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Present

# 5 Room Dungeons

## Volume 05

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.

You can download this file, and all other parts in the series as they are released, at [www.strolen.com](http://www.strolen.com) or [www.roleplayingtips.com](http://www.roleplayingtips.com).

Special thanks to manfred/Peter Sidor for editing.

Cheers,  
Johnn Four and Strolen



Thanks to the following sponsors who supplied prizes for the 5 Room Dungeon contest held September 2007:



Errors, omissions, or feedback? Please e-mail [johnn@roleplayingtips.com](mailto:johnn@roleplayingtips.com)



# 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 go 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.

**Variant:** 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 inscribe 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 forces 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, he 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 is 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 Kikkikk'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'tt 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'tt ran the shark appears to have something hanging from his mouth to indicate Klkkikk'tt has been eaten. This shark is actually Klkkikk'tt's occasional companion and is doing Klkkikk'tt a favor (Klkkikk'tt 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.

# 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.