

Hallway Encounters: A Zenopus Dungeon Variant

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A supplement for adding another layer of interest to the classic Holmes Basic Dungeon.

As published in 1977, Zenopus Dungeon does not include all aspects of a creepy dungeon. Due to the size of the physical game product, it is likely many things were redacted. It was also intended as a simple learning adventure, thus the more complicated play common with most home brewed dungeons is not included. Holmes himself was known for being a very clever and devious referee.

As game referee, you may want to enhance it with a few more troublesome situations to make it more interesting.

The following are some guidelines I have created. Do not feel you must adhere to everything that is within the original dungeon, nor even use everything I am suggesting here. Consider that all published works are best treated as jumping off points, which you can use to truly personalize what is already there.

When using the charts and a random result comes up which does not feel appropriate, or you personally - just aren't feelin' it, use something else!

It is important for a referee to have fun too.

I hope these encounter suggestions come in handy for you. Please change anything you do not like and personalize these simple events. Changes to your game are what keeps it feeling new and exciting.

- Griff

The Crossroads

The main crossroads at the beginning of the dungeon right after the players come down the stairs, roll a four-sided die:

1. Moaning and chain clanking sounds coming from the south.
2. A cold air blows through the intersection making a faint whistling sound. The breeze seems to come from the north.
3. A dripping water sound. Investigating further reveals a

puddle before the door to the west with a steady drip, or even dribble, of water falling from the ceiling.

4. A thunderclap comes from the direction of the stairs the players just came down. A large ball of lightning rolls toward the players. It is fast enough that the players can't outrun it. One can assume they will try though. After a turn of fleeing, it will catch up to the party. Those at the back of the party must make a Saving Throw vs Wands. Though the ball of lightning will have no effect on the players, be sure to make a big show of noting who failed their roll. (This is a psyche job to make the players unsure about the underworld.)

You will likely have noticed that none of these four events has any effect on the players, except to make them begin to feel uneasy. That is your goal. You want them to feel fear of everything in a dungeon.

Traveling the Halls

The hallways in most classic dungeons tend to be featureless avenues that connect the different encounter locations usually located within rooms. We can add to them and make them more interesting.

The basic roll I like to use upon entering a new passage is as follows.

1. Whew, nothing here!
2. Nothing here either.
3. A pool of blood with drag marks leading away from the players. This trail will lead to the nearest empty location where it just ends in splatters on the walls and ceiling. Perhaps something was eaten here? If this comes up a second time, try to think of something equally benign that appears to indicate something terrible to the players.
4. A message is written on the wall in chalk. "The sacrifice has been taken. Baledraugs hunt by daylight. The seekers are in the city. Blind raven speaks in dreams. All will perish – dark forces gather for war." If this roll comes up again you may make up your own message, create a cryptic drawing which means nothing, or simply treat this as event as nothing.
5. The Pits! A 10' deep covered pit will drop a rank of players passing over upon rolling a 1 or 2 on a six-sided die. This is for 1-3 falling damage, luckily there are no spikes!
6. The hallway is full of dense fog making it hard to see.

Wandering monsters will always surprise players here. (10% chance it is also magical in nature, roll the effect on the potions chart.)

7. Old cobwebs block the passage. Setting them alight will do two things. It will create a lot of smoke obscuring visibility to 10'. It will also cause an immediate wandering monster die roll. A ten-foot pole may come in handy for clearing the sticky strands.

8. Some random bones, or adventurer equipment item. (Roll a die to determine what the item is via the equipment chart.)

9. A secret door! First roll to see if anyone spots it. If found roll: 1-3 = on left hand side, 5-6 = on right hand side. This secret door opens on a passage. If the door is along the outer edges of the dungeon, it likely leads out and around the next room connecting to another passage. If it is on the inner side roll a die to determine if it connects with a nearby room via another secret door, or if it bypasses the room and connects to another tunnel.

10. Underworld brambles and vines obstruct the passage. These may take time to clear. Keep it simple by roll playing the activities, but secretly rolling a six-sided die for the number of turns it takes. Yes, make sure to check for wandering monster encounters too. For more fun, maybe the berries glow like light spells when picked for 2-12 turns, and if thrown, or fired from a sling, explode for 1+1 damage.

Ok, those basic rolls should add some fun.

The Compound Encounters

Now things are about to get more complicated. Along with the above rolls, you can also add a second roll. On a 1 in 6, the current hallway may become a compound encounter. By compound, I mean that while there will be the obvious sort of added element rolled above, this secondary encounter layer will make everything much more complex and possibly dangerous.

Each of these situations should only occur once. Roll a six-sided die and consult the table below:

Better Haunts and Dungeons Chart

1. Human Remains – this is a skeleton which has been here for some time. It bears fragments of clothing. Its arm is outstretched and a finger points to a secret door which leads to a small 10' x 10' chamber with a shelf carved into the far wall inside of which sits a wood chest. In order to

open the lid, the chest must be pulled out of the stone shelf it sits inside of. Placing one's hands under the chest to lift it out has unforeseen circumstances. Unseen, underneath the chest are poison needles which require a Save Vs. Poison by the players. Damage is only one six-sided die, half if they save, luckily the poison is old. Simply smashing the chest may be the best option. Yet, the noise caused by a turn spent chopping the front of the chest open could attract wandering monsters. The chest contains 600 coins of all kinds. Along with two random magical treasures. (Have your players roll the dice to determine what they are.)

2. Luminous Fungi – Yup, exactly as stated, there are mushrooms here. They grow out of the mortar between the stones in the walls. Some may even be on the floor. They glow enough to cast a pale light which will be seen from a distance, they are harmless if left alone. Along with the usual pale white ones there are also beautiful purple and green ones. The green ones are poisonous. Touching them with bare hands will immediately cause 1 hit point of damage. The purple ones, when touched, will cause the player to make a Save Vs Poison, or feel very good, but also be affected by delusion, just as the potion of the same name. (Feel free to convince the player of anything they want to believe as to the actual power of these purple mushrooms. If they ask a question which implies a good effect, just let them take the lead and be convinced they are under the effects of some powerful magic) A halfling may roll a twenty-sided die. If the roll is equal to or under their wisdom, they will know what kinds of mushrooms these are and their effects. Collecting a small sack full of either kind is enough to brew a flask of poison, or a flask of delusion. It may be possible to sell the sack of mushrooms in town later as well.

Note: These are fantasy mushrooms. In real life the white mushrooms are the most poisonous and deadly and should not be handled or eaten. There is even one variety known as the angle of death.

3. The Plank – This is an open shaft in the middle of the hallway with a heavy wood plank across it. The pit is 10' across and appears to plummet into infinity. Dropped torches will just fall off into the darkness, and dropped objects make no impact sound. The only way across is to walk the plank. The plank appears to be strong enough to hold one person, yet anyone wearing heavy armor who attempts to traverse it will cause it to break on a 1-2 on a six-sided die. If it breaks and they have not bothered to tie a safety rope to the player crossing, have them roll a Save Vs Stone to see if they manage to grab the lip on the far side of the pit to keep from falling to their death. Other-

wise, sad to say, it is adios to the brave adventurer and all their possessions. Just to make this interesting, every turn spent here may attract a large spider, or centipede that lives in the shaft. Any wandering monster rolls indicate such has climbed out of the shaft.

4. The Secret Lair – Hidden behind a secret door is a room, 20' x 30'. This is the lair of a kind of creature which should be rolled on the Level 3 random encounter chart. It is up to you to make this as interesting as possible. If an elf does not spot this door as the party approaches, perhaps the inhabitants decide to jump out at the party? Make sure to use reaction rolls to guide you, as referee, in deciding what these dungeon denizens choose to do. Since this will likely be a very tough encounter to overcome, and assuming the players do not simply run away, the treasure they have should be a hidden treasure and trapped chest with a very large haul of goods.

5. The Goddess – Part way down this hallway the players will come across a semicircular recession in the wall large enough to contain a person. In this case the recess in the wall is above floor level and contains the remains of a statue which has been broken off at the ankles, with the main body portion lying on the floor. Restoring the statue to its feet will cause it to magically restore itself, as the statue is engulfed by a blue light. The blue light is the goddess of this small shrine come to take life in the statue for a brief time before departing. The statue will speak to the players saying, "I am the goddess of mercy and compassion. I thank you for restoring this humble shrine. How may I repay you before I must depart." She is offering a wish. Wishes are always a conundrum for the players. Too greedy a wish and she may not be inclined to do exactly what the player wants, saying "I cannot do as you want, but I can do what you might need." In this case, what they may need is a punishment, roll to see if the result is favorable, or not. How you resolve this encounter may require some additional creativity. I always resort to a die roll for guidance.

6. The Curtains – The players see a curtain hanging from the ceiling. It is an old and tattered drape. A close examination of the curtain will reveal it is stitched together from a heavy leather like material, which is in fact human flesh. Faces can be seen on further inspection.

Yes, the bad guys down here have certainly been busy making good use of their victims from the village. If your players have any doubt as to exactly how evil this underworld place is, this may be a huge indicator right here.

But that is not enough. After traversing one, or two curtains, there will be a third. The third one will appear as

the others, but there is one minor difference. This curtain is made from stitched together zombie skin. It will wait until touched to react, whereupon it will either drop on anyone passing underneath it, or if the curtain is pushed aside with an implement, it will wrap around the implement and begin climbing up it toward whomever is holding it.

Treat this as a normal zombie for Hits and Armor.

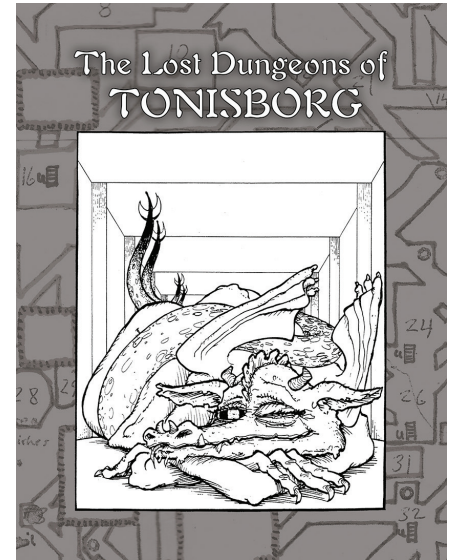


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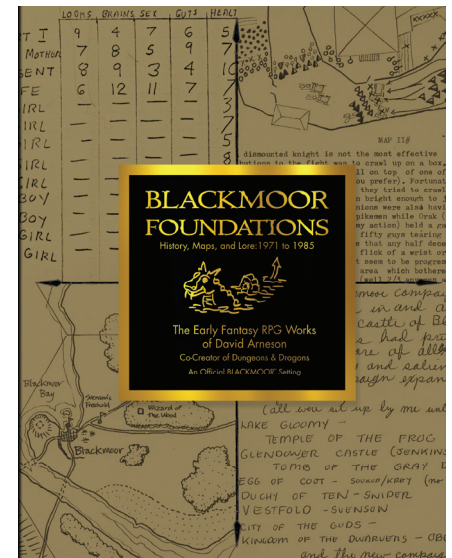
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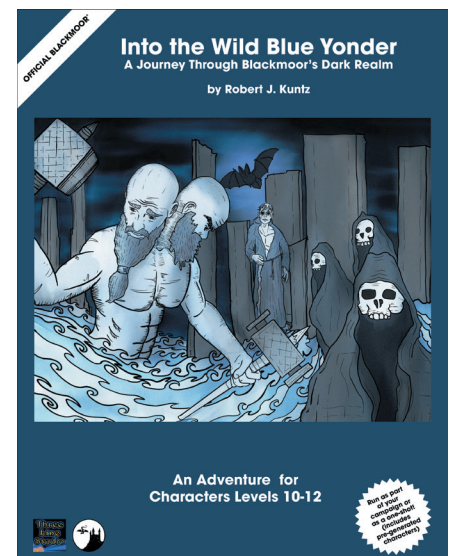
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