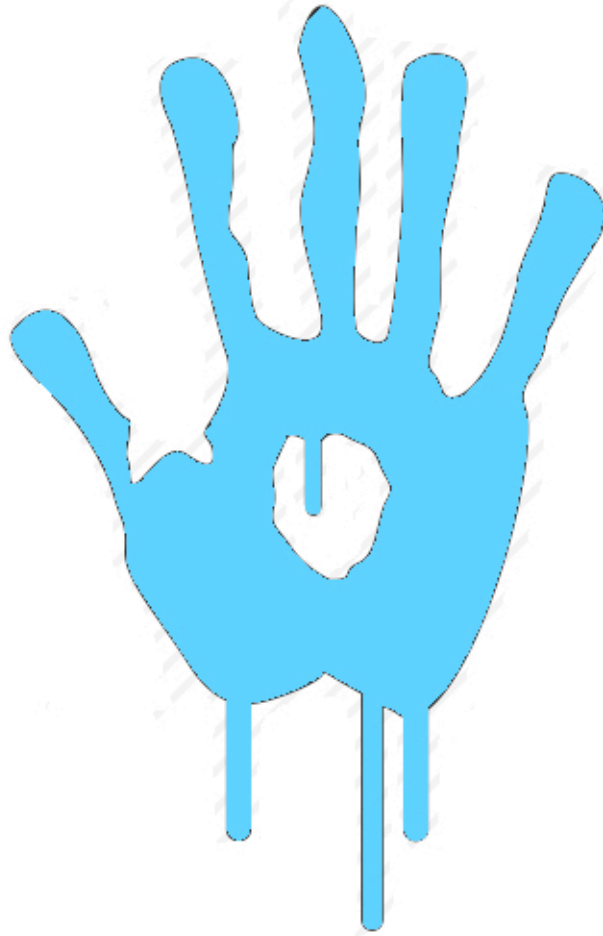


GRINDING US



A GRUESOME OSR MODULE
DEDICATED TO GRINDING GEAR AND FORGIVE US
COMPATIBLE WITH LAMENTATIONS OF THE FLAME PRINCESS

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GRINDING US

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A big thanks to you all!

Grinding Gear & Garvin Richrom

Are creations of James Edward Raggi IV,
who was kind enough to give permission to quote them in this module

The Tenebrous Hand

Is a creation of Kelvin Green,
who gave me permission to use it here as well

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Grinding Us is an homage to Grinding Gear and Forgive Us, two of my favourite Lamentations of the Flame Princess books.

The first OSR adventure I ever played was, in fact, the Grinding Gear, a relatively obscure module published in 2009. It's probably the gaming experience I recall the best. I remember we got ourselves trapped in the false tomb and died of starvation and madness. For several days, I couldn't wrap my head around the fact. What did we miss? What was it all about? What else was down there? I became consumed by it, obsessing over and over again about the meaning of all the puzzles, and riddles, and questions, demanding answers from my DM, who just sat there, unmovable and grinning. Sensing a personal descent into madness myself – just like my character – I decided to buy the PDF online just to understand exactly what it was all about.

It was clever. Really clever.

Some months after, I ran it for a few friends in back-to-back nights, stopped only by the first rays of sunlight cracking through the blinds. Only one character survived to see the last room and decided to leave all behind (including ALL treasure), and make a run for his life. At that point, life seemed more important than gold. That player still speaks of that session to this very day.

We would eventually move on to play other games and genres, but the gruesomeness of Lamentations lingered, reigning supreme on the back of our heads. Then, in 2014, Forgive Us was published, right when my players begged to play one of those “old school” Lamentations modules. What an incredible gaming night we had. Few encounters, almost nothing to see, a perfect atmosphere of emptiness and horror, and a brutal way to die. No one survive, but everyone had a blast.

So, here's my humble tribute to these two incredible pieces of work. Especially, because Grinding Gear has just turned 10 years old and Forgive Us is now 5! I could not let that pass unnoticed.

Enjoy,
A.

REFEREE INTRODUCTION

This adventure is designed for whatever party of whatever levels of whatever system you might be playing. Sure, it's better if you use Lamentations of the Flame Princess rules, because they tend to keep the characters low-key, but the referee is free to use whatever system desired. If the party is of high levels, just adjust the amount of damage rolls and the level of foes accordingly – there aren't many of these anyway, so it's not too much to ask. The party should be prepared to experience a cunning, little module of puzzly traps, deadly randomness and weird weirdness.

Like most of LotFP's original adventures (between 2009 and 2011), the primary challenge of this module is not lethal combat encounters with wondrous monsters, or hordes of goblins, or whatever lies in between, but rather to beat the riddles and traps that lie within. Like someone very important once said, "players will have to use their heads in order to find the ~~treasure~~ exit." (James Raggi IV)

There should be a strict bookkeeping of light and rations. How many torches do they have? How much food? How much water? Make sure you keep a good count of this, as the players will probably be trapped at a certain point and fight over them. Make sure you keep good count of them from the very start so that they don't become an "issue" all of sudden. Subtly hint at your players that these are important from the top. This will keep them on their toes and that's where you want them.

Placing this Adventure in your Campaign

This module can be effectively played from any tavern. It will work fine and players should have fun. However, the nostalgic value is lost if you choose to drop out the Grinding Gear. So, use the Grinding Gear. Especially if your players know it. I am sure that they will shed a tear or two when they explore the inn and find that Annabel Marie is a fifteen-year old lassie (working as the bartender), that the chapel outside contains statues to one St. McIver, that the library of Richrom upstairs has interesting tomes on construction, riddles and dragons, and that the attic is (still) not infested by mosquito bats.

Adventure Background

Long before a band of thieves lured his daughter Annabel into a rascal's life, Garvin Richrom ran a prosperous inn, the Grinding Gear. Cut off from civilization, the establishment became a hub of rogues and scoundrels, avoiding the grip of kings. In time, Richrom would grow resentful of these and devise the ultimate plan to scorn their kind. But, for now, he has allowed The Tenebrous Hand to set up base, him too profiting from their thefts – if only he knew then that his daughter would be fatally infatuated by one of them!

Richrom has allowed the Hand to use the inn to recruit new members. The method is cruel and sadistic, however functional, one that he would eventually put to use in his own twisted manner, creating a death trap out of his own tomb.

So, what is the method? The guild built the ultimate trial a day's ride from the Grinding Gear in an old abandoned convent. The guild is only interested in hiring the best of thieves, so the trial is brutal and (very) fatal. Upon spotting potential candidates at the inn, the Hand lures them into the complex to determine who is worthy. Those who make it out alive are hired and rewarded accordingly. Those who do not make it... the guild takes it as survival of the fittest / elimination of competition.

The Tenebrous Hand would eventually perish years later, succumbing to their own greed, after unadvisedly stealing a sacred artefact of the Brotherhood of Pus: an ancient casket trapping all sorts of diseases. Upon prying it open, all members were transmogrified into plague-monsters. There was only time for one of them to write a message on the wall with his own blood: Forgive Us.

But, for now, they are still growing. And hiring.

Opening scene

The PCs arrive at the Grinding Gear. After the second round of drinks, they eavesdrop on a conversation between three hooded men. These are high-members of The Tenebrous Hand. The PCs hear something about an abandoned convent with treasure buried in its crypt. The men give details as to its whereabouts. The referee is free to come up with descriptions for these, like “go past the dark forest and, after the field of mushrooms, ride for two hours towards the misty hills and the convent will appear on a hilltop to your right.”

Whatever the players do next, the referee should “reward” them with a map of the dungeon (handout in the back). Literally, whatever. Do players look for clues in the table where the men were seated? Do they search their room upstairs? Do they try to pick-pocket one of them? They get the map either way. This is not because the thieves are sloppy. This is because they WANT them to get the map. They have a stack of these and “offer” them to every party of potential candidates that arrives at the inn. The players will probably feel victorious, though. That's exactly how the Hand wants them to feel.

(Note: the referee should avoid too much interaction between the thieves and the PCs at this stage. If approached, the thieves dismiss themselves. If a fight ensues, try not to make it deadly. If it does, that's alright too. The convent and the crypt are still there. The only thing that will probably not be there is a reward at the end of the adventure, because the party just killed the men who were going to give it to them. Thinking of it as we speak, perhaps let them kill the hooded figures. Make it carnal and gory. Wouldn't that be the ultimate joke? Wouldn't that be the ultimate Garvin Richrom experience?)

THE SURROUNDINGS

The convent is tucked amidst a bleak, thick and hilly forest. The closest human-made structure is the Grinding Gear, which itself is isolated. Untamed animals and foes may come into the area. The beasts are lured by the smells of rotting flesh coming from the mass grave and the foes are probably out searching for treasure, or may even be other candidates eyeballed by the guild. There is a 1 in 6 chance twice per day that someone or something will drop in. The animals will hunt down the PCs for food. The thieves will try to murder the PCs, but if outnumbered will only sneak and steal them.

Roll	Encounter
1	1d4 Wild Boars: HD 1, AC 8, HP 4, Mov 2x of Human, One Bite Attack 1d3 damage, Morale 6.
2	2d4 Wolves: HD 2, AC 12, HP 6, Mov 1.5x of Human, One Bite Attack 1d4 damage, Morale 8.
3	2d6 Mosquito Bats: HD 2, AC 12, HP 10, Mov 1.5x of Human (flying), One Proboscis Attack 1d4 damage + blood drain 1d4 damage every round thereafter, Morale 10.
4	2d3 Wandering Thieves: Level 1 Specialists, AC 12-14, HP 4-6, Mov as Human, Daggers 1d4, Short bows 1d6, Short swords 1d6, Morale 12.

The convent is composed of a series of connected buildings, engulfed by dense vegetation. The plan of the site is irregular, composed of various spaces at different slope heights, incorporated into the local rock and cliffs. The complex is made of stone, topped by roof tiles, and even though all of its buildings and annexes are consumed by flora, they seem to be in relative good condition and well preserved. There are no obvious signs of dereliction, even though there is silence and the place seems abandoned.

Besides the convent, there are two other points of interest. The first is a mass grave about 500 yards out. The grave is concealed by two small rolling hills, so the PCs are unable to see it from any point near the church. There is, however, a number of mosquito bats circling the skies immediately above it, during the day. Any PC who makes a successful check in the appropriate skill (bushcraft, perception, or similar) notices this. Another way to discover the grave is to track down roving animals in the area. Their trails will lead into it.

There is another site that can draw attention, but this is only visible from one of the hills adjacent to the mass grave. Once there, PCs can spot a megalithic structure another 500 yards out in a clearing.

The Mass Grave

The grave has a display of rotting corpses. Most of them are half-buried and if the PCs excavate the site, they discover more. An appropriate skill check (bushcraft, etc.) determines that there are many animal tracks here, including some of digging. There are over 60 bodies in different stages of decomposing. Most have become skeletons, but a few still show rotting flesh and putrefaction. Some are still dressed. More interestingly, there are also a couple of petrified bodies, their remains turned to stone.

If searched thoroughly, the PCs discover that one of the bodies (a dressed one) is in the possession of an exact duplicate of the map that they “snatched” from the guild at the Grinding Gear. That same body is missing his right hand and the left one has a blue complexion. Several other bodies also have their hands severed.

If the party comes during the day, when the mosquito bats are circling above, 2d6 of them will attack the party. They don’t like their food to be messed with.

The Megalithic Monument

The megalithic monument consists of a ring of standing stones, much like those of Stonehenge. A closer inspection reveals that there are two giant boulders missing from the set. This is obvious even to simple-minded PCs.

A drifting ghost of pre-historic origins wanders astray in this area. The ghost will attack anyone that comes near the site, but will not advance beyond 100 yards of it.

- **Drifting Ghost:** HD 4, AC 16, HP 25, Mov 2x of Human, One Withering Touch Attack 1d8 damage, immune to physical attacks (only magic can damage it), Morale 12.





The Convent

The convent is a minimalist construction, tailored for an eremite order that lived by asceticism and inner-contemplation. It has been built in harmony with its surroundings, implanted in the boulders that form part of the hill. Dense vegetation covers and surrounds the various connected buildings, with fungi and lichen painting it in shades of pale green and grey. The composition and spaces are influenced by the number eight (evident in the number of cells and stairs between the rooms), symbolising infinity. The whole building is small and poverty is the central notion ruling its construction. The complex looks old and outdated, from an epoch far away, even though parts of it are fairly taken care of.

1. Main entrance

The entrance to the complex exhibits a sign “Those who make themselves ready, to the beginning shall return”. The entrance is a front porch of sorts. The wall in front is decorated with a painting of a big hand. The palm has a large lock. If used correctly, it triggers a mechanism that opens the base of the fountain in the yard, revealing a staircase leading into Dungeon Level One.

The key can be found in the chapel. However, the correct way to use is not with the normal key-shaped end (clearly too small), but rather with the stone carving of the hand itself.

2. The Chapel

The chapel is small and humble. The entrance exhibits a sign saying “Do not touch the bodies”. There are three rows of pews interrupted by an aisle leading to the altar. The pews are carefully displayed and populated by figures wearing black capes and hoods, their hands clutching one another, as if praying.

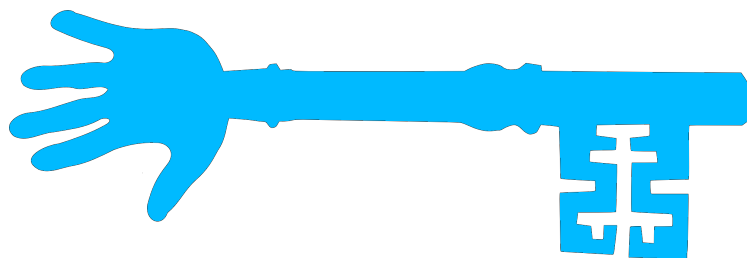
There are a total of sixteen figures. Inspection reveals that these are fully-dressed mummified or embalmed bodies. It reeks of death and moist lichen. There are twelve men and four women. Eight bodies occupy the pews on each side of the aisle, with the front row reserved for the women (two on each side as well).

The bodies have all been rigged with tripwire. The wire is attached to their feet and goes round the room connecting all bodies. Touching the bodies is harmless, but removing as much as one from its position will trigger a trap that shuts down the doors of the chapel and releases a cloud of poison – 1d4 of damage per round (saving throw for half). The door can be smashed but counts as having 20 hit points. It is possible to disarm the trap (if searched and found), but if the roll fails, the PC just cut the wire by accident, triggering it.

The altar is dominated by a sculpture of a big hand in place of a cross or other holy symbols. It has an obvious secret compartment in its base. If searched and cracked open, it reveals a stone carving of a hand, with the fist worked into a key shape. This key opens most (if not all) of the locks in the Dungeon.

3. Choir

Unremarkable room with seats for a choir.



4. Stairs

All sets of stairs have exactly eight steps.

5. The Cells

The eight cells are small and all have the same tiny doorframes (no doors remain). Intelligent PCs may understand that this is not because its original inhabitants were necessarily pygmies, but because each time someone enters or leaves the room, they bow before God. The cells have only stone beds and nothing else.

6. The Kitchen, Refectory and Bathroom

All abandoned. The only thing of notice is that the bathroom has seen some activity. Smells and stains of urine can be detected. The bathroom also has a water collector, which is full when the PCs explore.

7. Chapterhouse

This is where the monks once held assembly. Stone benches have been carved from the walls themselves, all around the room.

Opposite the entrance is a niche. The niche has a statue of a hand with five candles resting atop each of its fingers. If lit, these create a composition of light and shadow that makes the walls spell out the following message:

“Each of the eight bodies carries the weight of the world.”

8. The Library

The library is destroyed and long gone. The shelves have been emptied and many of them are broken. Some inlaid labels can be discerned, though. The referee can insert references to any suiting religious order in his or her campaign. Otherwise, the labels read “hermit life”, “asceticism”, “food production” and “inner-contemplation”.

9. The Infirmary

Once the infirmary of the convent, this room has been updated into an embalming station. There are brain hooks, oil jars, different sorts of knives, stacks of straw and so forth. The main mortuary table is made of stone and a closer inspection reveals stains of blood (not fresh, but not too old) running through a system of blood drainage.

10. Guest Quarters

No signs of recent usage. Abandoned.

11. The Penitence Room

Small and dark cell once used for meditation. The walls here have been inscribed with arcane writing. If a *Read Magic* spell is cast, the reader will discover that these are the words for a *Stone to Flesh* spell.

12. The Herbarium Room

This is the place where the monks once tinkered with medical herbs and spices. There are shelves, smaller containers hanging from the walls, hooks and working benches. The room has been emptied except for a set of four beakers displayed on a shelf. The beakers are stopped by cork and wax, each containing a liquid of a different colour: red, blue, green and yellow.

If swallowed, the liquid changes the skin pigmentation of the consumer's hands, dying them in the same colour of the liquid for 3 days. This has no other effect.

A secret compartment in this room hides ten flasks with a strange gooey substance, alongside an alchemist's toolkit. The substance corrodes all things metal.

13. The Fountain

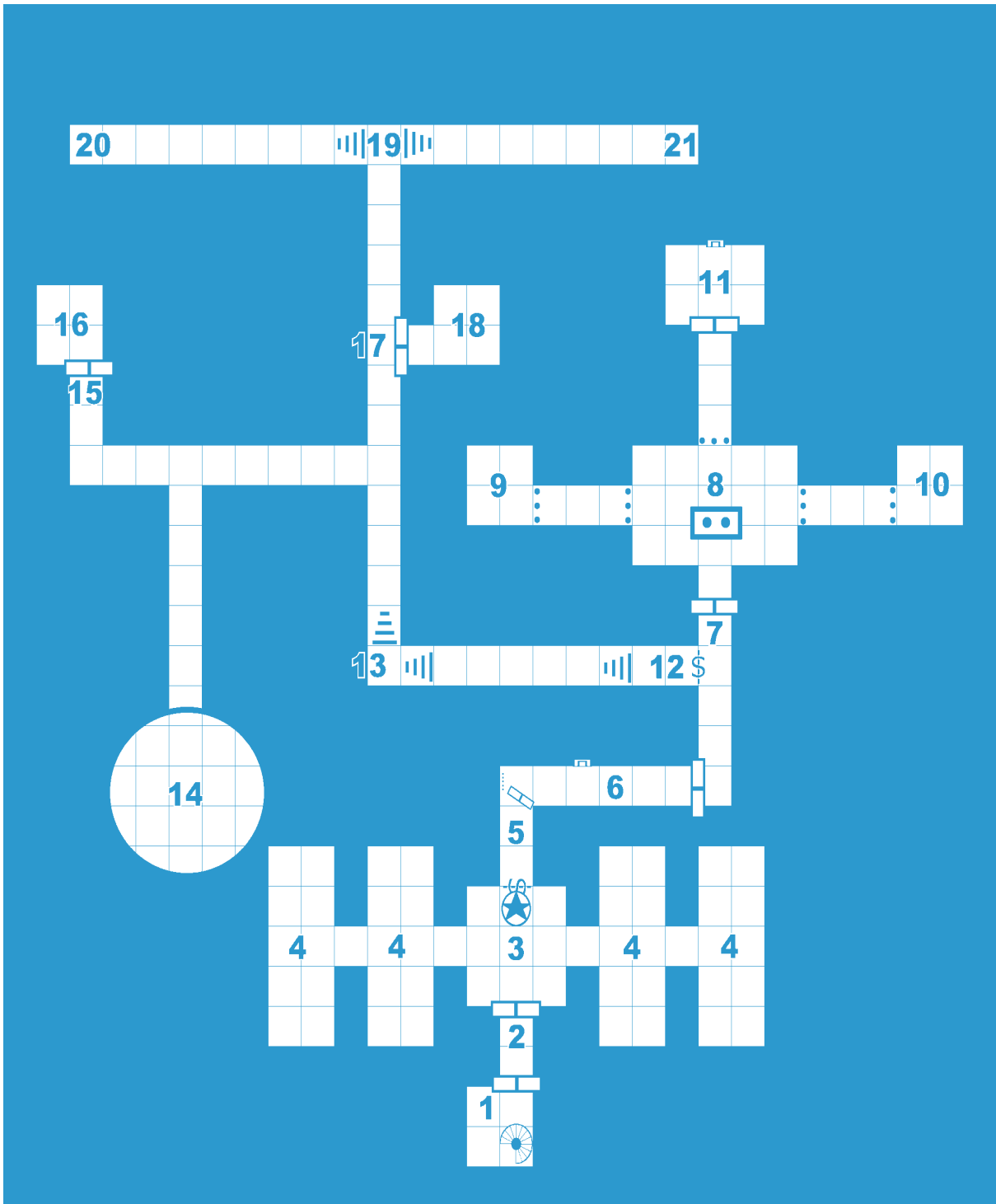
Fountain in an octagonal design. This is the way down to Dungeon Level One. If the key is correctly used in the main entrance, the fountain's bottom will open and its water drained, revealing a spiral staircase to the depths below.


14. Shrine

Abandoned shrine in derelict state.

15. The Barn

The barn has been emptied, no food or agricultural tools remain. Stashed against the back wall however, PCs may find a large mirror attached to the wall, a bulky tuning fork, two dozen torches, rope and a ten-foot pole. There are also four large, empty vases and two wooden chests, also bare. Displacing and carrying the mirror around is possible, but it counts as a large item for encumbrance purposes.



 = 10 FEET

DUNGEON LEVEL ONE

The first part of the dungeon is the original crypt of (whichever) religious order used to inhabit the convent. These include the chapel of bones and the vaults. From the altar onwards, this is all the doings of the guild. A proficient PC might notice the differences in construction with an appropriate skill roll (architecture, etc.). The vaults and the chapel appear to be older. Because the dungeon is used often, it is relatively emptied of vermin and the sorts. Sounds, however, can be heard. Once per turn, the referee may roll on the table below. The sounds should be played before location #5.

Roll	Sounds
1	Sounds of rats echoing in the walls. At the referee's discretion, 2d3 Giant Rats may have taken residence anywhere in this level. HD 1, AC 8, HP 4, Mov as Human, One Bite Attack 1d4 damage, 5% chance of disease every bite, Morale 6. The rats can be also used to steal the PCs' food.
2	Dripping water coming from above. This means it is raining. If the PCs closed the fountain in the entrance room, the rain will now fill it. Any PC that opens the base of the fountain again without taking precautions will be hit a mass of water for one point of damage (saving throw to avoid).
3	A faint growling coming from location #7. Ignore if troll is eliminated.
4	A persistent hissing coming from location #7. Ignore if basilisk is eliminated.
5	One PC hears a faint, low-pitched monk chant coming from the vaults. This is not real, but rather his or her mind playing tricks.
6	A sepulchral silence, so profound that it gives headaches. The referee can ask for saving throws against Magic, just to throw players off. If failed, the PC takes 1 point of damage.

1. Entrance Room

The spiral staircase leads into a dark room. There is a lever on the floor that can be used to close and open the fountain's base. The room is empty except for a large plaque located atop the door that reads "Religious crypt – thread carefully".

Smart PCs will question themselves as to how the water is drained. An appropriate skill check (architecture, search, etc.) reveals two grooves that have been cut against the walls, eventually channelling the water downwards.

This room has a second spiral staircase that leads into Dungeon Level Two. It is hidden under a large stone slab that seems perfectly in-built with the rest of the floor. To open it, PCs must go to locations #20 and #21 and use the key. The mechanism is installed inside the walls, so there is no way of knowing unless the PCs destroy the walls.

2. Door

The door has a sign above it that says:

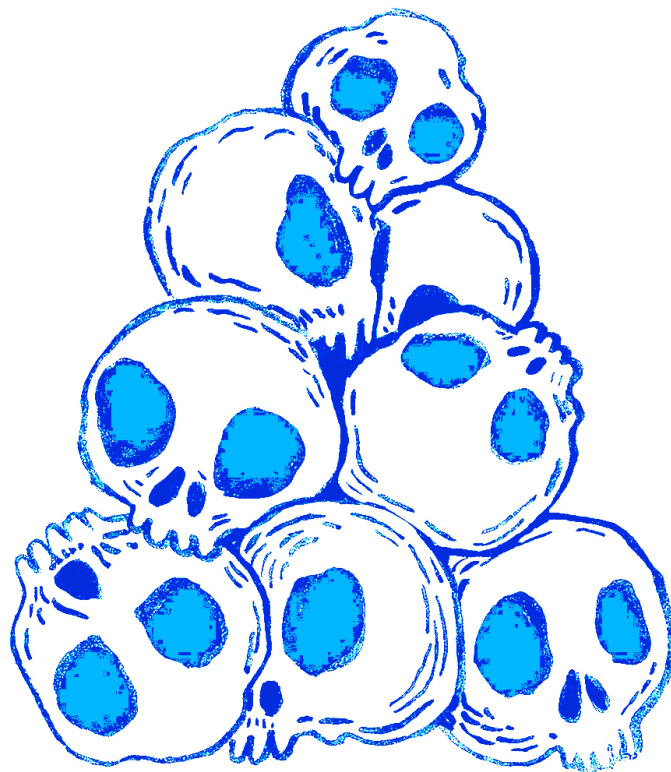
"We bones that here are, for yours await."

3. Chapel of Bones

This is a chapel with the walls entirely pasted with human skulls. Two pillars support the structure, floor to ceiling, made of thigh and arm bones. Some of the bones are clearly larger than those of humans. The north wall has a big altar, also entirely made of parts of human skeletons.

The altar hides a secret passage. In the middle of the room are four bunk beds made of wood. If one body is placed in each bed (eight bodies total), PCs will see an intricate mechanism in the altar rotating the skulls and bones, eventually revealing a secret passage. The mechanism works through weight. The weight of a body forces the beds downwards, pressing the slabs below. The mechanism is hidden in the floor and walls. Naturally, any object that has the weight of a body can be used here.

Removing the bodies (or the weights) causes the altar to hide the passage again.



4. The Vaults

The vaults contain crypt berths in every wall, with fully-dressed bodies in black monk habits. The bodies have all been mummified and may be carried around. Each wall of each vault has exactly eight berths. This means that there are 32 bodies per vault and a total of 128 bodies in the entire crypt. There is no treasure nor “afterlife belongings”, as the monks that inhabited the convent made vows of poverty.

5. Door

Above the door is a sign that says:

“Welcome thief – and stay sharp on your feet”

The door is closed, but unlocked. It has three visible puncture markings in the middle. The door opens inwards into the corridor beyond, with the hinges on the right hand side. Only one PC at a time may squeeze in and get through to the corridor.

6. Trapped Corridor

The western end of the corridor has three small deep holes in it. Only a PC that specifically searches the wall discovers them. Opposite is a closed and locked door. Using the key (found in the altar) opens it, but also triggers a trap that shoots three bolts from the holes. A saving throw is enough to avoid the arrows. If failed, each does 1d8 of damage. If the door behind was left opened (location #5), obstructing the corridor, the arrows will shoot into it.

The secret door in this room hides a small hidden compartment with two levers in the down position. If the left lever is placed in the up position, the trap is disarmed. If the right lever is placed in the up position, the altar in the chapel of bones will open, if it has been closed for whatever reason.

7. Door

This door is closed, but unlocked. Beyond the door can be heard a violent growling (troll in location #9) and a persistent hissing (basilisk in location #10). The secret passage nearby can be detected, but only opens with the lever in location #11.

8. The Cages

All exits in this room are barred with iron bars. Beyond the bars are corridors that disappear into darkness. Those who have night vision see that the corridors end about 30' ahead, stopped by another set of iron bars, presumably opening towards a room. The only exception is the corridor that leads into location #11. This corridor ends in a closed door. Growls and hissing are intense in this room.

In the centre of this room is a stone stand with three levers in the down position:

- If any of the levers is placed in the up position, the iron bars that lead into location #9 (crystal troll) will (slowly) begin to open. Putting the lever in the down position forces the bars (slowly) down again.
- When one of the levers is already in the up position, any other lever placed in the up position (slowly) opens the iron bars that lead into location #10 (basilisk). Putting it down forces the bars down.
- When two levers are in the up position, the last one opens the bars that lead into location #11. Again, putting it down forces the bars down.
- If all three levers are simultaneously positioned in the up position, a false slab in the ceiling opens, pouring acid onto anyone holding the levers for 1d6 of damage, unless a saving throw is rolled. The acid does 1d4 of damage per round, until it is dealt with.

There should be just enough time for a PC to sneak into the corridor that goes to location #11, if other PCs do the following: put a lever in the up position, then put a second lever in the up position, then put the third lever in the up position, then quickly place all levers in the down position again, as soon as the PC sneaks into the corridor. The PC that is waiting to sneak must act quickly and roll into the corridor as soon as possible. He or she will then be locked behind the bars, but the troll and the basilisk (probably) remain contained.

(Note: the referee can ask for dexterity checks to determine whether the PC is able to roll into the corridor before the bars close. Or make dexterity checks on behalf of the troll and the basilisk to determine whether they are able to sneak past the bars as well.)

9. Crystal Troll

Should PCs open the iron bars, an angry crystal troll will come storming towards location #8. The troll is strong, but it has one weakness: using the tuning fork does 2d8 of damage to it, without needing to make to hit rolls. The vibrations of the fork create an echoing frequency that shatters its body. The troll will fight until it has 10 HP, at which point it has no limbs left. The troll, however, will regenerate (provided all its parts are accessible to one another) in 1d3 turns.

- **Crystal Troll:** HD 6, AC 18, HP 50, Mov as Human, Two Claw Attacks 1d8 damage each plus One Bite Attack 2d6 damage, Morale 14.

10. Basilisk

Should PCs open the iron bars, a furious basilisk will come storming towards location #8. The basilisk can use its claws and teeth, but its most feared attack is the petrifying gaze: if the basilisk makes eye contact with another being, the target must make a saving throw or turn to stone. The creature has one flaw, though: if it sees its own reflection in bright light, it mistakes itself for a rival and targets itself with its gaze. The mirror found in the barn can be used here.

- **Basilisk:** HD 5, AC 16, HP 30, Mov 2x as Human, One Claw Attack 1d8 damage plus Petrifying Gaze Attack, Morale 14.

(Note: players will, of course, argue that their PCs were not looking at the basilisk. To avoid a heated debate, the referee can do the following: before the creature enters the room, mention that the PCs hear the sounds of a four-legged beast making a persistent hissing. After that, unless the players specifically say they are not looking at the corridor, it is fair to assume otherwise. As a last resort, luck checks can be made.)

11. The Chess

In the centre of this room is a square table with a carved chess board. The pieces are displayed ready to be played. The kings have been replaced by figurines of hands. These are made of superior marble and could probably be sold for 500 SP. There is a message in the northern wall that reads “Time is the most valuable thing one can spend.”

The chess and the pieces have no effect. But the referee should present a real chess set to the players. Every five minutes of real time spent playing it equal one in-game turn. Remember that the troll regenerates in 1d3 turns.

The room also has a secret door that hides a small compartment, in which is a lever in the down position. If placed in the up position, there will be a rumbling sound coming from the entrance and location #12 opens.

12. Triggered Door

This door can be found by searching, but it cannot be opened without placing the lever in location #11 in the up position. Magical solutions should work here, though, like a *Knock* spell.

13. Trapped Corridor

The wall in front of the second set of stairs is decorated with the symbol of a large hand. The palm of the hand has a large crack or fracture. One of the steps here is false and triggers a giant blade to drop from the ceiling. A saving throw avoids the trap, otherwise it does 2d8 of damage. If it does not hit the PC, the blade will lodge itself in the middle of the hand, opening the fracture further.

14. Gelatinous Cube

In the middle of this room is an octagonal pool with water. A large transparent cube made of glass hangs from the ceiling, attached to it via an iron chain with a metal hook. The content of the cube is transparent and appears to be liquid. The bottom is filled with hundreds of coins and two human hands, one of which with a ring.

If PCs destroy the glass, they realise that the content is not liquid, but rather a giant gelatinous cube that drops into the pool and springs back from it in one round, ready to attack them. The cube is slow, but will continuously pursue any trespassers down the halls until it hits a set of stairs, at which point it will just stand unmovable.

- **Gelatinous Cube:** HD 4, AC 12, HP 17, Mov half of Human, One Blob Attack 2d4 damage plus Paralyzing touch (saving throw or target becomes immobilised for 1d3 rounds), Morale 16.

If the cube is defeated, 2d100 SP worth of coins can be retrieved as well as the hands. The ring is worth 250 SP.

15. Door

Unlike all others, this is a double-door entirely made of wood closed via a wooden locking bar that rests atop two timber hooks. To open it, the PCs only need to remove the bar. Above it there is a sign that says:

“Danger – Do Not Enter”

16. Rust Monster

In this room dwells a rust monster. The creature will attack and pursue anything metal, until it is slain or locked again. If it is locked with the aid of any metal objects (regular locks, iron bars, metal cages, etc.), it will break free in 1d3 turns. Any attacks with metal weapons against the rust monster are ineffective and the weapon gets a permanent -2 to all damage rolls, due to corrosion. If given enough metal (like a sword or armour), the creature will stay put eating it for 1 turn. The antennae attack does not make damage, but rather oxidises pieces of metal on a successful hit. This can be broken down as follows:

- Any metal weapon touched by the antenna gets a permanent -2 to all damage rolls. If the weapon receives a second hit, it is destroyed.
- Any metal armour touched by the antennae loses efficiency and receives a penalty of -1 to AC. If the armour receives a second hit, it is destroyed.
- Any small metal objects (like specialist’s tools) touched by the antennae are immediately rendered useless.
- **Rust Monster:** HD 5, AC 14, HP 27, Mov as Human, One Bite Attack for 1d4 damage plus One Antennae Attack, Morale 12.

17. Trapped Door

This door has a knob in the shape of a hand. It is unlocked, but anyone opening it without using the key (from the altar) must make a poison saving throw. If failed, a needle springs from the lock and jabs the PC's hand for 1 point of damage and a 50% chance of infecting him or her with an exotic disease. The referee is free to determine which illness and its effects.

18. The Body

In this room is a body against the wall and a message immediately above it that says "The Hand lives eternal". The message is painted in a dripping red substance. A closer inspection reveals that it is not blood, but rather a red ink or unguent. On the inside of the door is a set of arcane writings, which spell out:

Ku Mi Tal'Hassa Ku
Tu tu Kumi Hassa tal Hi
Ma A'Li hu Vun Kassa-Tu
Hulu Hulu Mun Ka' Van-Tu Tu

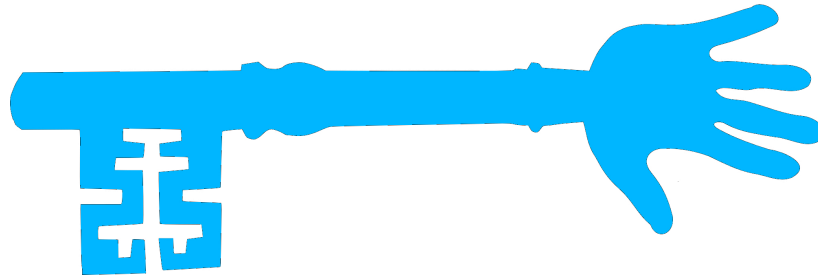
Show it to the players – or write it in a piece of paper. If anyone reads it aloud, he or she just casted a powerful *Animate Dead* spell. The body springs back to life and attacks the players. Moreover:

- If the spell is cast by a wizard, then enough energy is dispelled that all monks in the vaults are also revived. The monks are peaceful however and will not attack. They merely linger astray. There is a high chance that they will flock to the chapel of bones and remain there in prayers. A wizard that casts this spell can add *Animate Dead* to his or her spellbook
- If the spell is cast by a non-wizard, then it is considered "minor" and only affects the body in this room.
- If the spell is read backwards, it functions as a *Reverse Animate Dead*, putting to sleep all undead beings in a radius of 200'. The only beings affected, though, are those that were revived through the original *Animate Dead* spell.
- **Former Trespasser / Undead:** HD 2, AC 14, HP 15, Mov as Human, One Dagger Attack 1d4, Morale 12.

(Note: if the spell was powerful enough to revive all monks, then the ones in location #3 (if any) will leave the bunk beds, forcing the altar to close shut. The only way to open it back is via the secret door in location #6.)

19. The Hand Key

In this wall is an augmented bas-relief of the key found in the altar. The key-shaped end points west (left) and the hand-shaped end points east (right).



20. West Lock

The corridor ends in a niche with a painting of a big hand. The palm has a large lock, identical to the one found in the main entrance of the convent. Above the hand is a sign that says

“Those who make themselves ready...”

A closer inspection reveals that, although apparently identical to the one above, this lock has a smaller lock carved inside of it. PCs will probably understand that they should use the key found in the altar, but they must decide whether to use the key-shaped end or the hand-shaped one. The correct way to use it is given by location #19. Lock-picking or using a knife to interfere with it releases an electric charge that does 1d6 of damage.

- If PCs use the **key-shaped end**, they hear a rumbling sound starting exactly where they are and moving along the walls behind them towards the entrance. If the lock in location #21 has already been used correctly, a staircase opens in location #1, leading into Dungeon Level Two. PCs will not realise this, until they see it themselves.
- If PCs use the **hand-shaped end**, a spurt of acid squirts from the fingers of the hand. A saving throw can be rolled to avoid it, otherwise it does 1d4 of damage and 1 point of damage every round after that until it is dealt with. If the saving throw fails by more than 10 points, the acid hit the PC's eyes, rendering him or her permanently blind.

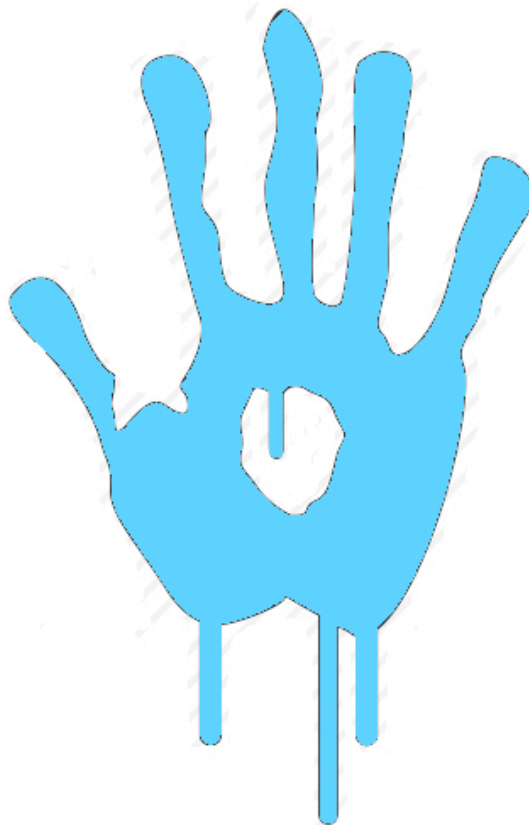
21. East Lock

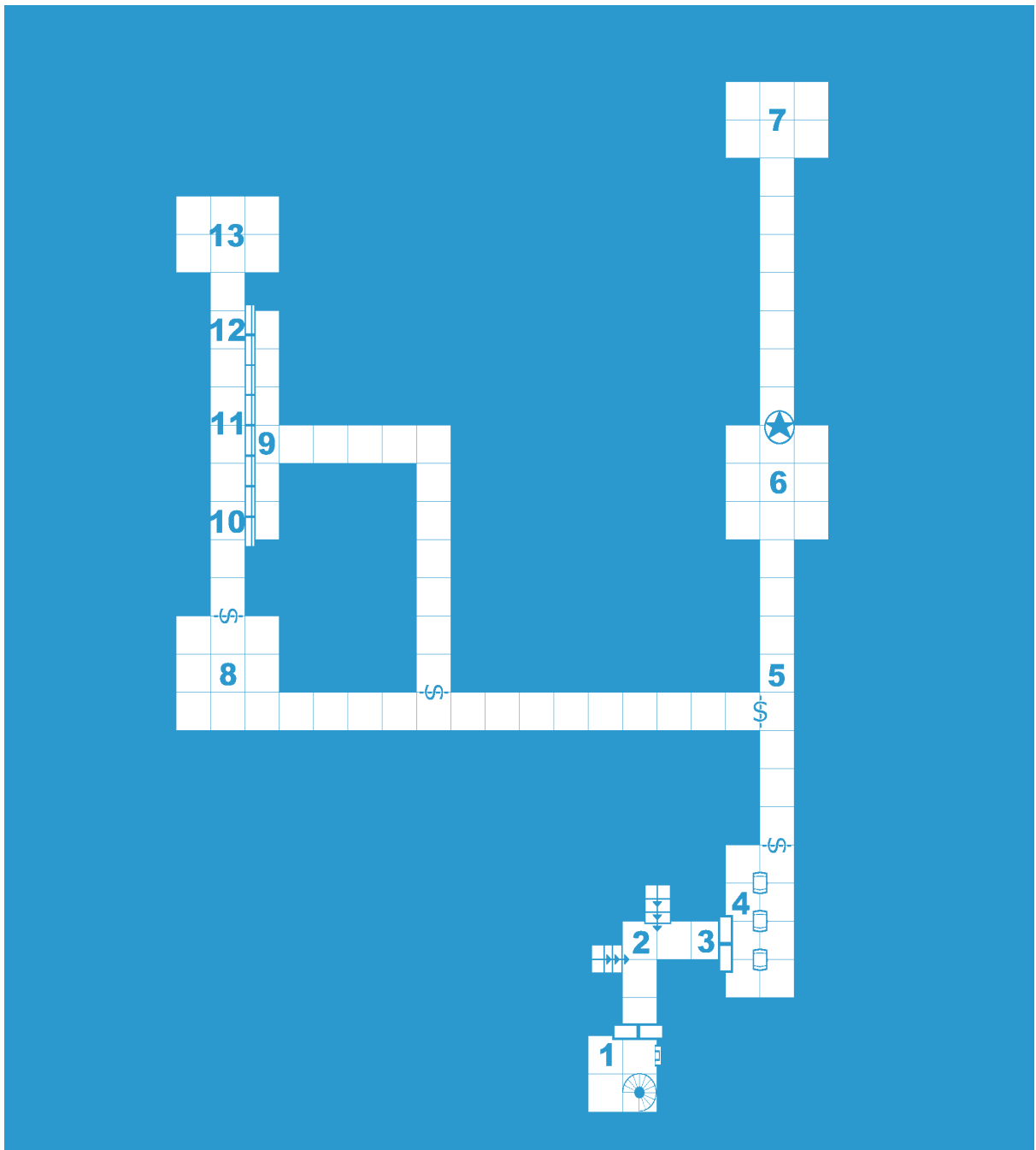
The corridor ends in a niche with a painting of a big hand. The palm has a large lock, identical to the one found in the Main Entrance of the convent. Above the hand is a sign that says

“...to the beginning shall return.”

A closer inspection reveals that, although apparently identical to the one above, this lock has a smaller lock carved inside of it. PCs will probably understand that they should use the key found in the altar above, but they must decide whether to use the key-shaped end or the hand-shaped one. The correct way to use it is given by location #19. Lock-picking or using a knife to interfere with it releases an electric charge that does 1d6 of damage.

- If PCs use the **hand-shaped end**, they hear a rumbling sound starting exactly where they are and moving along the walls behind them towards the entrance. If the lock in location #20 has already been used correctly, a staircase opens in location #1, leading into Dungeon Level Two. PCs will not realise this, until they see it themselves.
- If PCs use the **key-shaped end**, a horn above the PC's head is activated. The horn is so loud that it makes the PC deaf for 1d4 turns. Each PC standing in the corridor between locations #19 and #21 must do the same. All PCs near the horn should make a saving throw. A fumble renders the PC permanently deaf.





□ = 10 FEET

DUNGEON LEVEL TWO

The map that the PCs “snatched” from the members of the guild corresponds to this level. Everything in the map is real except where noted. There are no encounters in this level.

1. Entrance Room

This room has two large stone troughs running along both western and eastern walls. These are full of water. Smart PCs may understand that this is the water from the fountain, which arrives here through a drainage system in location #1 of Dungeon Level One. The secret door in this room hides a small hidden compartment with four levers in the down position.

- **Left lever:** this lever resets the boulders in location #2. Using it before these are activated (in location #7) has no effect. If the boulders have been triggered, the lever prompts a mechanism inside the walls that moves the stones back to their original position.
- **Middle left lever:** placing it in the up position opens the iron bars in location #5 (the last trap in the corridor). If these have not been triggered yet, the lever does nothing.
- **Middle right lever:** placing it in the up position opens an air vent in room #4. Placing it back in the down position closes the vent. Once the vent is opened, the air in location #4 will renew in one turn.
- **Right lever:** placing it in the up position activates a mechanism that drains all the water in the sinks to unknown parts. It is impossible to detect to where the water is flowing. Once the mechanism is started, it will not stop until all water is drained. Then, the lever will automatically reset to the down position.

2. Boulders

The corridor appears to be featureless.

An appropriate skill check (architecture, search, etc.) reveals two boulders nestled in the walls (as if part of the corridor) that seem out of place in comparison to the rest of the structure, which is made of smaller slabs and stones. Intelligence PCs may realise that these boulders are similar to the ones found in the megalithic monument, if they visited it before venturing downstairs.

3. Door

The door has a sign above it that says:

“We Hand that here are, for you await.”

4. The Chests

The eastern wall contains a message that spells out “Are you clever enough?”.

The walls around the room are covered in faint stains of blood and signs of destruction, like cracks and fissures. If inspected, the stains prove to be old. An appropriate skill check (architecture, search, etc.) reveals that there are six small holes cut into the ceiling in the south-eastern corner of the room. The holes are one-inch-wide and very deep (these function as an air vent).

In the middle of the room are three large wooden chests reinforced with steel bars. The key (from the altar) opens all of them. The floor around the middle chest, as well as the ceiling right above it, have burn marks. The chests contain nothing besides the traps and their mechanisms.

- **The left chest:** this chest contains a poison trap. The poison is similar to the one in the chapel in the Convent. If the chest is opened through regular means (using the key or pick-locking), it releases a cloud of poisonous gas. Anyone in the room must make a save versus poison or take 1d4 of damage per round. The gas will spread to the entire complex in 1d3 turns, after which it will only disperse in 1d4 days. The only way to flush it out is using the lever in location #1. The trap mechanism is inside the chest, so there are no easy ways to disarm it. The referee is encouraged to reward creative thinking.
- **The middle chest:** this chest has been rigged with explosives. Any PC opening it through regular means (using the key or pick-locking) must make a saving throw or take 4d6 of damage. Anyone in the room must also make a saving throw or receive damage accordingly: 3d6 if 5’ away, 2d6 if 10’ away, 1d6 if 15’ away. Because the explosive mechanism is inside the chest, there are no easy ways to disarm it. The referee can reward creative solutions. One thing that could work is to cut open a small hole in the chest and fill it with water, making the powder less effective (remember there is plenty of water in the troughs in location #1).
- **The right chest:** this chest has a needle stuffed in its lock. Any PC opening it through regular means (using the key or pick-locking) before disarming the trap must make a poison saving throw or die in 1d4 rounds from a severe toxin. A *Cure Disease* spell avoids death.

Beneath the right and left chests are two small niches with one round button each. Lifting and moving the chests does not trigger any traps, only opening them will do as much. If the buttons are pressed simultaneously, there is a rumbling sound coming from location #5 and a passage opens right between traps number two and three.

5. Long Trapped Corridor

This corridor has four traps (although the handout says there are only three), all of which are activated via pressure plates on the floor.

- The **first trap** shoots three arrows from the walls adjacent to the first pressure plate, doing 1d6 of damage each unless a saving throw is rolled successfully.
- The **second trap** triggers a blade to spring upwards from the floor, hitting the crotch of any PC that fails a saving throw for 1d8 of damage.
- The **third trap** is a false floor. If the pressure plate is stepped on, the floor will open and the PC falls into a pit with spikes, doing 1d10 of damage unless a saving throw is rolled.
- The **fourth trap** is immediately before the entrance to location #6. If triggered, a set of iron bars will drop from the ceiling to the floor. The PC who triggered it can make a saving throw. If successful, he or she avoids the trap and remains in the corridor. If unsuccessful by 6 or less points, he or she dodges the trap by thrusting himself to the room beyond, before the bars hit the ground. If unsuccessful by more than 6 points, he or she is hit by the bars and takes 2d8 of damage. The bars close either way unless something was stuck to prevent this (like a chest).

If the iron bars drop to the ground, the middle left lever in location #1 can be used to reset them. Otherwise, they are sturdy and can only be opened through magic or other creative solutions.

The passage that leads into location #8 can be detected, but is impossible to crack open by regular means. To open it, PCs must use the buttons beneath the left and right chests in location #4.

6. Another Hand-Lock

This room is empty except for a painting a large hand in the northern wall. The palm has a large lock identical to the ones found in the Convent and in locations #20 and #21 in Dungeon Level One.

Using the key here (either end of the key works) makes a deep rumbling sound, coming from both within the room and from the corridor behind. A mechanism is triggered, opening the secret passage in the north wall of the room, but also activating the boulders in location #2. The boulders can only be moved with the lever in location #1 or with the lever in location #14.

7. Nothing

There is no real treasure. This room contains nothing except for a message in the wall that says:

“Did you think it was that easy?”

8. Knife Game

In the north wall is a secret passage, hidden by a solid slab of stone, that may be detected, but will not open.

Pressed against the centre of the western wall is a large automaton device. It is an intricate invention of clockwork, pulleys and ropes, cranks and wheels, gears and cog wheels. A closer inspection reveals three obvious features: (1) a horizontal surface with a rough sketch of a hand that also functions as a pressure plate, (2) a large turning wheel on the right hand side of the mechanism, (3) a knife attached to an automaton arm that comes out of the back of the machine and looms over the horizontal surface.

Turning the large wheel, whilst pressure is applied to the horizontal surface, makes the automaton arm thrust the knife, hitting various points of the pressure plate. Augmenting the speed of the wheel also increases the speed of the knife, whilst it slowly reveals the secret passage leading into location #13. The mechanism will only expose the passage if the knife hits the pressure plate, while the plate is being pressed downwards. The obvious way to work this is: a PC puts his or her hand in the horizontal surface, whilst another PC turns the large wheel, triggering the automaton arm to thrust the knife downwards exactly between the fingers of the first PC. Other creative solutions should be rewarded to work around this.

Stopping the wheel or removing pressure from the surface resets the mechanism, forcing the secret passage to shut close again. Breaking the mechanism prevents the passage from opening at all. Before the passage is revealed, the PC who is applying pressure to the surface must make three saving throws. Failing means the PC moved his or her hand and got stabbed for 1d4 of damage each time.

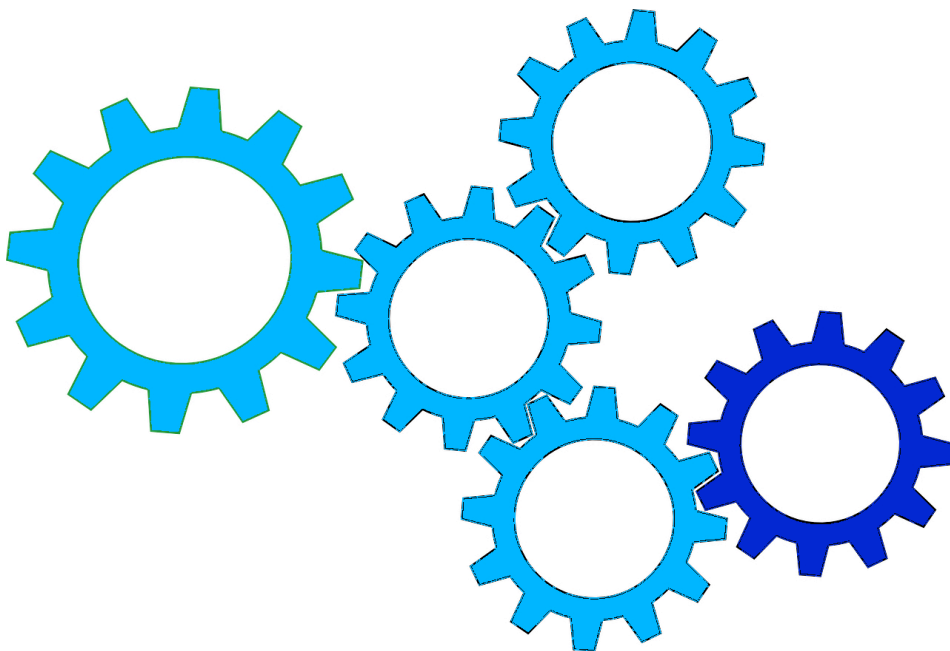
Optional: the referee can set aside the players who are working mechanism. Give a credit card (try not to use a real knife) to the player whose PC is turning the wheel. Have the other player stick his or her hand on the table, fingers stretched open. Now make them play a regular “knife game”. When a decent speed is reached (use common-sense), the passage opens. Each time the credit card hits the player’s hand, his or her PC takes 1d4 damage (the referee should have a few d4s in hand and roll them as the player is hit).

A PC with an Intelligence of 17 or higher can spend 24+1d20 hours sketching the mechanism (provided he or she has paper and pencil). The sketches can be worth anywhere between 200 to 500 SP to the right buyer.

9. Backstage

This is a secret area that contains three important features:

- **A hand deposit:** contains many severed hands. Most have become skeletal, but there are some that still have flesh. If searched thoroughly, 1d3 rings can be retrieved, valued at 1d100 SP each.
- **Levers:** this room has three levers in the down position. If put in the up position, they reset the iron bars in locations #10, #11 and #12. Naturally, the mechanism only works if the iron bars have been lifted (opened). Otherwise, the levers do nothing.
- **The blade mechanism:** this is the mechanism that is used to sever the hands of candidates. The PCs see the following in this exact order: a system of ropes, behind which is a system of blades, behind which are holes in the wall. The blades are placed between the ropes and the holes. The holes connect to the riddle barriers, which are located on the other side of the wall (see next page). It is possible to pull the ropes from this end. Pulling the wrong rope triggers a blade to swipe across the space between the hole and the rope itself. This means that pulling the ropes from this side is harmless, because the PC is not standing between the holes and the ropes, but rather behind the ropes. An appropriate skill check (tinker, etc.) is enough to understand the intricacies of this mechanism. Destroying the blades is possible and renders the entire riddles' mechanism useless.



Riddle Barriers

Locations #10, #11 and #12 all have the same setup and effects, so these will be explained here in detail and the unique elements of each room will be described below.

The corridor is interrupted by three sets of sturdy iron bars that impede the passage. Each set includes both vertical (ceiling to floor) and horizontal (west to east walls) bars. The vertical bars are always in front of the horizontal ones. Inspection reveals that the bars are probably opened through a mechanism inside the walls. The bars are very robust. It is impossible to break them down through conventional means.

Before each set of iron bars, the western wall has a plaque with a question written on it. Opposite, in the eastern wall, are a number of slots with answers. The slots have two obvious features: (1) they are coated with a strange gooey substance and (2) they are just wide enough for a human to stick his or her arm in.

- The gooey substance is identical to the one found in the herbarium room. The substance is harmless to all matter but metal. Any metal object stuck inside a hole corrodes and vanishes. The holes could, technically, be cleansed of the substance, but unless PCs come up with a very convincing method, the referee should disallow it. Fire and water won't work (the substance endures both), but a concentrated *Gust of Wind* spell could be allowed.
- The slots have the width of an average human arm. Trying to stick the arm in whilst holding an object (like pliers or a knife) is hard. Only a PC with a constitution score of 7 or lower should succeed, him or her being skinny enough to do such. On the other hand, a PC with a constitution score of 16 or more may not be able at all to stick the arm in, as it is too strong and thick.

Overall, the idea is that the PCs need to stick their arms in the holes. Creative thinking and odd solutions can be rewarded (and encouraged), but the referee should make it hard. At the very end of each slot (when the arm is inside the wall), there is a rope, hanging from the ceiling. The rope is designed to be pulled downwards.

- If the rope is pulled on a slot with the correct answer, both sets of iron bars (vertical and horizontal) open.
- If the rope is pulled on a slot with the wrong answer, a fast and sharp blade is triggered, hitting the wrist of the PC that is pulling it. The blade hits and retracts immediately. If the rope is pulled again (for any reason), it will do the same. No saving throw is allowed, as the blade is too fast and precise. If this happens, explain to the player what will happen: 1d8 of damage is going to be rolled – if the roll is 4 or higher, the PC loses his or her hand. If the roll is less, the wrist was damaged but the hand remains.
- If, somehow, PCs are able to stick their arms in and use an object to pull (or cut) the rope, then the blade will drop (in case of a wrong-answer) and render the object irreparable. If used on the correct-answer slot, the iron bars will open.

10. Riddle 1

The question in this plaque is:

“How much is infinity?”

There are 10 slots along the opposite wall, numbered 0 to 9. The correct answer is 8.

11. Riddle 2

The question in this plaque is:

“How many bodies are there in the vaults?”

There are 10 slots along the opposite wall, numbered 0 to 9. The correct answer is 128. Pulling the ropes on holes 1, 2 and 8 is entirely harmless. These do not trigger any blade. But to open the iron bars, PCs must pull them simultaneously or sequentially (1, then 2, then 8). Both methods work.

12. Riddle 3

The question in this plaque is:

“How many hands are there in the dungeon?”

There are 20 slots along the opposite wall, numbered 1 to 20. The correct answer is 11.

13. The Final Room

In the middle of this room is large chest. The chest is locked, but can be opened with the key (from the altar). When the chest is opened, a loud bang is heard. It is a confetti explosion. Inside the chest is a piece of paper that says:

“Congratulations! You are alive. Take this paper and meet us at the Grinding Gear. You have just been hired by The Tenebrous Hand. Those who make themselves ready, to the beginning shall return.”

(Note: the referee should write this down in a piece of paper and give it to the players.)

In the north wall of the room is a lever in the down position. If placed in the up position, there is a rumbling sound moving along the walls towards the entrance. The boulders in location #2 have been reset and the PCs are free to walk out.

EPILOGUE

If PCs return to the Grinding Gear in possession of the piece of paper, Garvin Richrom sets up a meeting with the members of The Tenebrous Hand. They offer the PCs a place in their organisation and, if accepted, they also give a substantial reward in SP – or any other treasure that the referee sees fit. By default, the referee can give the PCs 1,000 SP per level of experience. PCs who had their hands severed will not be admitted in the guild though, as the Hand does not take in less-abled-body thieves. On the other hand, PCs whose hands are tinted (as an effect of the liquids in the herbarium room) will receive an extra reward for their boldness.

The PCs are now free to use the dungeon themselves! They can do so to acquire new members or to deal with unpleasant adversaries. Each opponent sent into the dungeon has a chance of 10% per level of experience to come out alive. If he or she comes out alive, there is a 33% chance that he or she will have both hands, a 33% chance of coming out with only one hand and 33% chance of no hands at all.

The Hand Lives Eternal.

THE CHEAT SHEET

Some referees might want to know the interior logic behind the entire complex. There they have it.

The Surroundings

The mass grave

This is where the guild puts the bodies of the candidates that died in the dungeon. When the guild sends someone in and that someone does not return in two or three days, they will come to clean the site, resetting the dungeon afterwards. The guild missed the map on one of the bodies. It was not supposed to be there.

Animals keep getting attracted to this place and unearth the remains for food. Once unearthed, the bodies serve as the feeding stock for a group of mosquito bats nested nearby, who attack and drive off the animals that did the job for them. The guild is taking care of this, but is yet to find a solution. They are not too worried if the site is discovered, though. No one will come to claim the bodies and all activity is untraceable back to them.

The megalithic monument

The missing boulders are the ones used to strand PCs in Dungeon Level Two. The drifting ghost was released when the guild removed the boulders for their own use. Since then, they did not return to this area and just leave it be.

The Convent

Main entrance

The sign is an obvious religious motif used by the monks back then. The guild appropriated it for their own usage. It made sense to them. The motif appears again in Dungeon Level One and Two. In the very end, it serves as a reference as to how the candidates start in the Grinding Gear and return to it when “ready”.

The chapel

The corpses belong to previous members of the Hand, who are ritualistically “buried” in this way, as per the guild’s rites. The women are the founders of the guild.

The bathroom

The water collector is used to refill the fountain.

Chapterhouse

This is the guild starting to single out good candidates. It is an obvious tip for how to advance beyond the altar in the chapel of bones below.

The library

The guild does not use this room.

The infirmary

This is where the guild prepares the bodies that it “buries” in the chapel.

The penitence room

One member of the guild was tasked with learning this spell, so as to revive the basilisk, if the creature is turned to stone. Whenever this proves to be necessary, the caster spends the entire night studying the inscriptions here in isolation.

The herbarium room

The guild wishes to test the courage of candidates. Are they bold enough to drink an unknown liquid? The guild will know this when they meet the candidates face-to-face, due to their hands being tinted. The gooey substance is a mixture made of the rust monster's antennae (trapped in Dungeon Level One).

The fountain

After being used, the fountain needs to be refilled manually with water.

The barn

Bunch of equipment that the guild uses to reset the dungeon. The tuning fork is used to deal with the troll, forcing it into its cage. The mirror does the same with the basilisk. The guild leaves the equipment there so as to test the candidates. Smart ones will carry it into the dungeon and put it to good use. The vases are used to restore the water in the fountain. The chests are replacements for the chests room in Dungeon Level Two.

Dungeon Level One

Door

The sign here is merely a *memento mori* religious catchphrase. Pretty standard in the likes of Christianity.

Chapel of bones

This is part of the original layout of the convent. The chapel is a *memento mori* as well, reminding monks of their mortality and connection to God.

The vaults

The reference to number eight is pervasive here. For the monks, it meant infinity, a metaphor for eternal life.

Door (location 5)

The puncture marks are, of course, from the arrows in the trapped corridor (location 6).

The cages

The guild wants to know not only how smart the candidates are, but if they can do collaborative work. This is the exam.

The chess

This is the guild testing the knowledge of the natural world of candidates (do they know that trolls regenerate?), as well as their intelligence. They will take note of the result of the chess match, if it occurs.

Trapped corridor (location 13)

Are candidates sharp and observant? Do they know how to avoid traps?

Gelatinous cube

This is a test of the candidates' greediness. The hands belong to candidates that lost their hands in the riddle barriers in Dungeon Level Two.

Rust monster

The Hand told you to not enter. Candidates need to trust. The guild is not entirely sadistic, though. From this point onwards, the PCs do not need any metal equipment. There are no more encounters or threats, provided they are smart enough. Naturally, the gooey substance found in the herbarium room and in the riddle barriers is a mixture made with the rust monster's antennae.

The body

The guild wishes to know if there is a wizard amongst the candidates. The monks are appeased, so the guild is not worried about them. To put them back to sleep, they cast a reverse *Animate Dead* spell.

Key and locks (locations 19-21)

This is the guild incorporating onto the candidates that the Hand is to be trusted. Not trusting the Hand has consequences.

Dungeon Level Two

Entrance room

The guild is not entirely heartless. It offers water to those in need. The levers are used to reset the entire dungeon, replacing the boulders in the correct position (location 2), flushing out the poisonous cloud (location 4), resetting the iron bars in the trapped corridor (location 5) and removing the water from the sink, so it can be used again.

Boulders

Having come this far, the guild wants the candidates to move forward to the riddles barriers. This is their way of making sure.

Door (location 3)

The guild is serious on this one. Make it out alive and will be one of them.

Chests

How greedy (and stupid) are the candidates? The gelatinous cube was the first test of the greed of candidates. This is the real challenge. The map explicitly says to not open the chests. But it says nothing about "moving" them. The Hand is to be trusted.

Long trapped corridor (location 5)

This corridor is the ultimate challenge in trap-disarming. Even if the first three traps are mentioned in the map, the fourth one is the real challenge. How proficient are the candidates in thievery?

Another hand lock

The Hand is to be trusted, but it also wants to know if the candidates follow any given map without questioning themselves. Do they? Are they really going to use the key, before exploring the entire complex?

Knife game

This is the ultimate challenge on trusting the Hand. Candidates need to trust their own hands and work collaboratively to move forwards.

Backstage

This section of the dungeon is the backstage. It is not meant to be discovered by the candidates. The guild uses it to reset the riddle barriers and to clean any leftover hands from wannabe thieves that did not make the cut.

Riddle barriers

How observant are the candidates exactly? Severing the hand of inattentive candidates is the ultimate punishment for a wannabe thief.

Riddle 1

Did the candidates pay attention upstairs? The question refers to the sacred number of the extinct religious order, the eight, a symbol of infinity. The number is everywhere in the convent (number of cells, staircases, division of bodies in the chapel, chapterhouse).

Riddle 2

Did the candidates count all of them?

Riddle 3

Hand count

Level One: two chess figurines (location 11), trapped corridor (location 13), two hands inside gelatinous cube (location 14), door knob (location 17), hand-key (location 19), east lock (location 20), west lock (location 21). Total 9.

Level Two: another hand lock (location 6), knife game (location 8). Naturally, the severed hands in the hands deposit do not count, as this was never supposed to be seen by the candidates. Total 2.

