Strolen.com and RoleplayingTips.com
Present

5 Room Dungeons

Volume 10

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 or 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

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 challange?

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 then 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 PCs 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 then 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 sleevings, 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 on 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 fledge 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 beeep beeep beeeeeeep

"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 conversation 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 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 underapreciated 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. Booooom! 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 semisentient 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 side 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 (13ft+) 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 fist 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 door way 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 or piranhas and continues to grow. The door to the next room is simply a chamber door, with a masterful adamantine 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 heart 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 magi 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 them selves.

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.

Why Like 5 Room Dungeons?

By Johnn 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 limelight 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 the 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 bay guys 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.