

# GENCON 2006: True Dungeon Recap

By Randall Nelson



Our simple trip to the inn turned out to be much more. While enjoying our food and drink, my fellow adventurers and I were approached by the establishment's owner. Seems the cellar had become infested with giant rats, and an offer was made to dispatch the vermin. We gladly accepted the innkeep's offer and equipped ourselves for a quick jaunt under the inn.

As we entered the damp, earthen-walled cellar, something appeared to be dreadfully wrong. Before we could even formulate a plan, the cellar door was slammed shut! A heavy board was placed on the door, locking us in. A glass vial was dropped through a small fissure in the ceiling, and the subsequent breaking released a powerful sleep gas. Soon, we all succumbed, and fell to the ground, one by one...

When we woke, we found we had been moved, and our equipment had been stashed inside a cell of iron bars. We also picked up a brief conversation by guards posted outside our door. We were in the clutches of a spider cult, which planned a complete takeover of the entire *City of Greyhawk*! We had only a small bit of time to figure out a way to retrieve our equipment, and find a way out of this infernal underground temple, or we would surely become dinner for a giant spider...

And thus began this year's version of *True Dungeon*! Myself and six friends were to take on the personas of adventurers and tackle our way through a craftily engineered adventure, "Escape from the Spider Cult."

For those not familiar, a quick explanation about *True Dungeon*. A group of seven are given laminated cards with the stats for various player-characters within the world of *Dungeons and Dragons*.

The basic classes are all represented (rogue, fighter, ranger, etc.). The cards hold all of the basic, pertinent information: hit points, attributes, saving throws, and the like. Then, you "equip" yourselves by possessing cool wooden tokens, each which has the name of items imprinted on it. One token might say "50-foot rope" while another might say "+1 long sword." You get a bag of random tokens before the *True Dungeon* starts, and also have an opportunity to trade for other tokens at the tavern. Like the entire set-up, the tavern is a walled, partitioned room decorated to look and feel like a real fantasy-type tavern. NPC types (volunteers from *True Adventures, Ltd.*) wander the tavern, engaging folks in conversations, spreading rumors which may (or may not) be vital to the adventure, and directing those interested to where treasure/equipment tokens can be bought or traded for.



The actual dungeon itself can not be adequately described with mere words—it truly has to be experienced to be believed! Each wall, whether a hallway or room, looks and feels like a stone dungeon wall. The rooms are meticulously decorated with various props

to help immerse yourself in the experience. Every room has a GM, which describes to the whole party what is going on. The room can be interacted with too! For example, if you want to search around for treasures or a clue, you need to physically move stuff around.

Every room has a challenge of sorts—either a puzzle-type and/or a combat. Puzzles are rather straightforward, requiring the entire party to use their wits to find a solution. Combat is handled in a shuffle-board like fashion. The shuffle board has an image of the nasty being fought. The image is sectioned off with “to-hit” numbers. Those participating in the combat place one of their weapon tokens in a slider, and slide it toward the image, hoping to score a hit. Making the whole experience even more nerve-wracking is the fact that every room has a time limit. If the puzzle isn’t solved, or the creature defeated by the end of the limit, expect large amounts of damage to be doled out.

This was **True Dungeon’s** fourth year at **Gen Con Indy**, and Director Jeff Martin couldn’t have been happier with the outcome.

“The whole thing was just awesome,” said a tired looking Martin on the final day of Gen Con. “A whole lot of work and effort was put in this year to improve. The walls were better, the sets were better ... I felt that we just put so much more into this year.”



A change from last year’s version was the running of only one adventure, but having two identical dungeons running at the same time. Last year, two separate adventures ran simultaneously. Martin preferred this year’s version, as it allowed volunteers and GMs to really focus on the adventure.

“Plus, we were able to get about 1000 new people to experience **True Dungeon** this year,” said Martin. “The event sold out in record time.”

Some of the highlights from this adventure:

- The initial cellar room was authentically decorated, including a set of bars separating the party from their only way out. The room had a hodge-podge of items strewn about, requiring players to search around for something to help. Extremely intense!
- A battle with a huge spider that could turn flesh to stone with its gaze. The spider had to be seen to be believed. You actually found yourself backing away from the hair beast!
- Engaging a hooded man in a conversation,



where he would trade treasure for answers to riddles. Still not sure if this was an actor, or some type of animated robot dude. But it was definitely over-the-top neat.

I was pleased to make it to the final room with my mates. There, we met a drow priestess who challenged us to a final puzzle. Unfortunately, this particular obstacle proved to be too much, and my paladin found his soul being sucked into oblivion...Oh well. I know I’ll be back next year and look very forward to seeing what Mr. Martin and the rest of the **True Adventures** team cooks up. ☐

SO THEN THIS HAND COMES RIGHT OUT OF THE WALL AND IT’S GOT ME BY THE FRICKIN’ NECK...

I MEAN THIS GUY HAS A GOOD TIGHT HOLD ON ME AND HE’S THROTTLING ME LIKE AN APE SQUEEZING AN OVER-RIPE MELON -- AND THE REST OF THE PARTY...?

NO WHERE TO BE SEEN.

MOTHER MARY JOSEPH -- TRUE DUNGEON SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS AWESOME.

I PASSED OUT AND THEY CARRIED ME OUT ON A GURNEY.

SO WHAT HAPPENED?

