

RAPPAN ATHUK

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GAMES



NECROMANCER
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Tribute

When I first started writing this material, it was 1977. Giants of the industry were alive and well, and the roleplaying game industry was a fast-growing and new idea. Names like Gygax, Arneson, Bledsaw and Barker became my boyhood heroes, almost mythical beings that somehow were able to capture the hearts and minds of young people (mostly male) all over the world. Little did I know that 35 years later, I would be penning this work for thousands to read. This book is dedicated to four of those giants, all of whom have (sadly) passed to the next dimension since I last published my own work.

Over the years, it was my pleasure and privilege to get to know and even work with those heroes of my childhood. While I never met Professor Barker, he was kind enough to answer my emails and questions about the *Empire of the Petal Throne* setting. His faithful are just that, faithful. I have never seen a more dedicated and loyal pack of fans than the Tekumel crowd. Nice folks too. People should remember that this gentleman had created an entire alternate universe (and a complete language!) long before any notion of tabletop roleplaying games had been invented. The original box set (which sold for \$25 in 1975, or \$106.38 today!) is the standard of quality that my company tries to replicate today. M.A.R Barker was what I term the “cultural” creator of this game, he allowed us to see an alternate race and culture as ourselves.

Dave Arneson and I met on several occasions. Mostly at Gencon and mostly with other folks we both knew. People will, I hope, realize that he was the rules behind all this madness, and without his insight, no one would have turned tabletop miniature battle rules into a roleplaying game. His *Blackmoor* setting was the “first fantasy campaign”, and his Temple of the Frog inspired well, me. Dave turned mass battle rules into man on man, and later man on monster combat, then personalized the idea so that each player was playing a character with a name and the ability to advance in power (from man at arms to hero and later superhero), creating a continuous role for each player. This was the foundation of the games we all play, and have played for the last 40 or so years. Dave was what I term the “method” creator of the game, he allowed us to turn imagination into a game that we all could play, using a set of mutually agreed mechanics.

Bob Bledsaw was a visionary. Bob took what all his contemporaries were doing, and made it big. He defined “Go big or go home”. No other company in the history of the industry produced so much material in so short a timeframe. Darn useful stuff too. When many had taken bits of game worlds and put them into play, Bob created an entire world and detailed every 5 mile hexagon of it. When TSR was producing 5-7 products a year, Bob was producing 30. When others wrote a paragraph or two about a city, Bob created a city and detailed every shop in it, creating enough backstory to run entire game sessions out of a random trip to the blacksmith to get a shield. Bob made cities real, rather than some place that players “went to discuss the next dungeon delve or get Joe Platemail III raised from the dead”.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Bob in 2002. In my writing career, the work of which I am most proud of is still the boxed set known as *Wilderlands of High Fantasy* that Clark Peterson and I produced in 2005. It took Bob’s grand world and expanded the level of detail of his prior work from the later 1970’s, using his same game maps and content.

The team that created this detail was vast, and I still contend that one could run a continuous game for 9 centuries using nothing but this set. Bob reviewed and approved each section in turn. I spent many hours on the phone with him, listening in quiet fascination while he told me about the *Holy Cities of the Desert Lands*, and how his game group had spent hundreds of hours dealing with the intrigue and factions of those cities, of the radiation filled dungeons below them, and many, many other stories. This guy had an imagination the likes of which I have never before or since encountered. Bob was what I call the “creator of worlds”, who made us see a completely alternate universe and imagine it was our own. I still run my game (35 years later) in this setting.

So now we have discussed culture, mechanics and the world. What is left is adventure.

One time at Gencon (I think in 1999), I was out back smoking a cigarette, when a gentleman approached me for a light. We sat there and smoked several, having perhaps a 15 minute conversation about the advent of D&D 3.0 and what effect it was going to have on the industry. After I left, another stranger said to me, “Oh my God. That is Gary Gygax”. I had no idea. What a nice guy he was too.

Two years later, I got to know Gary through his relationship with Steve Chenault at Troll Lord Games (Steve was and is a regular drinking buddy of mine at conventions). We had just obtained the rights to republish *Necropolis* from Wizards of the Coast and I asked for an introduction to see if we could get Gary’s input and assistance on making the book right. Gary immediately agreed, and really helped us do this right. He did not even ask to be paid (we paid him anyway). The book was (and is) nothing short of spectacular, even if it is (now) nearly impossible to find a copy.

Gary had great stories. His stories were the foundation of what I call adventure. He regaled me with tales of how as a teen he and his friends used to explore an old abandoned insane asylum near Lake Geneva (creepy place—think “House on Haunted Hill”). Many think that Moria defined dungeons. I bet that while it inspired them, Gary’s exploits into the dark and creepy asylum may have had something to do with it.

Where Bob was the world guy, Gary was the dungeon guy. No one I have ever read has ever created the fiendish traps (you just die), nasty monsters and tricks that Gary did. Anyone who has ever read *Tomb of Horrors* knows Gygax. The sleep gas and juggernaut, the golden crown and scepter, the sphere of annihilation in the demon’s mouth...wow. Dungeons didn’t do this. Gary was not afraid to kill characters. Heck, the *Village of Hommlet* was super deadly. His stories of Castle Greyhawk were inspired. The guy knew how to write an adventure. *Necropolis* was in my humble opinion, his crowning achievement. It took *Hommlet* and added *Tomb of Horrors*. His stuff is just epic. Anyone who finished a Gygax module felt a certain pride in the accomplishment. Certainly the words “I am the Set Rahotep” will be etched forever in my memory.

I continued to correspond with Gary until just before he died. He offered great advice, and always took the time to help me get over my writer’s block or just chat a bit about anything I’ll always remember drinking \$500 bottles of wine with him at a steakhouse in Milwaukie, and my daughter shyly flirting with him while he and I were signing books together. . I hope they do get that statue of him built in Lake Geneva, he was a great man.

This book was inspired by these giants. I hope you all enjoy it as much as I have enjoyed writing it over the past 35 years. I will continue to add levels and side treks that are inspired by play in years to come, and this iteration reflects everything I have added in the last 10 years.

— Bill Webb
Poulsbo WA, 2012

Introduction

Once upon a time, there was an idea—an idea formulated by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974 and published in a little paperback book called *Underworld Adventures*. The idea was simple: it is a lot of fun to go into a dungeon and kill evil monsters. Why is the dungeon there? No one knows. Why do the monsters usually fight rather than talk? We aren't really sure. Why are there 16 trolls in a cave with a *jug of alchemy*? No one cares. What do all the monsters eat? We don't know that either (although "adventurer" probably tops the list). And we don't have to know these things. This isn't an ecology experiment, it's a dungeon—the quintessential setting for pure swords and sorcery adventuring.

This adventure pays homage to that original idea. True, there are opportunities for role playing, but most of this module is dedicated to "roll playing." Hopefully, while exploring the halls of Rappan Athuk, you will recall the thrill of discovery, the terror in your heart when you fought your first skeleton, the joy of rolling your first natural 20 and the despair you felt when that 1 came up for your poison save.

This module, *Rappan Athuk—The Dungeon of Graves*, is nothing more and nothing less than a good, old-fashioned, First Edition dungeon crawl updated for the *Swords & Wizardry Complete Roleplaying Game*. Very difficult, it should strike fear into the hearts of the most stalwart adventurers. It offers an abundance of traps, tricks and monsters.

We hope that you find this module as fun and exciting as those hundreds of players who have ventured into (and not as often out of) the endless caverns and mazes of *Rappan Athuk—The Dungeon of Graves*.

Rappan Athuk is a difficult dungeon. Even the upper dungeon levels should not be attempted by a party of less than six characters of 4th level. Only truly veteran players should attempt this dungeon with lower level characters. Parties delving deeper than the 1st or 2nd levels of the dungeon should be of 5th level or higher. Entering the dungeon through "The Well" (which leads to level 3A) is dangerous, best avoided by parties of less than 7th level.

Why did we do this revision (again)?

Rappan Athuk is the granddaddy of all dungeons, conceived when the game was new, renowned as the "real deal" by Referees and players alike. Perhaps the greatest statement a player can make about sheer terror his character is feeling is to say: "I was more scared than when we were in Rappan Athuk."

Rappan Athuk was originally released under the 3.0 rules in 2000. Two additional tomes of material were released in 2001. The areas of wilderness surrounding the dungeon and several other nifty tidbits were released as web-support over time as well. It was revised for the 3.5 ruleset in 2006 and expanded upon. Now updated to the *Swords & Wizardry Complete* system, the original dungeon has been expanded even further to excite and torture a new generation of PCs!

This book contains 19 never-before seen levels and an even more detailed wilderness section. It also has revised and amended statistics and tactic of the various NPCs and monsters that replace our earlier efforts.

This book is simply bigger, better and more complete than its predecessors. With a little effort, it's the only dungeon you will ever need, even if it doesn't use all the monsters ever created. Oh, and yes, Level 15 is still just intended for the Referee to read—Orcus is still supposed to be unbeatable. After all, we can't let an icon get killed!

The Legend of Rappan Athuk

The Legend of Rappan Athuk is well known, having been told numerous times by bards, adventurers, sages and loremasters. Read the following information in the text box to your players.

Many hundreds of years ago, the forces of good allied to destroy the main Temple of Orcus in the ancient city of Tsar. With their temple in ruins, the surviving high priests of this accursed demon-god fled the city with an army of enemies on their trail—an army of heroic fighters, clerics and paladins—led by Zelkor, a powerful wizard. The exact fate of these evil priests was then unknown, for not only did the remnants of the followers of Orcus disappear from all human reckoning, but so did the army of light that followed after them disappear as well. Some said that in the eternal scales the loss of so many good men was a fair price to pay to rid the world of so much evil.

The evil cult, however, had not been destroyed. The surviving priests and their followers instead settled on a hill near the Forest of Hope, a sylvan woodland near the Coast Road. There they found a vast underground complex of caverns and mazes, carving out a volcanic intrusion beneath the hill. There, the priests of Orcus found the perfect lair to continue their vile rituals. For many years, they carried on in secret, hidden from the light and from the knowledge of men.

Many years later, their underground delving completed, the evil priests erected a hideous mausoleum and a sunken graveyard atop the hill. It is believed that these graves are in fact the final resting place of the pursuing army of heroes that had been destroyed to a man. Soon after the mausoleum was erected the peaceful creatures of the wood began to disappear. Though many rangers and druids investigated these happenings, the cause of the creatures' disappearance was not immediately determined. Some years later a powerful group of adventurers, led by Bofred, a high priest of Thyr, investigated the evil happenings and found the sunken graveyard leading to a labyrinthine complex. Bofred and his companions found great hordes of evil creatures in the complex. Though some of his companions returned from their expedition, telling tales of fantastic treasure and ferocious monsters, Bofred was never seen again—lost in the catacombs beneath the cursed mausoleum.

For the last one hundred years, ranks of adventurers have ventured to the newfound dungeon. Many fell prey to bandits and monsters in the surrounding wilderness. Rumors suggest that of those who survived to reach the mausoleum and sunken graveyard, most were slain by guardians of green stone or perished on the very first level. Those rare few who return from deeper treks speak of horrible undead and creatures that cannot be slain. All who have explored Rappan Athuk offer this one universal piece of advice: "Don't go down the Well."