

# Accursed Apple Twists

An Adventure Module from the GM's Secret Stash



Presented by Quickphix

# Accursed Apple Twists

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A 1 - 3 Hour Adventure for 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Characters

## CREDITS:

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*"Many layers of crispy dough, a juicy filling of apples and sultanas, and a lukewarm vanilla sauce - the makings of an apple twist that couldn't be more classic." - Frohenfelder recipe book*

## Summary

Near the old dwarven road lies a tiny hamlet called Frohenfeld. Its not quite 40 inhabitants mostly make their living growing fruit. They are particularly proud of their cider, which has secured the village a decent income. Their business has been flourishing in recent years, thanks to exceptionally good harvests and steady demand. In good times like these the Frohenfeldians are regarded as friendly and open-hearted. However, there have been times, where the entire village was known for its fickle and calculating inhabitants. Usually, a place like this would never arouse the suspicion of the authorities. However, a few days ago one of the Archmage's couriers vanished near the town on his way to the capital. Since he was carrying a priceless amulet, the Archmage's agents immediately offered a bounty to anybody able to recover the lost artefact. Solving the case will therefore not only yield a princely reward, it will also grant some amount of political capital.

In this 1 – 3-hour adventure, a group of first to second level characters are sent to investigate the quiet Frohenfeld. Yet, what starts as an easy stroll through the countryside soon turns into a farce. A multi-layered intrigue which is bound to leave a sour aftertaste – or how the Frohenfeldians would put it: a truly "Accursed Apple Twist"!

## Premise

The players are hired by Maurizio Carafa, one of the Archmage's many agents. He wants the players to infiltrate Frohenfeld as undercover investigators, while his men scour the nearby countryside. He can tell the players the following things:

- The courier was last seen just outside Frohenfeld, where he was greeting one of his colleagues coming the other way. At that time, he was still in possession of the wooden box containing the amulet (see Appendix IIa).
- Carafa doesn't consider the party's mission to be dangerous – but he knows the Frohenfeldians wouldn't cooperate with the law-enforcement of the capital.
- Rumour has it, the amulet is not only ancient and valuable. Apparently, it contains vast magical potential. This is also the reason, why the otherwise thoughtful Archmage immediately organized a large-scale manhunt.
- According to the patrolling guards there are no thieve dens or other criminal organisations known to operate in this region.
- The courier himself is completely unimpeachable in this matter. He's been in the Archmage's services for ages and has carried out jobs for even more expensive cargo before.

## Act I: Harvest Festival

After an uneventful journey, the party reaches their destination shortly before dawn. The hamlet is nestled between soft hills and surrounded by countless apple groves (see Appendix IIb). As they follow the beaten path towards the small number of houses, they notice the villagers are preparing for a big feast: Benches and tables are set up, barrels of cider are rolled from cellars and the entire village square pleasantly smells of cinnamon and apple twists. The players are quickly noticed by a group of children, who scream loudly at a smiling

### In your campaign:

This adventure is meant for player without much experience playing D&D or in need of brushing up on the three main modes of play. However, it can also be easily used as a quick side-quest in your campaign.

but clearly tired old man, drawing his attention to the new arrivals. He introduces himself as Dieter Sirnach and welcomes them as the elected mayor of the village to Frohenfeld (see Appendix IIc). By chance, the players have stumbled into the annual harvest festival taking place tonight – and they are cordially invited by Sirnach and several of the smiling Frohenfeldians.

## A Pleasant Feast

The atmosphere at the feast is exuberant, the night is pleasantly warm and the cider flows in streams. Apparently, the villagers are even happy to let the players pay for their meals by telling stories. While talking to the villagers the players can catch on to the following rumours:

- In Arborn, a neighbouring village, the inhabitants secretly mix pear juice into their cider (true): an unspeakable blasphemy in the eyes of the Frohenfeldians! Moreover, the people of Arborn probably eat dogs (wrong).
- Due to a rebellion in the south-eastern provinces most of the trade routes leading there are endangered. The farmers fear they'll not make enough income this year if the conflicts continue (true).
- In the forest, a few miles west of Frohenfeld, a horribly mutilated corpse was found a few days ago. It is already the third in a month. Some beast up there seems to be up to no good (true).
- Dieter Sirnach is popular as the mayor. He is not some city bigshot and knows a lot about the farmers' work. They come to him for advice, which even helped the more veteran farmers remain pest free this year – unlike some neighbouring villages (true).
- The cider farmers from neighbouring Arbon have tried to poison the cider of the Frohenfeldians (wrong). During previous nights, suspicious figures have often been seen right at the edge of the village (true).

Asking around for the missing courier will only produce confused looks or raised eyebrows. However, after a while a small woman with a dirty apron approaches the players: It is the barmaid of the village tavern.

## Ruth Kreuzlinger (female Human)

A warm woman with a round physique and soft features. Ruth has never left the village in her entire life, since she always had to take care of the family's tavern. While she likes living in Frohenfeld, she's also intensely curious and likes to ask strangers for stories from the world outside.

### Ability scores

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AC: 12 / HP: 15 / Speed 25

STR: 12 (+1) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 14 (+2)

INT: 10 (+0) / WIS: 10 (+0) / CHA: 14 (+2)

### Traits

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**Pokerface:** As an experienced hostess, she's used to tell white lies with a smile. She has advantage against insight checks which rely on sight.

### Actions

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**Ladle** (+3 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d6+1 bludgeoning damage.

## The First Lead?

Ruth carefully assess the surrounding crowd, places a jug filled with cider in front of each of the players and sits down. With a hushed voice she tells them that she couldn't help but overhear them talking about the courier. With a conspiratorial look she explains, that she might know of his location. However, for fear of her life she's only willing to discuss it in private. She then tells the party to play along. She lifts her jug and loudly toasts the players to the harvest blessing. The other Frohenfeldians loudly join in. She takes a deep sip and signals the players to follow her in a few moments. She then leaves the players without further pause alone at the table.

Should the players decide to follow her, they'll feel strangely dazed. Talking becomes difficult and as they try to shakily stand up, they'll black out. Betrayal – the players have been poisoned. If the players refuse to return Ruth's toast, scandal will follow shortly afterwards. As soon as they follow Ruth outside, they are harassed

by a drunken group of villagers who accuse them of poisoning the cider. Somebody must have spread this malicious rumour. A fight against the growing mob is hopeless. The players must surrender for better or for worse. They are swiftly knocked unconscious.

## Act II: Dazed and Boozed

The players regain their consciousness on the cold hard floor of a dark room with a slight headache. The flickering light of two torches illuminates the only way outside. Unfortunately, it is blocked by a thick iron lattice (see appendix II d). At least they are unharmed except for a few bruises here and there - but their weapons have been taken from them. Looking around, the players will realize, that their cell probably once served as a burial chamber. The walls surrounding them have several coves carved into them. Old clay fragments and bones protrude from the loose ground, indicating that the room was probably recently plundered. In front of the poorly fitted but massive iron lattice stands a guard, who introduces himself as Igor. He informs the players they should consider themselves lucky. His master has chosen them as the first and final audience for his triumph. He promises, they'd only have to wait a few more hours to enjoy the great spectacle.

### Igor (male human)

An unpleasant looking guy who speaks like any good sense he once might have possessed had been surgically removed from him. He loves to be praised by his master and hates people who express themselves in a complicated manner.

### Ability Scores

AC: 14 / HP: 25 / Speed 25

STR: 17 (+3) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 8 (-1) / WIS: 8 (-1) / CHA: 8 (-1)

### Traits

**Drunkard:** His speech is still slurred from the feast. He has disadvantage against persuasion checks meant to enrage him. He's also immune to intimidation.

### Actions

**Mace** (+5 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d6+3 bludgeoning damage.

## The Grave Escape

There are several ways for the players to escape from their cell. Below are just a few of the options.

- **Persuading the guard:** Igor is absolute in his loyalty to his master and will only open the door if the players make him feel guilty or convince him, that holding them goes against his master's wishes.
- **Provoking the guard:** Igor is not known for his patience. He especially doesn't like to be treated like an idiot. With the right words, he could probably be provoked to attack the party. However, they then have a raging giant standing between them and their gear.
- **Breaking the lattice by force:** At the spot where the lattice was fixed to the stone wall, its joints are almost rusted through. A powerful enough blow could destroy the anchorage. It would also make a lot of noise.
- **Picking the lock:** The weapons were taken from the players, but a lockpick is easy to hide. A trained rogue should have no problems with a simple lock of this design.
- **Dig:** The ground below the lattice consists only of hard-packed earth. With a little effort and patience, a small opening could probably be created. However, Igor is actively watching the players and will intervene, with force if necessary.

## Conditional Freedom

After escaping from their cells, the players will find themselves in a sparsely decorated anteroom. Their equipment is lying on a table together with other,



mostly rusty weapons (see Appendix I, Room A). Except for the table, a few rotten shelves and a narrow passageway, there is nothing of interest to find in this room. The passage leads into a sparsely lit corridor, which splits into two curving paths to the left and right

### The Exit

If the players follow the round corridor to their left, they will soon reach a narrow split in the path. At the very end of this passage, they can see the starry sky and feel a welcome breeze on their skin (see Appendix I, Room C). Unfortunately, a heavy portcullis will have a say in their escape. The players clearly won't get any further with brute force. A successful perception check will reveal that the portcullis is connected to two chains disappearing into the ceiling. At specific places in the ceiling the chains shimmer through and hint, that the opening mechanism must be near the centre of the mound-like building.

### The Exotic Tomb

If the players follow the passage from the exit to the left, they will come across a heavy stone door. It takes the strength of two people to push it open. Behind lies a pitch-black room without any source of light (see Appendix I, Room B). On closer inspection, the players discover eight sarcophagi which are fitted into the coves across the walls. They are carved from a smooth rock which does not exist in this part of the country. Filigree patterns decorate these ancient coffins. A history check will reveal that their design is a mixture of the ancient burial rites of the region with a culture foreign to the players. Presumably, these are graves of foreign travellers, who have earned this grave of honour through some sort of heroic death. The back wall shows a complex carving, which seems to either display a recipe or a ritual. Strange figures are arranged in a circle around a symbol which looks a bit like an apple. Several pieces of parchments and drops of wax on the floor indicate that someone recently has been studying these inscriptions thoroughly.

The sarcophagi's lids can be pried open with a sword or similar instrument: Four of them are completely empty except for a few copper coins. Three contain skeletons wrapped in rotten robes. One of the sarcophagi contains a small stone box. Inside is a fine silver brooch with a twister symbol engraved on it. However, the box is secured with a wire against grave robbers, which activates a large spear trap (DC 10 perception check to notice the wire). If the trap is triggered, all players within a 5ft radius of the sarcophagus must pass a DC14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the players take 2d6 piercing damage.

### The Stone Portal

In the middle of the round passage there is a large stone portal (see Appendix I, Room D). Countless lines are carved into rough stone, forming a man-high twisting symbol. A keyhole, lever or switch to open the portal can't be seen anywhere nearby. Metal rings protrude from the wall on each side of the portal – the soot-marks above them indicate, that they were used to hold torches just recently. The portal can be opened in several ways:

- **Carry the brooch:** The brooch found in the exotic tomb reacts with a soft hum when placed near the portal. It was used as a mark of identification by the designers of the tomb. Placing it in the middle of the portal will open it.
- **Equipping the torch holders with burning torches:** a simple mechanism based on heat and-counterweights hidden inside the wall. A DC 14 Perception check will reveal, that two people must pull the torches down at the same time.
- **Cast a spell on the middle of the carved twist:** Passing a DC 12 Arcana check will tell the players, that the middle of the vortex responds to (any) magical energy. In times long past, a special spell was needed to open the portal, but the protection spells have grown weak over time and now respond to any form of magic.

## Act III: The Ritual

The portal opens with a loud crunching sound. It reveals a round chamber with a vaulted ceiling bathed in reddish light. Its insides smell sweetly of rotting fruit and cinnamon. A dark-hooded figure stands with its back to the players in a wide chalk circle. When it turns around, the players recognize it as Dieter Sirnach, the jolly mayor of Frohenfeld. His friendly facial features are distorted by manic glee. He clings to a knotty staff with white knuckles and a rune-ornamented amulet adorns his heavily breathing chest (see Appendix IIc).

Disturbingly, he begins to talk to the players with the same cordial voice he used to invite them to the feast. The players quickly learn, that Sirnach is surprisingly pleased that the players have come to him. He plans to sacrifice them in an ancient ritual to summon a demon. If the players have killed Igor, he'll offer up his mocking regrets, expressing his frustration on how difficult it is to find reliable servants these days.

If provoked, he goes on a rant about how he tricked the villagers he secretly despises. For years, he has brought them to his side, using some minor protection spells against vermin and bad weather. For seventeen years the Frohenfeldians have supported or tolerated Sirnach's experiments, sometimes even capturing willing subjects for his studies, such as the sought-after courier. The high crop yields provided by Sirnach in exchange made it easy for the farmers not to listen too much to their conscience. His previous experiments have given him insight into the old rituals of the mysterious builders of this burial mound. Yet, for his magnum opus he needed a powerful source of energy. The amulet of the Archmage finally made this possible.

### Dieter Sirnach (male human)

A master of manipulation: to the world he's the friendly and harmless mayor of Frohenfeld. However, beneath hides his true identity as a sought-after black magician. Due to his forbidden research he was expelled by the academy and hunted as an outlaw. Frohenfeld was only the last station in a long escape from the Archmage's bounty hunters. From here he planned his return and

simmered in revenge fantasies for years. Sirnach was extremely patient and will not let his greatest triumph be taken from him.

### Ability Scores

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AC: 15 / HP: 20 / Speed 25

STR: 12 (+1) / DEX: 10 (+0) / CON: 13 (+2)

INT: 17 (+3) / WIS: 16 (+3) / CHA: 15 (+2)

### Traits

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**Insomnia:** Sirnach hasn't had a proper night's sleep in weeks. The old magic coursing through his veins keeps him awake – he is immune to the sleeping condition.

**Manipulator:** The players must pass a DC 10 Charisma saving throw on each round. On a failed save, they are disturbed by Sirnach's friendly face and almost cuddly demeanour – rendering them unable to attack him.

**Spellcasting:** Sirnach is a level three wizard. He is able to cast the following spells through his arcane focus (the staff):

- **Cantrips:** Light, Ray of Frost, Thunderclap
- **Level 1 (4x):** Burning Hands, Shield, Sleep
- **Level 2 (2x):** Darkness, Suggestion

### Actions

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**Ritual Dagger** (+3 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d4 piercing damage.

### How to run this encounter

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During the battle, Sirnach keeps reciting a complicated summoning spell. He jumps around like a possessed marionette, stabbing the players and hurling spells in all directions. Should the players succeed in killing Sirnach, he'll purposefully collapse onto his dagger. Sirnach's blood mixes with the chalk outlines of his circle...

If, instead, Sirnach succeeds in killing one of the players, he will burst into triumphant laughter, as their blood drenches his chalk-circle...

## The Twist with Apples

Either way, the ground begins to shake, and the chalk circle starts to glow a deep red. Previously hidden lines carved into the ground light up and reveal a massive magical twister. A nauseating stench fills the air and a shadowy creature materializes from the floor up. The grotesque image and the stench take the players' breath away. The thing looks like a giant apple, with long, spindly limbs and a huge mouth (see Appendix IIe). If Sirnach is still alive, he orders the demon to eat the players. Instead, it immediately turns on its summoner and tears Sirnach's head off with a single bite.

### Apple of Discord

Failed harvest and rot personified in a stinking entity - frighteningly apt for this region. Would the villagers have continued to shield Sirnach if they had known about this thing?

### Ability Scores

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AC: 15 / HP: 30 / Speed 35

STR: 18 (+4) / DEX: 10 (+0) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 12 (+1) / WIS: 16 (+3) / CHA: 8 (-1)

### Traits

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**Roasted Apple:** Fire only increases the smell – it is immune against fire damage.

**Sour Apple:** Eating or drinking any part of the apple will result in 2d6 acid damage.

**An Apple a Day:** The demon draws energy from the fertile soil surrounding it. It heals 1d4 HP each round.

### Aktionen

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**Crumbling Claw** (+5 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 2d6 slashing damage.

### How to run this encounter

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The demon depends on the magical power of the vortex. Without a powerful master it cannot leave the burial mound and disappears if the amulet (the source of magic) is destroyed. Otherwise it will keep attacking until killed

## No Time for Seconds

With one last hit, the apple of discord vanishes screeching into thin air. All that remains is the musty apple smell rising from the flesh the players have chopped out of its body. Inspecting Sirnach's corpse, the players find a black leather booklet in a language unknown to them and a small bag of gold coins (2d6). Upon leaving the otherwise empty room, they'll notice an inconspicuous lever next to the portal. If pulled, the portcullis at the exit opens: The players free at last! Under the beautiful autumn sky, the players realize that their prison was an ancient burial mound located above the village. Here, the black magician had been able to carry out his dark experiments without attracting any attention. The players decide it's time to turn their backs on this god-forsaken region. One thing is for sure though, they won't be able to enjoy apples any time soon.

## Reward

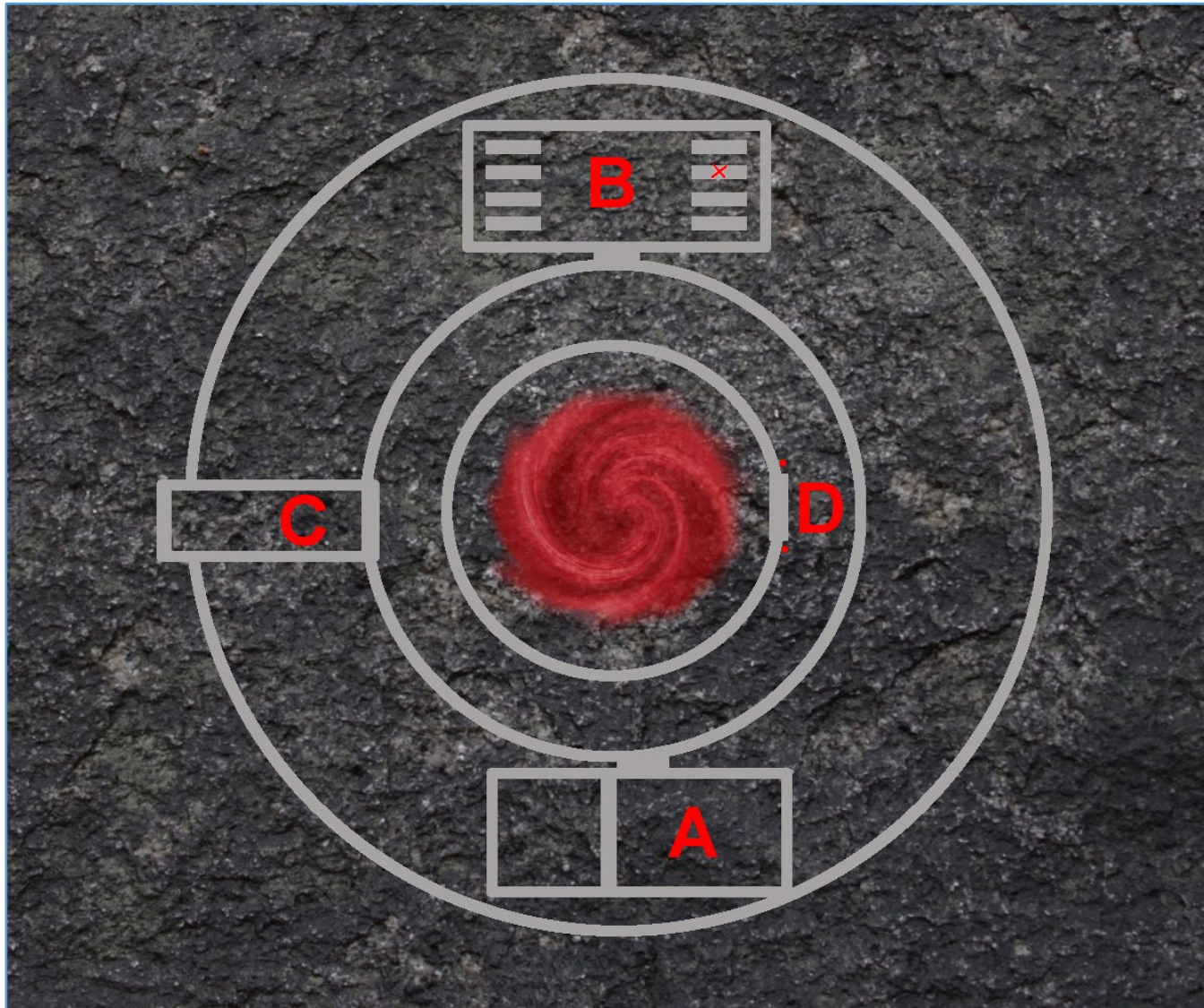
If the players were able to track down (the remains of) the amulet, the book of Sirnach or any other proof for their deeds, Maurizio Carafa will award them the agreed upon bounty.

## What's next?

The bounty of the Archmage has been collected and the Frohenfeldians must undergo a thorough interrogation. Many of them didn't really know what Sirnach was up to in the burial mound and were shocked to learn, that they had been living next to a portal to hell for so long. The same thought also crosses to the players' minds. Who were these foreign magicians who originally built the burial mound? What weird spells has Sirnach learned from their carvings? Where did they come from? And do the hundreds of other burial mounds in the valley hide similar horrors? There is probably only one way to find out!



## Appendix I: The Map of the Burial Mound



### Legend

- a. The Cell and Antechamber
- b. The Exotic Tomb
- c. The Exit
- d. The Stone Portal

# Appendix II: Illustrations

## Ila: The Lost Amulet





**IIb: View of Frohenfeld**



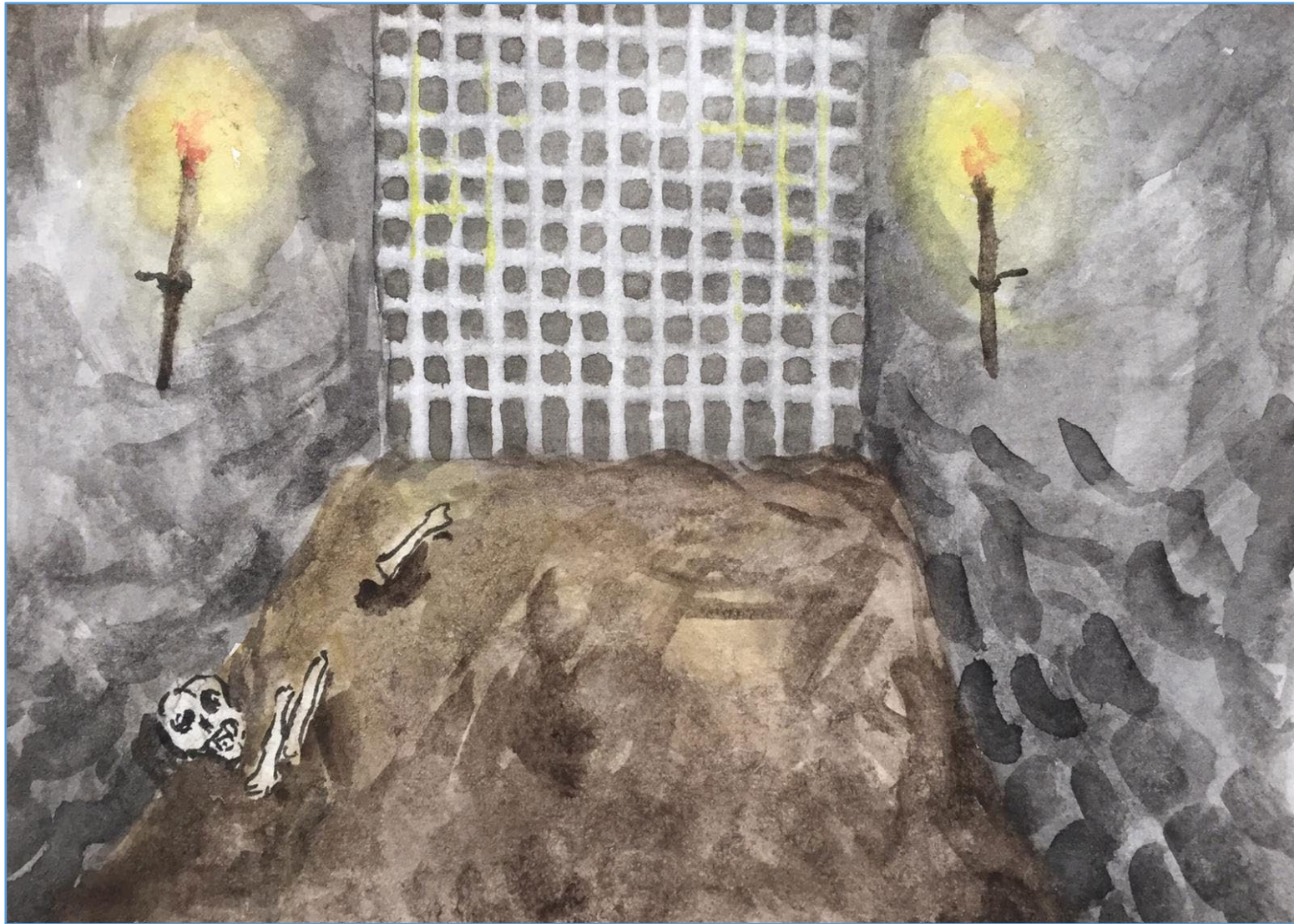


**Ilc: Dieter Sirnach (before / after)**





## Ild: The Cell





**ii: The Apple of Discord**

