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Present

5 Room Dungeons

Volume 16

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Special thanks to manfred/Peter Sidor for editing.

Cheers,
John Four and Strolen



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The Sledge

By Dragonlordmax

<http://www.strolen.com/content.php?node=4393>

The TheoRgs are known for being amongst the biggest, toughest, and most generally unpleasant sentients in the galaxy. And this is their nightclub.

Backstory

Coran Van, galactic drug-dealer, smuggler, and general pain to the authorities has been spotted near the TheoRgan nightclub The Sledge. Since TheoRgs don't have much use for illegal substances - they'd need enormous quantities of the stuff - it can be certain that Van's contacting them for the only reason anyone would - he needs bodyguards.

The enormous bounty on the crook's head, preferably still attached to the body, is high enough to tempt every bounty hunter in the sector, but not enough to risk a TheoRg nightclub. This is where the PCs come in. Can they slip in and steal Van out from right under the noses of the aliens he's trying to hire, or will The Sledge prove to be too much for them?

The Building

The Sledge is a large rectangular building with no windows and only two sets of doors - the main entrance and a way in at the back, which is kept locked. Big, neon lights spell out 'The Sledge', for the d is in a state of perpetual flickering.

Despite the lack of an interior view, the building almost seems to glow, and when open (i.e. at night), the loud techno booms from the doors.

Inside, the building is primarily one really big room, with a bar, stage, and dance floor, packed with gyrating TheoRgs. One will note that TheoRg dances tend towards the bizarre - some involve turning down the gravity, some activate the floor's anti-friction covering, others involve spurts of fire or explosive gases. In general, the dance floor should never be boring, and the PCs should hear continual yelps and roars from singed TheoRgs - but never anything that sounds too painful, for TheoRgs are too big to be seriously injured by such minor happenings.

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

Getting Past the Bouncers

In a culture of big, tough humanoids, it seems that the bouncers at the Sledge are among the biggest and toughest. Fortunately for our intrepid bounty hunters, they're not too bright. Still, they know their orders, and don't intend to let anyone (except the various TheoRgs and bands who consistently wander in and out) in without a specific invite from the boss. And since he's inside, there ain't nobody gettin in that way.

Still, there are a number of ways the PCs could sneak in. They could try to unlock the rear door, which is unguarded by well-secured. They could try to bribe the bouncers, disguise themselves as TheoRgs, or just attempt to kill/render unconscious the guards. All of these options are possible, but unlikely to succeed. The TheoRgs make good enough salaries that they aren't overly interested in risking them for a small bribe, and it would prove almost impossible for any normal humanoid to disguise himself as a TheoRg - they're just too big. Similarly, the guns-blazing approach is not going to be particularly effective because the bouncers can probably squash the PCs in any form of combat with one hand behind their back. Not to mention that this would give Van enough warning to escape.

No, what the PCs really want to do is disguise themselves as a band, and a casual inspection will reveal that all the players wandering in and out carry variations of the Whikok, a bizarre combination of a flute and an electric guitar. The simplest ways to get some instruments would be to either go buy them or to mug some musicians. Either method is valid, but Whikoks are sufficiently difficult to manufacture that they carry a hefty pricetag.

Still, the bouncers will let any musicians go in, so once the PCs get some flute-guitars, they can move to Room 2.

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

Information-Gathering

Once inside, the PC's can ditch their instruments (or hang onto them, it's their choice), and try to locate their target. He's much smaller than the TheoRgs, so spotting him will be very difficult. As he's been hanging about for the past few nights, however, many of the TheoRgs know where he is.

Unfortunately, TheoRgs tend to be a bit condescending towards smaller people, and are unlikely to simply tell the PCs where Van can be found. Therefore, the PCs need to try to impress them. Since the primary method of gaining respect in TheoRg culture - wild Mangacar wrestling - is not available here, the secondary method will have to do - dancing.

As mentioned above, TheoRg dancing can be quite involved, and the first dance that begins after the PCs decide that they're going to participate is a friction-less dance. Such dances are performed on repulser-boards - essentially ice skates with jets instead of skates. Boards will be provided.

I leave it up to the PCs to come up with an impressive way of dancing on repulser-boards - they're usually more creative than I am at that sort of thing, anyway.

If the TheoRgs are suitably impressed, they'll point the PCs towards Van, who happens to be in the middle of the dance floor. If they're not impressed, then the PCs will have to find a different group of TheoRgs and try to impress them with a different dance, which I leave up to the GM - I'll try to make a table at the bottom.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

As the PCs make their way across the dance floor towards their target, a new dance starts up, and I do mean up - the gravity is turned off. Suddenly, the air is full of flying TheoRgs, who take up a surprising amount of space. This dance is a long one, and lasts until the PCs get near the center of the dance floor.

While floating, the PCs need to weave their way through the other dancers to get to the center. Of course, some of the TheoRgs are a bit rowdy at this point, and will object to being crashed into. Essentially, this is a 3-D, shifting maze where the walls will try to throttle you if you run into them.

Fortunately, there are other ways through. If the PCs can stay near the floor or ceiling, they'll find it relatively clear. Alternatively, the PCs could try to get the band which is currently playing to slow down the tempo, making the 'maze' simple to solve.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

A Dance with Death

As the PCs near the floor's center, the music dies down and the gravity turns back on. It's not long before the PCs find themselves face-to-face with their target. Unless the PCs are extraordinarily persuasive, Van suspects them to be bounty hunters - he hasn't become one of the most wanted men in the galaxy by being careless.

Van is a clever man, however, and sees in these intruders an opportunity to impress those he hopes to employ, so he loudly accuses them of being bounty hunters, hoping to gather attention. Once he has it, several bouncers come over, waiting to see if there's going to be a fight ('cause if there is, they're gonna be a part of it!).

Van does not, however, challenge the PCs to a fight, but rather to a dance. If the PCs refuse the challenge, the surrounding TheoRgs will jeer, and there will be no way to bring Van in.

Should they accept, they must nominate one of themselves to face off with the smuggler - the others must watch. The TheoRgs form a circle about the adversaries and start the music.

For this dance, bolts of electricity flicker about at high speeds, but at a definable pattern (imagine DDR, but with pain if you screw up). The electricity is strong enough to blast a PC (or Van) off his feet, or knock him unconscious if he's messed up too many times. The last man standing wins the challenge.

Unfortunately, Van proves to be an able dancer, and the PC will probably have a hard time beating him fairly. Fortunately, in TheoRg culture, sticking out a leg to trip an adversary is just considered good form. The dancing itself is somewhat turn-based - one person dances, the other tries to outdo him, and so forth.

An observant observer, however, may notice what is generating the sparks - a large machine rose from the floor when the dance started. A PC with some hacking or electrical skills may be able to alter the rhythms of the machine, speeding up or slowing down the electricity almost at will, which could prove just the advantage the dancer needs. Fortunately, the TheoRgs are too busy watching the dance to notice, as long as no big fuss is made.

Should Van win, he takes a few moments to bask in adulation, and it all goes straight to his head, so if another PC challenges him to a second match, he's liable to accept, although it will be a different dance.

If all the PCs are knocked out, they're thrown from the club into the gutter (probably after being robbed), and Van gets some new bodyguards. If Van goes down, then the PCs can bring him in.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Here he is, sir

Actually taking Van to a Federation (or whatever) outpost could prove difficult, as he'll try to escape / convince locals he's being kidnapped / be a jerk.

Nonetheless, should the PCs get him back, they receive a hefty bounty, as well as the knowledge that they've made the galaxy a cleaner place. And of course, they may even be able to negotiate a larger reward.

In addition, should the PCs ever desire to go back to The Sledge, they may be treated to a free drink. Maybe.



The Pyramid

By Jeremy Coffey

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The sides of the pyramid can be inclined like an Egyptian style pyramid, or stepped like a Ziggurat. Either way, there is no easy way for the PCs to enter the pyramid as the entrance is halfway up on one side. Any steps have long since crumbled into rubble, and the PC's must climb to reach the entrance. For extra fun, they must also battle creatures relevant to the environment along the way (in the desert, several dog-sized scorpions skitter and clack their pincers; in the jungle, an overgrown plant creature blocks the entranceway; on the plains, giant crows or eagles; in a polar region, a snowy leopard prowls on a ledge).

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The PCs reach the entrance, but must now get inside. A guardian spirit resides here. Two glowing red eyes shine forth to challenge the PCs before they can continue. The PCs must convince the guardian of their worthiness to enter (offering proof of their faith, making a sacrifice, answering a riddle). Alternately, the guardian gives the PCs a clue as to how to enter, or how to avoid the trap. For example, the guardian tells the PCs that only those who would dare bring fire to the sun may pass. A secret door opens only if smoke enters a small crack in the ceiling above a mural of the sun shining on the surrounding area. Hopefully, the PCs have a torch or can start a fire.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

The PCs enter and walk down an inclined tunnel. Add descriptions to indicate that no one had walked this hallway for ages. Add side rooms and encounters as required (the PCs probably expect mummies or undead in the pyramid, so the GM may wish to avoid using those creatures for these encounters). The hallway ends at a door. The PCs enter a room that appears to have been a burial room. A sarcophagus is present, but the tomb has been raided. Thieves had been here and ransacked this room—no treasure left for the PCs. Evidence of some struggle is here, perhaps the corpse of a giant scarab beetle or one of the thieves. A shaft had been dug from the opposite side of the pyramid (or from another entrance higher up on the pyramid), and the rope and tack that the thieves used is still there. Perhaps the thieves are just leaving, perhaps they left long ago. Do the PCs follow that trail? A secret door behind the sarcophagus leads to the real treasure room.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The real treasure room is guarded by two (or as many as needed) living statues or golems. They are similar to Anubis, the Egyptian jackal-headed god of the dead. However, the animal head for each is environmentally correct (the plains could have bison-head guardians, the polar region, walrus heads, and so on). The statues can be made from stone or ice or other material as appropriate.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

If PCs survive, they claim the treasure – an artifact, lots of gold and jewels, or secret knowledge. Perhaps they must fight the tomb raiders from the false treasure room as they exit the pyramid, or perhaps they are now cursed for having violated this inner sanctum.



The Masters of Evil

By David J Rowe

Usage

The Masters of Evil is designed to provide a generic crypt location with a background story that GMs can drop into a campaign at anytime to meet the need for an adventure, to lengthen and adventure, or to provide a reason for a strange ambush in the middle of the wilderness. GMs can also recycle maps because the back story supports that these crypts are fairly standard in design and scattered throughout the land. The back story is rich enough that a GM could even use the crypts as a significant game arc or even a full campaign.

Overall GM Backstory

The crypts were constructed by a group of necromancers for a number of purposes. They serve as small forts or bases where the necromancers have various collections of undead. The undead are ferried between these holding locations. They serve as laboratories where the necromancers set up various long term experiments. They serve as traps to lure adventures because adventures are usually a source of good material for making more powerful undead and often have valuable magical items. They serve as repositories of information and secret meeting houses. Often a collection of the crypts were created in an area prior to the launching of a battle to allow the numbers of undead to secretly build up.

Reason for Adventurers to Encounter

The crypts were built all over the place in basements of homes and churches. They were built in the wilderness and they were constructed inside of existing dungeons and monster lairs. If a GM needs a location for a treasure map or to extend an existing adventure then the crypts serve a perfect purpose. If adventurers follow a wrong lead (like a merchant that the players think is too shifty) then the crypt can provide an instant excuse for the behaviour. It also allows GMs to explain why players might find a group of ghouls guarding a bridge when the Ranger decides to track where the ghouls came from. When players have encountered a couple of the crypts and ask questions, the back story is provided to allow the GM with enough information to keep the players seeking the answers for mysteries throughout much their adventuring life including the possibility of a major boss at the end of the arc or campaign. Evil villains have been known to also try to deal with pesky adventurers by leaking information of the existence of a crypt to try and weaken or rid them of the adventurers.

General Description

The crypts were constructed mostly over the last 150 years of the campaign world. During that time some have been discovered and raided. Some have had new owners take up residence and some have been cleared and refurbished by the original masters. One of the trade marks of the crypts is a large round sealing stone or capstone that is usually 12 feet (4m) in diameter. The sealing stone radiates a mild form of abjuration magic. The area beyond is usually an entrance area with a guardian force. After this there is usually some form of puzzle or trap based around the usage of undead and illusions or facades. The next section is usually some form of environmental barrier mixed with some more fierce guardians. The next area is usually the burial crypt where various corpses or powerful undead are stored. The last area is usually a laboratory or storage area of various items and lore.

Rumours and Knowledge

The following is a list of bits of information in order from the most general and widely known to the most obscure bits of information that will often involve some adventuring and effort to gain. GMs will notice that the term 'The Masters of Evil' goes through a variety of different names. This reflects the various sources using their personal choice of name for the group. It also helps sow some confusion among players when

they learn something if the information they are learning is connected to same group that they are originally investigating. It will also be noted that the later pieces of information may change or be different from earlier pieces of information. Again, this is intended to reflect that what the common person might know or think they know may be considerably different from the truth. The information that is at the bottom of the list should be considered the most accurate information.

- 'The Masters of Evil'? I think they died out a long time ago back when my grandpa was alive.
- 'The Masters of Evil'? No one has seen or heard from them in at least thirty years. I think some adventures killed them.
- 'The Lords of Evil'? Sure, some adventures keep running into their old crypts but no one has been attacked by any of them for ten years. There was a big battle and some paladins took care of it.
- 'The Lords of Evil'? Yeah, some of them attacked a castle around a decade ago and some clerics and paladins took care of it. I doubt there are any left after that except for some scattered crypts.
- 'The Masters of Death'? They were a group of necromancers with desire to rule the world. Never succeeded much though they have been a constant nuisance over the last 100 years.
- 'The Five Masters of Death'? They were a group of five necromancers that were loosely affiliated. They had some plan to raise up an army of undead and rule the world. They built a number of crypts as homes for themselves and their minions.
- 'The Five Masters of Evil'? There were five of them necromancers and they all worked together at one point building undead and building crypts. You can find the things scattered all over the place. I have reports of them showing up in the basements of merchants, temples, castles, and inside the lairs of monsters. No one really knows for sure how many their might be.
- 'The Five'? Sure, I know of them. Though my studies suggest that there were really six. I think they use the number five to confuse people. The crypts? Sure, you can find some valuable stuff in them but many are just plain traps. Unhallowed ground with booby traps for the foolish. If you want to live a long life then you will stay away from those things.
- 'The Five'? Sure there is speculation of a sixth. Same as there is speculation that the group is more than a hundred years old. It is just speculation. I have heard though that one of the five is a vampire and another is lich. The five were known for taking common undead and rigging them with all sorts of traps.
- 'The Masters'? Sure, I have heard of them. They are a constant problem though they are pretty quiet on their business. My studies show there were five of them but nothing I have seen shows they used the number five in reference to who they were. Evidently, they were originally friends but something changed them. They now are often at odds with each other.
- 'The Apprentices'? Sure, people might call them masters or lords but everything shows that they are apprentices of another. I don't know that persons name but that person was evidently the one that taught the apprentices how to use traps, illusions, and other things to make undead into walking bombs. The real master must have been some genius.
- 'The Apprentices'? Yeah, they once all were together as a group of five apprentices serving a powerful necromancer. Then the necromancer died and the apprentices started to have a falling out. That was around a hundred years ago and the apprentices have been fighting since.
- 'The Masters'? Yeah, they were a group of apprentices but after they killed their teacher, they started calling themselves 'The Masters'. It seems that the apprentices' teacher made some deal with them to give them eternal life after the teacher died. Well, the apprentices decided not to wait and choose to hurry up the process and kill their teacher.
- 'The Masters'? Yeah, around a hundred years ago the apprentices were offered a deal of eternal life after their teacher died. The apprentices after signing the contract granting them the eternal life then decided to band together and kill their teacher. Not only did they kill their master, they cut him into five pieces. At least that is how the story goes.
- 'The Masters'? Of course, they use the <abysal or game equivalent> when they say the name. I think they make it sounds better but it translates well enough to 'The Masters' though I have heard others translate it as 'The Lords'. Unfortunately, it results in some confusion when people discuss the subject that don't know the source of the word. Hell, yeah the apprentices

killed their teacher. They had a contract promising them an extra hundred years of life after their teacher died. I guess that the teacher thought the apprentices would be motivated to thus keep their teacher alive for as long as possible because the hundred years did not start till after the teacher died. Yeah, the apprentices cut their teacher into five sections. They were afraid of letting any one of them have the full body and possibly turning their former teacher into some form of powerful undead.

- 'The Masters'? Of course you should use <abysal or game equivalent> to pronounce the name. The sections of their teacher were a head with upper torso, a right arm, a left arm, a right leg, and a left with lower torso. The teacher evidently had the apprentices agree to sell something in exchange for the hundred years.

The following can be learned only from one of the apprentices/masters.

- The contract agreed to give apprentice a hundred years of life after their master died. The contract was in exchange for each apprentices soul. The contract also had a clause that prevents any of the apprentices from directly harming another. This has not stopped the apprentices from using various minions and followers to attempt to harm or thwart the plans of others.

The following can only be learned from one of the various lords that were connected to the teacher or the teacher.

- The master necromancer made a faustian pact with five different lords of the planes. The teacher sold their soul to five different lords (one Demon, one Devil, one Fire Elemental, one Water Elemental, and one Ancient Planar Dragon). The teacher further sold the soul the five apprentices in a secondary agreement to satisfy the first debt. When the teacher died, the five lords of planes came to collect and realized the problem of deciding which one would collect. They were not pleased but decided to wait the hundred years to collect on the bargain of the apprentices. The teacher has thus been kept in a limbo watched by the five along with the lords watching the apprentices. The lords have thus worked to make sure that none of the apprentices succeed well enough to damage their eventual collection. When the apprentices have been collected, the teacher will return with the powers of a full lich. This though can only occur if the five pieces of the teacher can be brought together. A person could choose to replace a loss limb with any body portion of the teacher and gain in magical power but suffer the problems of intelligent ego battling their will and trying to get all the pieces back together.
- The teacher's true name is Vi'der'owed. Some of the apprentices will refer to the teacher as Vi and most manuscripts will use the term The Teacher.

Sample Crypt

Room One: The Entrance and Guardian

The entrance is usually designed as an open area into which several waves of undead can be released. One of the lessons that Vi taught the apprentices was that clerics and paladins only have so many charges of turning ability at a time. Sending a few undead at a time encourages the expenditure of these turning attempts or the adventures usually face the problem of the undead getting into close combat. Another lesson that Vi taught was that undead serve as great delivery vehicles for various weapons and concoctions. Vi also taught that a wire attached to bone like a skull or backbone with a counter weight was a great 'dead man' switch to activate a trap if a particular undead were killed. Often, some of all of these ideas are found in different variations in the guardians of the crypt.

The following is a sample description of a few groups of skeletons that might form different waves. The different waves are triggered and released from stone housings or caskets set into the walls of the entrance. The first wave is likely plain skeletons or zombies because most clerics and paladins will use their turning ability on the first undead that moves against the party. The second wave will have jars of oil in their chests and flasks of alchemist fire in the heads. When the second wave skeletons die, they usually spread oil over anyone in five to ten feet range and then the alchemist fire (incendiary chemicals) ignites the oil. The next wave usually has jars with acid in the skeletons chests; so, that people who use melee weapons will splash acid on the weapons and armour which should degrade their value and function.

Other possibilities for waves and things that can be used. One wave can have jars with a quick hardening glue (tanglefoot bags in DnD) with the following wave having something like scorpions in the jars that spread out on the attackers. Other types of insects and poisonous snakes can also be put in a suspended animation that is triggered when the jars are shattered. The 'dead man' switch attached to skeletons can trigger crossbow bolts to fire or various items from rocks to spears to fall from the ceiling. A zombie could be covered in poisonous needles (just below the skin surface) that are revealed if someone touches it with a bare hand (like a monk punching it) or if the zombie attempts to hug the person forcing the needles to the surface. A skeleton might have a chunk of wood with rot grubs in its chest so that they leap out at the person killing the skeleton.

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

The puzzle area is usually a form of trap that often takes advantage of undead to be living gears to make the trap function. Skeletons are given simple instructions that they are able to handle. Undead are not affected by illusions which makes the usage of illusions an effective extra layer of defense or disguises the situation to adventures. Usually, after the entrance area, there is a section of corridors in the crypts where the puzzle trap is located. Vi taught the apprentices that if people mis-read a situation then they will often make mistakes that can give advantage to the undead. Stage dressing is often important in the way things are presented.

The following is one example of what can be done. The corridor is presented with a door at one end and another door is where the adventurers enter. The adventurers enter the corridor and then see dark robed figures with burning eyes marching up through the floor towards them. When the players go forward to deal with the black robed figures, spears come thrusting through the ceiling to attack the adventurers. The black robed figures are skeletons with continual fire spell placed inside the head. The floor has a stairwell in it that the skeletons are walking up. The floor and ceiling are covered with illusionary walls. On a ledge above the 'ceiling' are skeletons with spears that thrust them down to attack the adventurers. Similar ideas to this are to have the skeletons lining the walls behind illusionary walls and then step out to attack when people are part way down the corridor.

Another possibility is the usage of skeletons with bows, crossbows, or footbows hidden behind a thin veneer of wood with a few spy holes. Skeletons are happy to wait decades for the right moment to draw their weapons and fire making it appear that the attack is being triggered by some form of trap. The truth is that the skeletons fire based on what they see. Often, it is again good to have some stage setting like a pattern of colourful stones in the floor or a tangle of wires stretched across the corridor to make the players think that something other than a few undead are attacking them.

One thing Vi did point out to the apprentices that spells like Invisibility Undead could be powerful for avoiding troubles (like guardians and the puzzle section); so, he often encouraged that there should in some crypts be traps where things like the painted tile floor or the wires stretched across the hallway were attached to actual mechanical traps.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

This section usually feature some form of environmental hazzard to the living. This is often referred by Vi as the sealing room. It is sometimes straight like a corridor and sometimes it is larger like a room so it is not as easy to locate where the exit might be. The simplest example of this form of room is a room filled entirely with water. Other examples include the room filled with choking smoke or poisonous vapours. The undead require no air to breath so they are immune to such problems. All the apprentices usually have magics that allow them to survive in such environments for extended periods of time. The sealing rooms are also very

effective against spell caster who normally need to speak words which is hard to do without opening your mouth. There is also the additional problem of things like scrolls getting soaked in water or precious books and food supplies getting damaged. A further note is that often the water is often stagnant and may be a breeding ground for various diseases which could trouble adventurers after they leave the crypt. Usually inside the sealing area are more undead that are designed to maximize the threat of the environment.

The following is an example of what can be done. Inside the water filled corridor are a number of zombies. Each zombie has a chain with handcuff/clasp that it will attempt to latch onto any adventurers that should brave the waters. It is recommended that the iron chains be in 3e DnD terms a DC 18 (20% chance) to break if a full round action is spent. In 3e DnD a person with a Constitution of 10 can hold their breath for 20 rounds which means that even with a strength of 10 that the person should have a good chance of breaking the chains or another person of breaking the chains. The idea is to make the encounter seem scarier to the players as the idea of being chained underwater will sound terrifying. I would further suggest that at no point could a player have more than two chains attached to them by the zombies (the chains are not long enough for more than that).

Other creatures in the water could be ghouls with paralyzing touch. Large zombified sharks, octopus, and squids can be fearsome creatures to include. More dangerous undead that are non-corporeal could also make an appearance depending on the challenge desired.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

This section is often the most dangerous. The previous sections have been designed to wear away at the player's equipment by getting scrolls soaked, damaging weapons and armour with acid, attacks with poisonous scorpions, using turning attacks at lesser undead, and having attacks from directions that the players might not have expected. This is usually the main crypt where there are potential hordes of undead. Usually, looking into this area people should see potentially twenty to a hundred corpses on shelves dug into the walls or laid out on stone caskets. The potential for trouble should encourage players to almost immediately use their big room clearing magics initially to try and reduce the threat (note: despite the number of corpses, the GM should only use a number at any time to serve as a suitable challenge. The sight of the corpses should power the scene not the actual usage of them). Adventurers should be allowed to go on a bit of a rampage to kill as many of the corpses as they can. This area should be considered unhallowed ground making turning attempts more difficult.

If the players try to ignore the corpses then the GM should start to have a few come to life in a couple of weak waves to get the players to take action in fear that more corpses will come to life. When the players have suitably expended some more of their power and toys, the GM should then reveal what this crypt's big villain might be. The threat should be related to the strength of the party with the corpses still popping out of stone coffins or caskets to cause additional headaches for the adventurers. Wraiths, Vampires, Mummies, and other undead make good choices here along with necromancers. Additional things that could be released to increase the scene would be various swarms of insects that will make vision difficult and provide problems of concentration for people attempting to use spells.

If the adventurers have been hunting the mystery of the Masters of Evil and are of a suitable level, then they may encounter and battle one of the masters in this area. A master of evil should have one two powerful guardian undead of the vampire or mummy type. Defeat of a master of evil should bring significant rewards to the party in knowledge of the mystery.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

This section is usually a laboratory, storage area, or an archive. The GM may place some particularly strange and hideous creature here like a brain in a jar or a frankenstein style experiment. Usually these experiments are partially completed but not without risk. If the area is a storage facility then it will contain various body parts of undead (hands of ghouls, fangs of vampires, bandages from mummies) that are meant for transplant into some creature. Sometimes there are magical items that are meant to be given to the more intelligent undead like magical swords to be given to ghouls or mummies that have been harvested from past adventurers. Sometimes this room may have a former adventurer that is half alive and half undead with portions of their body spliced to various undead or supported by strange magics. Players may face the dilemma of killing the former adventurer or bringing the monster back to civilization.

If there is a library of information and scrolls here, it may contain hints of or maps to the location of other crypts. It may contain plans for launching attacks against other members of the Masters of Evil. There may be plot hints of how the Masters of Evil are providing aid to the current problem that the players are facing (a good way to redirect the players back onto the planned adventure path). The information may also be time sensitive requiring the players to need to decide to act on it now or miss an opportunity to meet with possible other members in the organization or stop a possible event (like an assassination or kidnapping) from occurring. Some of these events may clearly be attacks by one group of the apprentices against the other giving the players the moral problem of should they get in the middle of events between various masters of evil. Should the players even aid one of the masters of evil.

Last, is the big prize which is the possibility of gaining a piece of Vi. This will present new problems as players may need to question if it is wise to try and attach this body part to themselves (note: do to the five faustian deal Vi made, the body parts can only be destroyed by the most unusual and most powerful of means. They should be treated almost as artifacts for attempts to destroy as simple things like fire will do little to the limbs as will repeated attempts to hack or use acid on them). If the adventurers gain possession of a limb there will almost certainly be consequences of various groups (from the master that lost the limb, the other masters trying to collect and extra limb, to various kings, clerics, and paladin organizations getting involved if they find out). Each additional limb that the adventurers acquire should increase the situation as the body parts should aim to try and assemble each other. The various lords may also lend a hand in getting the assembly to occur and the apprentices killed (usually in indirect means through intermediaries providing possible information) so they can hurry up the soul collection process.

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.