The Bloodied Bowl

The smell of iron invades your nostrils. Dim, green light flickers from the torch in your hand, illuminating thick liquid dripping down the walls. Insects scuttle away underfoot from your movement. As you creep down the corridor, the hair rises on the back of your neck. Something is watching you...

Made with the Modular Realms adventurer's floor pack, the bloodied bowl map is an excellent spooky dungeon crawl for 4 level 5 players in the D&D 5th edition system. However, if you play with a different system, you could easily find similar stat blocks to adjust it for your game.

This encounter is themed as the haunted and abandonded chambers of an ancient temple, but could easily be flavoured for many underground systems or corridors with relatively few adjustments. For the floor, I used a mixture of cracked stone and flagstone, but you could also use plain stones or cobblestone.

Background:

So, how did this dungeon come to be? Long ago, a cannibalistic cult built their temple into the mountain range. They desired the ultimate power - immortality. However, their greed became their downfall. As they messed with unknown twisted magics and incomprehensible abominations, their bodies and minds slowly became part of the temple. Finally, all that remained were their shadows on the walls and their insatiable desire for power. To return to their flesh and bone forms, these cultists require the blood and bodies of others. Slowly, they have been accumulating corpses from unfortunate adventures who have ventured into their lair.

Dungeon tips:

*Only put down each portion of the dungeon as the players find it or can see it.*

You can re-flavour the monsters to fit with your scene. As long as they mechanically do the same thing, you can describe their attacks in many different ways.

For the steps, use a magnetic whiteboard or other magnetic surface. I propped mine up with a water bottle. I found the single tiles and the cobblestone wall tiles are strong enough to support figures. For the upper rooms, I put them on plastic boxes, but you can also use a different part of the table.

Horror games work best when you aim to scare the player, not the character. Withholding information can create an atmosphere of uncertainty and suspense. Remember - in movies, the scariest monsters are the ones you don't know anything about.

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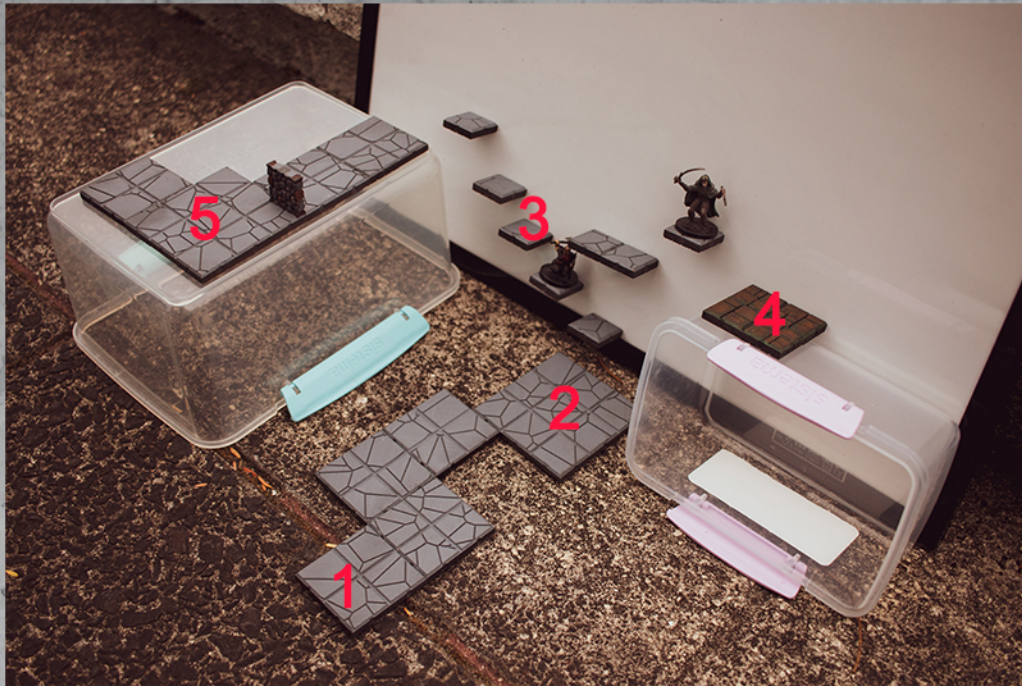
1. Entranceway. An ancient, cracked stone door gapes open. Besides it flickers a dim, green-flamed torch (continual flame spell) that gives off no heat. Note that while the players use this for light, everything will look green (thus, they may not recognise the blood from first glance). Inside, the corridor is completely dark.

2. The corridor leads into the bottom of a large pit. In the middle stands an old stone pedestal, topped with a stone bowl half-filled with dried liquid (blood). Keep in mind if the players are seeing in green light. The far wall contains an old stairwell.

3. Many of the stairs are broken. Dried blood streaks down the walls and over the stairs, sticky to the touch. The walls are not smooth but have large outcroppings that, upon inspection (DC 13 investigation), look eerily like hands and faces pressing outwards.

4. Both of the two stairs leading to the right room are very far apart and need DC 15 acrobatics checks to reach. The room is very small. Along the far wall is a small stone shelf with two potions of greater healing. In the middle of the room is a small trapdoor (mimic). The first creature to touch this door must make a DC 13 athletics or acrobatics check, or be grappled by the mimic and sucked down into a small-sized hole (squeezing into a smaller space rules apply for medium creatures), where the mimic will begin to attack them.

5. The walls of the room are made of obsidian, polished to a shine. Around the room are several tables with ancient, rotting books (mainly about necromancy and immortality), jars, vials, and 30 pg worth of old silver coins. Some of the vials are filled with pugnant liquids (such as serpent venom), while others are filled with dried blood, white powder (bone), or even teeth. Around the floor are strange, unreadable runes that have slight necrotic magic. A DC 17 investigation check realises that the characters' reflections in the obsidian walls appear slightly delayed (this DC should drop the longer the characters are present in the room). Any obvious display of this realisation, or if the characters try to leave the room, causes the monstrosities in the wall to stop their mimicry. As they begin to reach out, they take obsidian form (use reskinned gargoyle stats, changing the type to monstrosity). Since they began as reflections of the players, consider giving them any weapons or spells that the players have used in their presence. For level 5 players, consider using 4 monsters.