

The Adventures of  
**Uncle Dungeoning Ma'att**

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# **City of the Dead**

Being dead twice in as many hours can have an affect on a person. As I said before, nephew, the first experience had a profound impact on me, one which I wish to process further before commenting on.

My second experience, which I had as I was pulled down under the mountain, bouncing along the caves with the rushing waters, was far more prosaic. I dreamt, as a floated through the darkness, that I was being carried along by many hands. Then, for a moment, I was flying, to be caught by a beautiful mermaid. She kissed me deeply, and I could feel the fire of her kiss spreading down into my chest.

Again, one need not stretch one's imagination too far to discern the imagery my mind placed on the events my body was undoubtedly going through. Still, it was a beautiful dream.

It's a shame then that the first face I saw upon my return to the land of the living was that of Baleban.

"He's fine!" Baleban said, following it with that braying laugh of his.

Baleban stood and I could see the monk standing a short distance away, hands tucked into his sleeves.

"Thank you, brother," I said.

"Oh," he replied, "don't thank me. Baleban here has an amazing trick where he forces his own breath -"

"Thank you, brother," I repeated, getting to my feet.

I took a look around, We were in a cave of some sort, on the edge of a tiled, rectangular pool which stretched off in the darkness. Pillars lined the pool and a waterfall fell from the cave wall at one end. The water had a faint blue glow to it that illuminated the immediate area.

Off in the distance, there was a tall structure, indefinitely formed and lit by a similar hazy blue glow. For some reason it

reminded me of the buried city where I'd found the necklace.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"A necropolis," said Ferguson, appearing in the darkness. As my eyes adjusted to see him, I noticed that the ground around him was covered in rough wooden coffins. "I'm going to have a look up ahead. You three stay here."

I gladly complied, sitting myself down on the tiles with a heavy thump. I pulled off one of my boots and upended it, amused at the amount of water that poured out and hoping I wasn't offending some petty minor god by polluting their reflecting pool with my foot water.

"Alphege," the monk said, taking a seat beside me.

"Ma'att Goelz Fraggile," I said, offering him my hand. "Call me Ma'att."

"Pleasure," Brother Alphege said. "So tell me Ma'att, what brings you out adventuring? You don't seem like the kind of person normally found in a place like this or Molotok. You must be a powerful mage."

"I'm not a mage," I said.

"He's still low level," Baleban said. "But he's got a pretty good hearth daily."

"Interesting," Brother Alphege said. "I would expect a low level mage to travel with a larger party, or with more tanks."

"We're not a party," I said. "And I'm no mage."

"Modesty," Brother Alphege said.

"No, really," I replied. "I'm a scientist. I've been visiting dungeons to prove a theory of mine."

"Really?" Brother Alphege said, interested. "What kind of theory?"

I thought for a moment. I realized suddenly that, aside from my letters to you, nephew,

and my disastrous presentation to the Academy, I have not put my theory into a definitive form for another person.

"Tell me something, Brother Alphege," I begin, "what do you think dungeons are?"

"Is this an interview for joining the party?"

"Where do they come from?" I asked. "Do you think dungeons are magically created for the sole purpose of providing adventurers with employment, or do you believe they are structures with more prosaic origins?"

"If there's a steady paycheck in it, I'll believe anything."

I thought about that for a moment, then dismissed it.

"What if dungeons didn't just pop up, fully formed, as if built with a couple rolls of cosmic dice?"

"You think they were built by people?"

"Yes!" I said. "Take this place, for example. If this place appeared randomly there wouldn't be nearly as much symbolism and purpose to the design. Like this pool. It's shallow, so it was meant to be walked on; I'd wager it was some sort of death ritual. Mourners or supplicants would walk through this metaphorical water into this place of the dead. The columns here suggest places where tribute would be placed to appease the spirits of the dead."

"Ah!" Alphege said. "Treasure. That I get, we should start looting right away. I'll be happy to accept whatever loot cut Baleban's been getting."

"We haven't discussed party percentages," Baleban said.

"Ah!" Alphege said, nodding. "An equitable split across the board then."

"No no, we're not a party," I said.

"We only have one fighter and he's a multi-classed rogue," Baleban said with a nod, as

if agreeing with me.

"Shame Dozerman's dead," Brother Alphege said, nodding to himself. "My last party sucked but Dozerman was a tank and a half."

"So how long've you been on the road?" Baleban asked, sitting down next to us.

"Not long," Alphege said. "This is only my second party. Before that I had a post in a church in a border town."

"What made you leave?"

"A dragon moved into the mountains nearby and took offense to our church's presence in the town. Swooped in one night and landed right on the narthex. Crushed it flat."

"What did you do?"

"What do you think I did? I called up a half dozen paladins to kick its ass. Nobody steps on a church in my town."

"It'll be nice to have a healer in the party," Baleban said.

"Gear up," Ferguson said walking out of the darkness. His arms were full of weapons and armor which he dropped down on the ground next to us.

"There's some sort of ziggurat up ahead," Ferguson added. "I think our exit is there. These came from a couple mausoleums at the end of the pool."

I picked up a sword from the pile and waved it in the air. Ferguson dropped a heavy leather vest over my head and tied straps on the side. It was far too heavy to be comfortable, but there were metal rings embedded in the leather and I felt that wearing it was safer than not wearing it.

Baleban was dressed in similar gear but added a fur cap. Brother Alphege alone refused the gear.

"It's dark," I said.

"Not for long," Ferguson replied.

And he was right. The further we got from the glow of the water, the brighter the glow ahead of us got. We crossed a marble platform and ascended a small set of deep stairs. At the top, we found another marble platform on opposite sides of which were eight mausoleums, four on each side. Each of them were between eight and ten nongs high, and their fronts were carved in a way that reminded me of nothing more than a small house, complete with front door and windows.

Across the way was a building built on multiple levels of rectangles in a pyramid shape. A narrow set of stairs crept up its face and, oddly, two more identical sets of stairs came back down to the left and right.

Ferguson led us up the stairs. We found a small landing at the top flanked by two statues. Each was vaguely canine, but far larger and more fierce than any dog I've ever seen before. Between the statues was a short step up to a landing dominated by a larger, but plainer, mausoleum.

There were three skeletons, dressed in adventuring gear, lying around the landing.

We stepped up carefully. While I cautiously glanced over the edge at the cave below, the others began to explore the landing.

"There's an inscription," I heard Baleban say. "I can't read it."

Alphege approached. The inscription was a single line above the door of the mausoleum. The monk nodded thoughtfully while he read it.

"I am the Destructor. I am the Architect."

"That's it?" Baleban asked.

"I think so, but my Gozerian is a little rusty."

"Are you sure about that translation?" I asked.

"I am the Destructor. I am the Architect," Alphege repeated. "Does that mean

something to you?"

"It does," I said. "And we don't want to be here longer than necessary."

I wouldn't expect adventurers to know of Ryt'man's army as the lessons gathered from the story are mostly academic. The most feared general of his age, Ryt'man led his army to victory after victory. Eventually, his hubris led him to usurp the throne of his own king, installing himself instead. A coalition of leaders from the surrounding nations, fearful their own militaries would take inspiration, formed a joint army of such size that even Ryt'man's genius couldn't deal with the overwhelming odds. Fearing a loss, he turned where many before him had turned - to magic.

In a letter to the generals of the opposing army, Ryt'man said, "I have been the destructor of armies, now I will be the architect of the new warrior."

He chose two thousand of his best warriors and had them undergo a magic ritual that bound their souls to their bodies, making them immortal. It worked, and Ryt'man and his lieutenants followed suit. But, although they were successful in the initial stages of the campaign, sending entire legions into retreat by their very approach, the cost was too high. For although they couldn't be killed, they still aged and took injury. Soon they became cadaverous, bloody monsters, and their minds followed suit. Ryt'man and his men degraded into a feral, feral beast-like pack. The list of their atrocities grew.

Unable to defeat him physically, the other nations turned to their own magics. They cast spells that mimicked physical death and Ryt'man and his army found themselves souls trapped in dead bodies.

Their remaining supporters took those bodies and buried them in a secret location to await the day the binding magics wore off.

"Did you just make all of that up?" Baleban

asked.

“No,” I said.

“Well,” Alphege said, “as long as we don’t disturb them we should be fine.”

Both Baleban and I looked down at the gear we were carrying.

“Too late,” Ferguson said. He was leaning over the edge of the landing, looking down the stairs. “There’s something down there.”

“Is it just a mist or does it have arms and legs?” Baleban asked.

“We have to find the exit,” Ferguson said, turning on his heels and charging the mausoleum.

He attacked the stone door with fervor. Alphege and I came over to help and soon we had the door open wide enough to climb through. Ferguson went inside and I stuck my head in. The room was empty except for a sarcophagus. No stairs or door.

“It has to be here!” Ferguson said, angrily. He kicked at the sarcophagus until the lid shifted. He leaned in to push against it, but it suddenly flew up in the air and shattered against the ceiling.

A skeleton in a crown sat up. After a brief moment, it turned its head toward Ferguson. The ranger turned and ran through the door.

I turned as well and found myself almost bumping into another desiccated corpse as it crested the landing. It raised its hand toward Baleban and muttered a spell in a dry voice that reminded me of creaking branches. Baleban’s sword flew from his hand and streaked toward me. I fell backwards against the wall of the mausoleum and the sword missed me by a mere whisper, thudding into the corpse’s hand.

Another corpse was coming up the stairs. I scrambled to my feet and ran toward the other end of the landing.

When I turned to look, the first corpse was moving on Brother Alphege, sword held up. I saw that the second corpse was glaring at me as it raised its hand. The sword in my hand began to tug toward it.

Thinking quickly, I pivoted sideways so that the first corpse was between myself and the second. I fought the sword as long as I could (which wasn’t long, nephew), then let go. The weapon rocketed from my hand as if fired from a giant bow.

The first skeleton raised its sword above its head to strike Alphege, but my sword embedded itself, to the hilt, in its chest. It was knocked backwards and collided with the first, both tumbling down the stairs.

Ferguson stumbled into view with a leap. The skeleton from the mausoleum lumbered after him.

“Get us out of here!” Baleban yelled.

Behind him, there were other skeletons helping the first two to their feet. I reached in my shirt and pulled out the necklace.

And we were standing in the reflecting pool. Around us, the ancient coffins were creaking and cracking as their occupants fought for freedom or, in many cases, rose to take it.

The others looked at me in confusion. I could only shrug. The necklace didn’t function as we supposed it would and we were back at the same place we started.

On all sides they began to shuffle toward us, taking up positions along the tiled edge of the reflecting pool.

But they didn’t come in. They only stood, desiccated flesh-covered skulls cocked sideways as if watching us. In the distance, the blue glow around the ziggurat shimmered. The others were making their way down the stairs toward us.

And then it hit me. They weren’t entering the pool *because they couldn’t*.

"Of course!" I said. "It's the pool!"

"We know that," Baleban said.

"No, the pool! It's the pool!" I repeated.

"Listen, it wouldn't do them any good to have supplicants come in to leave tribute if they were getting eaten every time, they'd run out of supplicants!"

"OK, so we're safe in the water," Ferguson said.

"As long as we don't leave it," Alphege added.

"That's right!" I said, grinning. The others stared back at me blankly.

"Don't you see?" I asked. "The water is how the supplicants safely bring in tribute."

They weren't following.

"And if the water is where the supplicants come in -" I prompted.

"Then the water -" Alphege began.

"Is the entrance," Ferguson finished.

As a group, we turned toward the waterfall and then back toward the ziggurat. The Ryt'man skeleton and his lieutenants were standing on the first raised area, watching us. Ferguson was the first through the waterfall.

There was a tunnel there, just as we'd hoped. I'd always imagined walking through a waterfall, the way heroes do in stories, would be like walking through a wet curtain - a brief moment of water and then through to the other side. It was nothing like that. First, the "curtain" was actually quite deep and I found myself wishing I'd taken a fuller breath before entering. Second, there was nothing to keep the water from flowing in along the roof of the tunnel on the other side and raining down, which it did in great quantities. The end result was less walking through a curtain and more leaving an upright river and walking into a heavy rain.

Once we were far enough in that the drip fell to a light drizzle, we took a moment to wring out our wet clothes. For the second time, I found myself upending my boots, this time was less amusing.

The tunnel was slick with water for quite some distance, and the air heavy for quite a bit more. It was many hours later that we arrived at sunlight.

We were in the bottom of a valley between two craggy mountains. Rocky hills surrounded us.

"You stashed our gear?" Ferguson asked.

"Yes!" I said, proud of myself.

"Great, where?"

"On the cliff side above the prison camp," Baleban said.

"Great," Ferguson again, "and which direction is that?"

# Necropolis

## What is it and why was it built?

A necropolis is simply a large, ornate cemetery. It is different from a graveyard in that the bodies are stored above ground in tombs and mausoleums, and necropolei are usually situated away from inhabited areas.

Traditionally, a necropolis would be built over time as families honored their notable dead. However, it was not uncommon for it to be built in honor of a notable family or even a well-loved ruler, often with relatives and servants buried along with them.

## What are some real world inspirations?

In the real world, communal necropolei were built by the Etruscans and Romans, housing the remains of many families. The Glasgow Necropolis is not a true necropolis as the majority of burials are underground, however it and others like it, such as the cemeteries of New Orleans, are considered necropolei because of their collection of above ground monuments and elaborate place stones.

In China, the tomb of the emperor Qin Shi Huang is surrounded by a massive necropolis which not only includes a terra cotta replica of his personal army (including several thousand unique figures) but also a massive palace replica which includes rivers and lakes made of mercury.

The largest known necropolis is situated on the Giza Plateau. It houses three pyramid complexes, each with attendant temples, family tombs and monuments in addition to the pyramid tombs. The necropolis area also houses two smaller cemeteries for lesser nobles, the temple of the Sphinx, stone quarries for construction, and the remains of an entire village of workers.

## What can be found there?

**Streets** - The key feature of a necropolis is that the tombs and mausoleums are arranged in a city-like layout, with streets running between plots.

**Adornment** - Tombs are usually highly ornate. The necropolei built by the Etruscans were decorated to resemble houses, including furniture and the deceased's possessions.

**Treasure** - Signifiers of a person's wealth and power would be on display around their tomb.

**Memorials and Statuary** - A monument may describe some heroic deed or notable event in the life of the resident. In a communal necropolis, monuments would be erected to declare the status of the family. Other monuments were built to remember those struck down by illness, to honor fallen soldiers, or even as a way to preserve the histories of the local people and countryside.

Statues were often included as parts of monuments, usually as literal representations of the tomb's occupant. Other designs represented the deceased's hobbies or other beloved items, such as a pet or a favorite location.

**Places of worship** - a frequent inclusion in necropolei were areas for the living to pray and make offerings. Temples, chapels, stone meditation benches, and reflecting pools were commonly included for this purpose.

**The dead** - In addition to the obvious corpses of the notable residents, a necropolis may also include family members or trusted military. In underground necropolei, open-air coffins might be included for subjects and servants.

