

TRUE REALM

One party's experience at a special two-day True Dungeon event.

By Mike Steele



When our group of gamers heard that the people that created and ran **True Dungeon** at **GENCON** were setting up a special two-day event called **True Realm** at the beginning of April in Illinois which would have **True Dungeon** and other similar events, we knew we had to be there. We've had a group that has done one or more **True Dungeon** runs every year it has been offered, and it's always a highlight of the **GENCON** weekend.

Nine of us joined together to travel to this inaugural True Realm event. Jeff Lewis, Jason Lockhart, Jeff Howard, Ed and Haley Whalen and their children Hollian, Eddie, and Brinn.

This is probably a good point for a brief explanation of **True Dungeon**. It is a life-size **Dungeons and Dragons** adventure, where your group of adventurers outfit yourself with Treasure Tokens representing armor, weapons, scrolls, potions, and other items, and then travel through the corridors and rooms of a realistic Dungeon, being challenged by puzzles and monsters alike, and getting treasure if you succeed in defeating certain monsters or puzzles. If you go to the **True Dungeon** website (www.truedungeon.com) you can get more information about how the game is played, The Dungeons can be done in "Normal" or "Nightmare" modes.



Our group in the Dungeon Prep Area

Our first event started right after we arrived, at 4 PM. We started with a **True Dungeon: Retro 2003** event, which as I said is an updating of the original **True Dungeon** adventure that was run in 2003. I'm not going to go into many specific details of this Dungeon, because it is going to be run at the 2009 **GENCON**, and I don't want to give away any of the surprises to people that haven't played it yet.

We had a fun time with the adventure, it was a great way to get our True Realm weekend kicked off.

Four of us (me, Jason, Jeff Howard, and Jeff Lewis) went straight from **TD Retro** to **True Raid**, which is a brand-new event offered only at True Realm. We had Eddie, who was brand new to **True Dungeon** and had travelled all the way from Boston for the event, join us. True Raid was designed as an event for people new to **True Dungeon**. The set-up was that we were all low-level thieves, and we were breaking into someone's house to steal a special magical cube, and we were looking for the fame and treasure we'd get from steal-

ing the cube.

In the first room we had to cross from one rooftop to another. There was a two-by-four setting on its side that we had to cross in order to get to the rooftop of the building we were breaking into. It was pretty unstable, and Jeff Howard fell off of it as he was crossing and took a point of damage (we all started with 10 Hit Points). After crossing over we then had to open two locks on either side of the door down from the roof. The next room was fairly simple, there was a motion detector alarm we had to avoid. Four of us crawled along the edge and made it through, then Jeff Howard tried to move really slowly through and set it off, then tried to crawl through and set it off again, so he ended up taking two more points of damage.

We had to fight a couple of guards, who we dispatched without too much trouble, before we got to the final room. We agreed to take the "Nightmare" challenge of not saying anything in the final room. The final room had a bunch of large "stone" Styrofoam blocks that had to be assembled into a magic cube we'd come to steal. After a few failed attempts we managed to figure out how to assemble them, and won the event!

After hanging out at the Tavern for a bit we all went over to do our final event of the day, the **True Dungeon: Director's Cut**. We had run through the **GENCON 2008** Dungeon so had a vague idea of what to expect, but knew that it would be modified significantly. Some highlights:

In one room we were told to put out our lights (everyone had individual lights on a string around our necks) and we went into a pitch-black hallway that led into a pitch-black room. We all wandered around feeling the walls trying to find an exit, periodically taking pretty strong shocks from the wall (I thought it was from static electricity, I found out afterwards that there were shock generators behind some of the walls). After probably 8 minutes of wandering around trying to find an exit, it occurred to me that the exit might be at floor level, so I yelled out for people to run their feet across the wall to look for exits. Jeff Howard, our Bard, immediately found the exit. The entire group enjoyed this room, it was actually Hollian's favorite room of the entire weekend. It really exemplified the nature of **True Dungeon**, that you are the party of Adventurers in a life-size Dungeon, defeating the challenges yourself. Like many things in **True Dungeon**, it seemed unsolvable until you figured out the trick.

In yet another room, we came across a beautiful angel, chained to the wall. She told us that if we could solve a glyph in front of her, she would be free. Jeff Howard quickly solved the glyph, and it turned out to be a trap, and the lighting changed and she turned into

an amazing demonic angel who we had to fight.

After this crawl we all went to dinner and then to more gaming at the hotel. We woke up early for some gaming, before going back to True Realm early Saturday afternoon.

Our first event of Saturday was one of the Brand-New events – True Grind. It was so popular that it looks like it will also be at **GENCON** this year. After the prep area where the volunteer filled out our party card with our stats, based on the tokens we had, we entered the first room. The room was pretty bare, all we saw was a combat board with a cloth on it and with two DM's standing next to it. The DM's then whipped the cloth off of it, and it was a flock of Stirges, who attacked each of us.

After a brief battle the DM shone his flashlight in the corner and said "what's that?" Of course we all looked, and it was a Medusa bust!! So, we all had to roll savings throws, and our Bard and Rogue failed the rolls and were turned to stone.

It only got worse from that point on for the party.

Even though we all died in True Grind we had a wonderful time trying to defeat all of the monsters, it was such a fast-paced, adrenaline-rush, monster slugging!

Next we took another shot at the True Realm Retro 2003 Dungeon, this time in Nightmare mode. Again, I won't go into specifics since the dungeon will be played again at **GENCON 2009**. However, it was amazing that all of the puzzles that our group struggled with the first



The "Angel" of Pelor. Looks can be deceiving



time around, Haley (who wasn't with us Friday) was able to solve without much difficulty. She was amazing! Some of the other party members had been through before and had the answers to the puzzles in case we needed them, but Haley was able to solve nearly everything without any help at all. I was

really happy, after failing to successfully complete the adventure in 2003 and then on Friday at **True Realm**, we finally completed it successfully! Plus, as a bonus, when our party member was faced with a moral choice, once again they chose the correct choice – icing on the cake!



Big Ed on the Combat Board laying down some hurt on some nasty.

We then had about 5 hours before our final event, so we went back to the hotel and ordered pizza and had a Birthday Party for Eddie, who was celebrating his Birthday that day. Haley had even made a special Beholder Birthday cake (with cupcakes for the eyes) for Eddie! Some of the guys went out and got some beer, and many of the **True Dungeon** souvenir mugs were thoroughly broken in! The hotels were just about 15 minutes from the event, so it was easy to go back and forth as necessary.

After our party, we headed back for our final event. We were running the final **True Grind** run of the weekend, at 10 PM. We could see people tearing down many of the sets as we were preparing for our adventure, it was really exciting to be on the final run as things came down all around us. The DM, Stu, tried very hard to convince us to try it on Nightmare mode, but we knew how tough it was and decided to stick to regular (we later found out only one group tried Nightmare and they didn't succeed).

We were focused and ready for the room this time. We still took some damage from the earlier monsters, but not as much as before. We knew not to look when the Medusa showed up, so none of us were turned to

stone. We really hit our stride when the Beholder showed up. Our Wizard Hollian hit with both of her spells, nearly all of us hit on our slides with some criticals, and we did the Beholder 103 points of damage in the first round (our DM thought that was a record amount of damage for one round)! The Beholder got off one round of attacks on us, and then on our second slide our Paladin Ed slid his token right into the 20 – sure to finish off the Beholder! Then Eddie, our Rogue, was preparing to slide.

The DM's pulled out the Treasure box and offered Eddie two picks if he'd knock Ed's slider out of the "20". Eddie pretty quickly refused, and then the DM's raised their offer to 3 token picks – and then to 4 token picks.



Hollian being attacked by a Mimic.

Eddie was really struggling with the offer, but to his credit he said no, putting the party first. It was moments like that, that really made our True Realm experience so special!

The DM said we finished off all the monsters in the first room in record time, faster than any other group, so we had plenty of time to prepare for the second room. Between me,

Jason the Cleric, and Ed the Paladin, we were able to heal up all the Party Members to close to full strength before going into the final room. I put on my Ring of Fire Resistance, and we came up with a plan for most of the group to attack the Efreet, and a smaller group to attack the Wizard (me, the Haley the Barbarian, and Hollian the Wizard). We went in, and lined up before our respective combat boards – and the DM's pulled off the coverings – and they had swapped the combat boards so we were lined up opposite of what we'd wanted (which was a GREAT surprise for us, lots of fun!).

The Wizard then hit everyone with an icy blast, knocking several of our group near to zero hit points (and of course my Ring of Fire Resistance didn't help at all!).

We dove into the combat head-first, and the fighting was fast and furious! We got a lot of good hits in, but we

started losing party members, starting with the Rogue. The rest of the party finally killed the Wizard, but the Efreet put a wall of Flame up between us, that they had to cross through, taking fire damage to be able to attack the Efreet.

After a few more attacks, I suddenly realized that there were only two of us left alive to fight the Efreet, myself and Haley the Barbarian. Everyone else was standing off to the side, cheering us on against the Efreet.

We got two great hits on the Efreet, and then he attacked the Barbarian twice, hitting once but not quite killing her. We then both slid critical hits on the Efreet, killing it! Our entire party spontaneously let out a huge scream of primal joy when it died, I'm sure we could have been heard across the entire **True Realm**. We just started going around, high-fiving and hugging each other – without a doubt it was the high point of our True Realm weekend!

We all had a wonderful time at True Realm! All the events were great fun, we got to spend quality time at True Realm and the Hotel gaming and socializing – it was like a mini-**GENCON**.

And it was very affordable! Figuring in two people per room, we figured the weekend was about \$250 per person including everything. We're all looking forward to playing **True Dungeon** at **GENCON** again this year, and then coming back to Marion, Illinois for True Realm next year. I hope you'll all join us! ☐



Our intrepid adventurers. "Bring it!"