

GAME SESSION 103: INSIDE THE DEATH STONE – 8

(This Ravenloft game was played April 7th, 2024. Everybody is present)

Atmospheric cut scene sent before the game:

In his tomb, the Pharaoh of Numbers is cut off from the world, and he spends his time dreaming. His attention moves from one problem to another, attempting to further perfect the solutions he has found by modeling problems in science, engineering, magic, war, commerce, and the social sciences. At the same time, he evaluates the possible financial impact of future circumstances and the probabilities of future events that could have an influence on his grandiose plans. He then produces alternative simulations by reshuffling all the variables. His magnificent mind is filled with numbers, variables, theories, equations, vectors and many abstract and obtuse concepts.

He knows that there are no significant flaws in his plans, apart from his death of course and the unfortunate end of the reign of the Pharaohs of the Ascension. But when they return to earth, as they have planned, this reign will be perfect, and this time will last more than a hundred thousand years.

July 26th, 9 am

(Just after the *Sending* spell to Ivana)

They cast *restauration* on Dulcimae (to have her back to full power after she was raised from the dead). They also renew their *protection from curse* protection.

The group is preparing for their travel in the desert toward the Temple where Isu was seen.

They ask Dulcimae if she wants to join the group, but she says no, adventuring isn't in her blood and she would be a nuisance instead.

Al-Wawat comes back from the market. He says a group of Falkovnians is now at the marketplace, near the great library.

Kemat-Tii propose to go check on them while pretending going at the library. They agree.

They discuss the situation and in conclusion they do not plan to do anything aggressive toward the Falkovnians.

Hearing this, Al-Wawat warns them: do not do anything aggressive within the library walls, or it could trigger the curator mummies to rise and they will destroy any trespasser in order to protect the library.

Kemat-Tii and Austizel in *disguise self* (an akiri merchant) walk toward the library.

But when near the Falkovnians, Helmut blocks the way, and insults Kemat-Tii: “Well, well, now there goes the chick of those barovian idiots!”, while Kemat-Tii patiently ignores him.

Helmut: “what do you eat, to be that good looking? Do you want to meet me tonight, you could see what a real man is” and so and so.

Austizel tries to play diplomacy with Helmut, but Helmut barely look at him, all focusing on intimidating Kemat-Tii. She is very patient and do not answer, waiting for him to get on the side so she can pass.

After a moment, he gets tired of it and let them pass. The Falkovnians whistle her when she walks in front of them.

Kemat-Tii and Austizel enter the library. They find that Nebta-Khufre is inside the library on the second floor, as well as Udjebet, at another table. Both are reading books, but Austizel notices that once in a while, the girls are watching each other with curiosity.

When Nebta-Khufre sees Kemat-Tii, she waves at the scholar to come close and then asks her: Did your friends discussed my transportation offer?

Kemat-Tii: I do not know, they didn’t talk to me about it.

Nebta-Khufre then offers Kemat-Tii to be her research assistant. She talks about traveling the world, and exploring and researching new mysteries. In a honeyed fashion, she also tells Kemat-Tii that she knows that she can cast spells, and that she would learn a lot about magic when working as Nebta-Khufre’s assistant. Nebta-Khufre really tries hard for Kemat-Tii to accept.

But Kemat-Tii politely refuses and leaves. Nebta-Khufre watches her leave, looking mildly disappointed.

Austizel then passes near Nebta-Khufre and look at the book she is reading: “Arcana Magic of the past”. There is also on her table an object inside a bag, and that object is about the size of the red gem the heroes gave her as the Pact Stone.

Meanwhile, the other heroes buy camels for their trip, with the help of Al-Wawat. Cost : 350 gp.

At one point, they are near the group of Falkovnians. Helmut “Hey, losers! So your tastes evolved from vistani to camels?”, he says, with obscene gestures.

The Falkovnians look really aggressive and willing to fight. They say *Imstichen* at Exigu (“impalement!”). The verbal standoff lasts a few minutes, then the Falkovnians gets tired of it and leave, after insulting the heroes one last time.

DM note: I know they hate Helmut. Well, I tried hard to start a fight, but they didn't take the bait.

The heroes think that the Falkovnians could retaliate on Al-Wawat or Dulcimae while they are gone. So they think they should leave with the vardo, carried by camels, with Dulcimae and Al-Wawat (and of course Kemat-Tii).

Varadan buys a case of 12 bottle of wine for the jackals, in case they meet the same group as last time.

They leave at 3 pm, after the sun's peak. The Falkovnians are still near the library.

Macrazbunare transforms into an eagle and stays to watch the Falkovnians. Minutes after the vardo departure, they see a man walk from the entrance of the city to Falkovnians to talk with them. They give him something and the man leaves. A sentry?

The vardo is mostly traveling at half speed (move 25), but sometimes its wheel get nearly stuck in the sand and it slows their progression in the desert.

Later, around 8h30 pm, they see in front of them eight dog-like creatures surrounding a prey, in hunting mode. When they get nearer, they see it is a wounded lioness, surrounded by eight hyenas. When the lioness sees the heroes, she uses her last energies to run toward the heroes. The pack follows closely, but they stop about a hundred feet from the vardo, while the lioness stands in the middle. The hyenas are frustrated, and they yap. The lioness walks with the vardo, staying at 50 feet behind it, while the hyenas stay farther.



After about 30 minutes, the hyenas stop following the vardo and they leave. Later, after another 30 minutes, the lioness goes alone in the early darkness.

They stop to sleep, on a spot about 300 feet from the trail. Dulcimae makes a fire, and that will be a ward should anything comes near the vardo during the night, she says. Austizel thinks it's a vistani version of the *alarm* spell.

They cast *create water* for themselves and the horses.

July 27th, 9 am

After breakfast and spell related tasks, they leave the camp and travel until the warm hours, until 11 am. They rest during the peak of the heat and go back on the trail at 3 pm.

At 10 pm, they are near the entrance of the Valley of the Pharaoh. Getting there, they see a stone obelisk standing in the desert. The obelisk of black stone stands alone on the rocky desert plain. It is nearly 60' tall. No markings adorn its perfectly smooth sides. At the base of the obelisk lies a still humanoid form.

Kemat-Tii has information about the stone obelisk: it is one of many obelisks that once marked a long-forgotten border of Ancient Har'Akir. The stone from which the obelisk is made has the unusual property of conducting and storing electricity, which the ancient akiri used to defend this border. The obelisk stores electrical energy during storms. If one knows how to proceed, the energy stored within the obelisk can be used to temporarily charge metal melee weapons with magical electricity (Shock Weapon ability). But she doesn't know how to do it. They do not try to charge a weapon.

DM note: from PF

They stop there for the night, about a thousand feet from the obelisk.

They cast *create water*.

July 28th, 8 am

When they are ready to go, they approach to see the dead man near the obelisk. Its skin is charred black and flaking from its bones, and the tattered remains of its clothes flutter in the gentle breeze. From the clothing, they guess he was a merchant, most probably an akiri.

Detect Magic : strong evocation magic on the obelisk. Varadan throws a copper piece on the obelisk and this provokes an electrical spark.

They ignore the cadaver and the obelisk and go on their way.

The valley of the Pharaoh is a small canyon. The road slopes upwards as it approaches the entrance of the canyon. In the valley, there is little loose sand here, only smooth, flat rocks litter the landscape. The canyon walls are a mere 1 000 feet to either side of the road. Vultures begin to circle as soon as the heroes enter the valley.

The cliffs are steep, and they rise 700' from the desert floor.

Kemat-Tii - In the valley in front of us stand ruins of the First Age – temples to gods, tombs of pharaohs or important people of the time (many clerics and advisors). Statues tower proudly in places where ancient cities once thrived. Many of these statues are nameless today, victims of the long march of time. Scholars venture into the desert to study these monuments, believing they can unlock the great power the empire once held. These scholars claim that statues of the pharaohs were once enchanted with great power and would bestow boons upon those who showed the proper respect. If the proper offering was presented at the feet of these statues and the correct phrases were spoken aloud honoring the pharaoh, the supplicant would be granted luck, health, and prosperity. Scholars have identified some of the statues, but a vast number of them remain a mystery...

DM note: here starts the end of Touch of Death adventure, with the boss fight (Isu and Senmet), remodeled by me to make it more interesting I think. I removed the Death Dogs as I think they are superfluous. Perhaps if the heroes were always sneaking out to rest, I could add them back to add pressure. Added a few features (more rooms, some new magical enchantments and wards, added more mummies) and of course it is now dedicated to Sekhmet (one of Isu's worshiped evil goddess). And yes, I removed the "unseen" cheesy canon end. It will end with a real fight!

The valley is a massive monument to the dead, the cliffs dotted with the cavern-tombs of forgotten heroes and nobles: monument and temple. This necropolis climbs the canyon walls, where whole cliffs have been sculpted into massive statues of Har'Akir's gods and pharaohs.

Kemat-Tii guides the heroes, using the scroll of a map of the Valley. At one point, may be after an hour and a half of travel in the valley, she shouts "There it is!"

But the heroes look where she points and see nothing but rocky cliffs. They tell this to her. She shrugs and says many of these ancient edifices are enchanted to be invisible to people outside Har'Akir. She tells them to get closer.

When they are at 200' from the cliff, a veil suddenly lifts and they suddenly see it!

The tomb is a low, flat building with stone columns running the length of its face. There is a broad stone ramp rising up through the center of the columns. Past it is a flat expanse of rooftop. The far edge of the roof butts with the cliff wall, which has several statues filled alcoves.



The vultures are still flying above them. Kemat-Tii: this is a tell-tale sign telling everybody in the valley that there are living things here. Macrazbunare transforms unto a vulture and flies up 500' to speak with the vultures. When he gets farther than 200', he doesn't see the tomb entrance anymore, just the vardo, the camels and the other heroes. The vultures say they expect the humans to die soon so they fly there in circle, waiting. He asks them if humans always die here and the vultures answer "yes, most of the time". Then Macrazbunare sends them toward the obelisk, where he says a body is waiting for them. They fly away.

He gets back down. The heroes walk slowly on the sloped ramps. This low, flat building is a monument and shrine to the life and works of Sekhmet. Tightly spaced columns fill the wide expanse of the building. Each column is decorated with carved and painted pictures depicting the events in the life of Anhktepote. There are over 200 columns in the shrine. Many of the deeds depicted are exaggerated or outright false, say Kemat-Tii.

The heroes are surprised that Anhktepote ordered this display of his glory in a temple devoted to Sekhmet. Kemat-Tii tell that it wasn't unusual back then, and that people who financed the construction of a monument wanted people to know they did it. Also, a temple to Sekhmet might also have shrines to other gods in it, she adds.

Standing at the top of the stairs, the gigantic statues dwarf the first-time viewer. There are six statues, each set into a shallow alcove. Hieroglyphics are carved into the rock on the outer edges of the alcove and above each statue.



The statues on the left side of the doorway are of various deities. Ra is closest to the door, followed by Sekhmet and Osiris at the far side. On the right are Anhktepote, his wife, Nephry, and his vizier, Senmet. They see that Nephry's head has been defaced to the point where her features are not discernible. This is obviously the work of some deranged creature, so hideously is Nephry's beautiful face marred.

The statue of Sekhmet is of the highest quality and some features in bronze are still inserted in it. She appears as a muscular but petite woman with a lioness head.

Exigu is under the impression that the statue's eyes are following his every move.



Detect magic on the whole entrance: nothing, except the eyes on Sekhmet's statue (faint magic).

The heroes ask Kemat-Tii to remind them what kind of goddess is Sekhmet. *She is the goddess of slaughter, war and vengeance, and often depicted carrying a bloody axe. The story says that when the sun god Ra grew old, his human subjects rebelled against him, so Ra sent his daughter Sekhmet to punish them. Going further than was planned, Sekhmet took on the task with such fury that Ra feared she would exterminate the human race! Ra had to intervene to stop her.*



The akiri fear her as are fascinated by her. Akiri attributed the goddess the fury of the mother of wild beasts, always ready to fight to protect her young. When Sekhmet is angry, beware of those who stand in his way! She destroys everything and drinks the blood of her enemies. Sekhmet is a dangerous goddess. She terrifies the Akiri because she can also turn against them. Priests addressed her with daily invocations.

Ankhtepot was, without a doubt, the pharaoh who most feared this powerful divinity. His reasons remain mysterious: some historians have suggested that he suffered from an illness or was superstitious, or perhaps just trying to impress the people. In any case, he had hundreds of statues of Sekhmet sculpted and placed in his funerary temple, in the hope of appeasing her. The inscription that can be read on some of them, "Ankhtepot, loved by Sekhmet", reflects the pharaoh's desire to conciliate the powerful goddess.

They enter the temple by entering between Ra and Ankhtepot.

The still air smells strongly of the dust kicked up by your feet. The coolness of this room is a sharp contrast to the heat of the desert. The slightest sound seems to echo off of the distant walls.

A small building squats before the heroes: a collection of columns supporting a flat stone roof. Four stone lions wearing crowns are perched on each corner of the rooftop. Each column is carved in the shape of a woman, with the heads of bestial cats. Their implacable gaze is on the heroes, and they appear to judge them unworthy of their attention...

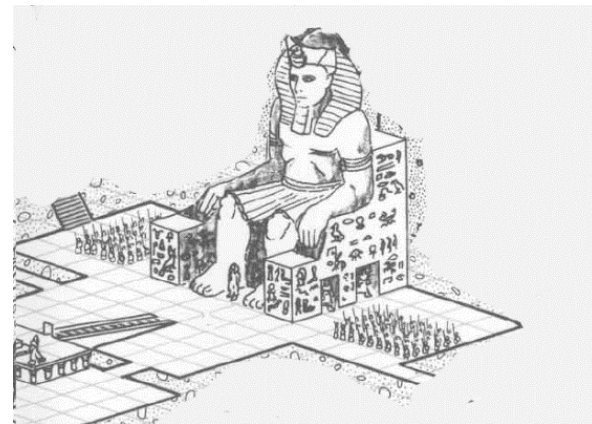
The heroes watch for traces in the dust: nothing! They appear like the first people to walk here in a long time... Odd, they think, as they had the information that Isu was seen entering here 3 or 4 days ago?

They pass through a corridor leading them inside. With the feeble lighting in hand, the heroes see an enormous statue in front of them, and at its feet, dozens pair of eyes looking at them!

They are careful but nothing moves or appears threatening. The enormous stone statue of a man dominates the view. The hero's head barely reaches to its ankles. The statue is seated on a block, hands flat on its lap. The powerful physique of the man being depicted is readily apparent since he wears only a crown and ceremonial loin cloth. To either side of his legs and between them are 5 statues of other female figures merely twice a normal man's height.

On either side of the huge monolith are clay figures of warriors. There are several dozen on each side. Their eyes reflect the light of the torches. The figures are painted to represent warriors of the time. Each has a bronze short sword and a bronze tipped spear.

Kemat-Tii: the statue is Anhktepote from his days as pharaoh. The figures around the base of his seat are portrayals of his five wives. The statue between his feet is a depiction of his wife, Nephthys. Her head was smashed again, like the one at the entrance.



The walls are covered in painted hieroglyphics. Kemat-Tii: they tell the story of Anhktepote. But since the walls extend to a roof high enough to contain the statue, it would be an incredible feat to read it all.

In front of the statue, a ramp climbs toward the front. They decide to go that way. It leads to the rooftop where the stone lions were standing. Exigu opens the door, to a hidden low altar (not seen from the ground floor). This altar is bloodied and from the lion head at one end, it was clearly dedicated to Sekhmet. The smell of fresh blood is strong near the altar!

When Exigu tries to go on the rooftop, the four stone lions animate and make a “backoff” gesture at Exigu.

Exigu takes the akiri language scarab and goes back to the lion: “We are coming in peace. We are studying your great culture.”

The four lions reply in unison, but Exigu does not understand as they speak old akiri.

Kemat-Tii, who heard the lions, and understood, shouts at Exigu “get out!”. Exigu quickly steps back. Kemat-Tii tells him the lion said that Exigu was impure, and should leave, unless he wanted to be sacrificed on the altar to Sekhmet!

They wonder if Kemat-Tii, an akiri, could enter the roof top. She tries, but she gets the same message from the stone lions.

They resume their exploration. From the large statue room, they are two corridors as well as a steep set of stairs going up.

In a side room, the walls are lined with standing stone sarcophagi. There are over a dozen of them. These are the coffins of the minor palace officials. Anhktepot ordered that upon his death they also be killed and buried with him to serve him in the underworld. The hieroglyphics on the walls tell this tale.



Another section was former offices for the priests who worked there. But the furniture and texts that once filled these rooms have been reduced to kindling and dust.

When going to another side corridor, Macrazbunare suddenly stops and say, “but I can’t pass this corridor!” The passageway leading to this room is only three feet wide and four feet high. The other heroes are puzzled, as the width of the corridor is large enough for him. But the druid is convinced he can’t pass. So he will stays outside while the others enter the room.

This small room has a low, seven foot ceiling. There are several ceramic jugs, vases, pitches, and large urns here. These once held the waters and fluids used to purify important visitors to the temple. Now they are empty or filled with dust.

There is another smaller room in the back of the purification room. There are hieroglyphs (ancient akiri) on the wall. Kemat-Tii reads to the other heroes : “Here begins my sojourn to the Great Beyond, as I rest in eternity.”

But it was a trap! When she finished reading it, the floor then turned gaseous, dumping Kemat-Tii into a 20-foot-deep pit filled with semisolid tar. The pit is twice larger than the room. Kemat-Tii immediately begins to sink!

Thinking quickly, Petrak casts *airwalk* and he descend in the pit. Kemat-Tii grabs Petrak’s hand, but it is not easy to pluck her out of the tar. The other heroes throw a rope at Kemat-Tii and help Petrak drag her out of the tar.

But just when they succeeded getting her out of the tar, the floor of the room resumes to its solid state! Petrak and Kemat-Tii are now stuck below it!

Then Varadan, who has the akiri language scarab, tries to say the trigger phrase written in old akiri on the wall: it works! Petrak exits in *airwalk*, with Kemat-Tii.

Meanwhile, Macrazbunare was still outside. He notices something moving in the room with the large Ankhtepot statue: he sees a small cloud of dust and storm, moving toward him. It is 10' wide and moves 20' in his direction. He moves away to let it pass and the small storm enters the corridor where the other heroes are. It doesn't do any damage, but it blinds them briefly and extinguishes unprotected torches. Odd! But they also notice that after its passage, it erased all traces in the dust! Now they have the answer to the oddity of Isu leaving no trace. They watch the mini storm go back to the large room and it dust the floor in one straight line until it reaches the other end, where it is lost in the shadows of the room.

They decide to climb the steps, and they find a tomb like room with two sarcophagi. A mummy attacks! It hits Tora hard (-16). Kemat-Tii throws a *magic missile* at it. Then Exigu misses, as well as Varadan. Tora hits all three of his attacks. Macrazbunare sends a *magic missile* too.



Then a second mummy appears, that of a woman, with a bow. The arrow hits Varadan and a swarm of angry wasps appears at Varadan's feet!

The first mummy hits Tora again (-16), while spells are thrown – *magic missile* from Kemat-Tii, *Scorching Ray* from Austizel, *Produce flame* from Petrak and *flaming sphere* from Macrazbunare.

The mummy with a bow misses Tora. They then destroy both mummies, then the swarm with *Scorching Ray* and *Produce flame*.

There is treasure in the room: 10 000 gp in jars, and jewels (1 500 gp). A magical ring (faint abj), and the shortbow (moderate, conj., composite Str18)

Kemat-Tii: I'm not having anything from the gold pieces or the jewels. These are often cursed.

The other heroes decide not to touch it either...

From hieroglyphs on the wall, they learn that Anhktepote's oldest son and daughter, did rest in this chamber. They died by their father's hand when the curse of Ra was placed upon Anhktepote.

GAME SESSION 104: INSIDE THE DEATH STONE – 9

(This Ravenloft game was played June 2nd, 2024. Everybody is present)

DM note: I started the game by asking all PCs to turn two 20 sided dices. But the only important ones were Tora's, who succeeded against mummy rot from last game's battle.

From the mummy's belongings, they only take the magical ring and a bow. They do not touch the gold pieces, fearing a possible curse.

In another room, 8 empty sarcophagi, and about 6 000 gp in big clay jars (again, they do not take the money). There are no markings to identify the sarcophagi.

The next room in this corridor is odd: 11 anonymous child sized sarcophagi, and 40 mummified cats on their feet. 9 000 gp in jars (again ignored).

In this room, Exigu finds a moving a panel, and then he finds a 3' wide tube in the wall. It has a slope, going up. Exigu enters in it and crawls the whole length of the tube, about 50 feet. At its end, he sees a wooden board on a peg. He moves it and finds himself looking through the left eye of the giant Ankhtepote statue in the entrance room.

The next room has four sarcophagi, containing the four first wives of Ankhtepote. Another set of clay jars contains 9 000 gold pieces. Exigu the thief is getting restless as they decided to leave untouched all these gold pieces!

In this room, they hear the noise of wind and see another small whirlwind of dust, that eventually leaves the room and passes harmlessly through the heroes.

The last room in this corridor holds a broken sarcophagus. Its lid has been shattered and lies on the floor. From the hieroglyphs, Kemat-Tii deducts that this room is the burial place of Nephyr, Ankhtepote's youngest wife. She was the last consort of Ankhtepote, and she had four children. Inside the sarcophagus, they find the broken piece of an ankh. A *detect magic* spell shows faint abjuration on the ankh fragment.

Kemat-Tii say an ankh is a symbol of life. Macrazbunare casts *identify* on it: Ankh of protection against mummy – immunity to mummy rot and bonus A/C +4 against mummies.

They backtrack the corridor, back to the main room. In the room with the mummified cats, Tora tries his *ghostsight*, and sees many ghostly cats, playfully running around the other heroes (who can't see the cats).

They go back to the bloody altar, and Tora tries again his *ghost sight*: he sees a horror of phantomatic shapes, all superposed at the same places, being gutted by daggers and raking claws, lots of blood splashing. (DM note: successful horror check by Tora)

Back to the room with the large statue, they check more carefully the walls and find a secret door. In the corridor after the secret door, hieroglyphs revering the high priests that served Anthem.

The corridor opens to a room where there are two upright sarcophagi. From them, mummies pass *through* the lid and charges the heroes! They appear very old and dry.

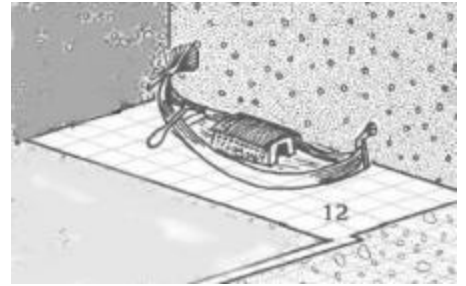
The first mummy reaches Tora and slams him hard (-16). The second mummy misses Tora. Exigu launches two arrows but both misses. Macrazbunare hits a mummy with *magic missile*, then Austizel casts the same spell. Petrak hits one of the creatures with *spiritual weapon*. Varadan moves and attacks but both attacks miss. Kemat-Tii throws a *magic missile*, and one mummy falls to the ground! Tora hits the second one (-13/-10), but it replies with a forceful slam (-16). One of Exigu's arrow touches but makes no damage. Petrak hits the last mummy with *spiritual weapon* (-10). Varadan hits once (-9) and Tora attacks (-8/-8). The mummy hits Tora again (-11), then a last *magic missile* (-17) by Austizel and *spiritual weapon* destroys the monster.

Tora was hit thrice by the mummy and feels his flesh starting to blemish. He makes three resist attempts against mummy rot but fails one! However, Austizel's *Fickle finger of faith* enables to him to try again, this time successfully.



Detect magic in this place: the illusion of a lid is magical.

From this room, a set of steep stairs is going down, and a corridor. They take the corridor and later it opens to a large room containing a boat! It is a funerary barge, a way to reach the underworld. There are many images of the god Osiris on the boat. They estimate the boat's age to be at least a thousand years old! They search it and finds nothing. *Detect magic* and *ghostsight*: nothing.



Back to the descending stairs, they are very steep: - 80' on 20'! They take the stairs and start going down. At one point, a *silence* spell! Austizel gets back and cast *arcane eye*: a ghostly disgusting magical eye appear and Austizel makes it move in the room at the end of the staircase.



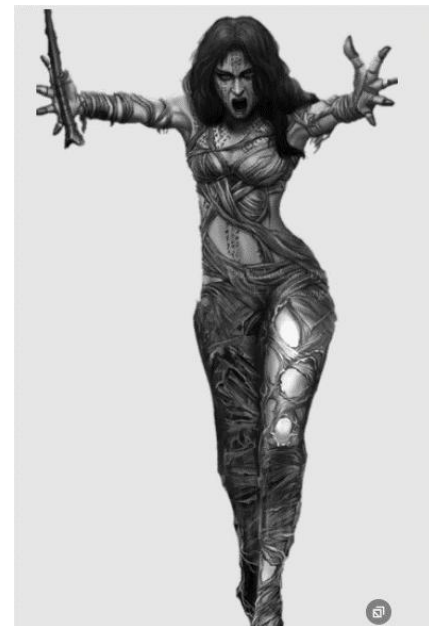
Through the spell, he sees a large room, full of hieroglyphs, with a dozen of open sarcophagi, all containing a mummy. Suddenly, he sees Isu! But she has seen the ghostly eye and ducks behind an altar.

They found her!

DM note: having heard the battle with the two mummies upstairs, Isu did cast *silence* (in the staircase), then *freedom of movement*, *protection from good* (+2 AC, +2 save, vs summon), and *resist energy* (fire). Senmet did cast *freedom of movement*, and *spell immunity* (*magic missile*)

From behind the *silence* spell, Macrazbunare cast *haste* on the group. Austizel cast *invisibility* and moves. Tora, Exigu and Kemat-Tii moves forward. Petrak cast *divine power* and move. Moving quick, Varadan is able to attack quickly Isu!

Varadan sees that Isu has seen some kind of horrible transformation since the last time they saw her! She is deadly pale and covered with black funeral wraps! Her eyes are insane and hateful. She wears a chainmail under the wraps, and a cloak.



Isu casts *flame strike* on herself, hurting hard the heroes surrounding her, but she appears unharmed. Then she calls: “Senmet! Kill the one in my back!”. Then one of the mummy comes forward one step, and cast a spell on Varadan, who feels the pain of his bones splintering and shattering! (*BoneShatter*, -56, successful save 50 %, Varadan is fatigued).

Senmet is covered in funeral wraps and staggers as he walks. Some of the wraps are missing, revealing emaciated, dried-brown flesh barely covering a skeletal frame. A faint odor of dry spices can be detected. He wears pieces of old clerical garments. A hateful glare in his dried eyes.

Macrazbunare cast *call lightning* on Isu. Austizel wants to capture Isu and casts *shackle* on her but the ray misses. Tora hits Isu three times. Petrak casts *produce flame* on Senmet. Exigu drinks a healing potion. Kemat-Tii casts a *magic missile* at Isu.

Varadan misses twice on Isu, who cast *Inflict Wounds* on Varadan (-26), and the wound keep bleeding (-5). Senmet casts a cure spell on Isu (CCW). Macrazbunare’ *call lightning* strikes Isu (-15). Austizel throws a *scorching ray* at Senmet (-16). Of all attacks, only one of Tora hits (-13). Petrak keeps his *produce flame* on Senmet. Exigu throws a holy water at Senmet. Of all three attacks, only one of Varadan hits target (-9). Another *magic missile* from Kemat-Tii.

Isu casts *Poison* on Varadan but misses him. Varadan’s touch wound still bleeds (-5). Senmet exhale a blast of superheated sand in a 40-foot cone. The blast deals -24 points of fire and slashing damage. Tora is blinded from the sand!

Isu – *The temple of Sekhmet will be your tomb; you will not escape!*

Austizel throws another *scorching ray* at Senmet (-33). MacRazbunare wolf attacks Isu, while the druid cast *dispel magic* on her. Tora fumbles through is potions but being blind he cannot find the one he seeks. Petrak’ *produce flame* hits Senmet. Exigu’s four arrows hit Senmet, none making any damage. Varadan misses three times. Another *magic missile* from Kemat-Tii.

Isu cast *heal* on herself! Varadan’s would is still bleeding. Senmet exhale another blast of heated sand (-36).

Macrazbunare casts *magic missile* at Senmet but sees the missiles vanishes near the mummy. Austizel gives a healing potion to Tora. Petrak cures himself (CCW, +37).



Exigu attacks with his war razor. Varadan has two successful hits (-6, -11). Isu casts *inflict wound* on Senmet, healing him.

Senmet cast *flame strike* on a group of heroes (-32)

Things are looking bleak for the heroes! The collective health pool from the Pact Stone is at 25 %! Tora is still blind!

Macrazbunare misses Senmet with a *Melf Acid Arrow*. Austizel casts *magic missile* at Isu. Tora takes a potion of *bear's endurance*. Petrak hits Isu (-8). Exigu also takes a potion of *bear's endurance*. Kemat-Tii brings two options to Tora. Isu casts *inflict wound* at Exigu but misses. Senmet casts *inflict wound* at Petrak (-28).

Macrazbunare cast a delivered healing spell at Varadan. Austizel uses a scroll of *magic missiles* at Isu (-13). Tora shakes off the blindness at last and he hits Senmet. Exigu throws an acid vial at Senmet.

Then Varadan hits Isu and she falls to the ground! He hits her again to make sure she is dead.

Senmet casts a healing spell on Isu, but she remains lifeless!

Macrazbunare transforms into a crocodile and moves toward the mummy, but Tora kills Senmet shortly afterward.

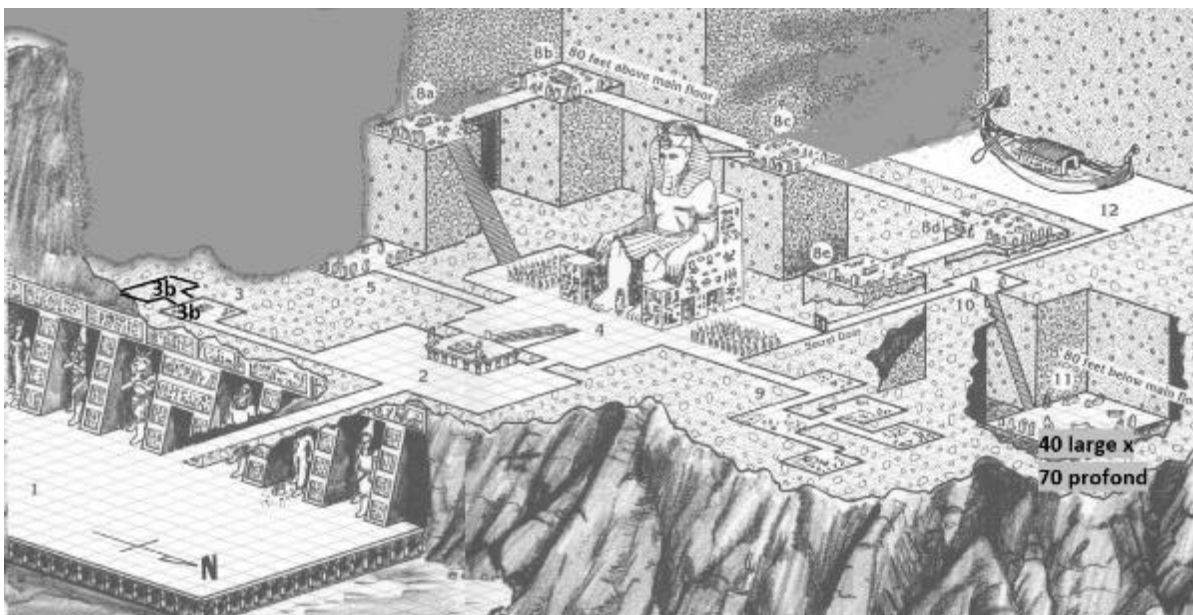
Detect magic: Isu's chain mail (faint abj), Isu's cloak (cloak resistance +1) and Isu's ring (Prot +2).

Isu had also a pouch containing a value of 500 gp in gems. They destroyed the Holy Symbol of Sekhmet

They cast cure spells on themselves.

In the sarcophagus where Senmet was, they find the other half of the broken ankh found in Nephyr's sarcophagus. When rejoined, both parts immediately fuse together. (additional effect: turn undead 2 cleric level, et CMW+5 1 times / day). Petrak takes it.

Then they notice that the other mummies in the sarcophagi start moving and open their eyes. One of them say something, and Varadan understands it said, "our rest have been troubled!". The heroes leave the room, then go sleep outside at the vardo.



July 29th, morning

They travel back to Muhar. Macrazbunare identifies some of the item found in the Temple of Sekhmet – the mummy’s bow is a *swarm bow* (wasps, 2d6, immobile), a ring found on a mummy is *energy resistance* (fire, 10), Isu’s items and the ankh.

July 30th, late at night

Arrival in Muhar. They leave the body of Isu at the temple, and trust Kemat-Tii will explain what happened to the villages’ elders. They give the camels to Kemat-Tii as a parting gift.

They prepare to leave Har’Akir with Dulcimae’s mist travel powers.

But then Exigu reveals to the other that he feels suddenly older... and that he took 1 gold piece from one of the jars! He is older by two years!

Kemat-Tii tells him that he needs to put back the gold piece where he took these, if he wants the curse to stop! They have to travel back to Sekhmet’s temple!

DM note: powerful malediction! The curse laid upon the robber is to age one year for every passing day. The curse's victim will still live the full span of their normal lives, but after 100 days or so, their bodies are physically well over 100 years old. They cannot walk or feed themselves. They lose their memories and ramble on for hours saying nothing. They live their normal life expectancy in this condition.

GAME SESSION 105: INSIDE THE DEATH STONE – 10

(This Ravenloft game was played Oct 27th, 2024. Everybody is present except Philippe)

July 30th, late at night

So they have to go back to Sekhmet's temple to put back the stolen gold piece!

They decide to sleep and leave the next day.

August 1st, 748

Exigu is older by a year ...

They ask Kemat-Tii for her help one last time: six *endure elements*. The heroes will do the others.

In the morning, they leave with Dulcimae's vardo, her horses and Al-Wawat. They say farewell to Kemat-Tii and Amenhemoft.

At 11 am, they see in the desert 3 camels, without harness. Wild creatures.

At 2 pm, Macrazbunare and Tora feel that something is suddenly different on the road. The sky is still blue, but the air becomes more electric-like and heavier. They stop and scan the desert for clues. Is it a blue dragon? Petrak casts *mage armor* on himself. Varadan changes to hybrid form.

There is a small wind now, slowly moving the sand on the ground. The sky is still blue. The heroes also hear whispers carried on the wind, incomprehensible at first but becoming more distinct as the storm approaches.

"Thief!", it whispers. This is for Exigu's theft?

The wind is getting stronger, menacing to cover the road.

They decide to leave the area and have the horses on full move. However, the same conditions are found all along the way.

Suddenly, without warning, clouds of sand rise out of nowhere, rapidly obscuring visibility and blocking out the sun. Visibility is only 20' now. The sky turns a shade of ochre and blood red, while the wind howls with the force of a spectral scream.

"Thief!", it says.

They decide to continue, but at half move because of the visibility. Winds are getting stronger. They see Dulcimae nearly fell from the vardo because of the wind. Then she has braced herself with the reins, seated at the helm of the vardo. She has also covered her face.

The sand seems to have a life of its own, entering the adventurers' mouths, ears, and clothing. They put blankets on the horses's faces.

Exigu falls on his knees, making a prayer to Sekhmet, trying to appease the goddess. He asks for clemency, and say that he is on the way to put back what he took.

Then a whirlwind appears in front of the vardo! Varadan mistakes it for a creature and attacks it, without results. Dulcimae tells him “it’s a spell, not a creature!”

Macrazbunare casts *haste* on the group. They see Dulcimae murmuring something soothing and it calms the horses. Austizel casts *dispel magic* on the whirlwind, but it remains. Petrak casts *prayer*. Exigu gets closer to the vardo and braces himself to it.

Tora tries *ghost sight*: nothing.

Then Exigu is blown away by the whirlwind! The heroes watch him go.

(Varadan’s player suggests throwing tar and feathers to the mix)

Then Exigu is moved 20’ at the back of the vardo and he is thrown out of the whirlwind, and he falls to the ground, to find Sekhmet is in front of him! She watches Exigu cruelly and doesn’t appear to feel the wrath of the storm...

She tells him “thief” in akiri.

Exigu offers her the stolen gold piece, but she doesn’t take it.

Then they hear Dulcimae, in front of the vardo, shrieking in horror! What is it? They do not see because of the poor visibility...



Varadan attacks Sekhmet but his attacks passe through her. It's an illusion!

Austizel moves top the front to see a horrible creature, hovering in front the vardo. He throws *magic missiles* at it (-14). He identifies it as a djinn, but corrupted or mad?

The other heroes move toward the front of the vardo.

Dulcimae stops the horses.

The whirlwind moves toward Exigu and the djinn attacks Tora with a fist (-12).

Another *magic missiles* from Austizel (-18). Then Tora hits it twice and the djinn vanishes! Quickly, the storm end and the desert is quiet again...



After a moment, they resume their trip.

Later during the day, at 4 pm, they find they are near the Falkovnian camp, where the Pact Stone pyramid stand. The heroes decide to stop one hour before and they find a place to hide the vardo from the road, a good 1000' from it.

The heroes stop and rest for the night.

At 7 pm, they see 20 horses coming from Muhar and going south. Macrazbunare the druid transforms into a falcon and spies on the caravan: Falkovnians! The horses moves slowly as they appear to have suffered from the heat. The men too. Helmut is leading the group. They have a wagon with 6-7 barrels. Nebta-Khufre isn't seen by the druid.

They let the Falkovnians pass without revealing themselves.

At 9 pm, they see more Falkovnians, with torches, may be 60 total, going back to Muhar. They carry tents and the wagon with the barrels.

Again, they let the Falkovnians pass.

Dulcimae walks in a circle a good 150' around the camp and she tells the heroes the camp is protected by an *alarm*-like protection.

They go to sleep.

August 2nd, 748

7 am - Exigu is older by a year ...

They talk of the Falkovnians seen last night. Al-Wawat – we saw all Falkovnians leave, but what happened to the akiri people who worked for them? There was about 30 of them?

They cast *endure elements* and resume their trip.

An hour later, they cross the path to the Pact Stone Pyramid. They see fresh traces of horses and wagons (the group they saw last night at 9 pm).

Macrazbunare turns to a falcon and flies over the akiri camp – he sees devastations and at least a dozen bodies on the ground...

They walk this path toward the pyramid. They see it has been covered in sand. The camp of akiri is a war zone: many tents are destroyed, the fabric moving in the quiet wind. But they see inside the tents the bodies of the akiris! They have been killed by swords, and from what they understand from the scene, the attack by the Falkovnians arrived during the night. There is one Falkovnian dead, killed by arrows. They search but there are no survivors. They think the massacre happened two days ago.



They leave the place, hating the Falkovnians even more, and resume their trip toward the Valley of Pharaohs.

At 4pm, they arrive at the entrance of the Valley and Al-Wawat helps them find the Temple of Sekhmet, still covered by the veil magic for foreigners.

Tora and Austizel stay at the vardo, with Dulcimae and Al-Wawat.

The others enter the temple. They feel observed. Exigu leads them to the place where he took the gold piece. They notice he must fight with himself to put it back, but the other heroes watch him carefully and make sure the stolen gold piece is put back.

Later, Exigu will explain that he felt an urge to stay inside the temple, as a guardian, so that he could have everything for himself. He even had the thought that he could enjoy being a priest of Sekhmet...

DM note: and bogus save dice to scare the player 😊

At 6 pm, they are back to the vardo. They rest for the night and eventually sleep. They hear the strange barking of hyenas in the distance.

August 3rd, 748

Exigu doesn't feel his body age and he is relieved. So he has lost four years with this malediction.

At 8 am, they are ready to follow Dulcimae's trail, and soon mists surround them!

The trip is quiet and again they wonder if it lasted minutes or hours...

They find themselves on the road between Misericordia and Krezk.

Varadan scratches himself, to find out if the pact is still working; Tora, Exigu and Petrak feels it...

They ask Dulcimae on her plans for the future. She answers that she doesn't know. She explains that they were more or less forced by Nostalia to help the heroes, but now she was free. However, her tribe was now limited to herself, after the death of her three brothers in the desert, and of her mother a year ago. She was now all alone.

The heroes invite her to stay at their manor in Levkarest, Vaugrenard. She accepts but adds that she will feel the urge to move in a few weeks, so that it is temporary.

When they ask her, she agrees to bring back Al-Wawat and his family to Har'Akir.

Arrived in Misericordia, Lucretio greets them at the door (Lucretio Napioli, in charge of the guards at Misericordia). At the manor, Dulcimae says she prefers to not see Nostalia or Ivana again, so she will wait in the court.

The heroes and Al-Wawat enter Misericordia. The Jongleur is there and he makes a sign inviting the heroes to follow him. He brings them to a salon, and makes a "wait" gesture. The Jongleur leaves. Anne-Claire Valloton, Ivana's chief of the maids arrives and serves tea.

Maybe 20 minutes later, Ivana arrives, followed by Nostalia and the Jongleur.

Ivana greets them and makes small talk about the chores of traveling. Al-Wawat quickly asks about his wife and daughter. "They are fine and eager to see you as well", Ivana says. She rings a little bell and quickly Anne-Claire Valloton arrives in the room.

Ivana - "Please bring Al-Wawat to the room where his family is". Valloton leaves, followed by Al-Wawat.

Ivana, to the heroes – So, tell me about your travel?

Varadan decides to tell her everything. Ivana doesn't seem interested until they talk about the Death Stone and what they found about it. Nostalia, however, is listening to all details, clearly enjoying more the adventure tale, especially inside the pyramid and the temple.

Ivana (when the ancient book with information of death Stones is mentioned) – Did you bring back this book?

Varadan – err, no?

They wonder for a moment if Ivana believes the heroes' information about the Death Stone. Before they were going to explain that books cannot be taken out of the Muhar Library, Ivana asks – Who in Har'Akir know about the Death Stone?

Varadan name Udjebet, but not Kemat-Tii and Amenhemoft. He is trying to protect them from Ivana.

She insists, but get the same answer.

Ivana – how did you find these informations?

Varadan – in the books, fragments here and there...

Ivana – did librarians helped you? What are their names?

Varadan – we do not recall their names...

She isn't happy. She glances at Nostalia, who gets up, and says "I'm going to get pastries", and then she leaves the salon.

Ivana – do the Falkovnians know about this?

Varadan – No, not at all. They were looking for the Pact Stone, something else entirely. That woman Nebta-Khufre mislead them in this search.

Ivana – what was her interest in the Pact Stone?

Varadan – we do not know for sure, perhaps restore the ancient order of the Pharaohs?

All this time, the Jongleur stays behind Ivana, looking uninterested by the conversation going on in the room.

After 20 minutes, Nostalia is back with a plate of extremely refined little pastries, with whipped cream, and offers them to the heroes.

Nostalia also passes a paper note to Ivana. Ivana appears to look at it with ennui, then takes a pastry, leaving the note folded on the table.

The heroes wonder what is on the paper and some understand the situation could be dangerous for them...

Ivana – so those librarians who helped you, you said their name was...?

Varadan – we do not recall their names...

But then Exigu shouts – Their names are Kemat-Tii and Amenhemoft!

Changing subject, Ivana then reveals that she will ask for the Death Stone daggers to be recovered, and plans to stop using them. Did you see other Death Stones in Har'Akir?

Varadan – No, we didn't see or hear about another one.

Ivana – a pity, that piece of rock has its use. Do you know more about the process to create a Death Stone?

The heroes explain that the magic used to create these artefacts is very old, maybe 10 000 years old, and forgotten and lost. There was nothing in the books about it.

Ivana – That woman, Nebta-Khufre, was looking for something called the Pact Stone. Do you think she might have learned about the Death Stone while looking for her own research?

Heroes – no, not the same books.

Nostalia explains they learned that Nebta-Khufre is a very determined woman, known as an explorer of ruins, without any scruples. A dangerous woman.

Varadan – and now for the return of Al-Wawat's family to Har'Akir, we made arrangements with Dulcimae who agreed to ...

Ivana, interrupting – We have our own plans, through the Boritsi Trading Company. We will take care of it, thank you.

Then she asks – speaking of Dulcimae, do you know what are her plans?

Varadan – no, we don't

Ivana – does she know about the Death Stone?

Varadan – no, I don't think so. As we said earlier, she and her brothers were killed early in the adventure, and then she was raised from the dead *after* we found the information. We never said a word to her about it.

Ivana – By the way, since you left, we didn't hear about Ivan and his little friends. He is probably in his own manor, Degravo, planning his next foul move. Someday, *someone* should take care of him...

Then she salutes the heroes and leaves the room, followed closely by the Jongleur.

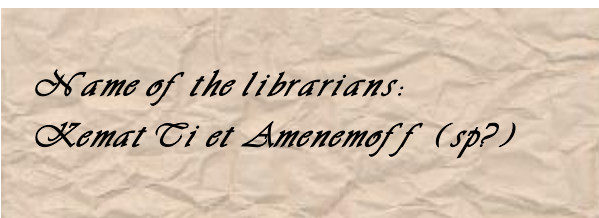
Nostalia salutes them and tells – we will contact you at Vaugrenard for anything. She adds that the tales of your adventures were very interesting.

Varadan – do you want to come with us next time?

Nostalia – sure, that could be fun. Goodbye now.

Then she takes the pieces of paper on the table and throws it in the garbage can near the door. She leaves the room.

Exigu makes sure he isn't seen from the corridor and takes the paper and reads it, then puts it back in the garbage can.



The heroes understand that Nostalia did leave the room to ask Al-Wawat.

Macrazbunare – what do we do with Al-Wawat? She will surely kill him!

Varadan – what can we do? Nothing.

With these grim thoughts, they leave Misericordia with Dulcimae and travel to Levkarest, to their home manor, Vaugrenard.

The servants are there: the cook - Mabilia Robiquet (are you hungry? Will you be there for diner?); a maid - Adeliza Naudé; and the gardener and concierge - Herbertus Thibodeaux.

Herbertus frowns when seeing the vardo enters the court. “Really?”, he asks. But the heroes tell him the vistani is here to be treated as a guest.

Heroes – now what do we do? Do we go at the tavern for rumors? Should we exit Borca?

Petrak decides to go to the Cathedral and there he meets Nicoletta Ladubay, his superior. “Nothing special”, she says, “all is quiet”.

Then they see Tara. She is worried as she had a meeting with a woman named Talena Von Zarovich, who invited Tara to go to Barovia to preach about Ezra. She politely refused, as she made a promise to her father that she would never go back to Barovia again...

Macrazbunare - Did you meet her during the day or at night?



Tara – during the day.

Then they decide to go to the Dark Maiden tavern, where they see the halfling Garrett Tallgallows.

Garrett says he is happy to see them. During conversation, he says all is quiet in town, “and that is very good for *business*.”

They ask him to keep an ear out for a Falkovnian named Helmut, and to tell them if he hears from him. “I sure will”, he says.

5pm – they go to Ivana’s favorite restaurant, Mava. Since it is early, they first take seats at the bar for drinks, then take a table for diner. At this time, Nostalia and Clothilda enters the restaurant, and seeing the heroes, join them for dinner.

Nostalia asks more questions about their Har’Akir adventures, Dulcimae’s plans for the future and the Pact Stone’s magic (how it works? Who is linked by it?). Clothilda is clearly interested too, but she keeps her questions for herself.

They ask Nostalia if they still have to write a report about Har'Akir, and she answers negatively.

Clothilda – oh, by the way, your first pay for the Boritsi Trading Company was send to Vaugrenard today. It is in a coffer. For the future, would you prefer to open an account at the Boritsi Trading Co?

The heroes answer that they have a very limited understanding of such a thing. Clothilda promises to provide them the information later.

They ask about Ivan, and Clothilda explains that Ivan is always pecking to gain more power from Ivana's own. His bank account is full, he doesn't need to try to expand his tax territory, but still he does, once in a while, try to have a property switch from paying taxes at Ivana to paying taxes to him. "Just to annoy Ivana.", Nostalia adds.

Nostalia, suddenly – Have you ever been to Tepest?

Tora – yes, I was born there! In Briggdarrow.

Nostalia – Great. We wonder if there is a potential for the BTC in this place. Tepest is a remote place, far from any important travel road. They are keeping busy chasing witches or feys, so we hear. We have a BTC counter in Liara, close to Tepest, but it does very few business from Tepest. Can you enquire? Do they have anything to trade?

Dinner is ending and the heroes say they are inviting Nostalia and Clothilda. The one taking the bill is surprised at the high cost of the meal, 80 gp! The wine Clothilda chose isn't cheap!

Before leaving, Nostalia says – By the way, do not hide information to Ivana if you want to work with her for a long time. Not a good idea. She accumulates. "This time, he didn't tell me everything". "This time he didn't tell me everything" and so on. At one point, it's over and you won't like it. She has reach over all places on the Core and elsewhere.

Tora, bluntly – what will happen to Al-Wawat?

Nostalia – well, as Ivana said, the plan is to charge the BTC to bring them back to Har'Akir. It's all you need to know!

They part and the heroes go to Vaugrenard. There, they find Dulcimae quietly drinking tea and drawing tarokka cards on a table. She appears somewhat dispirited and is happy to do something else and talk with the heroes. They tell her about traveling to

Liara. She agrees to travel with them through the mists, but only tomorrow as today's mist travel exhausted her.

She will take them to Liara, then she asks if she could come back here to Vaugrenard as she has no plans yet. Will she join another vistani clan? Start again a new one?

They ask her about Tepest. "The clergy there actively hunts feys and anything that is different, including vistani.", Dulcimae say. "So I will go with you to Liara, but I won't enter Tepest. Since about 741 or 742, the zealous Inquisition is the supreme power in Tepest. Wise foreigners avoid the place, particularly if they were nonhumans. Elves, half-elves and especially halflings are certain to draw the attention of the Inquisition — and they are nearly as certain to be burned at the stake as fey. The same is true of wizards and sorcerers. From the tales I've heard, I believe that no fewer than 20 to 25 innocent men and women were burned alive for being "fey" or for "consorting with fey" during those years. Close to 20 others suffered a similar fate, but in those cases, Wyan and his followers properly punished those they defined as guilty."

"Also", Dulcimae adds, "goblins in the forest are dangerous, they attack anything that looks like it can be eaten. The priests should fight the goblins, not the feys..."

Austizel takes this freetime to put *Cloudkill* in his spellbook (from a scroll Clothilda made).

August 4th, 748

The heroes plan to give Dulcimae 100 gp for the mist trip.

In the morning, they receive a visit from Nostalia – My proposition had the benediction from Ivana, so go to Tepest as discussed yesterday!

Austizel takes the day to put *Enlarge person, mass* in his spellbook.

August 5th, 748

In the morning, Tora, Exigu, Varadan and Petrak find that something is different. The Pact has finally ended!

They go to the Boritsi Trading Company to buy material for scrolls (2 000 gp).

They again follow Dulcimae's vardo and, after an eventless trip in the mists, find themselves south of Liara in Nova Vaasa. They enter the small town and find the counter of the Boritsi trading Co. They meet there a man named Dorisz. Dorisz knows

the heroes' name when they give it to him, as well as their special function in the company. He is deferent.

They order from him 5 light war horses (Exigu rides his dog). He agrees, promises them he will get the best horses he can find, but notices the heroes it could take a few days to get them from Kantora.

He suggests the Green Grail Inn, where the stew is great, as well as the pear brandy, he adds. Dulcimae takes a room too. This inn policy is that people have to check in before darkness, Dorisz adds.

"Oh! Going to Tepest?", the inn owner comments, "Them woods ain't no place to travel. Dunno what's worse — the screwy priests or the hungry goblins..."

GAME SESSION 106: TEPEST -1

(This Ravenloft game was played Nov 10th, 2024. Everybody is present except Philippe)

DM note: next adventure is heavily based on Servants of Darkness, modified for the needs of my campaign and its history so far.

August 5, 748, 2 pm

They pay Dulcimae for the trip in the mists, 100 gp. She says she will be leaving to go back to Levkarest soon.

Since they have 2-3 days to wait for the horses, they decide to plan for some scroll making (Macrazbunare & Austizel): *magic missiles, see invisible, CLW, neutralize poison.*

The other heroes decide to walk in Liara to have a feel of the town. The city is quiet, and its economy heavily oriented toward horses and needed tacking. They have a feeling people here are living well and they are richer than in Barovia. They feel the Liara city watch as being well trained, well equipped, and efficient in keeping the town safe of crimes.

Most of the buildings are one or two stories high, except two, located each at one opposed end of the town. The first is a squat fortress of stone, most probably where the city guards are located.

The other one is a grey four stories high brick building, its façade without clues of its use. They ask a person on the street what is this building, and that man has a

shameful face. He answers that it's a large tavern, gambling hall, and a brothel. It's called the Staggering Stallion. Ha adds that the owner is an old lady.

They decide to visit this place at 6 pm. Dulcimae accompanies the heroes. The doormen are four very large and ugly men (calibans - half orc? half ogre?) that scans the persons entering the Staggering Stallion. They let the heroes pass.

Inside, the ground floor is mostly a large tavern room, with around a hundred tables. About 40 of them are occupied at this hour.

It is fairly quiet, and the patrons are either groups of Nova Vaasan that are drinking and chatting among friends, or persons alone at their table, eating and drinking, watching the place. Many of the later are from out of town, they guess. In the center, there are bards playing music.

Their waitress Anja is extremely friendly, and she sits on Varadan' knees to take the heroes' order. She offers beer, wine and spirit, as well as food. Exigu watches her hand so that she doesn't pickpocket Varadan.



She leaves and later comes back to bring the hero's beer order.

They see a group of people wearing leather armor, talking with a low voice, and watching for people nearby so they do not spy on them. After half an hour, they shake hands and leave.

Anja brings them the "plate of the day", a bland stew with beef and rice. After their stay in Borca, this is far below the heroes' standards!

At 8 pm, the place is full, all tables are ready. They see many people finish their food and drink, then use a red staircase to access the first floor.

Later, there is a fist fight between two customers. They see two bodyguards enter the tavern, but they do not stop the fight. They just monitor a safe ring between the two pugilists, making sure the fight doesn't degenerate in a tavern brawl. It's part of the entertainment, the heroes guess.

Around 9h 30 pm, the air is thick with the scent of smoke, beer, wine, and imported spirits carried all the way from Barovia and Borca. The tavern's main hall buzzes with a cacophony of laughter, curses, and the clinking of glasses. They see some groups of people playing drinking games.

There are now exotic dancers on the stage, one at a time, mostly females. They dance lasciviously in their revealing clothes. Then the dancers move from table to table,

sitting on customers, promising them “much more than a dance” if they go on the second floor. They are also making sure the patrons drink more than what they should...

At ten pm, the heroes decide to move up to the first floor to see what’s going on there, and they take the red staircase. Up there, a red curtain hall where two more bodyguards look at the heroes and then lift a wooden coffer on a table. “Your weapons go in here”, he says. But the heroes refuse to do that, and they walk down the red stairs, back to the tavern.

It takes a few minutes to get another table, as they see many patrons going up to the first floor.

In the tavern, an announcer says that the patrons will be soon entertained by Mira, an exotic dancer. This announcement provokes a spark of excitement through the patrons. She is a dark-haired, mysterious and beautiful woman, dressed in flowing silk and sparkling jewels. She dances with a grace that captures the patron’s attention.



When her show is done, she also moves table to table to talk with the patrons. At the hero’s table, she promises them “young and wild girls” on the second floor, as well as opium and other drugs. She also tells the heroes of the *auction* on the second floor, at midnight, “for a chance to buy the finest entertainment” ...

Varadan gives her a gold piece for her entertainment, and she leaves for another table.

They notice the bar fights are becoming more and more frequent. People lay a wager on some.

A man named Vasha announces that the dog fights will soon start on the first floor and that it’s still time to bet.

At 11 pm, they quit the place. They are surprised that for a town that large, there is *nobody* outside. Even around the busy Staggering Stallion, no one outside, perhaps like if the client’s plan to stay there until the morning. The streets are dark and quiet.

They walk back the dark streets to the Green Grail Inn. There are only 3 occupied tables at the inn, and it is a very quiet place compared to the Staggering Stallion!

DM note: didn't think the players would visit this gambling hall, I had to impro all of it from the short description in Gaz 5 ;) It took about one hour of gaming time and it was fun to give the place a sense of thrill and danger!

August 6th, 748, morning

They resume scroll production, and restore their *protection from curse* defence.

Exigu asks the inn owner why is it the inn policy to refuse clients that do not check in before darkness? He answers, "Yes, I see you are from Barovia, I know what you think. But it's not that. There are troublesome clients of the Staggering Stallion that are kicked out, and then they wander here, often drunk, and I do not want this trouble here".

Why are there so few people out at night in Liara? The owner reminds them of the infamous killer stalking the streets at night. "Doesn't happen often, maybe 3-4 times a year," he says, "but nobody wants to meet him in the face." They also learn that the murders started 50 years ago!

August 7th, 748, morning

More scrolls done.

At noon, they see the man from the Boritsi Trading Company and he tells them the horses have arrived (150 gp each, plus 20 gp each for the saddles).

August 8th, 748, morning

They plan to enter Tepest. Exigu will disguise as a child, and will be the "son" of Tora. Austizel (an elf) will wear a cloak over his ears.

DM note – Exigu has no ranks in Disguise.

Dulcimae leaves the group, back to Vaugrenard in Levkarest for a week or two.

9 am, the heroes leave for Tepest. First stop: the town of Kellee. They travel the Nova Vasaa plains and see a dark wall of forest in front of them: the wooded lands of Tepest. Getting nearer, they see that Tepest is covered with thick, ancient forests that consist mostly of hardwoods (predominately oak, beech and hazelnut), punctuated by the occasional, towering evergreen (spruce or pine).

At the forest entrance, there is a sign, written poorly in common as well as in Tepestani (which Tora understands, as he was born in Tepest) – a warning against feys.

DM note: from his character's background, Tora was born in Tepest but left the domain in 739 to pursue the call of being a paladin. So he doesn't know anything about the Inquisition or the current state of things in Tepest.



The sign in Tepestani is clearer and claims that “anyone found practicing magic or having any connection to the fey will be tried and executed if guilty.”

They enter the forest. It is quiet. It starts raining. Cold rain. After 30 minutes, they find that the trees are growing in a unique fashion. The trees grow in strange and bent fashions, with every oak and beech tree having gnarled trunks and branches twisted like the arthritic hands of an ancient peasant. Even the pines appear oddly warped. Macrazbunare observes that despite the tortured appearance of the trees, they grow strong and healthy.

Their crowns of trees are thick and tangled overhead, preventing what sun that breaks through the ever-present cloud cover from ever reaching the forest floor. In this eternal gloom, a wide variety of mushrooms and mosses flourish. The rain is now pouring.

Macrazbunare explains what he knows about Tepest's flora: fairy stools and witching gourds. They wonder what Varadan will do with fairy stools, who are said to react to lycanthropes and shape changers?

DM note: early when the character was built, I gave him a summary of special flora of the core domains (source: the 5 Gaz) (well, most of it, except the very rare one). What they have is the flavor text only, without the mechanics.

Noon. They see a direction sign on the road: a leaning, weathered signpost. A sign carved with words in Vaasi and Balok pointed north toward a narrow, partly overgrown trail and read, “To Kellee.” Another sign, likewise in two languages, pointed West ahead on the road and carries the legend, “To Wormwood Hollow.”

They realize the road sign had been twisted around so the arrows reading “To Kellee” and “To Liara” were pointing where the ones reading “To Wretchwood” and “To Wormwood” should be. They think the goblins did tamper the road signs?

They move it back to its right position.

They resume their trip but quickly stop: in front of them, a pair of wolves is feeding on the carcass of some black animal. The wolves snarl at the heroes to protect their food.

Macrazbunare, speaking wolfish: what are you eating?

Wolves – something like you

Looking more closely, they see that the thing eaten by the wolves is a blacked, burned humanoid corpse, on its belly. It has no head.

Macrazbunare, speaking wolfish: do you find these often?

Wolves – here, yes

Macrazbunare, speaking wolfish: are there goblins in the area?

Wolves – yes

They backtrack the traces left by the wolves dragging the corpse. They find a shallow (3' deep) grave. Inside there is a blackened human head. They think the man was a man, probably around 35 years old. A look at the hole also shows that it was dug with shovels, and not by the wolves' claws...

Tora searches the wood around, to find a place where a fire was made: nothing.

They ask the wolves if one of them can look at the body, and they agree, as long as it is only to look.

Varadan finds that the body is without a head and without both hands. The stumps are not burnt, so the hands were cut *after* the burning. But the hands are not in the hole or anywhere else.

Tora – should we rebury him? But few agree so he abandons the idea.

The wolves drag the corpse, who turns on his back. The heroes see a hole in the ribcage at heart level, again without burning: the ribcage was cracked open and the heart was carefully extracted *after* the body was burnt. The cuts were clean, made by blade.

Petrak thinks this is a sign of black magic of the darkest kind...

They resume their trip, and the cold rain keeps falling, soaking everything.

3h30 pm, they arrive at the hamlet of Kellee. It is a haphazard collection of small dwellings and barns, loosely clustered around an open space that functions as a town square. Kellee's people live in simple, one-story dwellings. Most have thatched roofs and whitewashed walls that feature gaily painted pictures of flowers under each window. They understand the Tepestani are poor folk, and, as a matter of pride, they carefully adorn their cottage walls with intricate floral patterns. The window boxes overflow with blossoms. From the pelts hanging, and lack of agricultural fields, they guess that the community supports itself with hunting and trapping.

They find an inn, the Hawk's Haven, the only two-story structure in town. They are welcomed by a man wearing the Falkovnian eagle tattoo! But the man is warm and friendly "You must be coming from Liara, you must be cold" while bringing 5 shooters of alcohol (and a glass of milk for Exigu), on the house. Tora speaks in Tepestani, and the man replies in this language.

You are from Falkovnia?, the heroes ask.

Yes, I was in the army there, and didn't like what I saw, so I left, he answers. His name is Gerald Ferrier, and he is also the mayor of Kellee.

The cost of the room, the meal and place for the horses is 1 gp each. It has eight guest rooms that can comfortably house two travelers each, and a larger common room with ten beds that can sleep two each. The rooms are kept scrupulously clean, and the food is a unique blend of Vaasi, Tepestani, and Falkovnian traditional dishes.

The cook, another Falkovnian expat, is a master chef. Everything is very tasty, and the heroes think he would make a good business in a sophisticated place like Levkarest.

During the meal, they ask Ferrier about the Inquisition.

Not good for business!, he replies. *Before, this road was very busy, but then suddenly it stopped at the Rift. So it's not a trade route anymore. And when the Inquisition started, it was another cause for strangers to avoid Tepest. No, not good for business!*

They learn that Kellee's church burned down a number of years ago and has not been rebuilt, the main reason being that the mayor is more concerned with maintaining the militia than funding a new church. The village Belenus priest, he adds, is a rather insecure young woman named Tala. She holds weekly services in the common room of the inn, and also rents a room above. *So be a little careful what you say around her*, he whispers.

The Inquisition is led by an old priest named Wyan of Viktal. The Inquisition has no regular presence in this community, although they have visited occasionally at Tala's request. Mayor Ferrier no longer allows any witch trials in his city, since he is not convinced that Kellee is directly threatened by the fey. *For his part, Ferrier says, Wyan probably thinks that I'm being dangerously naïve!*

They also learn from him that there has been an execution two days ago in Viktal, a man executed by burning. The heroes say that they found a cadaver on the road, west of Kellee. It was buried at a crossroad, but wolves dug it. *Yeah, they bury criminals at crossroads, since they believe that doing so prevents the guilty spirit from finding its way home*, Ferrier says.

Varadan says that the body's hands and heart were removed. Ferrier replies that this is odd, as the Inquisition doesn't do that. He asks the heroes not to talk about it, so people do not worry.

They see a young woman priest coming downstairs to the main room, and she sits with two tepestanis. They overhear her speaking of Belenus's virtues and teachings. This must be Tala.

They talk about Belenus and share what they know about this god: Belenus is a sun god, like Ra in Har'Akir, and the master of fire. His followers claim that Belenus bestows the life-giving light and heat of the sun on those who please him and withholds it from those who earn his wrath, cursing them with icy cold and darkness.

The Belenus churches have no roof, so the deity can see who is attending the mass.

For generations, Tepestani clerics were content to watch over their small congregations, but this changed in the wake of the Grand Conjunction (year 740). Believing that the domains of G'Henna and Markovia had been destroyed by the fey (now where the Shadow Rift stands), a village priest of Viktal, a man named Wyan, organized an inquisition to fight back against the fey.

They meet Manzel Hannert, the cook. He is friendly too with the heroes. After asking if they liked the food, he looks at Exigu (disguised as a child) and warns him that some people might see through his ruse.

He was, he explains, in the Falkovnian army too, with Ferrier, and his job at the frontier was to find hidden enemy of the state.

They discuss with Ferrier about Tepest's economy – what people need, what they have to sell. After all, they will have to report to Nostalia about the viability of a new BTCo outpost in Tepest!

August 9th, 748, morning

At 7 am, they leave for Viktal. It is raining again.

At 2 pm, suddenly, a rope on the road makes Tora fall from his horse, but Varadan avoids it. Varadan cuts the rope so it isn't endangering anyone else.

As soon as this happens, arrows (from either side of the road) fly at the heroes. Arrows fly mainly at Macrazbunare. Tora gets up and climb his horse. More arrows at Petrak and Varadan.

Immediately after this salvo, savage war cries pierce the air! Even as the whistling of the arrows hangs in the air, growling war cries fill the forest. Dark creatures surge forward from the trees, charging at you from all sides. Your attackers are feral-looking little creatures, standing no more than a yard tall, with bulging black eyes and mouths full of jagged teeth. Their leathery skin makes them look like some cross between lizards and halflings. Each of these beast men wields a crude, stone-tipped spear and rides upon a great, slaving wolf with evil, intelligent eyes.



They also hear a goblin casting! *Deep slumber!* Austizel's horse and Exigu's dog fall asleep. The group is divided in two – Varadan, Exigu, Petrak, Austizel in the front, surrounded by worgs, and then Tora and Macrazbunare in the back, also surrounded.

The heroes in front notice that some places in the trail are crudely covered by leaves as if masking a pit!

A worg bites Exigu and makes him trip to the ground. Macrazbunare cast *lightning bolt* at a line of enemies. Petrak invokes his *shield of Ezra*. Varadan attacks a worg. More arrows at Macrazbunare. Austizel casts *magic missile* at a worg. Petrak hits a worg.

The goblin wizard in the woods casts *magic missile* at Varadan (three missiles). Two worgs bite Exigu. Macrazbunare cast *scorching ray* at a nearby worg.

Varadan kills a worg, and its rider goblin dismount on the side. More arrows at Macrazbunare, they seem to focus on him! Tora runs in the woods and kills to goblin archers.

A worg hits Petrak, but his *shield* absorbs it. The goblin wizard in the woods casts another *magic missile* at Varadan. A worg bites hard at Austizel, who falls unconscious to the ground! Macrazbunare casts *magic missile* and moves toward the heroes at the front. Petrak kills a worg, then Varadan kills another one too.

More arrows from the hidden archers at Macrazbunare. The goblin wizard hidden in the woods casts *magic missile*, again at Varadan. Varadan is surrounded by four goblins on foot, but all miss their attack. Exigu attacks with his war razor.

Macrazbunare *heals* himself (+15). Petrak casts *spiritual weapon* and it hits a goblin.

They hear more goblin in the woods, coming their way!

The battle continues, with arrows flying from the archers, and the heroes attacking the worgs and the goblins. Some goblins are easy to kill (one strike), but those that rode worgs are much tougher! Macrazbunare casts *magic missile* at two goblins archer, killing them. Petrak *heals* Macrazbunare (+33) and uses his *spiritual weapon* on a goblin.

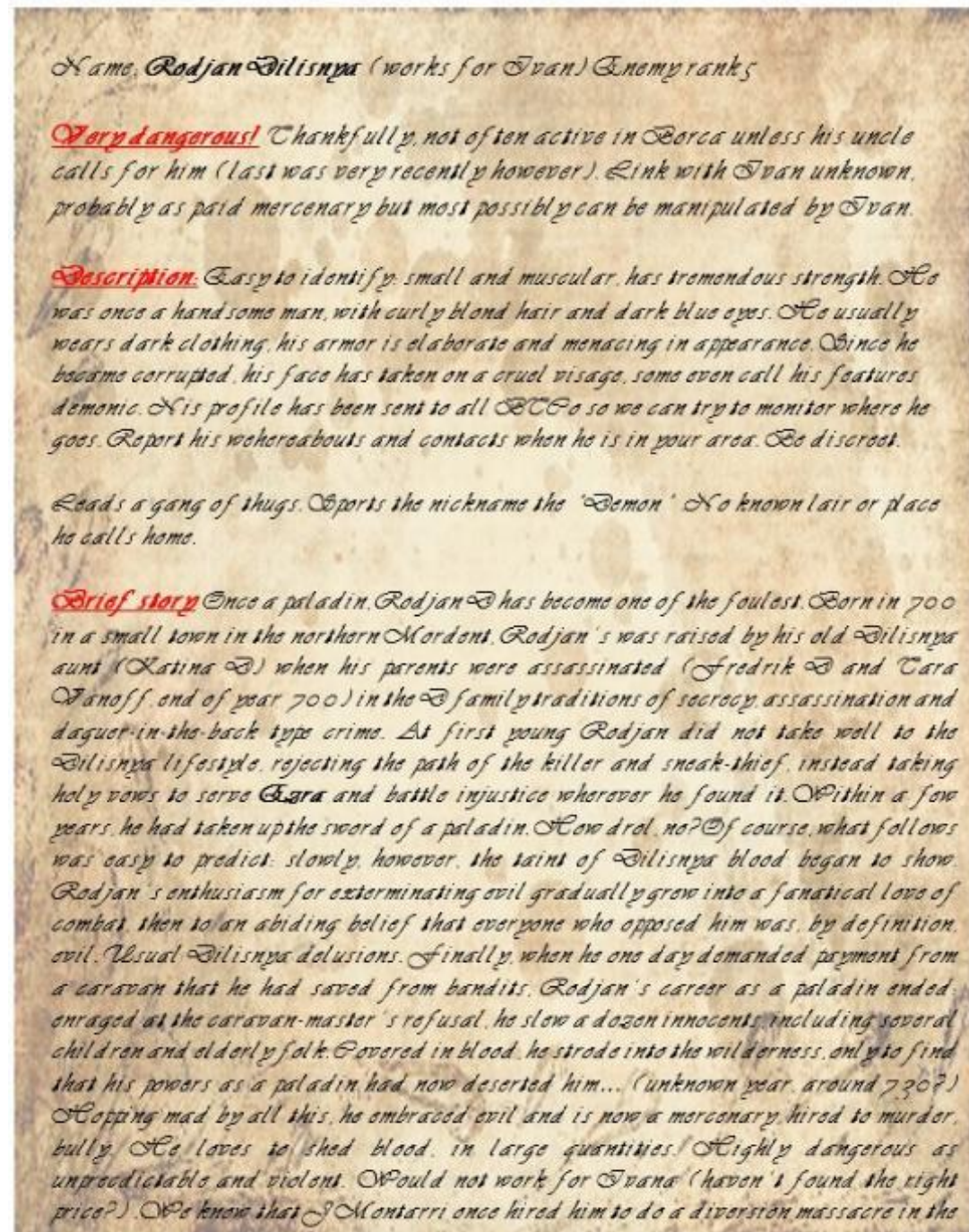
Taking an opportunity, the goblin wizard gets on the trail, and casts *lightning bolt* at a line of heroes! (-22). Macrazbunare casts *haste*. Petrak again *heals* Macrazbunare and sends his *spiritual weapon* at the now visible goblin casting spells. Varadan hits them hard. Exigu kills a goblin. The goblin wizard casts his 5th *magic missile* at Varadan. Macrazbunare sends a *cure* at Austizel through his wolf. Petrak cures Varadan.

As the heroes thought they now add the higher ground, when Tora kills a goblin, he sees five more goblins on worgs, coming at him!



DM note: beefed the goblin encounter, otherwise, the 9th level PCs would have had no trouble fighting them back. With a few traps, some basic battle strategies, cover in the woods, worgs, and a few 4th level goblins, this encounter was tougher than they expected. Next game – saved!

Sent before the game, name of the file “From NR secret files - people to watch” (miscellaneous atmospherics)



GAME SESSION 107: TEPEST -2

(This Ravenloft game was played Jan 19th, 2025. Everybody is present)

August 9th, 748, a little past 2 pm

The goblins fight savagely like if they really wanted to crunch the bones of the heroes. The heroes see the goblin's blood is oily and black. They have a disgusting sour scent, purposefully made worse by their habit of smearing themselves with animal musk and blood. They keep communicating between themselves, in a strange tongue made of harsh and guttural sounds, as well as high-pitched squeals with sharp consonants and deep, phlegmfilled clicks. The heroes do not understand this disgusting language.

There are five goblins on worgs in their back, and three more worgs protecting the goblin sorcerer. Three more are away, firing arrows at the druid Macrazbunare.

Varadan moves toward the sorcerer. Austizel freezes the group of five worgs with a well-placed *ice storm*. Exigu gets a *mudstone minion* from his pack (an item found in the Pact Stone pyramid) and starts making a mud creature in the shape of a lion.

The sorcerer throws a *lightning bolt* at the heroes (-20), and he mounts a worg. The other two worgs move toward Varadan to forbid him to attack the sorcerer.

Macrazbunare throws a *magic missile* at the sorcerer, killing him! Petrak directs his *spiritual weapon* on a worg and he also heals Austizel, who was again close to dying after the sorcerer's lightning spell.

Varadan hits the worgs, and Tora kills one of the worg in the back. The goblin that was mounted on it gracefully slides from his dead mount and gets on its feet (high ride skills). Austizel aim another spell at the group in their back, a *lightning bolt*, killing 4 goblins and 4 worgs! (they were previously affected by the *ice storm*).

Exigu has now finished making his mud lion, and he sends it toward the three goblins with bows.

A worg bites Varadan and tries to trip the monk to the ground. Macrazbunare starts summoning a *call lightning*.

Petrak casts *prayer*. One of the worgs succeeds in making a trip attack on Varadan's horse.

Then the heroes hear the sound of a blaring bugle and then the sound of hoofbeats charging toward them! It's a group of about ten horses, probably heavy war horses by the sound of it.

Hearing this too, the goblins are taken aback. They try to retreat or flee. While the goblins and worgs are fleeing, a *call lighting* hurts a worg and Petrak uses his *spiritual weapon* one last time before they get out of reach.

Then they prepare to meet what they expect could be Inquisitors. Varadan switches back to human form (from hybrid wolf/human), and they stop the ongoing spells. Austizel, the elf, gets *invisible* and hides in the woods.

Soon after, the horses are seen, ten of them, monted by humans wearing shining white armors and shields with the Belenus symbols on them. Belenus is a lawful good god.



They stop when near the heroes and their leader removes his helmet. He has pale skin, with freckles. The man's eye color is green, and his hair is blond.

He looks at the many dead goblins and worgs on the ground, and he speaks in Tepestani: "Oh, good strangers, seems you had a problem with goblins!"

Tora answers in the same language that his friends do not speak Tepestani and the rest of the conversation switches to common.



The man: "You have nothing more to fear, that the goblins have fled. My name is Seán Walsh, from Viktal. We often patrol this road hunting goblins and feys", then pointing at the holes in the road, "We dismantle goblin traps like this on the road, every day."

Then he asks to the heroes, "Where do you come from? And what is your name?"

The heroes answer.

"You are not feys, aren't you?", he asks. The heroes answer negatively.

Then Seán inspects Petrak's red head, and asks him why he has this hair colour?

Petrak is surprised by the question, and say it's always been like that since he was born.

DM note: Petrak's player did forget about this, perfect!

Seán looks at Petrak, sees his medallion of Ezra, and he asks him to cast a spell. Petrak casts a healing spell on himself. Sean is relieved, and explains that he wanted to be sure that Petrak wasn't a fey posing as a priest.

He points at his group, "we're all priests. Heresy is like a tree, its roots lie in the darkness whilst its leaves wave in the sun and it has an attractive and pleasing appearance. Be watchful!"

Then they decide to get off their horse and remove their helmets, and the heroes see that two of them are women. They are all nice-looking peoples: all blond or auburn, pale skin, often with freckles, blue or green eyes. On average, they are a little shorter than the average barovian.

They all take shovels and start burying the trap holes made by goblins on the road, burying the goblin bodies at the bottom in the process.

The heroes offer their help in this task, and it is appreciated by the priests.

They discuss during this work, and the Tepestani ask them to describe the goblin fight. At the mention of a sorcerer, they say it's very uncommon, and that goblins are usually making tactics like clever animals, but nothing really elaborated. "They like making traps!"

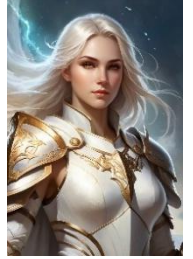
While they work, one or another Inquisitor often say phrases like "Witches never walk alone. Even in the shadows, they are surrounded by their abominable masters, always be careful", or "Their smile is a trap, and their words are poison in disguise." The others approve or nods after these phrases.

At one point, the conversation dies, and a woman starts singing a work song while they all shovel dirt to fill the holes. Tora translates its meaning for the other heroes. A shout of approval from the others comes after each sentence:

*My purpose is to destroy the feys and I must rise to the commandment.
I am a servant of Belenus and those who consort with feys need to fear me.
The innocent has nothing to fear from us, but the guilty pray for a quick death.
Divine justice never sleeps, and it works through us.
There is no forgiveness for those who dance with darkness. Never!*

Seán adds that most humans falling for fey spells are women, as “women are weaker in mind!” Even the woman Inquisitors approve!

Suddenly, one of these women turns toward the heroes and asks, “My good sirs, my name is Mira Kaldwyn. Can you tell us what the reason of your visit in Tepest is?”



Tora explains that they have been mandated by the Boritsi Trading Company to evaluate if a trade counter of the company could be located in Viktal. He adds, “I know that this route was once an important trade route and ...”

She interrupts him angrily: “Yes! Before the hole created by the feys! We have to act against the feys before the land of Tepest is also swallowed by the Shadow Rift!” The other Inquisitors approve.

The trap holes are filled, and the Inquisitors prepare to leave for Kellee.

Seán : “You are about an hour from Viktal, it is safe, we were coming from there when we met you. Have a safe travel, and thanks for the help for the holes.”

They leave, make a hundred feet, and then Seán turns back. He asks, “why do you have six tackled mounts if you are just five?”

Varadan answers quickly, “one of them is a spare, those beasts die quickly on such a travel”.

Seán nods, and he turns back toward Kellee.

The heroes resume their trip and find Austizel a little farther. They travel for an hour, and then they see Viktal in the distance. The village is encircled by a dark forest. A tall wall of stone circles around it. There is a river to cross to get there. Vaughn Dnar river, says Tora. To the north, a gray lake stretches away from a shore lined with docks and fishing boats.

They see more Inquisitors controlling the access to the village. Austizel asks the other if he should remain hidden, or if he tries to sneak in? They decide they will try with him, and Austizel wears a cloak to hide his elvish features.

They cross the bridge and an Inquisitor wave at them to stop. He asks, “What is your name and where do you come from? Remove your helmets and the cloaks on your head too” The heroes answers. Tora tries to make small talk with the Inquisitor.

The Inquisitor looks at Austizel nervously. He asks Tora, “how well do you know your traveling companions?”

Tora tries to reassure him by saying he knows them well, for a long time (5 months in fact). Then he tries to explain their mandate for the Boritsi Trading Company but the Inquisitor interrupts him, “Maybe, I do not know, that’s what you say, you know. But what I’m sure is that your friend here is not allowed in town, he is an elf!”

Tora insists, but the man doesn’t change his mind, “Once, we had an elf put in prison on police custody, while his merchants friends made business here and then left town with him. You will have to do this too!”

Tora refuses.

The Inquisitor says, “There is an empty house outside the walls, you will go there while I speak with our superior of the Inquisition, Goodman Wyan of Viktal. It is the last house on the river, facing the last quay. Go there now.”

Tora agrees and they go there to wait. While they were walking to get to this house, they immediately detect the apprehension of the villagers. Mothers pull their children close when the heroes ride past, and the village men look at the heroes with unease.

The house is nearly empty, with a few straw mattresses in a corner and a fireplace. The floor is earth.

While they wait, they discuss their BTC report to Ivana: no elves! No ermordenungs! There could be a business for weapons and armors. Tora also remembers that the Linde berry wine is good.



1 – prison, 2 – docks, 3 – animal farms, 4 – agricultural fields, 5 – Wyan’s house, 6 – temple of Belenus, 7 – Inn, 8 – Inquisition barracks, 9 – Bryonna’s cottage

An hour later, they see a group of 12 Inquisitors walking toward their house. They are led by an old man. Snow-white hair curls out from under his black skullcap. Wyan of Viktal sports a long, thick mustache and goatee, both of which are groomed into neat, stiff points. He is wearing a black partial cape worn over a plain white robe. He clutches a large book to his chest.



They knock at the door and Tora opens.

“My name is Wyan from Viktal, and to whom am I speaking to?”, the older man says.

Tora: “I am Tora Vimus from Briggdarrow, you may know my family?”

Wyan looks at Tora for a long contemplative moment, appearing concerned. “Yes, I know your family well, but we’ll speak about that later. You have an elf with you. If you want to vouch for this creature, that’s fine, but while you stay in Viktal, I want him in a place where we can watch him. He is not going inside the walls. My recommendation is that he should be in prison, and watched all day and night. I promise you nothing will happen to him. Belenus would not permit it.”

Tora proposes that Austizel could stay in this house where they are now, outside the city walls, and that he could be guarded there.

Wyan is visibly annoyed but agrees quickly, “This is an acceptable compromise. We will guard the house and when you leave, he goes with you. If we see him in town, he will be judged and burned at the stake, do you understand?”

And then he adds “For your commercial mission, come see me another day.”

He asks Tora how many days the heroes plan to stay in Viktal and Tora answers a couple of days.

Wyan: “You will have miserable living conditions in this house here, too bad for you my goodmen, because the Inn in Viktal is quite comfortable.”

And then he leaves, followed by the other Inquisitors, except three who will remain on watch.

Exigu has noticed that Wyan seemed very preoccupied, and that perhaps Wyan accepted Tora’s compromise quicker than he would normally have, in order to go back to his other chores. Exigu believes he would not have been this compliant normally?

DM note: he closed his eyes on Exigu. I made a change to canon: dwarves are OK for Tepestani, so halfling, as long as they behave is OK too. Didn't want to alienate two players while they are in Viktal.

Outside, they see a fisherman coming back from the lake, his nets full of a small silver-white fish.

They decide to send part of the group in town to see what Viktal looks like: Tora, Varadan and Petrak (all humans).

They pass the gate and walk around the town. The settlement is not much to look at. It is a collection of tiny one- and two-family homes, the simplest of which are sod huts constructed over shallow pits. The largest and nicest homes are whitewashed, wooden structures with thatched roofs. One can usually tell what a family’s main source of income is by the decoration in front of the house: pictures of fishes or sheep or goats, or an anvil for a blacksmith. None of the residences have more than one story.

They see the prison, the Fisherman’s Rest Inn, and the temple of Belenus is at the center (Belenus temples have no roof, so Belenus can see who is going to church!). A sinister burned circle with a half-burned stake is seen in front of the church...

They go at the Inn and find a tavern room with about 20 clients. There is a woman bard singing in a corner. They see behind the counter a very large man and a very large ugly woman. The woman waves at the heroes to get themselves a table. The innkeeper comes to the heroes' stable. "Welcome strangers, my name is Greabo", and he speaks with a constant wheeze, always out of his breath. He takes their order and leaves, panting.

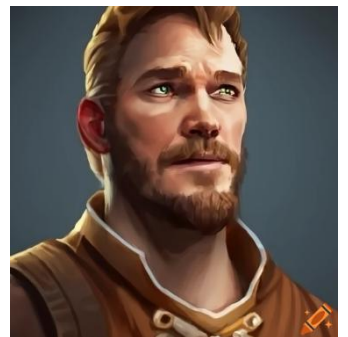


He comes back with their drinks of Linde wine, a specialty from Tepest. He asks the heroes if they also need to book rooms for the night. Tora answers that they have a house outside.

"Oh, it's you that came with an elf? I'm glad you didn't bring him here. Last time, when there was an elf, and we didn't know it until the Inquisition arrested him, all of our milk went sour!"

Varadan asks the owner to pay for a round of drinks to everybody. Greabo is surprised, but he brings to all patrons a glass of Linde wine. The heroes notice that many people are suspicious, and that some even refuse the drink Greabo brought to their table.

Then they see a young man, alone. From his clothing, he is a stranger too. He gets up and walks to the heroes and inquire if he could seat at their table. He is a young, friendly man, with the firm voice of someone used to dealing with the public.



"I'm Henrick D'Ogmai, originally of Darkon, though I've been calling Tepest home of late. I see that you are strangers here too. Well, let me warn you, there are worse monsters than those lowly goblins in Tepest. Mind your step when you deal with the folk around here as well. They're the most suspicious people I've ever met!"

They make small talk and they learn he is a textile merchant, and after a few minutes, he confesses something to the heroes: "I need help. The woman I love languishes in the temple jail here in Viktal. I hoped to find evidence to save her, but it is no longer safe for me to ask questions. In a few days, they'll be lashing Bryonna to a stake and..."

Henrick is unable to finish his sentence, as his voice is choked with emotion.

Petrak: "Can you tell us more?"

Henrick: "Bryonna and I haven't known each other long, but she means the world to me. Now, however, it seems that our love is doomed. My betrothed has been falsely accused of calling on the fey to place a curse on Lorelei, the daughter of the old priest in charge of the fey hunts. Lorelei and I were sweethearts once, before I learned that she's nowhere near as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside."

"Lorelei claims that Bryonna has cursed her - and that she's placed a spell on me to win my love. I tell you, that woman's just a crazy, jealous shrew making up wild tales because she wants me for herself. She cannot accept that I've chosen Bryonna over her."

"No one believes me, though, least of all that priest Wyan. If I don't prove to him that Bryonna is innocent, she'll be burned at the stake, and I cannot let that happen!"

If the heroes press for more information, Henrick tells the whole tale:

"Lorelei, Wyan's daughter, is famed in Viktal for her beauty. She has received suitors from as far away as Liara in the domain of Nova Vaasa."

"Bryonna, an orphan who came to Viktal two years ago, is known for her kindness. For her, however, suitors have been few and far between. You see, as a child, her face was badly scarred by the goblins who killed her parents. Not many men have been perceptive enough to look beneath her rough exterior and see the flower that blooms within."

"Despite their differences, however, the two girls became best friends. Until recently, each thought of the other as a sister."

"About six weeks ago, I met Bryonna and we quickly fell in love. When I proposed marriage, she instantly accepted. Some of Bryonna's friends then arranged a celebration for the young woman at the local inn."

"What should have been a night of revelry turned into disaster when Lorelei learned that Bryonna's betrothed was none other than me, her former suitor. She became hysterical, claiming someone with a face as scarred as Bryonna's could have caught my eye only through the use of witchcraft!"

"Lorelei beseeched me to cast off the wicked spell, insisting that I was being manipulated by magic. For her, clearly, Bryonna had won my heart by means of some

love potion or other enchantment. We both begged her to stop, insisting that her claims were nonsense.”

“Suddenly, Lorelei froze with a panicked look on her face. She fell to the ground and was racked by a series of violent convulsions. This seizure continued for several minutes, during which time she suffered minor cuts, bruises, and abrasions. When she recovered, Lorelei insisted that she had been the victim of Bryonna's fey-spawned magic! The fact that she suffered similar seizures over the next several days backed up her allegations. This evidence convinced the residents of Viktal that Lorelei's accusations were true. Bryonna, they believed, had put a spell on me and cursed Lorelei for revealing her secret.”

“On the day that Wyan went to Bryonna to discuss the growing charges against her, Lorelei had another seizure, this one so violent that she broke two fingers and dislocated her shoulder. Wyan immediately ordered Bryonna locked in the basement of the temple. No sooner was Bryonna deep below holy ground than Lorelei's seizures ceased. Wyan told me - What better proof could he find?”

“As this belief spread, other evidence against Bryonna began to surface. Tales were spread about children who fell ill when Bryonna walked by and animals who grew skittish when she was near. A few villagers even revealed that they had seen her consorting with the fey - performing dreadful rituals under the full moon. This is all false!”

“The thought that his own daughter has fallen victim to the evil of the fey is nothing short of blasphemous in Wyan's mind. But I think this Wyan is less fanatical than the Inquisition he created. If we have proofs or testimonies, we could make him doubt and save Bryonna.”

Then Henrick pauses. He looks at Greabo talking to another table while pointing at Henrick. They hear the fat man say: “The children say they are afraid to pass by Bryonna’s house. They say they hear strange voices at night.” And “She has no family here. Where did she come from? Who was she before she came here? No one knows!” Then “I know she has no salt in her house. Everyone knows that salt protects against evil!”

Henricks sigh and turn at the heroes “can you help me? Nobody wants to help Bryonna, you’re the first persons listening to me.”

Henrick explains that Wyan has condemned Bryonna to be burned at the stake in seven days unless evidence can be presented to refute the Inquisition's findings

(which he would not share with Henrick, because Henrick was himself under a cloud of suspicion!).

Tora : "What is your plan?"

Henrick "In Viktal, of course, there is always Bryonna herself to talk to. Talk to her and make you own judgement! Wyan himself may know more. He seems to know a lot about what goes on around here. Then in Kellee, there is a huntsman named Leobe. He raised Bryonna and brought her to live in Viktal a few years ago, when he decided that the girl should be in a larger city."

The heroes agree to help.

Then they hear Greabo again "That Sybil girl? Suspicious! I heard she tried to predict the identity of her future husband by very *strange* means, you know!"

And later "Oh, that Elda? Doesn't she have a hidden wart?"

Henrick tell them that he is staying here at the Inn, should they need to ask him something else.

7 pm. The heroes leave and walk back to the cottage, and it is still guarded by three Inquisitors.

Seeing the heroes come back to the cottage, one Inquisitor say to the others, snarling "He who allows the fey to live shares the crimes of the fey", and the other approve.

Tora: what a group of fanatics!

They decide to investigate Bryonna's house for possible clues. They (all minus Austizel) go where Henrick told them Bryonna's cottage was located.

It is rustic and functional, mainly with local materials: grey or beige stone walls, solidly assembled to withstand the elements, and a thick thatched roof, designed to repel the frequent rain. The windows, small and framed in dark wood, are protected by simple shutters, decorated with flowers red and blue.

A stone fireplace protrudes from the roof. Outside the door grows a few utilitarian plants such as thyme or lavender, growing in small wooden planters. The main door, made of wood, is decorated with a wrought iron handle.

Inside, the cottage is modest but warm. The walls are whitewashed, decorated with garlands of dried flowers. A large stone hearth occupies a central place, used for

cooking and heating the main room. The furniture, carved from local wood, is sturdy and functional: a table, benches, a few shelves loaded with pottery, dried herbs and time-worn romance books. And salt (so Greabo is wrong).

The floor is made of beaten earth. A ladder leads to an open attic, where sacks of flour, tools and thick winter blankets are stored.

They find nothing that could make them think Bryonna is making witch spells. The whole gives off an impression of self-sufficiency and simplicity, a place where life is hard but full of dignity.

Seeing the heroes come back again to the cottage, the snarling Inquisitor say to the others “Women are insatiable, lustful seductresses, whose temptations some men are all but powerless to resist”, and the other again approve...

The heroes go to sleep.

August 10th, 748, morning

Petrak casts *Status* on Exigu and Austizel, as these two will remain at the cottage while the others are in town. That way, if something happens to them, Petrak will know.

They go to meet Wyan at his house. He warns that he has little time for them. Wyan’s home is a small, two-story manor house. He meets the heroes in a salon, and the heroes see another room with a small library.

Wyan “So for the Boritsi Trading Company, it’s a good idea. Make us a proposition on how you see things, and we will consider it. Is that all?”

Varadan “We think it would be better if the counter was managed by someone local.”

Wyan agrees.

Varadan “do you have any names to suggest?”

Wyan “yes, but I need to ask them first. I will get back to you.”

Tora “what about your daughter? She is said to be very beautiful, that would be a good image for the store?”

Wyan frowns. “Yes, well, you’ll ask her that.”

Heroes “can we see her?”

Wyan, sharply “not now”

The heroes explain Wyan that wood could be a strong export for Tepest. Wyan agrees. Then the heroes switch back to Lorelei as a spokesperson for the store.

Wyan “You keep talking of my daughter. Are you sure you are not getting involved in a situation that you do not understand?”

Tora nods and tell him there are people in town talking about what is going on and that the heroes want to inquire if they could help.

Wyan “Young good man Tora, you have the wisdom of your father. I was sure you wanted to know more for a good reason. People are talking about Lorelei and Bryonna. My idea is not finished on this matter but so far the inquiry is going bad for Bryonna.”

Petrak “do you want me to cast the *Status* divine spell on your daughter, so we could know perhaps more on her condition?”

Wyan quickly refuses “you will not cast anything on my daughter,” then, after a pause, calmer “we already did that, to no results”.

Wyan “since Bryonna has been imprisoned, we have new witnesses against her every day, from people who attend church regularly, so for me, it’s quite clear.”

Wyan: “It is my belief that the girl is more than just a consort of the fey. I have reason to believe that she is fey herself - an agent of evil hiding in the midst of humanity and doing her sinister deeds in secret. I believe that the real Bryonna died in the goblin attack that killed her parents when she was two and that this creature was left in her place.”

“Also, as you probably know, Bryonna is from Kellee, not Viktal. A weaver named Marla, of high reputation, who lives in Kellee, knew Bryonna when she was a child. She claims that she witnessed Bryonna change her shape. If that doesn't prove that Bryonna is a fey, I don't know what will!”

He points to a large book “this is my Inquisition ledger, it gets heavier every day for Bryonna. Several folks have come forward to help in our investigation. One local woman reported that her son fell ill right after Bryonna scolded him for throwing rocks at birds. Another local claims that he got a painful rash after he refused to accompany her to the harvest festival last fall. We have new testimonies like this every day since

we asked people to come forward and say what they know or what they have seen. All religious people! The tongue of the just is as pure silver!”

“It sickens me to think that my own daughter has fallen victim to the magic of the fey. Lorelei is by far the most severely afflicted of Bryonna's victims. Not only did that evil woman make Henrick forget Lorelei's beauty, but she also cursed my daughter with horrible seizures. The seizures stopped the moment Bryonna was confined to the church cellar, another proof! So Bryonna will stay there until her trial and execution.”

“Magical means did not reveal that Henrick is under the influences of any charms, but fey magic is not always detectable by purer forms of magic. Young Henrick is a sad example of what happens to those who are not wary of the power of the fey. Hopefully, he will be free of Bryonna's spell when she is put to death.”

“When you are asleep, or uncaring, your defenses are down. Like Henrick. The fey are malevolent creatures who dwell in the wilds of the world. They take many shapes. Some are small creatures, what many call the *wee folk*. Others are larger, looking like normal men and women. Like Bryonna.”

“I see you want to defend Bryonna. So be it. If you want to talk to her or Lorelei, I can arrange that. But make sure you” looking at Petrak “cast spells of *protection against evil* before meeting Bryonna, to make sure she does not charm you. And make sure you do not touch her! The feys have ways to pass witching evil spells by touch!”

The heroes explain how they think a curse works, that it won't be lifted when Bryonna will be executed. Wyan is confused for a moment, then says, “I mean, the seizures are direct actions of the fey Bryonna, she has to will it every time for Lorelei to have a seizure. Bryonna dies, it stops.”

The heroes ask to speak to Lorelei.

Wyan “OK. Do not ask rough or unpolite questions, and never cast any spell on her,” then he asks a servant to bring Lorelei here.

Lorelei is nothing short of stunning. She has bright blue grey eyes, a perfect smile, and moves with the grace of a lady. Her features are smooth, and her complexion fair. It is easy to see why the priest's daughter has won the hearts of so many.

Heroes “Can we hear your version of the story?”



Lorelei “Henrick and I met during one of his visits to Viktal. He is a traveling merchant. We were instantly attracted to each other, but Henrick insisted that we keep our relationship quiet, I think until he wanted us to be sure of our union. We would meet outside of town and take long walks together in the woods or enjoy a quiet picnic away from prying eyes. I know that he was about to propose to me. Then, for no reason, he told me that he didn't want to see me anymore. I was shocked at the time, but now I understand what happened. I'm sure that we'll be together again once Bryonna's spell is lifted”

Wyan: “This is the reason Bryonna used fey magic!”

Lorelei “When I heard that Bryonna had fallen in love, I was delighted. I was happy that she had found a man who could love her despite her ugly scars. When I met her betrothed, though, I knew at once what had happened. What could explain Henrick's actions if not black magic? When I said this aloud, it must have angered Bryonna. I don't know how she did it, but somehow that witch cursed me. The next thing I knew, I was back home with my father looking over me. He told me that I had some kind of uncontrollable fit.”

“Then other seizures struck me. A moment before I was under the strange impression that Bryonna was thinking about me, or spying on me, and then I had these seizures.”

After telling her story, Lorelei breaks down into hysterical tears, so her father asks the heroes to stop asking questions. Another servant takes Lorelei out of the room.

Wyan appears shaken and sad from seeing her daughter like this.

Wyan “It is clear that Bryonna is a witch or a fey, no?”

Then they ask to see Bryonna. As suggested, Petrak casts *magic circle against evil*, under the approving eye of Wyan.

They go outside and cross the street to go to the temple. They see many Inquisitors on guard duty. Wyan leads them to a trap door, opens it, and gets downstairs. There, more guards welcome them. One says to Wyan, “Still the same, she doesn't move at all”.

Wyan asks the guards to open the cell. Wyan at the heroes “again, make sure you do not touch her!”

Bryonna is locked in a lightless cellar, and the ground is dirty straw. They see a few bowls of untouched food and water.

Bryonna is in the corner, a chain forbidding her to move far from a wall. The sight of Bryonna is nothing short of pitiful. She is dirty, and her very short red hair (she was probably shaven) are unclean. Her clothes are a filthy mass of wrinkles and tatters. She does not look up as you enter, keeping her face buried in her hands. She starts weeping.

Then Wyan enters and forcefully presents his hammer to Bryonna : “Look upon this hammer I hold before me, for it is far more than a weapon. It is a symbol of the divine justice that smites the enemies of humanity wherever they are found. It remains true and pure, just as I will be. Furthermore, it is a symbol of my order and my office, of the authority granted to me by the divine will of Belenus. By that authority, I am commanding you to obey me without question or hesitation. Cooperate, or it will your blood that stains my hammer this day!”

DM note: when planning this adventure, I read a few books, studies and web sites about witches and the inquisition in our real world. I even read the whole of the infamous Malleus Maleficarum. Recommended! Here and there I collected quotes and gossip ideas. I added a feature to the Tepestani Inquisition: they often pepper their talk with religious or fanatical quotes from their own Inquisition / Belenus canon. They are encouraging themselves while trying to educate the others.

The heroes are surprised by that display of force and faith! Bryonna doesn't react to the command and keeps her face in her hands.

Petrak “do you speak common?” No answer.

Tora “We would like to hear your side of the story” No answer.

Varadan “We are your only hope, help us trying to help you!”

Through her crying, Bryonna starts pleading for mercy. She whimpers that she is not a fey and keeps repeating that she and Henrick truly are in love.

Varadan “did you meet another stranger at the same time you met Henrick?”

At the mention of Henrick, she quiets down a little. “No”, she answers. Then she repeats that she is not a fey and that she and Henrick truly are in love.

Varadan “How did you meet Henrick?”

Bryonna gets calmer. “By pure chance, one afternoon, at the water well in the village. We spoke for an hour, it was nice and then we agreed to see us again.”

Tora “You didn’t say anything to Lorelei?”

Bryonna “No, not then, it was very quick, you know.”

Exigu “did anybody help you to get Henrick’s heart?”

She repeats that she is not a fey and that she and Henrick truly are in love.

Macrazbunare “Do you have enemies here and could have framed you to get accused?”

Bryonna “I do not see who. I do not have enemies. Perhaps Lorelei now, but I do not understand why...”

They ask Bryonna to name her other friends in the village: Elara Brightfield, Maris Sunbrook and Lydia Dewfall.

Varadan “No boys?”

Bryonna “Yes, one. Bertram Holtwright”

Exigu “do you own your house?”

Bryonna “No, it’s rented.”

Macrazbunare “Tell us about Marla from Kellee.”

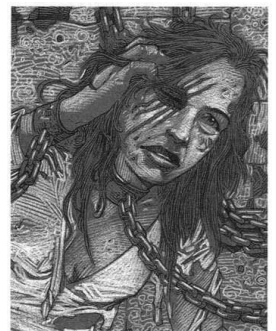
Bryonna thinks for a moment and say, “She was stern, I did not like visiting her when I was young. Ermintrude had me looked after by her a few times when Ermintrude had to go to the woods for days. But I didn’t go there very often. Why do you ask? She said something mean about me?”

The heroes do not answer.

Bryonna “so it is Henrick who asked you to help me?”

Exigu “Yes, he is very worried for you.”

Bryonna seems relieved. Bryonna draws back her hands to look at the heroes. As she tilts her head back, the meager light of the torch falls across a face thickly smudged with dirt. Bryonna might be described as pretty if not for the four jagged scars that mar her features. These gruesome lines run from her forehead to her cheek, across the empty eye socket where her right eye once was.



The heroes notice that one of her thumbs is flat, red and bruised, as if she had been tortured...

Bryonna "When I met Henrick, he showed me kindness like I've never known. Immediately, we fell in love. Even though I have known him only a short time, he already means a lot to me. I don't know why Lorelei is telling these horrible lies. I thought she was my friend and would be happy that someone would marry me."

Wyan snaps "stop insulting my daughter. What do you know about them fey, witch!?"

Bryonna "Not a blessed thing. I mean, I've heard all the same stories everyone in town knows about them. But I haven't been consorting with them, and by Belenus I'm certainly not one of them."

Wyan, to the heroes "They all say the same thing, but we see clearly through these lies!"

Bryonna sigh but says nothing.

Wyan "Tell us about your life, with the years for important events."

Bryonna thinks for a moment, then starts, "I was born in Forlorn in 729. My parents died in a goblin raid in 735, I was 6-year-old"

Wyan "six years, you say? I thought it was two years old?"

Bryonna "No, Sir Wyan, I was six. I don't remember much about the attack, or my life before, since I was only 6 when it happened, and it was a traumatic event. I did not speak for years after that. So the goblins had gone into the forest with me and probably intended to eat me later. Lady Ermintrude heard my cries and killed the goblins. She saved my life. Then as she thought I no longer had a family, she went back to her home in the forest in Tepest. She healed my wounds, and I lived with her until I was twelve. It is during this period that Ermintrude asked Marla, and other nannies, to look after me sometimes. Then Ermintrude decided that I needed to live in the city. It was 741, I was 12 years old. She asked her friend Leobe, a woodsman from Kellee, to find me a home, but Leobe and his wife adopted me. I lived with Leobe and his wife Adriana for another six or seven years. This was in Kellee. When I became an adult, Adriana became sick, and she died weeks later. Leobe turned into a sad person, and it wasn't fun being around him. So with his blessing, I moved in Viktal to find work two years ago, I was 17 years old. I've lived here since then (about 2 years). It's been hard, but I've managed to support myself doing washing, house cleaning and that sort of work."

Wyan “Hear, hear! Adriana died when Bryonna was around. Weird, right? Were you jealous of Adriana?”

Bryonna shakes her head negatively. She seems exhausted.

The heroes thank her and leave. In the church, Tora asks Wyan, “From what you know, Bryonna was pious. Why do you choose not to believe her?”

Wyan is angry at the question and replies quickly, “But she is a fey in disguise! Witches deserve the heaviest punishment above all the criminals of the world because they corrupt innocents!”

Then he turns pensive and adds, “to be honest with you, Goodman Tora from Briggdarrow, I still have a little doubt about Bryonna's guilt myself, but I cannot overturn her sentence without proof of her innocence: the rest of the Inquisition believes her guilty, and now most of the town too. Also, the evidence seems to prove that she is a fey consort, if not a fey herself. If you can find facts to support your claims that she is innocent, I will happily let her go. If not, she will be judged and executed in seven days, at the new moon, when we believe the feys are at their weakest.”

DM note: I have to share a little about my long-term planning for Petrak's player.

From the players background at character creation (in 2003!) I added the precisions between parenthesis, to make it fit with Bryonna's own story:

Where is your family? When he was a teenager (12 years old, year 735), his parents (and siblings) were killed by a horde of barbarian goblins. Thanks to the help of his dog, he was able to escape the massacre. His parents were followers of Ezra and it was at Ezra's temple that he spent his childhood. To avenge his parents, he trained to become a fighting priest.

Also, Petrak was born with the Redhead feat (given at the time of the PC creation, in 2003. He chose *Produce Flame* for the free spell, which I do not recall he ever used).

(Bryonna has red hair too).

Also early in the campaign, Petrak learned that he has a living sister:

Session 5 (played in 2004), in Vincenzo's House of the Mist in Evil Eye: “Petrak sees a similar scene, a very large barbarian goblin emerges from the mists and attacks him (Petrak's family was decimated by goblins). Petrak slays the creature and is struck with a new certitude: he has a sister somewhere. It is a surprise as he thought that the whole family except him was dead.”

So Bryonna is of course Petrak's sister! He will find this in the next game, but perhaps he already has suspicions as he was eying me strangely at the end of the game ;)

And another PC, Tora from Briggdarrow also should meet a few of his siblings ... and one of them is in the dreaded Inquisition!