

GAME SESSION 92: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 7

(This Ravenloft game was played Sept 11, 2022. Everybody is present)

Varadan's email to the DM a few days before the game, and the DM's answer:

Questions to the DM:

1) What is the travel time to our destination in Falkovnia?

From what you know: a little less than half a day to reach the place where the trail leaves for the old winery. After that, you do not know.,



2) How long does it take to copy spells from one spellbook to another? Are there any shortcuts (do scrolls maybe)?

We use the PF rules: adding another spell to a spellbook: 1 hour to understand a spell (regardless of the level) than 1 hour per spell level for copying the spell.

It is shorter than making scrolls: scribing a scroll takes 2 hours if its base price is 250 gp or less, otherwise scribing a scroll takes 1 day for each 1,000 gp in its base price

Then a discussion by email between Varadan and Clothilda:

Here is what Varadan thought the night after learning that he had a slave for 7 days... He thinks it's a potential problem because either he makes peace with Clothilda right away so he doesn't

have her as an enemy later (but Ivana won't like that), or he applies Ivana's punishment as she would like it (but Clothilda won't like it). So Varadan tries to find a win-win scenario in order not to create additional enemies, and he thinks that maybe Clothilda can help him later when it's time to break his relationship with Ivana (in this regard, Varadan would like to take the first step rather than being found poisoned in an alley, just another Black Widow victim...). As Clothilda knows Ivana very well, it is possible that she can give him important information to accomplish this goal.

It is certain that Varadan would prefer to keep Ivana on his side as long as possible, especially after this demonstration of loyalty which is so dear to Ivana (I am referring to Yakov). So, on the way to Falkovnia, Varadan makes this proposal to Clothilda.

July 7, 748

They leave Levkarest at 9h30. The trip will be about 3 hours to reach the Falkovnian frontier, then about a half hour to reach the point mentioned in the mysterious letter (sign for the Blue Hill Vineyard).

Clothilda leads her horse calmly, following at the same pace, but she stays a good fifty feet behind the group. She didn't say a word since they left Levkarest and she avoid the heroes' gaze.

At one point, Varadan slows down a bit to stay behind the group with Clothilda, to chat quietly.

She does not look at Varadan when he approaches her. She instead puts her head down and she looks brooding.

Varadan explains that Clothilda needs to understand that the current situation was not desired by Varadan and that Varadan is faced with a decision by Ivana that he cannot change. Clothilda knows Ivana and she knows very well that Varadan has no choice, and that he takes no pleasure in it.

Clothilda doesn't answer, she keeps looking at her saddle.

So Varadan tells her that he is ready to minimize the situation and the discomforts for Clothilda on 2 conditions:

- 1) That she tries to be part of the group and be a real ally in Falkovnia (or, if possible, give us information that minimizes the chances of a fight).
- 2) That she lets our Magic Users copy spells from her Spellbook.

If she accepts, Varadan will not treat her like a slave, but, since Ivana has spies everywhere, in public he will have to act as Ivana would like him to act, which is to treat her like a slave. Varadan will do his best to minimize these situations and he will also minimize time spent in public. If she accepts, especially because of the spells we could get, Varadan thinks the group will accept this situation. This way the 7 days of slavery will be less painful for Clothilda and she will save face as much as possible.

(Note to DM, Varadan recalls that maybe Clothilda is a double agent for Falkovnia, he realizes maybe Clothilda is just trying to buy time so she can take refuge with her Falkovnian "friends" Which explains the next comment.)

But he reminds her that he will not hesitate to act forcefully if Clothilda does something against Ivana's decision. For example, if she tries to run away, Varadan will react like Ivana would like him to *act (when saying this, as he thinks Clothilda knows he's a werewolf, he bares his teeth, much like a dog would).*

Clothilda keeps her head down, and Varadan sees she is clenching her teeth.

Varadan also tells her that after the 7 days he will do his best to convince Ivana that Clothilda is still loyal to Ivana, despite her "mistake". Also, it is better to have Ivana on her side, even if she thought of fleeing to a country like Falkovnia. Ivana has a long arm, and the result will always be in favor of what Ivana wants... Is always looking back over your shoulder a good way to live?

She thinks a long moment, and then she answers Varadan's long speech, now looking at him with a slightly haughty attitude she has trouble to hide.

"I see, my ... master. You play the nice guy and try to make sure that I won't stab you in the back the first bloody chance that I have. Don't worry, I think I figured out how you guys think, and I won't do that. Because I feel my best chance of regaining Ivana's trust is to play her sadistic games and endure those seven days. So I'll be an ally in this Falkovnia adventure, if we have to fight or enter this damned place with stealth."

"That said. ... What Ivana asked me has **** limits. I will not give you everything I have. When she asked me to obey every command, she didn't mean that I should be trading all my wares to you for free, or handover my ***** mansion to you."

"NEVER, do you understand?", she shouts, making some of the other in the group look back at them.

"... Now, if you ever force me to do that, with Ivana being on your side, I ... I will never forget it", she says, with a hateful gaze. Varadan understands her pride is heavily damaged by this whole situation, and she hates this.

She remains silent for a moment, then she adds: "I agree to trade spells, but only if I find in your children books something that I could need. Also, Ivana has enforced that she would not be happy if I trade spells that she bought for me. But ask your casters for what they have, I'll consider it"

Reply from Varadan: (And note to DM: Varadan has 16 in Wisdom and 15 in Charisma... that should help a bit, no?)

"I'm so sorry you feel that way, I'm being honest and suggesting a solution that could benefit both of us, unless you are actually planning to get away from Ivana—then I can't help you. But I feel this isn't it, I hear a lot of pride from you, and maybe we can talk again when there is no pride involved in the discussion. Finally, I'm not treating you as a master, but as an equal that is, like you, thrown in a situation over which I have little control. How I act will depend largely on how you react to this situation, don't force my hand to make me the bad guy. And don't underestimate us, that could be a critical mistake."

"But before I go, I want to say that it is true that I don't want you as an enemy, but I'm not *playing* nice, I *am* a nice guy. Also, I'm not a weakling without any defences, I can take care of myself. I do not fear you, so this is not why I made the proposition. I'm not against trading

spells, I'm sure that will be fine. If we trust each other instead of despising each other, I believe we will both benefit a lot more."

With this Varadan gives a little kick to his horse and catches up with the others. He summarizes his interaction with Clothilda with the others. They discuss their plan to enter Falkovnia.

(and the rest during the game itself)

At Clothilda – do you have a suggestion to hide the halfling and the elf of our group at the frontier? Clothilda answers that this frontier isn't guarded normally, so it will be probably an easy task to enter Falkovnia.

After passing through Sturben, the trip is quick to reach the frontier, about 45 minutes.

This frontier isn't guarded, as Clothilda predicted. However, they see two lines of poles on each side of the road, with corpses or heads spiked on top: welcome to Falkovnia!

The heads belong to humans and nonhumans, men and women, old or young. There is even a baby corpse. Most corpses and heads are old and withered, but some are quite new (a few months of decay). Both lines of poles are a hundred feet long.



They enter Falkovnia and pass this grim sight. Then they notice the unusual black bark of all trees. Even usually lighter colored trees bear a darker hue. Clothilda adds that transplanted trees from out of Falkovnia eventually get this color too.

They resume their travel. 30 minutes later, they see a sign : “Blue Hill vineyard” with an arrow leading away from the road. They take this trail. They look for traces: 4 heavy horses came from the forest to the main road, about 6 days before. The traces turn to the South, toward Borca.

They advance on this trail, half move, watching for traps or anything. Macrazbunare, the druid polymorphs into an eagle and scouts the trail in front of the group.

He sees a young deer, a fawn, stuck into a net near the road. He signals the group to be careful. The group reaches that point. They check for traces around the tree where the deer is struck : nothing. Their first thought was a wolf in sheep clothing type of monster.

They free the fawn, who swiftly runs away.

Then a small bird, a yellow sparrow flies and perch on a branch near the heroes. It chants loudly while looking at the heroes. It appears it tries to talk to the heroes, but nobody understands it?



Then it changes its chant, but again most heroes still do not understand the bird. The druid does, however! He understands a kind of sylvan speech.

The bird asks « does anybody understand what I say?»

The druid, still in eagle form, flies near the little bird and waves “yes” with its head.

The bird : « follow the bird, come alone”, and it flies away through the forest.

The druid waved “yes” again and follows the little bird. The rest of the heroes was going to follow, but the druid signals them not to.

He follows the little bird about 300’, way out of sight of the other heroes, and suddenly it stops to sit on a branch of a large tree. The druid perches near the tree.



Suddenly, a 7' tall creature comes out of a tree and appears in front of the druid - a thin girl, bark skin, hair in branches and roots. A kind of dryad! She has a bow in her hand, arrow nocked, but the bow is not pointed at Macrazbunare. Its appearance also shows a dark, disturbing side, like the forest around. The druid wonders if she's affected by some form of nature's corruption?

The dryad "Who are you? What are you doing in our forest?"

Macrazbunare polymorphs back to human form so he can speak "we are just passing through your forest"

The dryad - "To where?"

Macrazbunare "to the other side of the forest"

Her "Why do you understand me?"

Macrazbunare "We speak the same language, I'm a druid"

Her "Humans like you are not far away in the hills. They mistreat nature, they batter the forest." She also talks about the trail: a widened path, with cut trees. "They even deliberately kill their own people to make them reborn as dead. The ground is now corrupt. Me and my sisters are in pain, we are in pain to the point of slowly turning into a dead tree, but we can't do anything because we can't get away from here as you probably know...".

Macrazbunare agrees to help "we are here to destroy this place and end its evil"

Her "Help us and come back here after, as you know, nature knows how to reward those who protect it".

She gives precise directions to go to the camp ("too far for me, but that's what I saw through the eyes of the birds"). She tells them that the Falkovnians patrol their camp about thrice during the day, and at night, it's the dead creatures that do patrol the site.

She adds "when men will no longer have room in their heart for nature, perhaps nature will no longer have room for men. And this war, you will lose it"

Macrazbunare tells her not to put him in the same lot as the other humans, or even in the same lot as the other heroes nearby "we're just associates".

Her "What is your name? I'm Myrtoessa" and Macrazbunare gives his name to the dryad.

He walks back to the other heroes and tell them what just happened. Macrazbunare thinks the trapped fawn was some kind of test.



They resume their travel. They cross a second route through the forest, leading to the North, probably toward Aerie in Falkovnia. Four traces of horses come from this direction, toward the camp in the vineyard. They were made yesterday.

They resume their trip and exits the forest, to stand in front of many hills, devoid of trees but with many shrubs.

1h30 pm

They hide the horses in the forest, away from the trail.

Exigu goes scouting and Macrazbunare in eagle form flies 800' in the air. They see a patrol circling the camp, then going back to it. They see an old winery installation, but the wines are unkempt and the whole look forsaken. The camp is made of three buildings. The Falkovnian flag is well visible from a tall pole. From the air, the druid also sees a black pond, like some kind of tar pit?

Most of the guards appear relaxed and some do some training. There are six large mastiff dogs with them.

They count about a dozen guards, plus 4 officers wearing plate mail.

They come back to discuss their plan.

Clothilda, when asked about the woman mentioned in the letter "Nebta-Khufre is some kind of archeologist, but that is all I know, I've never met her"

The druid goes back to spy on the camp, again from the air.

At 4 pm, he sees a man, a woman and a little girl exit from one of the buildings. They look like a family. The man plays with her daughter outside, while the guards watch them. They appear at first struck by the sun light, like if they haven't seen the sun in a while. Macrazbunare also notice their clothing is similar to the robes worn by desert people. This must be Al-Wawat and his family, he thinks.

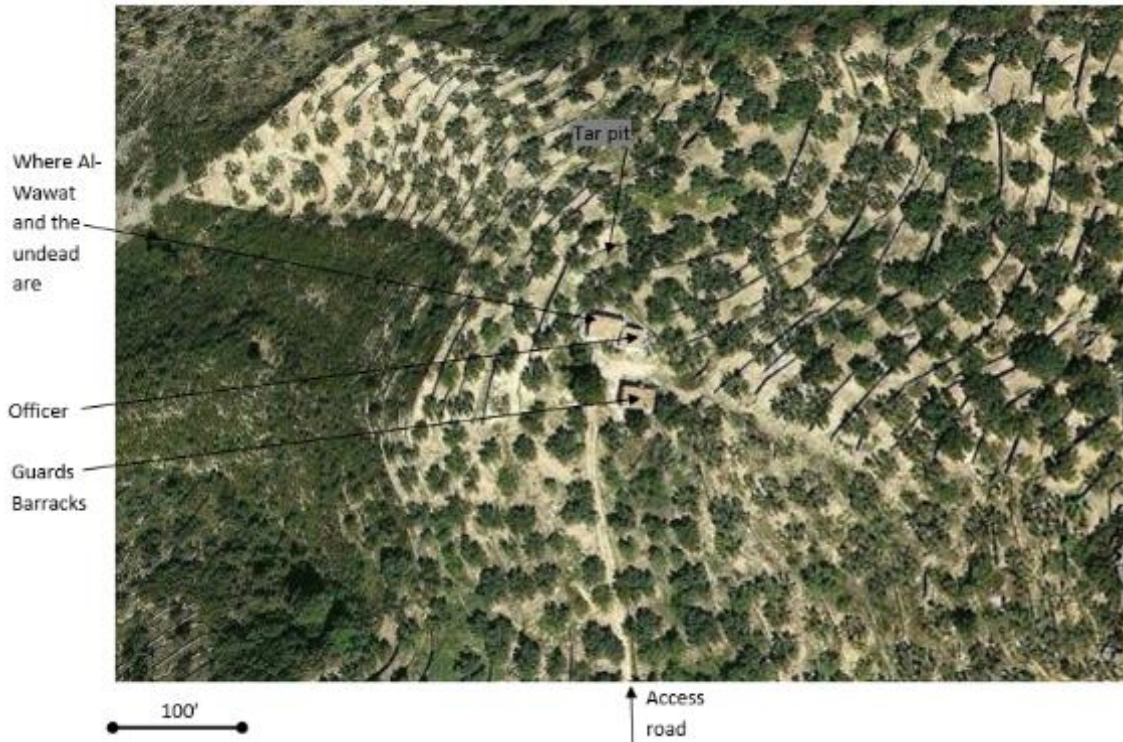
They play outside lasts half an hour only, and the family is escorted back inside one of the buildings. One guard enrage the dogs and keeps the barking and foaming dogs just outside the reach of the little girl, to the cruel laughter of the other guards.

He sees two patrols going around the camp at 5 and 6 pm.

He goes back to the others, and they discuss a plan to save Al-Wawat and his family. From him, they think, they will have more information about the camp and the undead creatures. One problem is the 6 dogs who could smell the heroes from a distance.

Clothilda offers to make a *cloudkill* to get rid of the dogs.





At 7h30 pm, Varadan goes spying, in wolf form. He sees that at 8pm, seven undead thin creatures exit the same building where Al-Wawat is kept. They are six men, and they are led by a woman, which Varadan recognize as Antunia Papiecù (from the Falkovnian delegation).

From that moment, the guards relax and remove their armors. They are clearly off duty when the undead creatures are outside. The guards are a total of 25, plus 5 officers. They drink beer, eat and play games. There are few interactions between the guards and the undead.

The undead creatures start running around the perimeter of the camp, and they run for hours, tireless!

At 10 pm, the guards enter a barrack, and an officer uses a key to enter a third building, the smallest of the three.

The undead stop running (after three hours non stop!) and go back to the camp. They extinguish all lighted torches with their hands, and afterward Varadan hears them training in the dark with swords.

Once in a while during the night, Varadan sees some of the guards exit their barrack to relieve themselves in the bushes, then back to the barrack.

He goes back to the other heroes' own camp to tell them of what he saw, then goes back spying the Falkovnians.

Meanwhile, the heroes organize a turn order for guard duty, without adding Clothilda to this list. They notice she removes a glove before going to sleep...

July 8, 748

The undead guards train themselves for a very long time (until 4 am), then they sit in circle and draw things in the sand, as if discussing battle strategies and tactics.

At 5 pm, 4 guards and 2 dogs exit the barrack and patrol around the camp. Varadan again sees few interactions between the guards and the undead. The dogs avoid being close to the undead circle. Soon after, the undead get up and enter their building, just before as the sun is coming up.

At 9h15 am, Varadan is back to the group.

They decide to attack this very morning.

They advance under the wind, to avoid being smelled by the dogs. A group of guards is training outside. When they are very close, Clothilda casts *cloudkill*. The spell is a carnage: it kills 14 of the guards and the six dogs. The heroes move in to attack the rest.

The highest officer yells “alarm!” and a few more guards exit the barracks. The heroes kill this officer and 6 more guards.

During the short battle, they heard that the door to the main building (where Al-Wawat is kept) had been locked from inside, after the shouting of “alarm!”

Clothilda casts knock on the door. Varadan enters but sees only a warehouse with empty boxes and barrels. Austizel enters and spots a concealed trap door on the floor. It is locked. One more *knock* from Austizel and they open it to see a ladder going down 60’.

Meanwhile, Macrazbunare casts *detect magic* on the dead bodies outside. Nothing, except a medallion on the main officer. It looks like a tarnished silver scarab.

He tells his wolf and Patu (Exigu’s dog) to leave and go where the horses are (they can’t climb down the ladder).



They explore a network of grottos. A large room is a dormitory.

Petrak hears a little girl sobbing behind a closed and locked door. The room’s door is also protected by an electrical *glyph*: blam! He breaks through the door with an axe, to find Al-Wawat’s wife and daughter cowering in fear (no trace of Al-Wawat himself). The girls are shaking from terror when they see Petrak break the door with his axe and enter! (*DM note: Here’s Johnny!*) He tries to calm them, but clearly, they do not understand him or his intentions.

Petrak notices the little is missing two digits on the left hand. He leaves them and rejoin with the rest.



Elsewhere, Varadan is stuck in front of a lowered grill gate. They open it and the group sees more underground rooms. They smell a strong odor of chemicals and dead flesh...

Meanwhile, Exigu explores the house of the main officer. He sees a desk with letters, papers and ledgers (but it's all in Falkovnian, so he understands nothing). He also finds a case of 12 bottles of fine spirit (he takes one for himself), and a sack with 500 gp.

GAME SESSION 93: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 8

(This Ravenloft game was played Jan 22, 2023. Everybody is present)

Cut scene sent by email before the next game (from an idea by DustBunny):

July 6, 748, about 9 pm (the night Ivana dropped Clothilda's from her elite rank)

Ivana is now alone in her reading room after Nostalia left for her own suite. Varadan will soon arrives.

"Oh yes, my little Clothilda, I am going to enjoy this immensely", she murmurs to herself.

"You really think you can hide such important matters from me, really?"

Ivana takes a crimson rose on the table and twirls it gently in her hand, "Lately, you thought yourself as being too important, or irreplaceable, I think. So the need for a public lesson of humility. You have set the stage yourself, and my new friends are playing the appropriate music...".

A single petal detaches and drifts lazily to the floor, Ivana's eyes following its wayward descent and the girlish mirth which had formed at the corners of her mouth fades to a tight smile when the petal reaches the floor. Returning her eyes to the bloom, she crushes it with a mad smile, ignoring the thorns piercing her flesh.

"Now, Clothilda, on that stage, let us all see how well you can dance..."

July 8, 748, 10 am

The heroes resume the exploration of the underground complex. They are reminded here and there that the place used to be a vineyard: there are wine and grape sculptures on the walls.

There are many portcullises, all closed. They manage to open one where they think the reminder of the Falkovnians are hidden: the smell of chemicals is stronger in this direction.

Exigu returns to the room where Al-Wawat's wife and daughter were, and he is able to calm them.

The heroes reach an intersection. Macrazbunare hears a faint metallic noise in one direction. They investigate: suddenly, two tar mummies run from this direction and they attack Varadan!

The mummies' corpses are slightly withered but not completely desiccated. It's only when seen closely that they appear unhuman. They wear light leather armors and strike with long swords.

One guard appear from the same direction and blows a whistle! *Alarm!*

Two more mummies appear from another direction: Tora and Varadan are flanked! Austizel cast *shackle* at one of the mummies. They hear Clothilda casts (*improved invisibility*). Tora and Varadan hurts the mummies, but they find their flesh is very tough and supple, so it absorbs many blows.

DM note: damage reduction (5/piercing), see my article in QtR 18 for more information on Antunia Papiècu, the tar mummies and this Falkovnian project.

Then a man approaches from the direction where the first mummies came. He appears sinister, and he is a cleric. He cast *channel negative energy*: it heals the mummies while the heroes are negatively affected! The guard that blowed the whistle is also killed by the negative energy burst, but the cleric watch him fall dead without any expression, and do not seem to care...



Three Falkovnians officers appear and try to hit Austizel.

Macrazbunare sees a line of enemies and cast *lightning bolt* at them. They hear Clothilda cast again and see a flurry of *magic missiles* emerge from a point in the air and they hit the cleric: it misses as if he was protected against it. They hear Clothilda swear.

The mummies concentrate their blows on Tora. More mummies appear and one hit Macrazbunare, unprotected by fighters. One of the officers warns the other about the cleric and his careless use of negative energy burst "stay away from Gui, he's a bastard".

Austizel cast *haste*. The cleric sends another burst of negative energy: the mummies are fully healed while the heroes are badly hurt. They hear Clothilda cast again (*gaseous form*).

Gui the cleric cast *dispel magic* and the *shackle* spell vanishes: this mummy is free! Things look grim as there are five mummies, all fully healed, four officers and the evil cleric. The heroes are wounded.

The fight resume and Varadan and Tora concentrates on the same enemy, and then Macrazbunare hurls *magic missile* at it: at last the first enemy falls.



Meanwhile, hearing the whistle, Exigu runs toward the group. He hears a door opening in his back! Oh oh, more enemies coming. He runs faster! He sees two mummies running after him and toward the rest of the group! One of them is the women, their boss! (Antunia Papiecù). They are a mere 10 feet behind him! He rejoins the group, after yelling “be prepared to close the portcullis gate after me”. Austizel reaches the lever, and when Exigu passes, he closes the gate after him. The two mummies running after him reaches the portcullis moments later.

But surprisingly, the woman tells them “let me pass, I can help you”. Exigu is of course sceptical and he asks how she plans to do it. “I can stop the mummies”, she says, adding:

“I’m the one who wrote the letter”.

She proves it and neutralize the mummy accompanying her, sending it to “guard the entrance”, a useless task.

But one of the Falkovnians officers heard Antunia and yells “Watch out! That Papiecù woman is turning on us!”

Varadan is at last able to move and hit the cleric Gui. But then Tora is surrounded by enemies and now deeply hurt.

Gui runs inside the room and the heroes hear a thud as if someone was just hit by a blow, and they hear “What is the command word for the f... wench? TELL ME!”

Austizel opens the portcullis, and Antunia enters. She deactivates another mummy, relieving Tora of one enemy.

Petrak cast healing spell at Tora, while on the other side two mummies tries to kill him.

Varadan enters the room and see a laboratory. In a corner he sees the cleric Gui in front of a man tied to a chair. He recognizes the man as Al-Wawat! (Varadan saw him when they were spying on the camp). He tells Al-Wawat not to tell him the command word, and that he will soon be freed.

But Al-Wawat reveals the command word to Gui! “It’s Abreisen”, he says.

Meanwhile, Tora kills another mummy.

From where he is standing, Gui doesn’t see Antunia. yells “Abreisen! Neutral!” but the other heroes see Antunia is not deactivated! Al-Wawat lied! Gui then cast *slay living* at Varadan but Varadan avoids the deadly magic effect.

Soon after, Antunia deactivates the last mummy. Hearing her voice in the next room, Gui is enraged!

But then he feels hit by an unseen blow and the heroes see Gui turning greenish in colour in the neck and he gets weakened! Clothilda's poison! Then Petrak, Tora and Varadan regroup around Gui, avoiding the place where they think Clothilda is standing invisible. Gui casts another negative energy burst, and Al-Wawat dies!

The heroes hit hard the despicable man, and Petrak has the last blow on the evil priest! He is dead!

Petrak heals Al-Wawat and the man opens his eyes, surprised. They untie him.

After the fight, Antunia drops her sword and states that the heroes have "erased a dreary bleak spot in Falkovnia's grandeur". "Get al-Wawat and his family to safety, away from the reaches of the Falkovnians."

They ask Al Wawat what is his role in this project was and learn that he is a specialist in embalming rituals in his country, but Nebta-Kufre and Bernard Gui added necromantic magic to his work to create the tar mummies. Antunia confirms this.

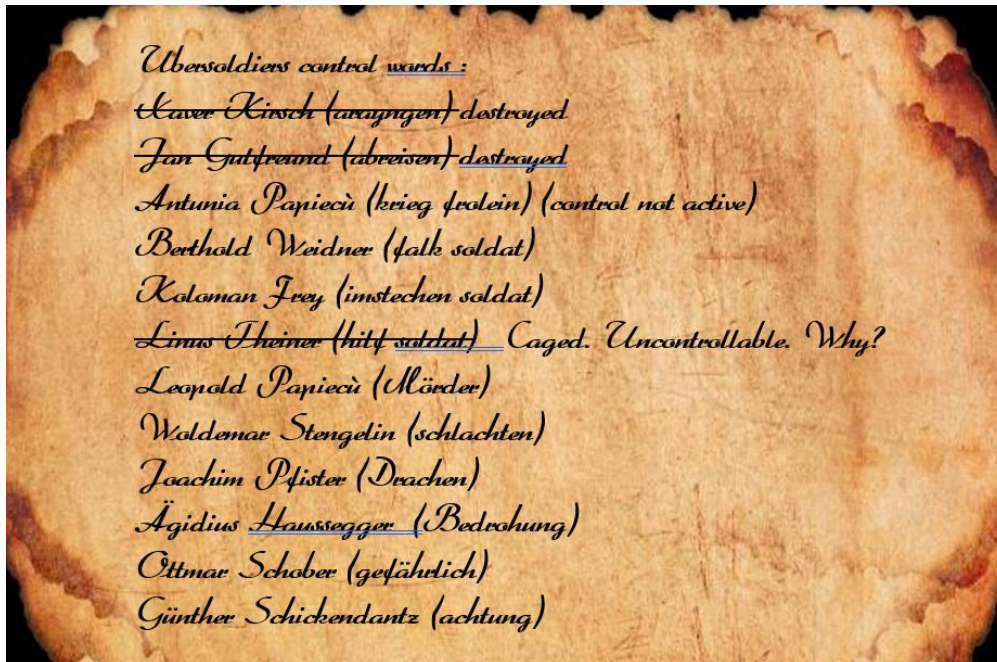
Antunia looks like a tanned and very thin fighter woman of about 40 years old, with broad shoulders and short black hairs. The Falkovnian hawk brand on her forehead turned blackish during the creation process. To most onlookers, she mostly passes as human, unless someone looks closely at her.

They now ask Antunia what she will do after this. "I'm after a vengeance on the Ministry of Science, Vjorn Horstman. He made me like this. The first part of my plan is now underway: the destruction of this camp and its necromantic capacities. You helped a lot in that, and I thank you. Next I will get Horstman's head at the end of a pike". She adds "I may need help, and I know how to contact you".

"When it will be done, I don't know", she adds grimly, "perhaps I'll hurl myself in a volcano or something..."

She explains to them what the command words are. When Vlad Drakov approved this project from Vjorn Horstman, he wanted a guarantee that these undead won't fall under an enemy's control and battle Falkovnians instead. Vlad Drakov cited the disastrous Darkon campaigns, where the fallen Falkovnians got back on their feet as zombies and attacked the Falkovnians. As far as she knows, only Al-Wawat and Otto Klockar had the list of command words. Not even Gui or Nebta-Khufre had access to this information. Also, only someone with a hawk brand tattoo (i.e. a Falkovnian) can use the command words.





“This system of command words was supposed to be a safety net, but it became a tool to help end this project”, she muses.

They ask about Nebta-Khufre. Al-Wawat says she left for a trip with Falkovnians, but he do not know where. Al-Wawat hates her: she’s the one that tore out two fingers on his daughter’s hand. Speaking of it reminds him of his wife and children, and the heroes gather them. They are reunited. Al-Wawat is grateful.



Al-Wawat



Layali-Nek



Nuzha-Nek

They explore the rest of the underground level, searching everything.



(map from WotC)

- 1 Narrow stairs land here, after a 60' descent.
- 2 Portculis, open from the other side of area 2.
- 3 There is a smell of dead corpse and chemical products in this area. The portcullises leading area 11a and b are opened from area 3. The portcullis leading to area 4 opens from the other side of area 3.
- 4 Much stronger smell of dead corpse and chemical products in this area.
- 5 Additional storage (mostly food and alchemical products)
- 6 Al-Wawat's family is kept locked in this tiny room.
- 7 Many camp beds.
- 8 Antunia's private room.
- 9 Al-Wawat's study (contains many papers in Hakiri and Falkovnian, the sum total of the notes for the creation of übersoldiers). An envelope contains the entire Falkovnian tar mummies control word list. The only other copies of this list are kept in Otto Klockar's desk.
- 10 A) Laboratory. A table with straps to retrain someone, with many tar stains on it.

B) Two cages. One cage restrains a berserk mummy, its mind uncontrollable, and kept here for further study.

- 11 a and b Two empty rooms, with blood stains on the floor, plus straw beds. Al-Wawat explains they were used as cells for people destined to be immersed under tar.

The heroes destroy the three neutralized mummies, and the insane one. They gather all notes and papers and burn them. Antunia makes sure all the command word lists are burned. They destroy the laboratory. Otto Klockar and Bernard Gui are decapitated, and the heads and bodies thrown in the tar pit with rocks as weight.

At one point, Varadan shows the scarab they found on Otto Klockar. al-Wawat say "it's mine, can I have it back?". He explains it's a linguistic device enabling the wearer to understand, speak and read Hakiri, his home language.

The heroes have finished their business there and they walk back to the forest where they hid the horses. They take one additional Falkovnian horse at the camp for al-Wawat and his family, and free the other horses.

Antunia watches them leaves. She then piles the mummies bodies, except one, in Otto's house and set it to fire. Then she went in the forest and buried the other mummy, placing an anonymous marker.

On the trip back, Macrazbunare sees the same yellow bird appearing in view. It flies in circle a few times then leaves in one direction. Macrazbunare walks in that direction, to the clearing in the wood.

They are four dryads waiting for him this time. Myrtoessa presents her sisters Malilia, Carya and Canescens (these are smaller, between 4' and 5' high, while Myrtoessa is 7 feet tall).

"Welcome back, human. Have you been where they corrupt nature?"

Macrazbunare "We reached this place. We killed all humans and found mummies in the underground cellar.

There was also an evil cleric. All are now destroyed, except one mummy, and a man and his family" He tells them what Antunia revealed about her revenge, and about Al-Wawat. He adds that "the project was based on the knowledge of three persons. One is dead, the evil priest, another, a woman, was gone from the site when we arrived, and the man with us, who was forced to work with them."

Myrtoessa and her sisters asks many questions and the whole lasts about an hour. They are very curious and want to know every detail.



Myrtoessa thanks the druid. She takes off her belt and give hit to the druid - a belt of dried roots (*belt of the dryad*). "Gives a little water every day. This belt will give you *goodberries* and also protect you from those who want to attack you: the darker berry will improve the quality of your armor."

DM note: it grows 2d4 +15 goodberries per day, and another berry, the brownish berry, creates barkskin as caster 6. These berries do not last long after picked from the belt.

As they leave, Malilia says "Tell the men that when the blood of their veins will return to the river, and their bones return to the earth, they will see that this land does not belong to them, but that it is they who belong to this earth". Macrazbunare agrees with her.

Meanwhile, Varadan has a private talk with Clothilda, reminding her that when in Levkarest, he will have to appear to make her suffer, and he will treat her harshly in public. She nods "do what you think you have to do, but do not overdo it".



They travel back to Borca, talking with Al-Wawat and his family (using the scarab). He reveals that their fate with the Falkovnians would have been harsher if Antunia didn't often intervene for them. Al-Wawat think she is a patriotic Falkovnian, and would never hesitate to invade a neighbour country, but she is a descent person, who would never hurt someone who's not a soldier fighting against Falkovnia.

While Al-Wawat's wife is visibly appraising the heroes, as if always expecting the worst, the little girl Nuzha-Nek is very curious about them and asks many questions, typical of a child her age. She says she craves for fresh fruits.

At one point, Clothilda asks "You say you are from Har Akir? Do you know something about something called a *death stone*?". But Al-Wawat does not.

DM note: a subtle hint to the players, who were asking themselves what to do now with Al-Wawat 😊

The heroes think Al-Wawat should be presented to Ivana as he can read Hakiri and thus possibly read what's written on the Death Stone.

They arrive in Levkarest (west entrance, by Crimson Rd) at the end of the day, thinking of buying fresh fruits for Nuzha-Nek. Varadan send Clothilda for a shopping errand, with a disdainful bossy tone.

Al-Wawat's family have their eyes wide opened when arriving in the city. Such a large city is a wonder to them.

But they hear a commotion, and speaking to people on the street, they learn that Ivana was snatched by a flying monster while in the streets of Levkarest, about an hour ago!

The Gargoyle!

People saw it fly over the Cathedral with Ivana in her claws, then fly *through* the Cathedral roof! This made a big hole in the roof!

They run to the Cathedral. Nuzha-Nek is suddenly very fearful, asking “what is going on? Is it dangerous?”

Arrived near the Cathedral, they see a large group of persons surrounding the Cathedral, leaving an empty safety zone between them and the Cathedral. They learn that the Cathedral has been emptied when the monster crashed through the roof. They leave Al-Wawat and his family to the care of anchorites they know and Varadan gives them the scarab, after explaining what it does.

They enter the Cathedral by the front door, left opened wide when people fled from it. It is all dark and gloomy, gone is the light and the impression of delicatessen of the construction! There are blood stains everywhere, as if the walls were oozing blood. There are many howling faces that have appeared in the walls! The delicate and bright stained glass are now darker and let pass few sun rays.

They see the gaping hole in the roof, about 20' diameter.

They go to the choir, to check on the crypt's access. Their suspicions were right: they see the stone hatch was melted, as if by a stone shaping spell. Then they hear a woman's cry of terror, coming from underground, but muzzled as if behind a wall!

They go down the stairs. In a room (room #2 on the crypt plan below), they see a wall has been modified: instead of a white stone wall, there is now a wall filled with small cherubs half carved but not finished. The whole appears as a wall of melted cherubs.

In this room, they hear the woman's cry louder, and coming from the direction of the cherub wall.

They approach it... A stone tentacle hit Varadan! The heroes reply hard with all they have, and the wall is destroyed! It shatters and falls to the ground. Behind, the heroes see a passage! Then the cries are even louder!



Image made with AI Craiyon

The passage is 30' long, and they see it was sculpted by large claws.

It opens on a kind of similarly sculpted room (about 50' x 55', with ceiling 30').

There is a strong smell of blood and earth when the PCs arrive in the room...

Seated in the pews facing the altar, there are 20 women partially immured in the pew stone, many with limbs or body parts torn off! All have a pool of dried blood at their feet.



Thanks DustBunny for the AI image!

Most are dead but two moans and are still alive! A quick look shows they are more or less crazy from the horror and the pain....

One is missing her left hand and the other is missing her right leg. When the heroes enter the room, one of them, a young woman yells prayers to Ezra with a mad voice!

DM note: I started Diamanda Gallas: Cris d'aveugles, from Saint of the Pit (1986). Glacial!

A lot of half melted candles flickers, and the air is full of smoke. Ivana is on the first bench, as it is her reserved place the Cathedral. She is held down to the pew by the stone bonds and is half paralyzed with fright. She is the one shouting the horror cries.



The Gargoyle is there, working on an Ezra statue 7' tall, with only the head missing. It's on a pedestal, and at first glance, the statue is stunningly beautiful!

The gargoyle watches the PCs arrive in the room – its gaze looks cold, but also so malevolent!

The whole is a vision of hell!

DM note: horror check DC 17 for the PCs, all passed.

Varadan is the first to enter and he runs toward Ivana. He sees her stone bonds will take minutes to remove without hurting her. He tries to calm her.

"My head! This thing wants my head!!!" she yells in terror.

Petrak tries to hit the Gargoyle with a *spiritual weapon*, but it fails. They remember the Gargoyle was seemingly immune to all the spells when they fought it the first time.

When Clothilda reaches Ivana, she heals her with a potion, and then she says her reminding spells can't do a thing in this battle. She stays there and protect Ivana by shielding her with her own body. Varadan goes for the fight.

The heroes decide that they should destroy the Ezra statue and focus their harm on it: spells, bullet slings, *spiritual weapons*, etc. it is slowly destroyed, bits by bits. The Gargoyle shakes its head in disapproval.

Meanwhile the heroes receive messages in their head, often after they did hit the statue:

DM Note: passed note to the player, with "You hear a gravelous voice in your head", and

"Leave this place! My shrine will have the most beautiful Ezra statue, let me finish my work"

"Leave now or I will destroy you!"

"This woman has the most beautiful head, she looks like Ezra, she will come to understand the need for her sacrifice"

"With her I will be able to finish my grand plan! Leave now! You are interfering!"

"I have faith in Ezra! Ezra will make me attractive, nobody will fear me anymore!"

"Leave me, I need more time!"

"I want to be able to go to the church with the rest"

DM note: the G thinks that the statue of Ezra will animate when it completed, as the Gargoyle did, and grant it its wishes of acceptance. Do not ask me why they started by hitting the statue instead of the Gargoyle.

At one point, Tora stops his attacks, gets on his knees, and start praying Ezra feverishly! Later, the same thing happens to Petrak.

The monstrous statue slams Tora without mercy and Tora falls! It turns its attention to Petrak, then to Varadan when Petrak starts praying.

Macrazbunare turns to a wolf to approach Tora, pulls him from the battle and heals him.

At this point, they stop destroying the statue and all focus on the gargoyle.

Varadan is the one hitting the hardest the Gargoyle, and one final blow destroys the creature!

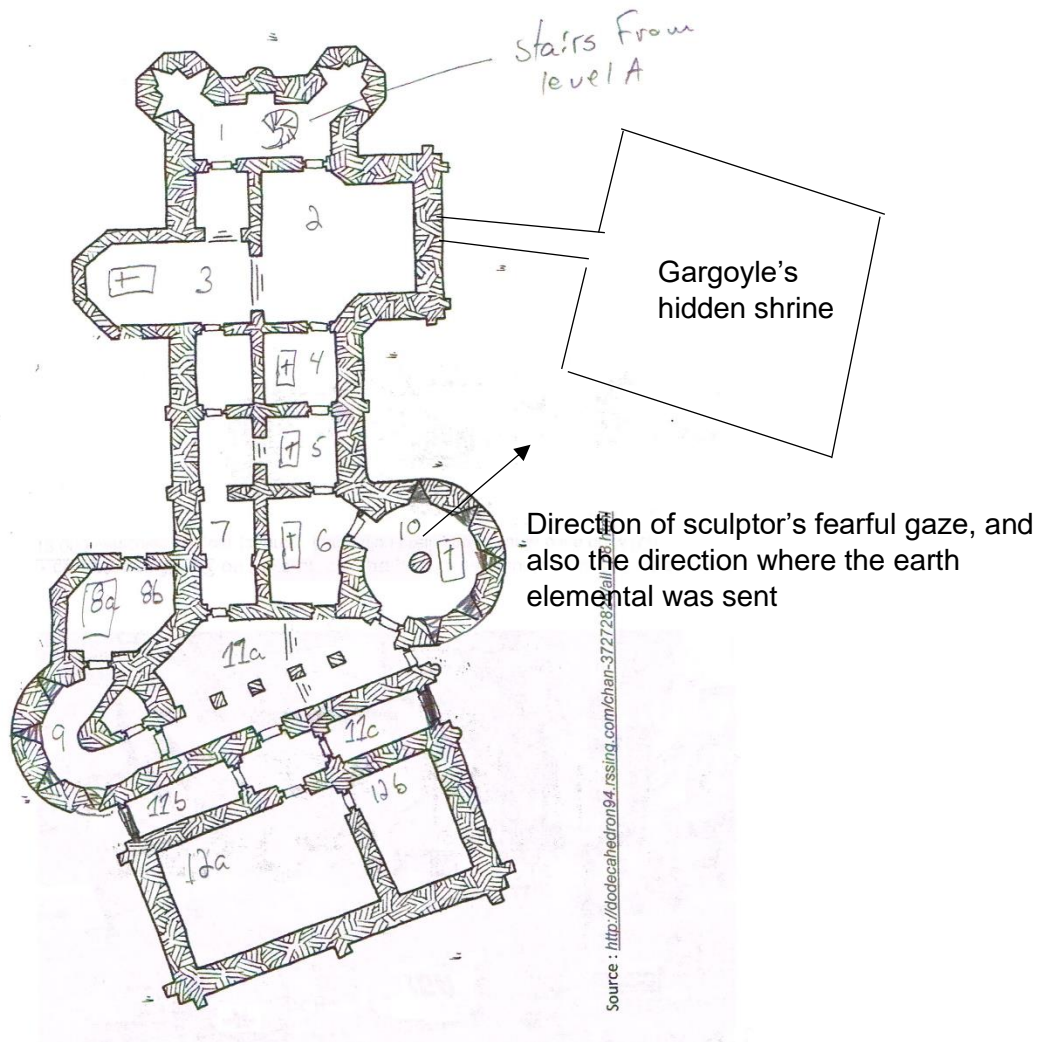
It cries red blood tears and then the creature falls in small rubbles...

They free Ivana from her stone bonds.

They notice a small lump of earth in a corner, with legs and arms made of earth ... (the earth elemental Macrazbunare did send to through the walls!). It gives them the idea to visit again the sculptor's crypt and Tora tries his *ghostsight* ability: he sees nothing, the ghost is now gone...

DM note: on the crypt plan below, room #10 shows the sculptor's tomb, and the location of the secret shrine the Gargoyle did built. When they saw the sculptor's ghost, he was fearful of

something unseen. Now, the heroes understand he was watching in the direction of the shrine and possibly fearing the Gargoyle or its work.



Ivana is in shock but says nothing. She asks for water. She follows the other heroes everywhere, looking haggard. All she says is she wants to leave this horrible place.

They go up to the floor level, and the howling faces in the stone are gone. They think those could be the spirits of the kidnapped women, who are now freed? Light now freely passes through the stained glass, but the blood stains are still there.

They want to exit the church, but Ivana says she can't be seen in public like this. They give her a cloak to hide her face. They go outside and see Ladubay. Petrak tells her what happened, and that the whole horror is probably finished. She tells them it's a great news, as Yakov's 50th anniversary of his death is in a week and there are grand celebrations for it. (Some heroes gasp when Ladubay says that in front of Ivana, but they remember Ladubay doesn't know anything about the not-so-dead remains of Yakov)

They tell Ladubay about the two girls still alive in the crypt, and that some priests should go there and free them. They will need healing and are probably insane, they add.

For the moment, Ladubay asks the heroes to keep silence about the event, until the church decides what to reveal.

Varadan gives leave to Clothilda for the night and say she can go back to her house for the night. Clothilda glances at Ivana, as if expecting this command to be changed by Ivana, but she doesn't intervene. Clothilda leaves with a sigh.

They ask for Ivana's carriage, and for Al-Wawat's family.

Ivana asks with disdain "who are these folks ... and *why* are these coming with us?", and the heroes tell her he might be useful for the Death Stone research. Tired, she nods and enters her carriage, closing the door after her.

They escort the carriage to Misericordia, accompanied with Al-Wawat's family. They arrive at 8 pm.

In Misericordia, Ivana asks the chief of staff Vallotron to take close care of Al-Wawat's family, and some heroes understand that she means Vallotron should keep an eye on them.

The heroes ask if they can stop make guards turns during the night. Ivana is too tired to discuss, and quickly agrees.

She takes Varadan (and two bottles of brandy) to the Widow's walk on the roof and stays, there, brooding, drinking, watching Levkarest's lights in the distance. All attempts by Varadan to make conversation fails, and he eventually stops trying. He just shows her the scarab and tells her that it enables them to read Hakiri, so may be it will be of help when deciphering what's written on the Death Stone. She just nods but her attention is elsewhere.

She is sleepy and they go to her room. She is asleep fast.

CUT SCENE – later in Ivana's parlor

Al-Wawat tell Antunia's tale. Antunia Papiècu was born in Lekar's southern slum and raised in poverty. But even as a young adult, she was stronger than many men, and hard working. Few people picked on her because she would mercilessly fight back with anger.

When she got older, she knew that to become a Falkovnian soldier was her goal in life. It would raise her above poverty and she could use the strong physical abilities nature gave her when she was born.

Antunia enrolled in the military and liked it from the start. She quickly became a dedicated Falkovnian soldier. Even in the chauvinistic Falkovnia army, she was able to fight for her place in the sun with a lot of determination. There again, those soldiers that picked on her because she was a woman, or tried to force themselves on her, were found unconscious and with blood on their face from her angry pummelling.

Born in poverty, Antunia wasn't as cruel with the commoners as the other Falkovnian soldiers, but she fought savagely for the state, twice as hard as a man, and her reputation grew as a tough woman. Her superiors truly esteemed her fighting skills and her will to fight for Falkovnia, but her advancement in the military was always slowed because of her gender.

When her place in the army was secured, she complied with the duty of a woman in Falkovnia and gave two children to the state. Both fathers were soldiers whom Antunia did not care for, but were chosen for their physical strength. From then on, her life was divided between the military and raising her two boys, Léopold-Passmoilé and Jean-Niapud, to become future Falkovnian fighters. When she was on military duty, Antunia's mother helped raise the boys. The years went on and the boys were soon young men.

Among other projects, Falkfuhrer Vjorn Horstman, head of the Falkovnian Ministry of Science, conducted research on mummification in order to create a super soldier. He was counseled by a foreign exotic woman, named Nebtha-Khufre.

The year before, a temple of evil cultists was annihilated by the Falkovnian military near the Invidian border. But the cultists left behind undead minions that proved to be extremely ferocious, cunning, and atrociously dangerous. The elite Falkovnians troops had trouble dealing with these powerful creatures. In fact, using explosives, the entrance of the underground temple had to be buried under tons of rocks to seal this horrible place forever and its monsters.

Nebtha-Khufre then told the Minister of Science of a way to make similar ferocious unliving soldiers, and to make them fully obedient to the state. More importantly, their unliving state was not obvious to the eye as are most undead. So after many discussions, this unliving übersoldier project was approved by Vlad Drakov, even if the lord of the state had little hope. But soon the success of this project proved him wrong.

With information from Nebtha-Khufre, a select group of Talons, and other elite Falkovnian fighters, including Antunia, went to the Amber Waste, in the town of Muhad, to kidnap an embalming alchemical specialist, Rashid Al-Wawat. They also took his wife and his daughter, to help in persuading him to work for Falkovnia.

The Falkovnians established a secret research camp. The camp was in an abandoned vineyard in a deserted area of the Crumbling Hills. The area was secured by military and the only thing to enter the restricted area were controlled caravans bringing supplies to the camp.

The utopian "Teer Stahlmann" project had started. With the help provided by the Har'Akir specialist held against his will, many tests were made to create this übersoldier. Many Falkovian prisoners were killed during these experiments, but that might be because of zealous and cruel assistant Nebta-Khufre.

But after a little more than a year of work, al-Wawat, Nebta-Khufre and a dark necromantic priest, Bernard Gui, were ready to test the formula and creation process with a real Falkovnian soldier.

To create the one of the first Falkovnian mummy, Otto Klockar, the Talon in charge of the camp considered a soldier that has proven her dedication to Falkovnia: Antunia. Also, she was then told she was of the "expendable" gender. Antunia's last memories of life was the horror of being

stripped of her armour and weapons, of being forced to drink a foul tasting brew, and of being drowned in the tar pit, under the cruel laughs of her former comrades...

More alchemical treatments were applied by al-Wawat, Gui and Nebtha-Khufre, and nearly a month after her immersion, she was raised to unlife with exhilarating new powers. She was still completely loyal to Falkovnia and her hate of the state's enemies was as immense as her new strength. Antunia remembered everything in her former life as in a dream. Her mind was now completely focused on destruction for the Falkovnian state's glory.

Her strength and obedience were tested in many ways, and she proved to be perfect according to her masters. One night, under direct supervision of Vjorn Horstman, they had her defeat easily 10 experienced Falkovnian soldiers. Falkfuhrer Horstman was extremely pleased by these preliminary results and was liberal with promotions for those in charge. His reports to Drakov explained that a small shock division of 40 to 60 of these similarly obedient übersoldiers could easily seize a town, and then leave control to regular Falkovnian troops while these tireless shock troops went blitzkrieg elsewhere.

As the first of her kind, Antunia was charged with training new tar mummy "recruits" to their new powers and test their obedience. She appreciated this new role in serving in that secret division of the Falkovnia army. Her former comrades feared her new strength and she secretly delighted in this new status.

The newly created tar mummies were under her control during their training. They were similarly exhilarated about their new powers and their extreme loyalty to the state. After their training, their control word was passed to Otto Klockar, the Talon in charge of the research camp.

However, things went sour one day for Antunia when she saw her own sons taken out of the tar pit as new tar mummies recruits. Old forgotten emotions suddenly came back to her dried flesh. She felt something was very wrong. She felt pity for her sons, something her dried heart had not felt in a very long time. She also began to feel hate for the lack of concerns of her superiors. She realized the Falkovnia government had taken from her all that she had. From then on, she secretly hated the Ministry of Science and its leader, Vjorn Horstman.

One of her sons made it as an übersoldier (Léopold) and the other son was destroyed in the process. When she trained him, she really hated their strong obedience to the state. His son had no feeling whatsoever about her, and it made her very sad. In her rebellion, she knows she can't turn the other mummies to her side.

Antunia wanted to bring down this secret experiment camp and destroy those responsible for it, especially Otto Klockar, and Vjorn Horstman. Otto is dead, only Horstman remains alive.