could mean repercussions to the PCs. Such a plot might be that the monster has connections.. it could be a spy, or a princess on the run from an arranged marriage or fleeing towards forbidden love, yet finding herself in ever deeper trouble; perhaps enough to become a PC.. or it might have a nest, and is planning to use the village as a food source when its young ones hatch.

If the PCs' search is compromised, the PCs might find themselves harassed, arrested, framed, or otherwise harmed. Or, the monster might have a guise that the PCs are unlikely to think of, such as the old, half-blind dog that usually sleeps the days on the warm stones next to the village well - and hears and sees everything that goes on. Most would probably seek someone hiding as human.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

This depends on whether the PCs succeed in finding the monster before the monster finds them. The one to outdo the other will largely choose the battlefield, and the time of the confrontation. This can be a classic fight, PCs vs monster and possibly its allies (who might be villagers that the PCs are loathe to harm, but who defend the monster due to one reason or another, ranging from money to trickery to a crush to monstrous abilities to blackmail). It can also be an ambush that the monster orchestrated and participates in. Or, it could be an ambush by the monster, but without the monster's direct involvement, planned simply to be a diversion to cover the creature's escape; it could mean be the local militia or church, or even another party of adventurers that was also hunting the monster.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

These depend largely on whom the PCs fought, where, and how. It can mean that the PCs thwart a vile plot, reveal evil-doers and bring the villain to justice, or that a threat is ended in black smelly demon blood and shattered eggs of hatchlings. But it can also mean that the PCs find themselves fleeing from the militia out to arrest or kill or expel them. They can pose a true threat to the party by sheer numbers and better knowledge of the lay of the land and due to some preparations they have in place, but they may also be a weak - yet if the PCs fight and kill them, they are likely to be hunted down by troops sent by whoever owns the village, and this would pose a deadly threat. If the monster manages to escape, it is also likely to be resentful of the PCs, possibly providing a long-term enemy - especially if it had an interest in the village (such as a nest or a plot) that was endangered or destroyed by the meddling Pcs.



# The Braun Castle

By Monstah

For a medieval low-fantasy setting (low fantasy for greater impact ; ).

## Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The Braun Castle is guarded by fear. Sitting on a hilltop, overlooking a small farmer village and surrounded by dark woods, the Castle is indeed a fearsome look. It is surrounded by legends, and players should hear the most unusual and unsettling accounts. Some say it is deserted and haunted; others, that it is inhabited by the last descendants of a long lost noble bloodline.

Should the players show intention of visiting it, the locals will try everything to persuade them, and give them all kinds of (useless) protection against its evils (think of Jonathan Harker and his trip to Castle Dracula).

Getting away from the locals and near the castle shouldn't make the situation better. Climate is hard, and the nights filled with wolf howls to keep the players from sleeping - or was that a child crying? Is this mud they're stepping on? - It looks more like blood.

## Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

So the players have faced their demons and reached the tall dark walls of the castle. How should they get in? The castle does seem inhabited; from this close one can hear chatter inside, and sometimes candlelight is seen flickering off some window. Should the players find someone from within, they could get invited, or they might try their foot in the door and face some consequences.

Main problem in getting invited is finding someone to do the invitation. No one has ever been seen getting in or out of the castle, hence the legends of it being deserted. Actually, there are very few accounts of people getting out at night - but those weren't really people, they say. Maybe that sinister character who's been roaming town past few nights knows something - ?

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

Once inside the castle, the players will find the (few) Brauns very hospitable, yet sinister in their fashion (again, think of Harker and Dracula). In fact, the players could never say no to the invitation to sleep inside the castle, even if they tried to - they're trapped.

The players will spend days fulfilling their hosts' hunger of news from the outside world. Should some of them show some occult or otherwise forbidden knowledge, they will see sparkles of satisfaction on the eyes of the Braun family as they ask about everything they can.

After awhile, the players might try to force their way out, and will find that the castle was build to be harder to get out than to get in. Its tall walls overlooking sharp hills, its thick wooden walls barred with iron, and the constant howls of wolves outside are reminders that there is a reason why people shun the castle so much. And the Brauns within - as time passes, their company should feel always more sinister.

## **Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict**

Should the players explore enough, they will soon find the dungeons beneath the castle. And what dungeons - in fact, they are much, much bigger than the castle itself. Stretching miles underground, this Lovecraftian cave complex is dark, damp, huge, smelly. The taunt of death is everywhere, until the players actually meet the dead.

Or better, dead-ish. The dungeons are swarming with undead creatures. Some have skin, some bare flesh, some are just a pile of bones. Some look more dead, some almost alive. Some can talk, some can run, some can conjure demons to aid them. Thousands and thousands of things back from the dead populate the underground of the castle, serving as a reminder to why the players should have never come here.

Fighting is no option. They have to run.

## **Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist**

They might notice it from the tombs; or maybe from the clothes that the dead things bear. Or they might witness the Brauns not giving orders to the dead, but actually talking to them. The truth is, the undead aren't an army summoned by the Brauns; they ARE the Brauns. For long has this wizard bloodline raised their own, generation after generation. Some bring back knowledge the living should never have; some return with nothing save hunger for the life left behind. Some become great masters, respected and feared by the others. Some just serve as servers and helpers, carriers of heavy load. In fact, it is even hard to distinguish who is alive from who isn't.

The Brauns never intended for the players to die. Should they, they would probably be brought back anyway. They are, in fact, ancient seekers of knowledge. Generation after generation, the ones brought back have kept alive long lost lores and tales, incantations and recipes, names and Old Gods. They will learn all they can from the players, and will even be willing to share some of their knowledge - but that would taint the players forever, and they shall always remember that they should have never visited the Braun Castle.

**The End**

# Why Like 5 Room Dungeons?

By John Four

This format, or creation method, has a number of advantages:

- Any location. Though I call them 5 Room Dungeons, they actually apply to any location with five or so areas. They don't have to be fantasy or dungeons. They could take the form of a small space craft, a floor in a business tower, a wing of a mansion, a camp site, a neighbourhood.
- Short. Many players dislike long dungeon crawls, and ADD GMs like to switch environments up often. In addition, some players dislike dungeons all together, but will go along with the play if they know it's just a short romp. This helps ease conflicts between play styles and desires.
- Quick to plan. With just five rooms to configure, design is manageable and fast. Next time you are killing time, whip out your notepad and write down ideas for themes, locations, and rooms. Knock off as many designs as you can and choose the best to flesh out when you have more time and to GM next session.
- Easier to polish. Large designs often take so long to complete that game night arrives before you can return to the beginning and do one or more rounds of tweaking and polishing. The design speed of 5 Room Dungeons leaves room most of the time to iterate.
- Easy to move. 5 Room Dungeons can squeeze into many places larger locations and designs can't. If your dungeon goes unused or if you want to pick it up and drop it on a new path the PCs take, it's often easier to do than when wielding a larger crawl.
- Flexible size. They are called 5 Room Dungeons, but this is just a guideline. Feel free to make 3-area locations or 10-cave complexes. The idea works for any small, self-contained area.
- Easy to integrate. A two to four hour dungeon romp quickens flagging campaign and session pacing, and can be squeezed into almost any story thread. It also grants a quick success (or failure) to keep the players engaged. The format is also easy to drop into most settings with minimal consistency issues.

## Room One: Entrance And Guardian

There needs to be a reason why your dungeon hasn't been plundered before or why the PCs are the heroes for the job. A guardian or challenge at the entrance is a good justification why the location remains intact. Also, a guardian sets up early action to capture player interest and energize a session.

### ***Room One challenge ideas:***

- The entrance is trapped.
- The entrance is cleverly hidden.
- The entrance requires a special key, such as a ceremony, command word, or physical object.
- The guardian was deliberately placed to keep intruders out. Examples: a golem, robot, or electric fence.
- The guardian is not indigenous to the dungeon and is a tough creature or force who's made its lair in room one.
- The entrance is hazardous and requires special skills and equipment to bypass. For example: radiation leaks, security clearance, wall of fire.
- Room One is also your opportunity to establish mood and theme to your dungeon, so dress it up with care.

## Room Two: Puzzle Or Roleplaying Challenge

The PCs are victorious over the challenge of the first room and are now presented with a trial that cannot be solved with steel. This keeps problem solvers in your group happy and breaks the action up for good pacing. Make Room Two a puzzle, skill-based, or roleplaying encounter, if possible. Room Two should shine the lime-light on different PCs than Room One, change gameplay up, and offer variety between the challenge at the entrance and the challenge at the end.

Note, if Room One was this type of encounter, then feel free to make Room Two combat-oriented. Room Two should allow for multiple solutions to prevent the game from stalling.

### **Room Two ideas:**

- Magic puzzle, such as a chessboard tile floor with special squares.
- An AI blocks access to the rest of the complex and must be befriended, not fought.
- A buzzer panel for all the apartments, but the person the PCs are looking for has listed themselves under a different name, which can be figured out through previous clues you've dropped.
- A concierge at the front desk must be bluffed or coerced without him raising the alarm.
- A dirt floor crawls with poisonous snakes that will slither out of the way to avoid open flame. (A few might follow at a distance and strike later on.)
- The PCs must convince a bouncer to let them in without confiscating their weapons.

Once you've figured out what Room Two is, try to plant one or more clues in Room One about potential solutions. This ties the adventure together a little tighter, will delight the problem solvers, and can be a back-up for you if the players get stuck.

## Room Three: Trick or Setback

The purpose of this room is to build tension. Do this using a trick, trap, or setback. For example, after defeating a tough monster, and players think they've finally found the treasure and achieved their goal, they learn they've been tricked and the room is a false crypt.

Depending on your game system, use this room to cater to any player or character types not yet served by the first two areas. Alternatively, give your group a double-dose of gameplay that they enjoy the most, such as more combat or roleplaying.

### **Room Three ideas:**

- The PCs rescue a number of prisoners or hostages. However, the victims might be enemies in disguise, are booby-trapped, or create a dilemma as they plead to be escorted back to safety immediately.
- A collapsed structure blocks part of the area. The debris is dangerous and blocks nothing of importance, another trap, or a new threat.
- Contains a one-way exit (the PCs must return and deal with Rooms One and Two again). i.e. Teleport trap, one-way door, 2000 foot water slide trap.
- The PCs finally find the artifact required to defeat the villain, but the artifact is broken, cursed, or has parts missing, and clues reveal a solution lies ahead.
- Believing the object of the quest now lays within easy reach, an NPC companion turns traitor and betrays the PCs.

Another potential payoff for Room Three is to weaken the PCs as build-up to a dramatic struggle in Room Four. It might contain a tough combat encounter, take down a key defense, exhaust an important resource, or make the party susceptible to a certain type of attack.

For example, if Room Four contains a mummy whose secret weakness is fire, then make Room Three a troll lair (or another creature susceptible to fire) so the PCs might be tempted to burn off a lot of their fire magic, oil, and other flammable resources. This would turn a plain old troll battle into a gotcha once the PCs hit Room Four and realize they are out of fire resources.

Don't forget to dress Room Three up with your theme elements.

## Room Four: Climax, Big Battle or Conflict

This room is The Big Show. It's the final combat or conflict encounter of the dungeon. Use all the tactics you can summon to make this encounter memorable and entertaining.

- As always, generate interesting terrain that will impact the battle.
- Start or end with roleplay. Maybe the bad guy needs to stall for time to let PC buffs wear out, to wait for help to arrive, or to stir himself into a rage. Perhaps the combat ends with the bad guy bleeding to death and a few short words can be exchanged, or there are helpless minions or prisoners to roleplay with once the threat is dealt with.
- Give the bad guy unexpected powers, abilities, or equipment.
- Previous rooms might contain warning signals or an alarm, so the bad guy has had time to prepare.
- The bad guy tries to settle things in an unusual way, such as through a wager or a duel.
- The lair is trapped. The bad guy knows what or where to avoid, or has the ability to set off the traps at opportune moments.
- The bad guy reveals The Big Reward and threatens to break it or put it out of the PCs' so reach so they'll never collect it.
- The bad guy has a secret weakness that the PCs figure out how to exploit.
- A variety of PC skills and talents are required to successfully complete the encounter.

## Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Here's your opportunity to change the players' bragging to "we came, we saw, we slipped on a banana peel." Room Five doesn't always represent a complication or point of failure for the PCs, but it can. Room Five doesn't always need to be a physical location either - it can be a twist revealed in Room Four.

Room Five is where your creativity can shine and is often what will make the dungeon different and memorable from the other crawls in your campaigns.

In addition, if you haven't supplied the reward yet for conquering the dungeon, here is a good place to put the object of the quest, chests of loot, or the valuable information the PCs need to save the kingdom.

As accounting tasks take over from recent, thrilling, combat tasks, this would also be a good time to make a campaign or world revelation, or a plot twist. Perhaps the location of the next 5 Room Dungeon is uncovered, along with sufficient motivation to accept the quest. Maybe the true identity of the bad guy is revealed. New clues and information pertaining to a major plot arc might be embedded in the treasure, perhaps sewn into a valuable carpet, drawn in painting, or written on a slip of paper stuffed into a scroll tube or encoded on a data chip.

## ***Room Five ideas:***

- Another guardian awaits in the treasure container.
- A trap that resurrects or renews the challenge from Room Four.
- Bonus treasure is discovered that leads to another adventure, such as a piece of a magic item or a map fragment.
- A rival enters and tries to steal the reward while the PCs are weakened after the big challenge of Room Four.
- The object of the quest/final reward isn't what it seems or has a complication. i.e. The kidnapped king doesn't want to return.
- The quest was a trick. By killing the dungeon's bad guy the PCs have actually helped the campaign villain or a rival. Perhaps the bad guy was actually a good guy under a curse, transformed, or placed into difficult circumstances.
- The bad guy turns out to be a PC's father.
- The true, gruesome meaning behind a national holiday is discovered.
- The source of an alien race's hostility towards others is uncovered, transforming them from villains to sympathetic characters in the story.
- The true meaning of the prophecy or poem that lead the PCs to the dungeon is finally understood, and it's not what the PCs thought.