

Touch of Death



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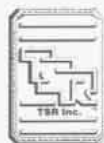
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Introduction



Welcome again to Ravenloft, the demiplane of dread. Far off in the burning wasteland of Har'Akir an ancient evil is awakening. Another of the Hex Signs of Hyskosa is unfolding to wrap your players inside its dry, dusty shroud.

This adventure is for 4 to 6 players of 3rd to 5th level. At least one priest able to turn undead is necessary for the party. Magical weap-

ons are not necessary, but are recommended. The party must have some capacity to *cure disease*. If the priest or cleric of the party cannot cast the spell, have them find a scroll with three *cure disease* spells on it.

Be sure to read this entire module before starting play. After all, the best game masters are prepared game masters. Warn the players in advance that this is an adventure for thinkers—not hackers and slashers. Sometimes running is the best answer for the situation presented. The gamemaster is given many tools which can kill party members if they are not willing to flee in the face of overwhelming danger.

At several points in this adventure the PCs are required to make fear or horror checks. Any player who has his character act in a frightened or horrified manner does not need to make the check. Give that player double the normal amount of experience points for the encounter.

This adventure takes place in the domain of Har'Akir (see *Chapter XII: Islands of Terror* in the RAVENLOFT™ boxed set). The theme and mood are Egyptian in style. If you have the AD&D® 2nd Edition *Legends & Lore* book, read the "Egyptian Mythology" chapter for background material. Some of the details presented here differ from that book. For example, there are deities in this adventure not mentioned in *Legends & Lore*.

Story Background

Many years ago, Isu Rehkotep, a priestess in the service of Osiris, discovered an ancient scroll describing a ceremony used to control one of the children of Anhktepot, a greater mummy. Osiris was not an evil god and Isu was not an evil woman. After reading this scroll Isu attempted to burn it, but the parchment refused to ignite. Unable to destroy the scroll, she returned it to its secret hiding place.

The knowledge of the scroll and the power it conferred ate at Isu's mind for years. She began to read and study the works of darker gods. Slowly, she convinced herself that it was her right to wield such terrible power.

Thirteen years later, Isu unearthed the scroll again. Now a worshipper of the evil god Set, she set about to enslave a greater mummy. Entering the Valley of the Dead, Isu braved the tomb of Anhktepot. There she found one of his so-called children—a mummified priest from a time long past.

The scroll crumbled to dust as she performed the soul ceremony inscribed upon it. Senmet, child of Anhktepot, rose to walk the land of Har'Akir at Isu's bidding. In his ancient sarcophagus Anhktepot stirred, but did not awaken.

Unfortunately for Isu, Senmet is not enslaved to her will like a golem. He is like a shackled beast who knows it can break its chains at any time. Though Isu is unaware of it, she can only control Senmet for only a few minutes at a time.

Senmet desires to usurp Anhktepot's power and rule. To accomplish this goal, he must increase his power a hundred fold. This must be done slowly and delicately without awakening the ancient lord and incurring his terrible wrath. Senmet has channeled all of his spell casting power toward this effort. Because of this, he cannot cast spells for some time. Through this massive effort of will, Senmet has taken the power to open and close the fiery borders of Har'Akir from Anhktepot. Senmet has also been silently calling people into Har'Akir. When they walk the mists leading to Ravenloft, they end up in Har'Akir. Newcomers (the people Senmet has drawn into Har'Akir) to Mudar are made into desert zombies if they don't show a willingness to adopt the religion and blend into the population. Senmet can now create undead of his own.

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The last stage of Senmet's plot requires that the population of Mudar worship him. This must be done carefully so as not to draw the attention of Anhktepot. With a small army of undead, and a majority of the people of Mudar worshipping him, Senmet hopes to have the power to depose Anhktepot as lord of Har'Akir. As high priestess of the cult of Anhktepot, Isu is critical to Senmet's plan to divert the worship of the villagers.

The Vistani and PCs are newcomers to Har'Akir. They clearly have no chance to blend into the society of Mudar and are unlikely to adopt its religion. Therefore, they must be eliminated, but subtly, so that Anhktepot is not aroused.

Starting the Adventure

The PCs may be inside or outside of Ravenloft at the beginning of the adventure. Below are the ways to get the PCs into the story depending on where they are in your campaign.

Inside Ravenloft

Regardless of what Ravenloft domain the PCs start in, they run into a Vistani band. The gypsies are on the side of the road, their wagon tipped over, one wheel broken. Five Vistani men are staring at the wagon. It is doubtful that they can lift it alone.

If the PCs offer to help, read the following aloud:

The men stare at you in stony silence. Their hostile gazes make a sharp contrast to their festive clothes. A beautiful young girl appears from behind the wagon. Her long, dark hair is captured in a red silk bandanna. Garish jewelry adorns her neck and fingers.

"My name is Dulcimae," she says. "We would be grateful for your help."

Her face is innocent and trusting. One of the men spits, mutters, and turns away. Sparing him a quick frightened glance, she looks back at you and says, "Please! Don't mind my brothers. They distrust outsiders and worry that you would try to steal me from them. We cannot lift this wagon by ourselves. I will reward you fairly for your help."

"You have no right to promise them anything

of ours!" hisses one of the men.

"I have the right since mother died. I lead this family now. I will grant them a boon if they help us," Dulcimae says.

Turning back to you she continues, "Will you help lift our wagon?"

If the PCs are going to pass by and not offer assistance:

A beautiful young girl walks out from behind the wagon.

"Dulcimae! Get out of sight," says one of the men sharply.

"No! They can help us. Would you have us stranded here until brigands come by?" she asks.

"Please, kind sirs, help us right our wagon. We can reward you fairly," she pleads. Her face is innocent and trusting. Glancing desperately at the men she is with she rushes on, "Don't mind my brothers. They distrust outsiders and worry that you would try to steal me from them. As you can see, we cannot lift this wagon by ourselves."

"You have no right to promise them anything of ours!" hisses one of the men.

"I have the right since mother died. I lead this family now. I will grant them a boon if they will help us," Dulcimae says.

Turning toward you she continues, "Will you help us lift our wagon?"

It is assumed that the PCs help Dulcimae. Her promise to help the PCs is sincere. Her brothers, (Sergei, Marius, Antonio, Enrico, and Dominic) are very distrusting and will continue to be so even after the PCs help them. The wagon can be righted easily with the help of the PCs. Once the wagon is repaired, Dulcimae offers to lead the PCs out of Ravenloft. She tells them that a few gifted Vistani are able to leave the living land of dread for the sunny realms of other worlds. Her mother, Madame Bodoni, had the gift. The old woman died a few weeks ago. Among the Vistani, leadership is frequently the right of the women because they are the ones who usually have the power of second sight and the ability to travel the mists. A Vistani's ability to control his destination when travelling the mists is never guaranteed.

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Dulcimae continues to treat the PCs kindly while her brothers will give them the cold shoulder. The PCs are told to follow close to the wagon as the Vistani travel to the edge of the domain where the following occurs:

The mists loom ahead of you. The wagon you are following lurches from side to side, bells and trinkets jangling softly the noise oddly muted by the gathering mists. Suddenly, you are surrounded by the dank, swirling fog. The mist is so thick you can barely see the wagon anymore.

As you wander through the mists, your sense of direction is lost. All you see and feel is the dank miasma surrounding you. Faintly, you can still hear the sound of the gypsies' wagon ahead of you. After a few minutes, you notice the air is warming up. Then it is hot. The mists are burning off from the heat. The dull red orb of the sun can be seen overhead through the evaporating fog.

As the last tendrils of the mists blow away in the hot, dry breeze, you see sand under your feet. The heat is suffocating and you find it difficult to breathe. A quick glance around reveals trackless desert on three sides and a barren cliff to your right. Ahead is a small village surrounding a few palm trees. The road leads toward it.

Dulcimae's brothers are shouting at each other and at Dulcimae in a strange tongue. They are clearly upset, as is she, by this strange new land.

Dulcimae says that she has the power to tell men's fortunes and the future. She wants to do this for the PCs as part of their reward for helping her. Dulcimae says she must cast the fortunes when the stars are out for the best results. Therefore, the PCs must follow along until nightfall if they want their fortunes read. Whatever direction the PCs are heading turns out to be the direction the Vistani are travelling.

A small desert village can be seen in the distance. It seems to shimmer in the heat as if under water. A wave of heat passes over you as the image of the village becomes solid and real. The desert looks no different, except for a line of cliffs on your right. You don't recall those being there a moment ago. The road before you leads directly into the village.

Dulcimae's brothers are shouting at each other and at Dulcimae in a strange tongue. They are clearly upset, as is she, by these cliffs that have appeared out of nowhere.

First Reactions

The PCs might try to return to where they came from. The borders of Har'Akir are an impenetrable wall of heat preventing anybody from venturing too far into the desert. The Vistani are more than willing to try and help the PCs through the heat, but it is of no avail.

The PCs may accuse Dulcimae of duplicity. She'll tearfully defend herself claiming this was not where she tried to take them. Her brothers' angry reaction would tend to support this. They are furious with Dulcimae. They accuse her of having false sight and of being a mixed breed. These accusations devastate the poor girl.

Once these first reactions are out of the way, there is only one course of action. The PCs must go to the village. Dulcimae and her brothers go there, regardless of the PCs' actions.

Outside of Ravenloft

The PCs must be in a desert area or be led near one. How you accomplished this will depend on the current status of your campaign.

In the early morning far from civilization, the PCs encounter a gypsy wagon tipped over with one wheel broken. It is Dulcimae and her brothers as described above. Use the above boxed text for the same situations.

Har'Akir



A

map of Har'Akir can be found in the RAVENLOFT™ boxed set. The domain is a very simple place. There are two roads, a village with a spring, a canyon riddled cliff, and a lot of sun and sand.

Desert Survival

It is likely that the PCs are not used to survival in the desert. Any PC wearing armor in the sun is a candidate for heat stroke. If the PC is wearing metal armor, he must make a constitution check every turn (10 rounds). PCs wearing leather armor don't start checking until a half hour has elapsed. Clothing other than the white robes of the natives

requires a constitution check every turn (10 minutes) after an hour in the sun. If the PCs remain in the sun after the first check, each successive check is at a -1 penalty.

Wearing native garb forestalls the check until after two hours in the sun. A failed check means that the PC faints. The PC cannot be revived except by cooling his body. It takes a full night's sleep to shake off the effects of heat stroke.

As you might guess, the population of Har'Akir stays indoors during most of the daylight hours. In fact, most of the natives sleep from mid-morning until mid-afternoon. They are awake until midnight then sleep again from midnight until dawn.

PCs must have water each day they are in Har'Akir. The dry air and extreme heat rob humans of moisture very quickly. After six hours without water, the PC is dehydrated and makes all saving throws at -2. This penalty becomes -4 after 12 hours and the PC can only move at half speed. His Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution are halved (rounded up). After 24 hours, the PC can't move and saves at -6. All physical attributes drop to 3. After 48 hours without water, the PC falls into a coma and must make a saving throw vs. death each turn.

There is very little to eat in Har'Akir. The trees provide some dates and some of the residents tend small gardens near the spring. However, the land provides for its own. The water of the spring in Mudar can sustain a man without food for an indefinite period

of time. Most of the inhabitants still eat small meals once a day or so simply because they enjoy doing so.

Desert Encounters

The animals of the desert are not very numerous. However, they tend to congregate around any form of food they can find. Anytime the PCs venture out into the desert, roll for a random encounter. If they stay out more than a few hours, roll once for every eight hour period (morning, afternoon, etc.). It is assumed that the PCs have blundered into a situation where the creature feels it must defend itself.

2d10 Encounter

2	Sandling (1)
3	Spotted lion (2d4)
4	Newcomers (1d6)
5	Jackalweres (1d4)
6	Ant lion, giant (1)
7	Snake, spitting (1d4)
8	Desert zombies (1d4)
9	Scorpions, large (1d6)
10	Half buried dead villager (1)
11	Jackals (1d6)
12-20	No Encounter

Newcomers are people who have just entered Har'Akir. They are the people Senmet has "called" into Har'Akir to be his worshippers. The odds are that they are dressed inappropriately for the climate and are probably in need of water. They are usually from other strange lands in Ravenloft which the PCs haven't visited. Their dress and manner may be from any of the different lands listed in the RAVENLOFT™ boxed set. They will not attack the PCs, but will ask for help. They are incapable or unwilling to help the PCs.

Entering Mudar

To the side of the road, still far from the village, one of the PCs notices a brown weathered hand sticking out of the sand. If the PCs investigate, they'll unearth a human body. All that remains of the body is brown, shrivelled flesh clinging tightly to the skeleton—as though every drop of water had been drained from it.