

GAME SESSION 97: INSIDE THE DEATH STONE – 2

(This Ravenloft game was played April 23rd, 2023. Everybody is present)

Cut scene sent before the game:

The Vistani have set up camp just outside the village. One of Dulcimae's brother is watching the camp, seated near a fire. He suddenly hears a whispery voice, like sand in the wind... "Dulcimae," it says. Alarmed, he warns the other vistani, but suddenly the ground beneath his feet explodes: many clawed hands try to grab at his legs. The other vistani brothers arrive from the vardo to help but the entire campsite seems to be growing limbs like some madman's garden. It seems that there is nowhere to go to escape them. They grab and pull the three men under the sand.

Some of the desiccated zombies walk to the vardo and open its doors. Dulcimae tries to fight with a short sword, but a zombie grabs her by the ankle. The zombie pulls her out while she claws at the vardo floor to pitifully resist being dragged outside. She falls in the sand, ready to fight for her life. But seeing the many dried hands grabbing her from the sand, she faints from fear.

July 19th, 1 pm

Inside the hall of the gods of the Muhar temple, the heroes discuss what should be their next action.

Macrazbunare – it seems someone here wishes us to go away?

Petrak – but if so, they would not have kidnapped Dulcimae the vistani, our travel mode to exit Har Akir. We could try *sending* a message to her? Or *speak with the dead* with today's death corpse (the one found with a piece of Tora's pants in his hand) ?

Isu – will you do *speak with the dead* or do you want me to do it?

Petrak – thanks for the offer, but we will.

Tora – the Falkovnians are probably looking for the pact stone?

Then a group of people arrive at the temple, carrying the dead body found this morning. Isu excuses herself and go meet the grieving Muharis. She leads them to the embalming room of the temple.

After about twenty minutes, the Muharis leave and Isu is back with the heroes. Tora tells her that the body found this morning had a piece of clothing from Tora's pants in its hand, and that it was placed there afterward by an unknown person.

Isu is shocked to hear that. “But... are you *sure* you really have nothing to do with that death?”, she asks, some suspicion in her eyes. The heroes deny.

They tell her of yesterday’s story where a man saw a mummy near the village at night.

Isu: “Oh! Anhktepote has risen again!”

They ask Isu if she can talk to the Muharis and explain them that the heroes have nothing to do with the deaths at night.

Isu “I could, but it won’t change much. Do not forget some Muharis want you sacrificed to appease the gods to end this cycle of murders ...”.

As Isu offered, they decide to spend the day in a room at the back of the temple. This way, they will not be seen from Muharis and will avoid possible angry gestures. Macrazbunare and Austizel copy spells from another’s spellbook.

During the afternoon, they see many Muhari come to meet Isu for counsels, or healing (a man with a bloody bruise on his arm).

At night, they go back to Al-Wawat’s house. Given the current situation, Al-Wawat propose that he could go to the market and get some food for the group, instead of the heroes themselves.

After an hour, he is back with food and news: “The Falkovnians were in town this morning! They came to buy supplies, ropes, shovels and food. They are trying to hire as many Muhari as they can. They promise 1 gold piece per week of work. They are working with Nekht and Adeben, two good for nothing young men of Muhar. These two are always found where trouble is. Nebta-Khufre was there too! She asked about the news in town, so she heard about you and also of my return to Muhar. It seems she asked a lot of questions about us, including your names ... She left warning Muharis to be careful of us. She said she know us and that we are not people to be trusted ...”

The heroes ask how many Falkovnians came to Muhar, and Al-Wawat answers “about 30”.

They eat and go to sleep.

At 11h30, during Exigu’s watch, he sees Dulcimae enter the house *through* a wall! She is a ghost. She smiles at Exigu, and wave at him a “follow me” gesture, and then exits through the front door.

Exigu wakes his friends, and they exit the house. Dulcimae is there, again another “follow me” gesture and she vanish... They see her appear about a hundred feet, gesturing the group to follow her.

From one place to another, the heroes follow her in the sleeping village, and see her entering the temple!



The heroes try to follow and open the temple door. These doors are usually opened all the time, but this time they are locked. Al-Wawat find this odd. Exigu the thief unlocks it.

They enter the grand hall of the gods, to see Dulcimae pass through Isu's private room's door! They find this door is locked too.

Tora knocks, but there is no answer.

Macrazbunare casts *knock* and the door opens. This is Isu's public room. Isu is not there. A curtain hangs in the doorway to her quarters. This room is richly decorated with gold and fine works of old art (total value in this room is in the thousands gold pieces). There are several chairs and divans and a few small tables scattered about the room. The walls are carved and painted with scenes of the pharaohs and gods. One wall depicts the story of Anhktepote.

An opening lead to Isu's private quarters. It is a lavishly decorated room. The wooden bed is covered with silk hangings. The posts around the bed are plated in silver and dyed with bright colors. Her bath is made of glazed brick dyed in wondrous colors. There is a tapestry on the wall showing the glory of Osiris.

But what catches their attention is a rolled carpet in a corner, revealing an opened trap door with a staircase going down! Something is fishy as Isu told them there was nothing *under* the temple...

Then they hear Bashat, Isu's cat, hissing loudly at the heroes. The cat runs downstairs and hisses.

Varadan runs down the staircase to see a horrible scene: Isu is standing before an altar. She isn't wearing her usual Osiris headdress. In its place is a sinister crown with a cobra and vulture prominently held upon the face. She is swaying back and forth with her head thrown back, eyes closed, chanting in a strange songlike tongue. Four other Muhari are with her, chanting too.

There is a hot, coppery smell in the temple. On the altar before Isu is the bloody body of a human. Varadan see that Isu's hands and face are bathed in blood! Also, a bright red bandanna is wound around her left wrist. He recognizes the bandanna: it belonged to Dulcimae! Isu has a staff with a black and gold cobra head in one hand.

A thin haze rises from an incense jar on the altar and coils around her.

More misty smoke is coming from three braziers in the room and Varadan see the floor is partly hidden because of this low lingering smoke.

The heroes also see the room is an old temple to Ra that have been desecrated: all the great sun god themed mosaics have been destroyed by heavy hits. The same with the floor, where the tiled floor is greatly damaged and uneven.



Isu comes out of her trance and sees Varadan. She quickly realizes this isn't a situation she can talk her way out of... She shrugs. She has an evil smile!

Two of the adepts cast *inflict light would* and try to hit Varadan without success.

Macrazbunare enters the room, preparing to cast a spell, but just before he can act, the cat Bashat turns into a cat swarm and moves to engulf the druid, who is nauseated and loses his spell...

Austizel casts *magic missile* at the cat swarm. The other two adepts cast *command* "sleep" at the monk, but he resists the compulsion.

Isu uses her staff and a swarm of scorpions appear where Varadan is standing!

She also yells "Set! Help me!"

Exigu moves and throws an arrow at one adept. Petrak attacks the cat swarm with *spiritual weapon*. Tora runs downstairs too.

Then they hear very loud footsteps and a large statue moves inside the room, from behind an entrance hidden by a heavy curtain. A 9 foot high jackal headed stone creature, with red flames where its eyes are! It attacks the monk, hitting hard.

Varadan exits the scorpion swarm and withdraws from the golem, moving toward Isu. The first two adepts move to protect Isu from Varadan.

Macrazbunare exits the cat swarm and casts *flaming sphere* at it. Austizel casts *haste*.

The adepts try again a *command* "sleep" at Varadan but both spells fail. The swarm of scorpions move to engulf Tora and Exigu.

Isu casts *silence* in the staircase, blocking the caster to use this space.

Exigu moves away from the swarm of scorpions. Petrak casts *divine power* on himself.

Tora gets hit by the scorpions swarm (and loses 3 dexterity). He attacks the statue of Set but makes very little damage! The golem ignores Tora and walks to attack Varadan again as he is the closest to Isu. The statue also tries a spell-like effect, but Varadan resists it.

Varadan was going to attack Isu when he hears something in his back, a clicking sound, and it attacks him (two claw-like attacks and a sting). The thing stays invisible. Varadan attacks Isu and hits her. She smiles at him.

The swarm of cats move upstairs to attack the caster but a hit from Macrazbunare's wolf destroys it: Bashat appears as only one cat only again, and it hisses at the wolf!



DM note: I gave Bashat the power to turn into a swarm of cats (40 hp), and when the swarm is destroyed, it is back to its normal form (17 hp). It won't last long as Macrazbunare's player hates the furry thing! The invisible thing attacking from behind is a variant on Mage's Faithful Hound (a scorpion guardian). It is part of the ritual Isu is performing.

Two adepts cast *command* "flee" at Varadan and one of them works!

Macrazbubare casts *flameblade* and attacks the cat. Austizels attacks it too.

One adept casts *obscuring mists* around Isu, shielding her from long range attacks.

Isu casts *inflict critical wounds* but misses Varadan. Exigu throws arrows at the adepts. Petrak moves closer and hit another with *spiritual weapon*. Tora also moves to get closer to Isu.

The golem attacks Varadan again, and then Varadan flees as ordered by the *command* spell.

The cat Bashat tumbles and runs away from his attackers. Al-Wawat close the door to Isu's private quarters to trap the cat inside.

The swarm of scorpions move to engulf Austizel, who gets nauseated.

Isu cast *flame strike* (-26) at Tora and Petrak. "I'm sorry, I told you I'm not very high level you know...", she says.

Petrak hit Isu with *spiritual weapon* (critical hit -24). Tora was going to attack when he feels two pincers hitting him from behind and a sting. He falls asleep!

The golem attacks Petrak. Varadan is back and he awakes Tora. Exigu kills the last adepts.

Bashat tries to hide under a bed but Macrazbunare's wolf finds him and kills it.

Macrazbunare casts a *lightning bolt* at Isu (-26) then seconds later, Austizel does the same (-32).

Isu moves away from Petrak, says "we'll meet again" at the priest, and her form melts into a thousand little brown scarabs that skitters away through the broken floor...

DM note: Isu has already decided to flee but just before she could do it, the two lightning bolts brought her to ... 2 hp!

Her mistress gone, the golem stops attacking and moves back to the room with the heavy curtain.

The battle has ended and after confirming that Isu has fled, the heroes heal themselves. They extinguish the braziers, so the smoke on the floor will eventually vanish.

Exigu finds a secret door under the stairs. They open it, half expecting to find Isu there (but she is not). It is a small 5'x5' room that appeared to have been unopened for decades. It is filled with ancient texts (112 scrolls) and small treasures: 20 pieces of jewelry and 17 small statuettes of the

gods. The value of the treasure (not the texts) is 15,000 gold pieces. They take the scrolls and leave the treasure, then they close this door.

Varadan looks through the curtain to find a very dark room, and he sees the golem's eyes through the darkness. They investigate this dark room. No light can penetrate the doorway more than five feet! They hesitate to enter in it. Macrazbunare *summon nature's ally*: a rat, and throws food inside the room. The rat enters the darkness, and they hear it munching. But after a moment, it is still munching in the dark when it should have finished...

They enter the room and the light's action is feeble but they can see the entire room. As they enter, a hot, dry breeze washes over their face. It raises gooseflesh despite its warmth. A fetid, sickly, sweet smell drifts out of the dark. They see the golem, seated. Many blood stains on the floor: the remnants of vile ceremonies and sacrifices stain the stone surfaces.

Then they see the rat is munching Dulcimae's corpse! Macrazbunare dismisses the rat.

They also find a small chest. They open it and find all Dulcimae's belongings, including her silver brooch. The chest is lined with lead... They realize they discussed their plans in front of Isu and she did hide the belongings from a *locate object* search.

In the chest, they also find old scrolls: it is instructions for using the rooftop observatory. It describes the cycle of many celestial objects, with notes on the Night of Thoth, a night where evil rituals are at their peak, the scroll notes. There are also many notes on the planet Aucturn.

They then move up to search Isu's quarters. They find ten scrolls hidden under a desk, and a tapestry of Osiris hiding a drawing on the wall: it is glorifying Set's murder of Osiris, the ultimate act of evil for the gods!

Two of the scrolls are magical: *Cure critical wound* x 2, and another has *flame arrow* and *ice storm*.

The other eight scrolls are written in Akiri by a woman. Varadan reads them, using the amulet.

I have discovered a mysterious scroll fragment secreted away in a compartment in the Tephu library. It was divine magic in origin. I first read its ancient text with great excitement, but when I saw what it contained, I was horrified! It was part of a foul ritual to raise one of the children of Anhktepot and enslave the monster. I tried to burn it, but the flames refused to touch the parchment. Osiris forgive me, but I cannot not destroy it. . . I did hide it.

Could it be that the gods want me to use this evil scroll? I have prayed to Osiris for weeks, but received no answer. Surely they would not have placed such temptation before me if I were not supposed to use it. No, I cannot think that. The scroll is the evil work of Set and must not be used by anyone!

. . . I cannot help myself. The thought of the scroll burns in my mind. I have tried everything to destroy it. Maybe it was not meant to be destroyed?

I see now that Osiris is a weak god. How could I have thought him to be worthy of my worship?

Set, the mysterious, not only killed Osiris, but was able to withstand the vengeance of Horus.

Surely Set is the most powerful of the deities. I now pledge my life and will to serving the dark secrets of my lord Set.

I have decided to use the scroll to enslave one of Anhktepot's children. They lie mummified and enshrined in the tomb of Anhktepot. Soon I shall be a master of the living dead! First I must complete the spell. Only the first part is recorded on the scroll. My lord Set shall guide my hand!

...I have done it! I walked through the tomb of the gods and have woken the living dead.

Senmet, priest of Anhktepot, serves Lord Set through me. Together we shall leave this cursed land to conquer all that lies beyond the Walls of Ra!

The heroes were thinking of leaving Muhar, because of Isu's hand on the city, but now they think they have many proofs to show about Isu being evil.

They go back to Al-Wawat's house, with Dulcimae's body hidden in a carpet. But the village is asleep and they do not see anybody.

July 20th, 9am

They awake and learn spells.

The heroes wonder if Isu will be back to the temple this morning, and if she could lead a mob against the heroes. The druid turns to a bird and flies over the village, and especially the temple: all activities are normal. There is no one around the temple.

They go at the library to meet Amenhemoft. Kemat-Tii is not there. He explains “she had to meet someone this morning, and will be here afterward”.

They tell him of Isu’s treachery, and explain she was corrupted and give him her journals. This surely explains why people vanished recently. They tell him to go see for himself the drawing behind the tapestry in her private room, as well as the bloody altar below, with a sacrificed Muhar man on it. They tell him everything but the fact that they saw Dulcimae as a ghost.

Amenhemoft is shocked of all this! He says he will talk to the other curators about it, and they will go to the temple later today to see everything. Then they will decide on how to bring this news to the public. He says it will make a large hole in the city’s structure, as she was the only priest around and she had such a large spiritual role in the city. He explains there is no form of government in the city, only a council of elders. They will have to be convinced.

The heroes think they will have to investigate Anhktepót’s tomb, as it seems to be where everything started. Amenhemoft agrees.

The scroll speaks of Senmet. Amenhemoft says:

Before Anhktepót's fall from grace, Senmet was already a corrupt priest. He rebelled against Anhktepót and sought to claim power over Har'Akir for himself. However, Anhktepót discovered Senmet's schemes and ordered his secret abduction, after which he was entombed alive.

At this moment, Kemat-Tii arrives at the library, she seems excited and quickly says “The Falkovnians found the top of a pyramid last night! They almost cleared an entrance. Are we going tonight? Should we sneak in and get in there before them? We have spies there who will make us avoid the patrols!”

Amenhemoft tells her what the heroes just revealed about Isu. She is shocked too.

DM note: I added as a joke a comment from Kemat-Tii “Oh, no, not Miss Perfect!”

Amenhemoft says “this Falkovnian thing is timely. It could be a good idea if you leave town for a few days while we talk to the population about Isu.”

So they leave Muhar at 1pm for the Falkovnian digging site. They are accompanied by Kemat-Tii “you will need an archeologist with you!” and Namuroth, a spy for Kemat-Tii and Amenhemoft that was hired by the Falkovnian to dig.

They notice Kemat-Tii and Namuroth are not affected by the afternoon heat. Kemat-Tii : “you’re not the only ones able to cast spells, you know!”

Along the way, Namuroth explains “yesterday, the pit reached a depth of approximately 100 feet. At that point, the workers discovered a pyramid’s tip jutting from the bottom! Double shift all night, they excavated a door. But today they probably didn’t work, as they digged double shift yesterday and are probably exhausted.”

“I propose we enter around midnight, when most of them will be asleep. There are patrols at night, but they carry torches, so they will be easy to avoid.”

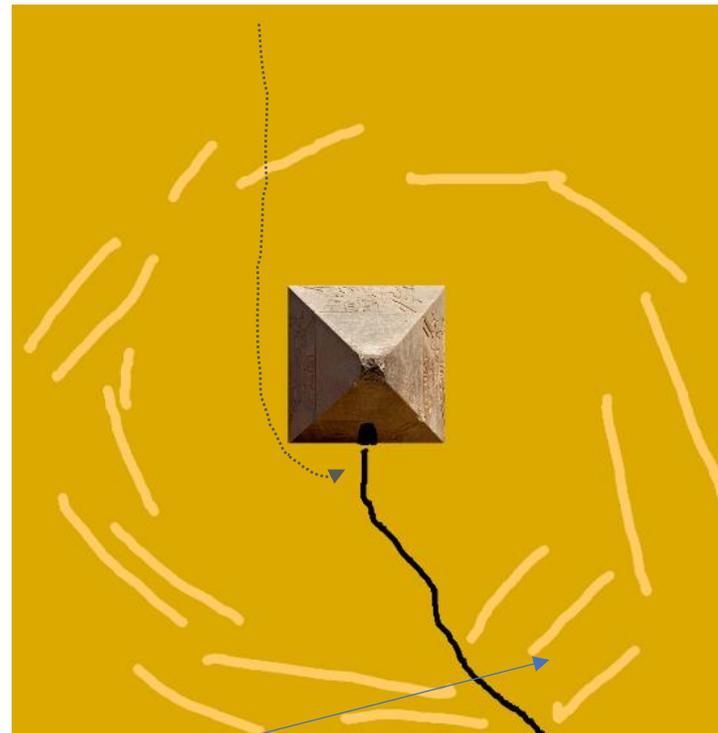
They pass the time and rest until it is time to go. At midnight, they start walking, with the moon’s light to help them see where they go. They arrive at the digging site, where a large hole was excavated. All is quiet, except one patrol which is far away on the other side of the hole. In the darkness, they see a large darker object at the bottom of the hole : the pyramid!

They descend the gentle slope toward the pyramid. They arrive from behind the pyramid and walk along its west side.

There, they see an entryway as a perfectly dark opening: a tunnel going down. It is 10' wide, 15' high.

They see sheets of rocks on the side “remnants of the door, I guess”, says Namuroth, and he gestures for the heroes to move to the door ...

... and Tora’s leg is trapped by a vicious mechanical claw! A bear trap! He tries to move but finds an anchored chain is keeping the trap from moving from this place.



Seconds after, they hear a whistle coming from the slope! The heroes see Falkovnians and Akiri rising from the sand! There are 30 crossbows (Falkovnians) and 30 bows (Akiri) pointed at them!

Some other Falkovnians open bull eyes lantern in front of them, half blinding the heroes with this sudden focused light.

Then they hear a voice, with a Falkovnian accent: “how we meet again, Herr Tora! What are you doing in this sinister place, and far from home?”

Tora recognizes the voice as Helmut’s! The Falkovnian they once met at the Karina enclave! (game session 62: Helmut considered Tora as a friend, but the heroes helped a vistani girl escape from a Falkovnian brothel).

They are still blinded by the bull eyes, but they see Helmut in the back, standing near a Akiri woman with a large purple hat.



“Nebta-Khufre”, whispers Kemat-Tii to the heroes.

Then Namuroth turns to Kemat Tii : “I’m sorry, I had no choice, this woman kidnapped my wife”. He falls to his knees “forgive me!” Kemat Tii is angry, and she plunges a dagger into the back of Namuroth, who falls dead. “Traitor”, she says a few times, in common and in Akiri.

The Falkovnians laugh, and Helmut says “oh well, we won’t have to pay this one!”

Nebta-Khufre: “calm down, young girl! Or I order the archers and crossbowmen to empty their quivers on you. Believe me, they are all excellent and they won’t miss you. They have orders to shoot the same person, starting with the one in the bear trap, so they will probably get one kill every volley of arrows and crossbow... If you don't want to turn into pin cushions, one after the other, you're going to stay calm. Understood?”

The heroes do not answer. The only thing breaking the silence is Helmut’ cruel laughter.

NK – “We have a little problem, and you are going to help us solve it. You owe that to your old friend Helmut, I think!”

“We opened the door to the Ahn Selota pyramid this morning. We sent Akiri inside but... they didn't come back. Three groups. No surprise, sometimes the ancients did put traps in their graves...”

“Helmut tells me that you are an interesting sum of diverse skills, *adventurers*. So you will enter the pyramid and find the Pact Stone, then give it to me and you leave with your lives. Do you know the legend of the Pact Stone? Otherwise ask Kemat-Tii, she will tell you all about it. The guards posted at the exit will bring you to me when you exit.”

DM note: To be fair, most players expected this Indiana-Jonesesque moment. The presence of Helmut was a real surprise however. (And before Macrazbunare asks, Namuroth brough the heroes downwind, so his wolf could not smell the persons hiding in the sand!)

The heroes agree to this proposition. Then an akiri man descend the slope toward the heroes, carrying a 4-foot metallic pole. They recognize the man as Nekht, one of the local Muhar good for nothing people. He puts the pole in the bear trap, turn it, and it frees Tora. Exigu notices the end of the pole is star shaped, so it would have been difficult to open the trap with a regular pole. A nasty Falkovnian war device.

Macrazbunare considers for a moment to force Nekht to go inside with them “we could need someone to walk in front of us”, but he doesn’t do it.

Kemat-Tii: "Nekht! You again, causing trouble. Working against your people. Why?"

Nekht swears obscenities at Kemat-Tii, then says "With what these guys pay, I'll be rich and I will escape this sand hole. You will stay here your whole life, I won't".