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Present

5 Room Dungeons

Volume 18

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

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,
John Four and Strolen



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The Tomb of Three Brothers

By Jake Sorensen

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

This is the entrance to the tomb of three brothers, princes who all killed each other before any could inherit the throne of their kingdom, which quickly fell apart afterward. The solid stone door will open if the names of the three brothers are said in order from oldest to youngest, or by using a key found in the lair of a nearby monster, such as a giant bear.

The names of the brothers could have been learned through research in a large-sized library, or the recovery of a history book from a treasure trove the characters recently plundered. If desired, the relative ages can be designated in a puzzle such as "Oren poisoned his younger brother Kelleth, and Jarthal only ever attempted to kill his older brother." Maybe the one stating the names stands to receive an electric shock if he or she gets the order wrong.

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

When the characters enter the tomb, the three brothers appear to them. They are cursed to remain in the tomb as spirits until someone chooses one of them to be king and coronates their skeleton in the burial chamber. They promise that the characters can have the treasure buried with the brothers if they will just coronate one and release them all from undeath. Each one makes a pitch why the characters should coronate him:

Oren did attempt to kill his brothers, but he was oldest and should have had the crown by right. Kelleth was his father's favorite son and claims he was meant to be heir. Jarthal claims to have led the kingdom in successful wars and trade missions and claims the crown by right of his effectiveness at ruling.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

Assuming the characters have chosen one of the brothers already (or the brothers think they know who the characters have chosen), the other two will attempt to prevent the characters from reaching the burial chamber. One will spring a trap on or just ahead of the characters, blocking them from reaching the chamber (or alternatively attempting to kill them by springing the trap on them). The other will activate guardian golems to capture the characters and try to convince them to coronate him.

If the characters can evade the golems, they can make a break for the burial chamber ahead.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Here each of the brothers' corpses sits on a throne, with the crown on a plinth in front of them. Each controls undead servants they employ to hinder (by fighting them) or help (by fighting the other undead servants) the character's attempt to coronate a corpse, depending on whether the characters are trying to coronate them or their brother. If the characters don't even agree on which brother to coronate, this could be even more of a free for all.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

Coronating a corpse only puts two brothers to rest; the one with the crown becomes even more powerful (maybe changed into a vampire – the crown itself could be an artifact called The Crown of the Vampire Kings) and escapes the tomb. What's worse, it's not the brother the characters chose; it's another brother, who had his undead servants swap his corpse with his brothers' while the other two brothers weren't watching.



The Wizard's Retreat

By Jake Sorensen

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The Wizard's Retreat is an extradimensional space kept by a wizard long ago. The space is rumored to contain unimaginable wealth and knowledge, but no one can find it. The players may finally get word that the entrance is the hearth in the wizard's great room. A key command word causes a portal to form in the front of the hearth. Maybe an old friend of the wizard's knows the word and will reveal it if the players chase off a local bandit gang.

Just inside the entrance, there is an anteroom with the walls, floor, and ceiling made from some slightly spongy black material (tire rubber?). A plaque on the wall reads "Enter as ye were born".

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

Rooms two through four of the extradimensional space are in a strong magnetic field. Any ferrous metal will be strongly attracted to the material that forms the floor and ceiling of the space. It requires great strength to keep hold of any metal, and the players have next to no chance if they are wearing metal armor.

Generally, they'll have to leave their metal weapons and armor to continue.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

The floor and ceiling of this room are matching sets of tiles, mostly gray metal tiles with lots of black onyx or obsidian tiles interspersed. The tiles only cover half the room, and the far half contains what looks like a library. An old man is sitting in a chair on the far side, staring at something no one sees and not moving at all, even to breathe.

The gray metal tiles are trapped – if someone makes contact with one, a lightning bolt will arc between the tile and its corresponding one on the ceiling, using the player as a channel and causing electrical damage. The players must either fly between the floor and ceiling without touching the metal tiles, or jump from one obsidian/onyx tile to the next.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

The old man is the wizard whose retreat this is, who has been placed in stasis until an electrical discharge happens in the vicinity. When one does (usually with the trapped tiles in the first half of the room), the stasis will end and the wizard, having no knowledge of the condition he was in, will be quite annoyed at having

invaders. He will activate two guardian golems (non-metal ones) who will seek to grab players that make it past the tiles and throw them back onto the metal ones. The wizard will also seek to cast spells to destroy the players.

Keep in mind that the players may not have their metal weapons and other combat-valuable metal devices with them, so they may not be able to handle as much of a challenge as normal.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

The room beyond the tiles, and the next room are not in the magnetic field. The treasure should include numerous gold pieces which are actually gold-plated with a ferrous metal inside. Any player carrying a significant number of them into the tiled area to leave the space will be drawn to the floor (or ceiling, if they are closer to it because they are flying). It will be hard not to make contact with the floor or ceiling, thereby touching a metal tile and causing a discharge (and possibly awakening the wizard at this point if they managed to avoid it before).



The Shifter By The Shifter

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The PCs become aware.. possibly by arcane means, an earlier plot, or maybe they're tipped off.. that a village has been infiltrated by one or more monsters that are able to appear as a villager; maybe a shapeshifter, maybe a creature capable of possessing, perhaps an illusionist or a renegade mage with transmutation powers, perhaps a parasite that is taking over a person, perhaps a person with a magical scroll that permits a single use of a spell to be used for hiding.

Most in the village do not know about the threat. Unfortunately, the PCs lack obvious means to pinpoint the threat. To make this feasible, the monster should lack shapeshift-at-will; whether due to the nature of a natural ability or a lack of suitable components.

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

Should the monster learn that it is hunted, it might for example try to isolate and murder a PC, go on a vengeful rampage, cause damage and confusion by arson, poison wells and defile stockpiles - or simply leave the village and start over somewhere else. Since none of those scenarios are in the best interests of the PCs or the village, a discreet search is called for.

Room Three: Trick or Setback

How exactly to monkey-wrench the search depends on the means the PCs use to find the monster, who or what the monster pretends to be, the abilities of the monster, and its nature.

The trick could be that the monster hunt ties into a larger plot, or it could mean repercussions to the PCs. Such a plot might be that the monster has connections.. it could be a spy, or a princess on the run from an arranged marriage or fleeing towards forbidden love, yet finding herself in ever deeper trouble: perhaps

enough to become a PC.. or it might have a nest, and is planning to use the village as a food source when its young ones hatch.

If the PCs' search is compromised, the PCs might find themselves harassed, arrested, framed, or otherwise harmed. Or, the monster might have a guise that the PCs are unlikely to think of, such as the old, half-blind dog that usually sleeps the days on the warm stones next to the village well - and hears and sees everything that goes on. Most would probably seek someone hiding as human.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

This depends on whether the PCs succeed in finding the monster before the monster finds them. The one to outdo the other will largely choose the battlefield, and the time of the confrontation. This can be a classic fight, PCs vs monster and possibly its allies (who might be villagers that the PCs are loathe to harm, but who defend the monster due to one reason or another, ranging from money to trickery to a crush to monstrous abilities to blackmail). It can also be an ambush that the monster orchestrated and participates in. Or, it could be an ambush by the monster, but without the monster's direct involvement, planned simply to be a diversion to cover the creature's escape; it could mean be the local militia or church, or even another party of adventurers that was also hunting the monster.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

These depend largely on whom the PCs fought, where, and how. It can mean that the PCs thwart a vile plot, reveal evil-doers and bring the villain to justice, or that a threat is ended in black smelly demon blood and shattered eggs of hatchlings. But it can also mean that the PCs find themselves fleeing from the militia out to arrest or kill or expel them. They can pose a true threat to the party by sheer numbers and better knowledge of the lay of the land and due to some preparations they have in place, but they may also be a weak - yet if the PCs fight and kill them, they are likely to be hunted down by troops sent by whoever owns the village, and this would pose a deadly threat. If the monster manages to escape, it is also likely to be resentful of the PCs, possibly providing a long-term enemy - especially if it had an interest in the village (such as a nest or a plot) that was endangered or destroyed by the meddling Pcs.



The Braun Castle

By Monstah

For a medieval low-fantasy setting (low fantasy for greater impact ;)).

Room One: Entrance and Guardian

The Braun Castle is guarded by fear. Sitting on a hilltop, overlooking a small farmer village and surrounded by dark woods, the Castle is indeed a fearsome look. It is surrounded by legends, and players should hear the most unusual and unsettling accounts. Some say it is deserted and haunted; others, that it is inhabited by the last descendants of a long lost noble bloodline. Should the players show intention of visiting it, the locals will try everything to persuade them, and give them all kinds of (useless) protection against its evils (think of Jonathan Harker and his trip to Castle Dracula).

Getting away from the locals and near the castle shouldn't make the situation better. Climate is hard, and the nights filled with wolf howls to keep the players from sleeping - or was that a child crying? Is this mud they're stepping on? - It looks more like blood.

Room Two: Puzzle or Roleplaying Challenge

So the players have faced their demons and reached the tall dark walls of the castle. How should they get in? The castle does seem inhabited; from this close one can hear chatter inside, and sometimes candlelight is seen flickering off some window. Should the players find someone from within, they could get invited, or they might try their foot in the door and face some consequences.

Main problem in getting invited is finding someone to do the invitation. No one has ever been seen getting in or out of the castle, hence the legends of it being deserted. Actually, there are very few accounts of people getting out at night - but those weren't really people, they say. Maybe that sinister character who's been roaming town past few nights knows something - ?

Room Three: Trick or Setback

Once inside the castle, the players will find the (few) Brauns very hospitable, yet sinister in their fashion (again, think of Harker and Dracula). In fact, the players could never say no to the invitation to sleep inside the castle, even if they tried to - they're trapped. The players will spend days fulfilling their hosts' hunger of news from the outside world. Should some of them show some occult or otherwise forbidden knowledge, they will see sparkles of satisfaction on the eyes of the Braun family as they ask about everything they can.

After awhile, the players might try to force their way out, and will find that the castle was build to be harder to get out than to get in. Its tall walls overlooking sharp hills, its thick wooden walls barred with iron, and the constant howls of wolves outside are reminders that there is a reason why people shun the castle so much. And the Brauns within - as time passes, their company should feel always more sinister.

Room Four: Climax, Big Battle, or Conflict

Should the players explore enough, they will soon find the dungeons beneath the castle. And what dungeons - in fact, they are much, much bigger than the castle itself. Stretching miles underground, this Lovecraftian cave complex is dark, damp, huge, smelly. The taunt of death is everywhere, until the players actually meet the dead.

Or better, dead-ish. The dungeons are swarming with undead creatures. Some have skin, some bare flesh, some are just a pile of bones. Some look more dead, some almost alive. Some can talk, some can run, some can conjure demons to aid them. Thousands and thousands of things back from the dead populate the underground of the castle, serving as a reminder to why the players should have never come here.

Fighting is no option. They have to run.

Room Five: Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

They might notice it from the tombs; or maybe from the clothes that the dead things bear. Or they might witness the Brauns not giving orders to the dead, but actually talking to them. The truth is, the undead aren't an army summoned by the Brauns; they ARE the Brauns. For long has this wizard bloodline raised their

own, generation after generation. Some bring back knowledge the living should never have; some return with nothing save hunger for the life left behind. Some become great masters, respected and feared by the others. Some just serve as servers and helpers, carriers of heavy load. In fact, it is even hard to distinguish who is alive from who isn't.

The Brauns never intended for the players to die. Should they, they would probably be brought back anyway. They are, in fact, ancient seekers of knowledge. Generation after generation, the ones brought back have kept alive long lost lores and tales, incantations and recipes, names and Old Gods. They will learn all they can from the players, and will even be willing to share some of their knowledge - but that would taint the players forever, and they shall always remember that they should have never visited the Braun Castle.

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.