

Gregorius21778:

Beneath Unhallowed Ground

A Minimalistic Dungeon



**Version 1.4; by Kai Pütz
(c) 2019**

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My blog: www.gregorius21778.wordpress.com
My other titles: [at drivethrurpg.com](http://at.drivethrurpg.com)

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Beneath Unhallowed Ground is a “Minimalistic Dungeon”. It has about 13 encounter areas with descriptions about just three or five sentences each. The background is but a summary of events and circumstances, the NPC are not fleshed out. The map is functional instead of “fancy”. All in all, it is a simple OSR dungeon crawl with a few combats, a trap or two and a few things the adventurers may uncover by searching. It is straight forward, without larger twists and turns, yet still offers some scenic bits. Good for a side-quest. Good for a one evening session.

It is NOT meant for inexperienced Referees, and not for high level characters. That being said, starting characters and/or inexperienced players may be in for a “party wipe”. A group of 3 to 4 characters (close quarters) of 2nd to 4th level should be a good fit.

As written, *Beneath Unhallowed Ground* is LotFP(tm) compatible and meant to be run with this system, but any experienced Referee should be able to adapt it to a different OSR RPG system.

Background

Imagine a small town, somewhere in Europe perhaps. A town that is paralyzed by dread. It started a few weeks ago. Tombstones in the cemetery fell forward onto their graves during the night. People crossed themselves, but dared not to look into the graves. The keeper became frightened, too, and talked about strange noises in the night.

About a week later, he had disappeared. The townsfolk says he has run away at night. The priest then rallied people for a nighttime vigil at the graveyard, and some did join him. At the second night of it, devils jumped out of the darkness and attacked. The townsfolk ran, and left the priest behind. That was two days ago. Nobody dares to go to the graveyard or the church anymore. A few people already have left the town.

Enter the player characters.

Hooks & Rewards

The burgomaster hears that well-armed (or simply adventurous looking?) strangers have come to town, and welcomes them. By the best wine and food the inn has to offer, he nervously tries to learn something about them through small talk. The chat will end with him **BEGGING** the characters to help the town somehow. He can offer up to 1.500 sp (in total).

The characters came here to see the now missing priest, either for the removal of a curse or for the translation of some Latin text in a book or on an item they have found, or to acquire some holy water. *No priest, no service.*

Some shady figure has originally hired the characters to rob a crypt on the graveyard, in order to secure an amulet supposed to be there. Needless to say, the corpses have been robbed from the crypt and the amulet is now somewhere in the burrow of the ghouls. The “interested party” may have offered up to 1.000sp for the robbery.



First Investigations

The cemetery is outside of town, the only buildings that border on it are the house of the keeper, the church and the house of the priest. It is rather large, and surrounded by a five feet rubblework wall. Two cranky iron gates lead inside. Several larches and conifers have been planted between the graves, as well as some bushes. In the western part of it, opposite from the church but close to the keeper's house, lies an old crypt. It is shadowed by two large conifers and surrounded by thick bushes. The crypt belongs to a now extinct family line that used to rule the town a few generations ago.

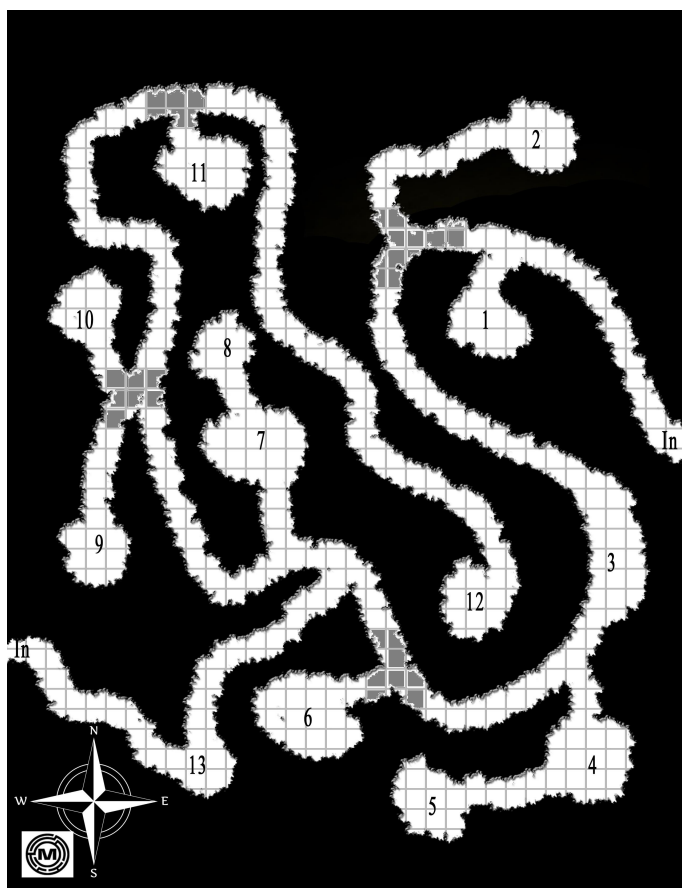
The house of the graveyard keeper is not locked. A quick search reveals that the bed is unmade, but all is there that one would expect in a regular house hold. The latter is true for **the home of the priest** as well, but the door is locked and there is a strongbox, hidden under the floor boards. It contains several hundred sp (tithe money belonging to the church). **The church** contains what is to be expected from a town church. The stoup contains water, but not *holy* water.

The cemetery has numerous graves where the headstones have tumbled over. Characters that look around and succeed in a test for *Architecture* will recognize that it looks like tunnels have been dug under the graveyard. Digging at an appropriate spot (e.g. a grave with a toppled headstone) will uncover one of the ghouls “access tunnels” (see **Beneath Unhallowed Ground**). Even without any successful checks, the characters will be able to locate the place where “the devils” attacked the peoples’ vigil: the ground is trampled, there has been a struggle, two discarded torches lie there and traces indicate that several beings dragged somebody or something toward the crypt.

The rusty gate of **the crypt** is unlocked, angled steps lead several feet down into it. Several dirt tracks, to much to indicate anything useful, stain them. At their end lies a broken lantern and a key ring with a couple of simple iron keys (both belong to the missing keeper). A wide brimmed, simple hat lies near one of the crypt walls while in the middle of the floor, a few of the stone tiles that cover it have been removed and placed aside. They now reveal a man-sized steep tunnel that leads down into the earth. All coffins in the crypt have been forced open and emptied.



Beneath Unhallowed Ground



The ground the tunnels and chambers of the ghouls' burrow are in is high in clay and dotted with gray rocks of different size. Sometimes, large rocks partly protrude from the walls or floor. No beams or other support structures are there. The tunnels have a roughly round cross section and wind from the east downward to the west. The entrance in the eastern part of the the map leads to a network of smaller tunnels that the ghouls created to access and plunder different graves. Neither these access tunnels nor the entrance area to it are larger than would be necessary to push a coffin through.

As the burrow is beneath the roots of the larches and conifers above, some of these shoot through the upper fifth and fourth of the walls and dangle down from the ceiling. The air is cool and damp, and so is the earth around the characters. In general, the ceiling is only five to six feet high, and a square on the map equals five feet. Unless of course, you as the Referee like a more "realistic" and crowded burrow. In that case, it is best to reduce the grid size to four or three feet.

The low ceiling makes it hard to wield medium weapons effectively (-2 to all attack rolls), and two-handed weapons are impossible to wield. Same is true for longbows. Even characters with a small weapon will suffer a (-1) penalty to all attacks, unless they are either Fighters or Dwarfs. The use of minor weapons like daggers does not suffer any penalties.

As the ghouls are able to see in infrared (up to 30') as well as in the normal spectrum, they need no light. They are not blinded by or afraid of it either, and will notice party members that carry a light source with them quickly.

When the characters enter any of the "gray" areas with a light source, they will sooner or later gain the nearby ghouls' attention. *Surprise* will be impossible unless the characters charge the ghouls quickly. Always see the next encounter area's description for further details.

Any combat against any number of ghouls that took more than three rounds has an X-in-6 chance of having alarmed the next group of ghouls that is nearby, where X is the number of rounds.

Every 2 turns, there is a 1-in-6 chance that one of the ghouls from the next lair [2; 6; 9 and 11] is encountered. The ghoul will notice the party first, and try to sneak upon them to get a look before sneaking away again to alert all remaining ghouls, one lair after the other.



[01] The entrance to this cave is more rock than clay, and the ground turns to solid rock only a few steps into it. A constant dripping is audible, and the deep cave is full of water. It is slightly murky, but drinkable to the ghouls and free of other contamination. The bottom is 21 feet under the surface.

[02] When the party comes close to the tunnel that leads to this area, they may (2-out-of-6) hear *something* from deeper in there. When they follow the tunnel, they may notice (1-out-of-6) an odor of decay as well.

In the cave, four ghouls squat around a torn-apart and partly decomposed corpse. Or *did*. When the characters have a light with them and approach the bend in the tunnel, they will already have noticed them and lurk at the walls left and right of the entrance instead, to *ambush* the intruders. Otherwise, the party may *surprise* the ghouls as each lazily gnaws on a limb of the corpse (which otherwise lies dismembered in the middle of the place while the ghouls hide in the shadows).

A search will reveal a wedding band on the left hand of the decaying corpse (10 sp). All other fingers of the hand have been chewed off.

[03] Further down the tunnel, all manner of human bones have been neatly piled up against a niche in the eastern wall, and form a hip-high and several steps wide pedestal for about two dozen skulls that have been piled up on top of it. All face towards the opposite wall. A golden tooth (50 sp) will shine in a skull at the second row from the top (if the characters have any light with them).

It is easy to silently remove the skulls on top to get the one with the tooth, but doing so will rouse a couple of rats that are currently hiding behind the piled-up bones. A random nearby character must *Save vs. Paralyze* or will receive a bloody bite to the leg from one of the animals before it flees. *Characters with open wounds cannot surprise ghouls.*



[04] At a fork, a very short side tunnel leads into a round chamber. Its ground is more than a foot below the entry and the ceiling is 7 feet high. An opening to another tunnel is located in its southwestern wall.

Eight simple wooden coffins have been piled up in its center, four upon four. Their loosely closed lids are covered with large blotches, splatters and stains in different shades of brown, red and dark gray. The surface of this impromptu “dinner table” bears claw marks. The lids of numerous other caskets have been crudely laid-up on the floor and placed against the walls.

The lids will creak, groan and sometimes thud against another when stepped upon.

A **successful search** will uncover a silver necklace with a cross (30sp) that has been cast away and ended up in the cracks between two lids.

[05] The small tunnel that leads into this area has the disgusting stench of excrement to it, and this grows stronger the further one approaches the shallow ditch it leads into. The ground of the ditch is capped with broken skulls, cracked bones and torn up rip cages, all embedded in a layer of semi-wet offal. Worms writhe in the disgusting filth, which is more than ankle deep.

The first successful search of the stinking cesspit will uncover grave good jewelry worth a total of 100sp, the second a total of 180 sp and a final successful search will uncover another 70sp.

Any character that sifted through the cesspit stinks horribly and may not surprise anybody.

[06] The ceiling of this chamber is no more than 5 feet in high. It is the dwelling of **6 ghouls** that use rags of grave gowns and the linings of plundered caskets as bedding. During the day they are likely to be asleep, but the faintest shine of light will wake them up. Still, the character will *surprise* them if they rush them. Otherwise, the ghouls will ready themselves rather quickly.

A search will reveal nothing of value. The only notable item in the rooms is a large piece of salt the ghouls shared (and licked).

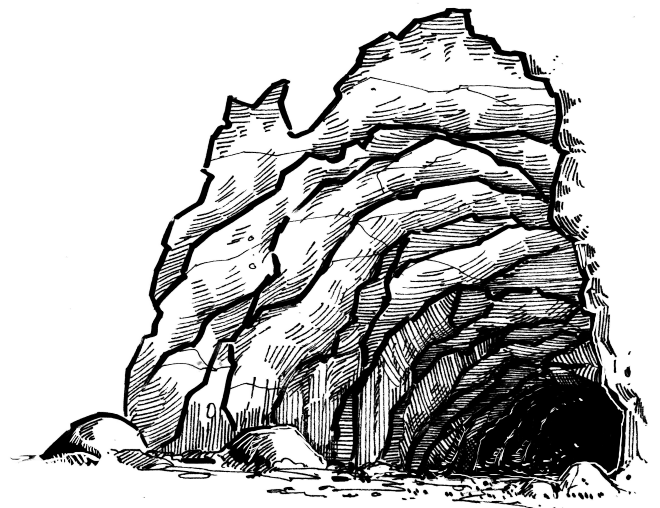
[07] The tunnel that leads into this room reeks of decay, the odor becomes sickening in the chamber itself. Those who want to stay there for more than a mere moment must *Save vs. Poison* or will be nauseated to the point of being close to throwing up.

Being nauseated like that means a (-1) penalty on all attempts to avert surprise for the next turn.

The ceiling is about 8 feet high. At the eastern and western wall, closed caskets (still nailed shut) have been piled up to the ceiling. At the northern wall, already plundered and partially broken caskets have been stacked, with their short ends towards the wall, so that the pile protrudes into the middle of the chamber.

The northern exit is not visible, as it hidden behind the stack of empty caskets. It is possible to move them out of the way without much noise, but doing so takes two persons with both hands free and a couple of minutes. While doing so, the characters will soon hear a low whimpering from behind the caskets.

A search that includes the still closed caskets will take two turns and produce 80 sp in jewelry and wedding bands.



[08] The small chamber behind the stacked caskets is about four feet high, and reeks of piss and shit. Here, the ghouls keep prisoners as “life rations”. The current inhabitant is the missing priest of the church. To prevent escape, they chewed off his fingers and toes while they held him down. He is thereby unable to run, unable to handle anything and much to hurt to push the caskets away on his own. By now, he is scared out of his mind. It takes a character with Charisma above 10 to have him come back to his senses.

Pulling him out by force will have him scream hoarsely, which will eventually alert the ghouls if he is not stopped from doing so quickly. The poor man cannot walk without being support by another character.

If the PC rescue him and put him into the hands of a monastery (one may be found two days away, he will ask them to bring him there), they will be reward by the abbot with 3 gp each.

[09] This chamber is the dwelling of **4 ghouls** that use rags of grave gowns and the linings of plundered caskets as bedding. During the day they are likely to be asleep, but the faintest shine of light will wake them up. Still, the character will *surprise* them if they charge into the chamber in a rush . Otherwise, the ghouls will ready themselves rather quickly.

These four are a fierce bunch. They will have the initiative and will not have to check for Moral until two of them have been slain.

A successful search of their lair will reveal a small talisman made of the long hair of a female corpse and three short ribs. Every non-lawful character within 10 feet of the one holding this talisman will gain a +1 bonus on all *Saves against Magic/Magic Devices*. It will come apart (and lose its power) after about two month.

[10] When the characters enter the small segment that leads into this chamber with a light source, they will see something shine up briefly. It will turn out to be the reflection of their light on numerous silver chains and necklaces (125 sp), hung around the neck of a nearly mummified corpse. It has been propped up inside an open casket, which leans against the far end of the room.

The ceiling is 8 feet high and the ground is laid-out with casket lids. Tomb stones have been placed on the ends of them, and form a kind of espalier toward the semi-mummified, jewelry draped corpse.

It is a trap. There is an 8 feet deep pit in the center of the chamber. A character that walks straight toward the corpse will have at least one lid swing down like a seesaw and drop into it. The fall is rather harmless, the tombstone that will slide down the now up-tilted casket lid is not (1d8 damage).

[11] The chamber is the dwelling of **5 ghouls** that use rags of grave gowns and the linings of plundered caskets as bedding. During the day they are likely to be asleep, but the faintest shine of light will wake them up. Still, the character will *surprise* them if they charge into the chamber in a rush . Otherwise, the ghouls will ready themselves rather quickly.

One of them, an almost skeletal fiend, will give a bloodcurdling shriek at the start of battle. All characters that are not Fighters nor at least of fifth level must Save vs. Devices or will count as surprised.

[12] The tunnel that leads here declines softly at first, then steeply while the ceiling grows lower till the characters are forced to move with their backs against the floor or on all fours.

Unlike the tunnel, which has been burrowed by the ghouls, the underground chamber it leads into seems to be natural. Its clay walls have been decorated by numerous bones that were pressed into them. A quick glance shows that these are from humans, from life stock animals ... and from other things. The ground of the chamber is not clay but sandstone. A long, ragged crack, large enough to allow a man to climb down, leads into abyssal darkness. From it wafts up cool, stale air that smells of opened crypts and moldy bones. A character who listens long enough will hear something moving, deep down below. Something large.

The crack is where the ghouls came from, and it takes more than two hours of strenuous climbing till its end is reached. What lies below is beyond the scope of this dungeon crawl, but the Referee is encouraged to make it a horrible twilight crossroad between the world of men and a completely different realm. It should discourage further exploration. But as players are players, and adventures are daredevils, the Referee may have to improvise something...

[13] The tunnel turns into a steep upward ramp towards the west. Afterwards, the ceiling is much lower. Any man that would want to move further would be forced to bowed forward, like a monkey.

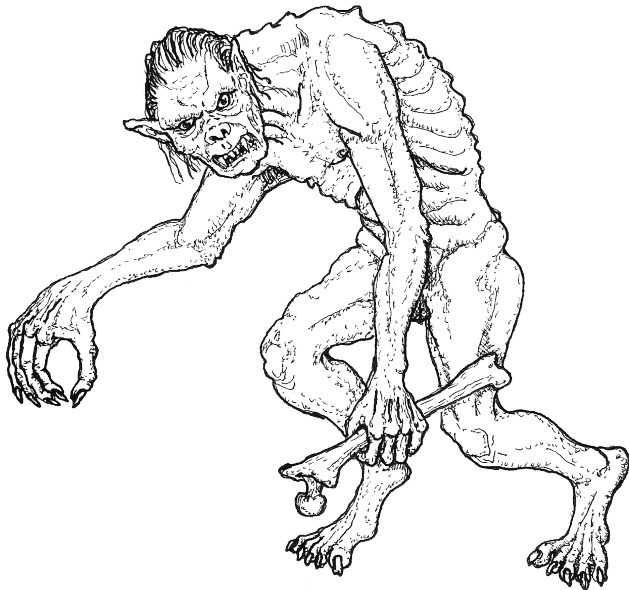
This area is the transition between the ghouls'burrow and the small network of tunnels they created to access the graves above them.



"These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degree. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast. The texture of the majority was a kind of unpleasant rubberiness. (...)

a (...)blasphemy with glaring red eyes, (...)bony claws (...), gnawing at [a] head (...). Its position was a kind of crouch, (...). (...)dog face with its pointed ears, bloodshot eyes, flat nose, and drooling lips. (...)the scaly claws, (...) the mould-caked body (...)."

[Quoted from "Pickman's Model" by H.P. Lovecraft]



"My" ghouls are little different from the mainstay OSR stat block. They are grotesque, malicious little devils still, but without any paralyzing touch.

Alignment: Chaotic
Move: 120' (40')
Hit Dice: 2
AC: 13 (Unarmored & Shield)
Attacks: Claws; Teeth if successful (1d4 damage; 1d3)
Save: as Specialist
Moral: 9* (in their burrow, 7 otherwise)
Special: Infrared Vision (30')

Suggested XP: 50

Scrawny: Hit Points are determined with 2d6 (instead of 2d8).

Dastardly: Stealth 4; Climb 3; Sneak Attack 2.

Maniacal: when a Moral check shows doubles, the ghoull falls into a mad frenzy that changes Moral to 12 for the rest of the scene.

Eater of the Dead: when corpses or heavily wounded beings are present, ghouls must pass a Moral check in order to give chase to fleeing combatants. When the check is failed, the ghouls will turn upon the dead and/or wounded instead (even their own).

They can smell you: due to their keen sense of smell, a ghoull cannot be ambushed by characters with an open wound unless they were able to disguise their smell (e.g. attacking downwind). Likewise, ghouls are able to pick up the scent of blood, sweat or a decaying cadaver from up to 60' feet away with a 4 in 6 chance when they spent a minute sniffing.

Dreadful: Ghouls are malice incarnate and radiate an almost tangible sense of dread. When five or more attack at once and their opposition does not outnumber them at least 2:1, all non-fighter characters that have never fought ghouls before must *Save vs. Devices* or will have their Initiative halved at the start of combat. The Initiative stays halved till the first ghoull is taken out of the fight.

If a character that is not of 4th level, a Fighter, Cleric or Dwarf is alone, confronted by ghouls and outnumbered at least 3:1, she has to *Save vs. Devices* or will come under the effect of a 3rd level *Cause Fear* spell.

Filthy: Wounds that have been caused by a ghoull's claws or teeth will will inflame and fester after a while. The character needs to see a *Physician* to have the wounds dressed, must be treated with special remedies or needs magical healing. Otherwise, they will not heal and the character will lose a point of Constitution per day, due to inflammation, fever and suppuration. When half of the Constitution is lost before the wound has been treated as mentioned above, a limb needs to be amputated or the character will die from blood poisoning within 1d4+TB days. Dwarfs only lose a point of CON every second day.



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