

HAWK & MOOR



I

KENT DAVID KELLY

WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE THERE....

The HAWK & MOOR series chronicles the history of E. Gary Gygax, David Lance Arneson, and the creation of the first legendary game to arise in the Golden Age of role - playing. In Book One, you will find the secret tales of the Twin Cities and Lake Geneva campaigns, the Oak Hill Sanitarium, the Black Moors, Loch Gloomen and the Great Kingdom. Prepare yourself, take up torch and sword. Come along and experience an unprecedented journey into the Golden Age!

W O N D E R L A N D I M P R I N T S

HAWK & MOOR

THE UNOFFICIAL HISTORY OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ®

BY

KENT DAVID KELLY
(DARKSERAPHIM)

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORIES OF

DAVID LANCE
ARNESON

&

ERNEST GARY
GYGAX

WONDERLAND IMPRINTS

2014 – 2017

O S R

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HAWK & MOOR is an historical research project developed with the primary intent of broadening the popular awareness of, and appreciation for, Fantasy Role-Playing Games (FRPGs).

Quotes attributed to various individuals are derived from a wide array of filmed interviews, online forum posts, magazines, books, newsletters, and various game-oriented materials. Please refer to the Footnotes and Annotations section for detailed citations. Individuals who wish to have their own quoted words alluded to, rather than quoted directly, are welcome to contact the author with requests for modification, emendation or deletion of specific comments.

The cover of this volume features a detail from The Great Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea, by William Blake, painted c. 1805-1810.

(Document Version 3.1)

For corrective and revision purposes, please note that this is document version 3.1 of this manuscript, completed in September of 2017. Versions prior to this, while useful are outdated, and this most recent version of the book has been amended as more interviews, documents, corrections and feedback have come to light.

In the age of the Internet, a printed book can never contain the final word. Therefore, the eBook version of this volume is intended as a living document, so that interested readers can enjoy a resource which is constantly revised, one which does not merely sit upon the shelf going slowly and forever out of date. The print version of this volume may well be slightly out of date, as in-depth research into the ever-shifting field of Role-Playing Game history continues to grow, diversify and change.

Please feel welcome to contact the author at shadowed_sky@hotmail.com with comments, questions, requests, recommendations and greetings. And thank you for reading!

DESCRIPTION

THE CREATION of the world's preeminent Fantasy Role-Playing Game (FRPG), *Dungeons & Dragons®*, is one of the most fascinating tales to be told in all the shared histories of entertainment, play and game design. Two very different men, David Lance Arneson and Ernest Gary Gygax, undertook an unprecedented collaboration which gifted us — as their shared legacy — with one of the most intriguing games the world has yet experienced. Their game did not just simulate one isolate corner of reality; it dared to encompass the entirety of all realms of adventure, the consensual playground of the human imagination.

HAWK & MOOR tells the story of Dave and Gary, and the many other people whose efforts gave first life to the game we know and love today. Arneson had spectacular ideas, but Gygax knew how to refine them. Collaboration soon turned to conflict as Arneson believed his game was being taken from him, and Gygax crystallized systems where incomprehensible riddles had stood before. Both men were creative geniuses, but the game they created from Gygax's *Chainmail* (1971) was the end result not only of their teamwork, but also of their clashes and disagreements.

HAWK & MOOR chronicles that first legendary game to arise from the Golden Age of Fantasy Role-Playing. Herein you will find Gary's life story, the history of Gen Con and the Castle & Crusade Society, and details concerning the conception of Castle Greyhawk. This first book also includes new revelations pertaining to Arneson's Blackmoor and its influences; tales from the Blackmoor Dungeons and Loch Gloomen; details on Gary's first dungeon adventure; an exploration of the links between H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and the earliest underworld adventures; the secrets of the asylum which inspired Castle Greyhawk; and much more.

HAWK & MOOR, *The Unofficial History of Dungeons & Dragons®*, includes 117,100 words on over 410 pages, supported by a detailed chronology, extensive research into the inspirational origins of D&D, and over 560 footnotes and annotations.

The adventure begins here. Prepare yourself, take up torch and sword. Come along and experience an unprecedented journey into the Golden Age!

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of the two fathers of fantasy role-playing games, David Lance Arneson and Ernest Gary Gygax. Many hundreds of individuals worked to create this wonderful hobby, but none gave more than you both, gentlemen. For the shared dreams, and for a lifetime of enjoyment and inspiration, I humbly and sincerely thank you.



In memoriam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A BOOK like this is never written by a single person without significant contributions from many other kind, insightful and respect-worthy people. Some of these esteemed individuals contributed through their own diligent volunteerism, while others aided my efforts indirectly with their generous public engagement of the D&D and FRPG fan communities. This book is the culmination not only of hundreds of books, magazines, and interviews; it also comprises a living and ever-growing record of the thousands of scattered Internet blog entries, sub-pages and forum postings which have hidden away much of the true history of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Special thanks are due to my beta readers, including Andrew (“aeakett”), Axel (“aia”), Carl (“cdenham”), Carl (“gyg”), David (“faro”), David (“Thunderdave”), John (“Gnat the Beggar”), Mark (“Mars”), Matt (“nesbit37”), and Ron (“rredmond”), for their comments, support and recommendations. Constructive criticisms provided by Dan Boggs, Robert S. Conley, Jon Peterson, “Sauromatian,” “Stratochamp” (Bill Meinhardt) and others have also been very helpful as well.

I am grateful and happy to thank Jeff Berry, Mike Carr, Ernie Gygax Jr., Luke Gygax, Tim Kask, Rob Kuntz, Len Lakofka, Steve Marsh, Frank Mentzer, Mike Mornard, Greg Svenson and James M. Ward for their extremely helpful blog and forum posts which have helped to illuminate many of the darker corners of D&D’s early days. Their generously shared experiences, revealing much about the earliest games in those years which I now term the Golden Age, were the primary inspirations for this book.

The following individuals conducted interviews with Dave Arneson, Gary Gygax, Tim Kask, and/or Rob Kuntz, which were also very helpful in creating the foundation for this work: Barbara A. Blackburn, Martin Brown, Andrew S. Bub, Alex Handy, Anne F. Jaffe, Jeremy L. C. Jones, David Kushner, Robin D. Laws, Scott Lynch, Frank Mentzer, Allen Rausch, Ciro Alessandro Sacco, Sam Sloan, Harvey Smith, Ben Sones, Michael O. Varhola and Allen Varney. Please note that this is an incomplete list due to some partial attributions within the available materials, and I hope to add to it further in the future.

Further, many bloggers provided excellent resource materials through their ongoing sites which were extremely helpful to me, including Joseph Bloch (of the Greyhawk Grogard blog), Dan Boggs (Aldarron) (of the Hidden in Shadows blog), Allan Grohe (Grodog of Greyhawk) (of the From Quroth’s Quill blog), Chris Kutalik (of the Hill Cantons blog), Jon Peterson (via his Playing at the World blog), Sham

aka Dave (of Sham's Grog & Blog), Zach "Zenopus" H. (of the Zenopus Archives), and Jason Zavoda (of the Hall of the Mountain King Blog).

The Secrets of Blackmoor crew, as well, are to be lauded for exhibiting a truly excellent spirit of sharing. To date, they have demonstrated a praiseworthy example of ideal, intent, and spirit ... particularly in contrast to several adversarial private collectors, who — through their obstruction of research, dissemination, and public understanding — are frequently the unintentional enemies of *Dungeons & Dragons* history.

Bill Owen's history of the Judge's Guild, and associated forum posts, were very helpful to this series as well. A special shout out goes to Michael Popham of the *Horror Incorporated* Project as well for his outstanding summaries of Twin Cities "Creature Feature" movie showings in the early 1970s. The Tome of Treasures website, in addition, displays significant resources which allowed me to fill many of the proverbial "blank spaces in the map" concerning the early years of pre-*Dungeons & Dragons* history.

Scott "Foulfoot" of the Acaem.com is also to be thanked for allowing my ongoing coordination of beta readers and commentators for this manuscript via his website forums. Please feel free to join our discussion in the Acaem General Forum. Further, I am grateful to: the administrators of the Blackmoor Comeback Inn; Paul Stormberg's esteemed Collector's Trove; the endlessly-valuable Dragonsfoot and ENWorld forums, which archive much of the fan correspondence shared by Gary Gygax; the Knights & Knaves Alehouse; and the ODD74 Proboards. These valuable resources possess, via their forums, excellent archives of crucial anecdotes and historical posts pertaining to the early Greyhawk and Blackmoor campaigns.

Without all of you and the generous availability of your works and research, this book could not exist. I sincerely thank you all for your generous sharing, memories, and contributions to the cause!



*As the enchanted castle crystallizes in the wind,
you spy the silhouette of a dragon in the distance ...*

BOOK I

THE DRAGON RISES

Sample file

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What's the real story? Is the saga prettier than some dry retelling of mere names and numbers? Not to worry. History is a story, inherently. A bardic saga. And whenever in doubt and gravitas, if there's any confusion as to what really happened and how entertaining it really was, you can always blame the bard.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: CHAOTIC BARDS, LAWFUL SAGES

Chaos often breeds life,
When order breeds habit.

— Henry Brooks Adams

THE LEGENDS and history surrounding the creation of the very first and preeminent Fantasy Role-Playing Game (FRPG), *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), together comprise a fascinating and labyrinthine epic tale filled with surprising tricks, deceptive traps, and monstrous setbacks ... much like the imagined dungeon environs of the adventure game itself.

As dreamers, fantasists, storytellers and gamers, many of us love to relive these glimpses of a time I term the Golden Age: discussing misinterpreted events, or sharing stories with the people who were fortunate enough to actually be there. There is nothing quite like hearing the tales of momentous occasions such as the creation of the Arch-Barony of Blackmoor, the first explorations of the netherworld sprawling beneath Castle Greyhawk, the derring do of crafty and infamous Sir Robilar, or the many wilder misadventures from the people who first played “the ultimate game” before it was ever published as *Dungeons & Dragons*.

While many of the most engaging and entertaining persons who were involved with Blackmoor, Greyhawk and/or Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) during the seventies and eighties (such as Jeff Berry, Mike Carr, Ernie Gygax Jr., Luke Gygax, Tim Kask, Rob Kuntz, David Megarry, Frank Mentzer, Mike Mornard, Erol Otus, Greg Svenson, James M. Ward and David Wesely) are still with us and sharing stories, the game’s forefathers — Ernest Gary Gygax and David Lance Arneson — are sadly no longer with us, having passed in 2008 and 2009. Many of us who still play and enjoy our “outmoded” pen-and-paper game in this age of the Internet miss these men, not only as inspiring mentors, but as our lost friends from afar. For diehard fans of the game, our losses of Gary and Dave have serendipitously led us into a time when developments in RPG research are bringing forth a myriad of unprecedented rediscoveries.

Until recently, the most commonly accepted accounts of *Dungeons & Dragons* history were largely anecdotal. Throughout their later lives, Gary and Dave and

others were frequently asked to recall exacting specifics about their many products, game sessions, legal matters and publishing deals — the crucial elements which fundamentally created the RPG (along with the MMORPG) industry as we enjoy and know it today. Many of these recollections, however, were made by people concerning events which they had participated in some twenty, thirty or even forty years prior to being asked for their remembrances.

The haze of memory and the attrition of time have caused some dates in the understood chronology of D&D's history to remain in question. Many “commonly known” and “uncontested” dates — including those found in the official histories published by D&D's current publishing body, Wizards of the Coast — are actually untrue. As a result, our understanding of the entire history of D&D is now in a state of flux. These matters of confusion, while slowly clearing over time, created ripples which inevitably have made their way into this current work. We will never know the entire story — the pool of history is now too deep — but nevertheless, many details beneath the surface are becoming clearer all the time.

This is a daunting, unavoidable, and yet enticing new reality. In creating **HAWK & MOOR**, I simply wrote the best chronicle that I could over the years, given the diverse and fragmentary sources at hand. Please note that there are many hundreds of tenuous accounts recorded herein, stories which were shared and refuted many times. Sometimes, deceptively reasonable details were provided only a few years after an event, but then a more detailed account would appear some fifteen or twenty years later. All told, these myriad accounts are understandably imperfect, and are now impossible to fit together into a mosaic without some damaging friction arising between the pieces.

Although it is certain that the people involved in the game's creation commonly believed they were always telling the truth, the *actual* truth of momentary details is now forever lost. What I can do with this dangerous trove of conflicting data, however, is to stitch all of these accounts together, and to smooth things over (wherever possible) by using proven documentation. This “Frankenstein” approach to the history of *Dungeons & Dragons* — building the monster, one stitched-together scrap of flesh at a time — allows for the development of a fascinating and living (undead?) history, which is the closest we can now approach to the lost reality. The preliminary and ongoing results of those years of work are now held in your hands.

This book was not created within a void. Major historical research efforts in this field have already been conducted by fan-collectors on the Acaem website (Acaem.com, 2000-present); in the Old School Renaissance (OSR) movement (a loose conglomeration of many independent resources, circa 2001-present); and by FRPG researchers and contributors who have developed their own popular and

academic studies, such as Shannon Appelcline (primary work of interest — *Designers & Dragons: A History of the Roleplaying Game Industry: The 70s*), Matt Barton (*Dungeons & Desktops*), David M. Ewalt (*Of Dice and Men*), Brad King and John Borland (*Dungeons & Dreamers*), Robert J. Kuntz (one of D&D's earliest contributors, now developing his *El Raja Key Archives* and other works in progress), Robin D. Laws (*40 Years of Gen Con*), Jon Peterson (*Playing at the World*), Lawrence Schick (*Heroic Worlds*), Michael J. Tresca (*The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*), and — following my own publication — Michael Witwer (*Empire of Imagination*).

Adding to this already-excellent collection of works, I am hoping to share my own research and discoveries (to be represented throughout the **HAWK & MOOR** series) in an affordable, accessible, and potentially collaborative ongoing endeavor, so that the history of FRPGs can remain growing, communal, and open to all.

Tragically, despite all of these advances in our understanding of the poorly-documented history of the game, we have mourned the loss of other beloved D&D luminaries such as Bob Bledsaw (founder of Judges Guild, d. 2008), Dr. John Eric Holmes (editor of the “blue book” D&D Basic Set, d. 2010), Tom Moldvay (co-creator of *The Isle of Dread*, “red book” Basic and many other D&D products, d. 2007), and David C. Sutherland III (illustrator of the *Monster Manual*, *Dungeon Masters Guide* and other classic works, d. 2005). Recently, renowned D&D artist David A. Trampier has passed away as well. In the face of these irreplaceable losses, we find that more and more of the great stories, jokes, recollections, and untold adventures are being taken away from us by the day. I hope that by making this book a gatherum of first-hand tales, I can encourage readers to embrace the living history of the game, and to reach out to those good men and women who were there. Those who inspire us should always be honored and remembered, *before* their own time is past.

And so, in reflection, I now realize that the purpose of this book is twofold: first, I have written this meager summary to reaffirm many of the error-filled accounts in a hopefully-corrected historical context, so that these irreplaceable stories are placed within an appropriate and human landscape with as much accuracy as is currently possible. If we were to focus our efforts solely upon documents, the human soul of the living history would be lost. Secondly, I am a decent writer and storyteller, but an unorthodox historian. I am a gamer most of all. And that is why this book is written *not* as a history text, but rather as an enjoyable saga filled with personal moments, so that readers can be regaled by these storied men in their own voices, even though many are no longer with us. These books are, in a way, a secret-filled Campaign Journal chronicling the very first *Dungeons & Dragons* campaigns to a depth never publicly revealed before. (And

this is by far the most personal aspect of this work, as I am far more interested in telling the tale of *gamers* and *game designers*, as opposed to the scientific study of gaming *systems*.)

With those oft-conflicting goals in mind, I have written this book to reveal the human history of early *Dungeons & Dragons* — not as a dry scholarly dissertation, but as an adventure in the shared imagination. This is the story of gamers creating an entirely new and entrancing kind of game, the exploration of a brave new world within the consensual mind. This book is intended for everyone who ever wanted to know what it was like to *be* there, in the classic days when the ruins of (Grey) Hawk and (Black) Moor were still unfolding their dark blooms from out of the dreams of their creators.

This is a book of gamer chat, the masters' own insights, and the spirit of adventure. If you as a reader are *less* interested in the rules minutiae explaining how 19th-century *Kriegspiel* distantly affected the underpinnings of games like *Fletcher Pratt's Naval War Game* — and are *more* interested in hearing precisely what happened when the mad and cackling dwarf Obmi turned the beam of his infernal gravity-ray contraption on unsuspecting adventurers — then this is the book series for you.

HAWK & MOOR is primarily a *folkloric* history, and only secondarily an analytical one. If we can regard the ongoing historical research effort to discern the factual past of RPGs as a “Lawful” endeavor conducted by “Sages,” then **HAWK & MOOR** represents a counterbalancing “Chaotic” labor of love. Its mission is to preserve facts, ruminations, speculation, the game's ever-conflicting folklore, and the hazily-recollected game sessions of the past in a single source which will change, grow, and become *more epic over time* — a chronicle of the “Bards,” if you will.

As frequently as possible, I have therefore used the words of the people who were actually *there*. However, wherever colorful recollections conflict with the actual evidence, the evidence necessarily takes its precedence.

As a result of this precarious balancing act, some of the material in this book is going to be proven wrong. Whenever it does, I as the author will strive to offer updates and corrections to this living history, so that it will always be up to date with the latest research. This book will never have the treasures of the *entire* truth locked between its covers, because that is not within the realm of human possibility. And yet, in admiration I have preserved here the words and heartfelt memories of many amazing people, and their story is a remarkable one which I think you will enjoy.

But enough of justification and preamble. Let us return to the Golden Age. Let us begin to relive the adventure! The imperious world of the Great Kingdom, the

lavish spectacle of Greyhawk and the frigid mystery of Blackmoor all await us beyond the gate.

Let us now take that very first step ...



The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. “Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?” he asked. “Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end; then stop.”

— Lewis Carroll

CHAPTER 1 BEFORE THE DAWN OF THE GOLDEN AGE (1937 – 1969)



*An idyllic glimpse of a steam landing
in early Lake Geneva, 1909. Public domain.*

THE STORY of fantasy role-playing, and of *Dungeons & Dragons*, begins with one E. Gary Gygax, an eccentric and affable gentleman who always preferred to be known simply as Gary.¹

Gary's parents were married on a Sunday, August 15th, in 1937. Gary's mother was Almina (always affectionately known as "Posey") Emelie Burdick, a lovely

¹ According to family lore it seems that Gary's middle name was a nod to the actor Gary Cooper, of whom Gary's mother was a huge fan. Refer to *Empire of the Imagination*, by Michael Witwer, pg. 16.

woman born into a longstanding and highly regarded family in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.²



Postcard image of the Lake Geneva region, 1914. Public domain.

The Burdick family's presence in North America predates the United States, with the first Burdicks arriving in colonial Rhode Island in about the year 1642.³ The Burdicks later settled in the frontier lands of Wisconsin, in 1836.⁴ At that time, much of Wisconsin was still a wilderness; Michigan was not formally separated from the Wisconsin Territory until July 3rd of that year, and Wisconsin did not officially

² For many more interesting notes on Gary's childhood and Burdick family heritage, please refer to his online article "Around Grandfather Burdick's Dining Table," which he wrote in 2006.

³ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted October 20th, 2005.

⁴ Online interview: The d-infinity.net interview with Gary Gygax. By Michael O. Varhola. Posted on July 27th, 2013.

become a state until May of 1848.

Gary's father, Ernst, had been born in Seeberg, in the canton of Bern in Switzerland.⁵ He was born on January 19th, 1884. After coming to the United States as a youth in the 1880s,⁶ Ernst would later choose to Anglicize his name to the more American "Ernest," a name he was destined to later share with his son. Ernest Sr. was a man of many gifts, possessed of an imaginative and winsome spirit. He was an accomplished violinist as well, and — according to Gary's familial recollection — his father may have played professionally with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. (More recent research has put this particular point into contention, however, as the Symphony archives appear to insinuate that Ernst Gygax Sr. did not actually play for the Orchestra proper. He may have been a substitute, or he might have been a member of one of the ensembles that played in the Orchestra Hall.)⁷



A rare glimpse of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (at that time, simply the Chicago Orchestra) in 1897, just 7 years after its founding. Public domain.

⁵ The family name Gygax, as well as the related name Ghikas, are derived via Switzerland from the Greek Gigas, meaning "Giant" (as in "gigantic"). Family in this bloodline apparently also settled in Bleienbach and Thunstetten in the same canton; some say this was in the 1700s, some earlier.

⁶ Online interview: The d-infinity.net interview with Gary Gygax. By Michael O. Varhola. Posted on July 27th, 2013.

⁷ Refer to "Did Gary Gygax's Father Play for Chicago Symphony Orchestra?" as featured on the Save Versus All Wands blog, posted February 8th, 2014.

Gary, then, was born to Almina on the morning of July 27th, 1938 at St. Joseph's Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. He would live in a little house with a big yard, situated on Kenmore Avenue just a few blocks north of Wrigley Field.⁸ By that time, Ernest Sr. (who was well into his fifties when Gary was born)⁹ was working as a suit salesman in the premiere Chicago department store which was owned by the extravagant multimillionaire, Maurice L. Rothschild.¹⁰ Gary was born after his father had set his Jacob Steiner violin forever to rest, and so he never had the chance to see or hear his father play.

By a curious twist of fate, the years 1937 and 1938 also saw the birth of a revolutionary phenomenon in children's and fantasy fiction: *The Hobbit*, by English author John Ronald Reuel (J. R. R.) Tolkien. This now-classic tale of thrilling adventure, lurking goblins, hulking trolls, dwarven treasure and a merciless dragon was published in the United Kingdom on September 21st, 1937. The very first American edition of *The Hobbit* followed via Houghton Mifflin Co. in the spring of 1938. The harrowing misadventures of the titular Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, as he arose from the humblest creature of comfort to a dragon-defying hero, would later inspire (and become irrevocably intertwined with) Gary's own signature masterpiece, the game of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

When he was still a young child, Gary's mother would read to him to ease his restlessness.¹¹ One of the most compelling tales to young Gary's mind involved the tale of the Dancing Hut of Baba Yaga, which strode along through haunted Russian forests upon its giant magical chicken legs.

⁸ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted July 9th, 2005.

⁹ Online interview: The d-infinity.net interview with Gary Gygax. By Michael O. Varhola. Posted on July 27th, 2013.

¹⁰ As a point of trivia, Rothschild's store was especially famed for its beautiful hats. One of the more notorious customers who purchased a fine hat there, specifically one straw boater *borsalino*, was none other than Al Capone. As a 1931 ad would proudly proclaim, "Our hat department is actually the largest in the world, largest in space, in stock, in variety."

¹¹ *Dragon* magazine, issue #95, pg. 12.



An intrepid maiden preparing to explore the Dancing Hut of Baba Yaga. One of the Hut's chicken legs can be seen behind her outspread arm.

Jack and Jill magazine, produced for the first time in November of Gary's birth year (and still going strong to this day), later featured this tale and many others,¹² and was soon Gary's favorite source of tales. *Jack and Jill* may also have, interestingly, also marked the naissance of Gary's own affection for alliterative titles for creative endeavors (*Swords & Sorcery*, *Castle & Crusade*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dangerous Dimensions*, *Dance of Demons*, and so forth).



Brownies infiltrate many a moonlit castle built from the imagination ...

¹² Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted June 16th, 2005. See also ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part VIII, posted March 1st, 2005.

Gary's mother would also read the Sunday funnies for him while he marveled over the pictures. His favorite piece every week was the *Teenie Weenies*, a famous strip concerning elfin and pixie-like folk dwelling secretly in a strange world filled with bumbling giants (*aka* human beings).¹³ After a long hiatus, this classic strip was reinstated on Sundays in the *Chicago Tribune* in May of 1941.

We can therefore presume that by the age of three, Gary was fully immersed in the worlds of storytelling, capricious adventure, and illustrated fantasy. A little later in life, collected fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang would heighten Gary's interest in faerie folk, which began with the *Teenie Weenies*.¹⁴

While he was still three years old, Gary also made the first crayon drawing that his mother would decide to keep for posterity. This was a sketch of "a great ugly troll, because I loved the stories of the Billy Goats Gruff. It was a vaguely cubical thing with a great many legs and eyes."¹⁵

Gary later commented that "Most of the influences on my creative work were acquired from childhood on."¹⁶ Many of these highly imaginative elements would later appear in *Dungeons & Dragons*, and the troll bridge from the Grimm tale in particular would apparently make an appearance in Gary's first *Chainmail Fantasy* game in early 1971.¹⁷

¹³ Gary's lifelong fascination with the "little people" would percolate throughout *Dungeons & Dragons*, with particular notices prominently featured in the *Monster Manual* (leprechaun, nixie, pixie, sprite), *Descent into the Depths of the Earth* (jermlaine), *Shrine of the Kuo-Toa* (svirfneblin), and the derivative *Fiend Folio* (booka, killmoulis).

¹⁴ In *Dragon* magazine #95, on pg. 12, Gary explains that after being exposed to fairy tale reading by his mother (who read him stories from *Jack and Jill* magazine), he then went on to read the Brothers Grimm collection on his own.

¹⁵ This quote was found on an obscure temporary Tripod web page, preserving an interesting interview with Gygax. See also *Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IV*, posted September 29th, 2005: "My mother actually saved my first crayon 'art,' depictions of square things with big eyes and mouths, squiggly legs that were 'great ugly trolls.' I believe they are now lost, but I recall them well, even drawing them."

¹⁶ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. *ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part I*. Posted September 5th, 2002.

¹⁷ Online web forum post: *Dragonsfoot.org*. *Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IV*. Posted September 22nd, 2005.



“Who’s that tripping over my bridge?” roared the Troll.

His burgeoning interest in fantasy was gently encouraged by his father as well. As he once recollected, “My father was a marvelous storyteller. What a treat it was for me at age three and later to have him tell me a bedtime story. Those tales were usually of giants and dragons, wise old wizards with magic rings, cloaks of invisibility, and always a little boy involved in the adventure and derring do.”¹⁸

(It thus seems possible that Ernest Sr. may have regaled Gary with the tale of *The Hobbit* or at least scenes inspired by that book, but this is speculation on my part.)

With his parents’ encouragement, Gary began reading fairy tales on his own around 1943, and then moved on to books filled with fables, legends and mythology a few years later on.¹⁹ He would enact some of these tales in play with his own small collection of metal dime store soldiers, a collection cultivated and

¹⁸ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, issue #2, July 2005. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 2. See also the online post in the Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part V, posted June 1st, 2006.

¹⁹ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part VI. Posted February 29th, 2004.

encouraged by his father. Every Saturday night Gary would earn a present, and more often than not these were Barclay-brand toy soldiers. The figures were about 65 millimeters tall, cast in metal and finely detailed.²⁰



A glorious time for wild tales of adventure.

²⁰ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part XIII, posted November 5th, 2007.

These engagingly painted \$0.10 figures were no mere trifles, considering that a dime could be more responsibly used to purchase a loaf of bread. Gary's ever-growing armies would be arrayed "with blocks and Tinker Toys adorning the battlefield,"²¹ an early instance of his interest in the nuances of terrain and cover which would later inform his own particular modes of play.

As we shall see, Gary would never quite outgrow his love of toy soldiers; he would in fact make a living sharing his enthusiasm for them with the world through his own amateur and professional game designs.



The chessboard imagined as a world of idle war, gaming, adventure, and exploration ... from Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There, by Lewis Carroll, and as illustrated by Sir John Tenniel.

But that was yet to come. In that grim and escapist era of the American home front during late World War II (when Gary himself was yet to experience television

²¹ Online interview: *The Ultimate Interview with Gary Gygax*, with *Ciro Alessandro Sacco* of *dungeons.it*; hosted at *thekyngdoms.com*.

on a frequent basis),²² he relied on storytelling, reading, imagination and radio to fill his days with dreamt-of adventure. The greatest game of all proved to be that ageless standby of children the world over, “Let’s Pretend.” Gary occasionally managed to share and even control this social activity with other Chicago children. “I had a full back yard,” he once mused, “so I generally got to call what make-believe game we would play ... my first experience as Game Master.”²³

At the tender age of six (1944), Gary learned how to play the game of chess under the mentorship of his grandfather, Hugh.²⁴ Chess would teach Gary the importance of balance, predictability, and regimentation in strategic gaming ... lessons he would carry forward into his wargames designs, and lessons which he would act *against* in the development of more unorthodox role-playing games.

And also at around this time, Gary was able to visit the Chicago Field Museum with his father on many a Sunday, a jaunt which occurred about once a month. He fell in love with Egyptology due to the museum’s impressive mummy and artifact displays.²⁵ These memories would later inspire his conception of the arch-villain Acererak (as featured in Dungeon Module S1, *Tomb of Horrors*), as well as parts of his *Necropolis* game setting and a novel, *The Anubis Murders*. Gary also enjoyed the taxidermy displays and the enormous loxodons, and was the lucky recipient of some great tyrannosaurus and triceratops toys from the museum gift shop²⁶ (which might have inspired his inclusion of many prehistoric beasts in the 1977 *Monster Manual*). In many ways, through such adventures of the imagination he could claim a happy and imaginative early life.²⁷

Not all was peaceful in Gary’s Chicago childhood, however. There were fierce rivalries between neighboring children that often erupted in competitions which became far more dangerous than mere games and roughhousing. (Gary’s mates, by

²² For some of Gary’s interesting memories of the World War II era, refer to ENWorld Gary Gyax Q&A, Part XIII, posted November 5th, 2007.

²³ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Issue #2), July 2005. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gyax, pg. 2.

²⁴ *Dragon* magazine, issue #103, pg. 56.

²⁵ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gyax Q&A, Part II. Posted March 14th, 2003.

²⁶ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gyax Q&A, Part XIII. Posted February 6th, 2008.

²⁷ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gyax Q&A, Part II. Posted March 14th, 2003.

the way, christened themselves the “Kenmore Pirates.”)²⁸

Gary once explained: “Back in Chicago in the early 1940’s we used wooden swords and garbage-can or peach-crate lids, reinforced with cardboard shields, to have ‘wars’ against the ‘enemy gang’ that were at the North End.”²⁹ The battle became quite intense, with a BB gun being used to hold back the “invaders” and Gary’s friend Jerry Paul knocking out one of the more aggressive kids (the leader, Rex) with a well-thrown piece of brick. That worst fight had apparently started when Rex broke a basement window in Gary’s father’s building, and Gary demanded that Rex pay up for the damage. In response, Rex stomped off and came back with about twenty of his “flunkies” and things escalated from there.³⁰

The explanation for all of this fracas was simple, a sign of the times: “The neighborhood in 4100 North Kenmore Avenue was declining rapidly throughout the war.”³¹ The increasing violence of these North Side encounters would soon cause Ernest Sr. to move his family from Chicago to Burdick land — within the quiet Wisconsin resort town of Lake Geneva — in July of 1946.³²

This was at first considered a temporary move of one year’s duration, a pause in life to “regroup” with the extended family. Gary’s parents at that time planned to make a permanent move to family property in La Jolla, California.³³ However, another house would need to be built first, and Ernest Sr. was having difficulty finding lucrative employment prospects out in California. During the delay, Gary and his parents fell in love with Lake Geneva. It was a far better place than Chicago, at that time, to raise a child. And Gary’s mother’s family hailed from there, and urged Ernest Sr. to consider a move there. Gary’s father sagely agreed that this was indeed the right thing to do.

²⁸ *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the Birth of Dungeons & Dragons*, by Michael Witwer, pg. 13.

²⁹ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted July 5th, 2005.

³⁰ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted March 27th, 2007.

³¹ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part XIII. Posted November 6th, 2007.

³² Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted July 5th, 2005. See also ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A Part XIII, posted November 6th, 2007.

³³ This information appears in several places on the web, in various levels of detail. See for example Gary’s online article “Around Grandfather Burdick’s Dining Table,” at burdickfamily.org, which he wrote in 2006.



A bird's-eye view of Lake Geneva, 1882. Public domain.

Gary made many deep and lasting friendships in Lake Geneva, the most important being a reunion with his buddy Donald Raymond Kaye. Gary and Don had met earlier (c. 1944)³⁴ when the Gygax family would spend their Augusts in Lake Geneva,³⁵ and they became best friends when Gary moved up for good in 1946. Gary and Don trusted one another implicitly, and the closeness of this relationship would one day result in their becoming partners in business as they founded Tactical Studies Rules in October of 1973.

* * * * *

Despite such strong and lasting friendships, Gary was a private person in many ways. He was extremely sensitive in nature, claiming that he recalled memories of sunlight experienced when he was only six months old. While Gary's sensitivities

³⁴ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted June 23rd, 2005.

³⁵ Refer to the online article "Around Grandfather Burdick's Dining Table," which Gary wrote in 2006.

grew with age and the simple “Cowboys and Indians,” “Private Detective” and “Recon Patrol” games began to flourish into more convoluted realms of role-play, the superstitious borderline between reality and fantasy became more permeable. Gary had a vivid imagination; he was always receptive to the possibilities inherent in the unlikely. He frequently, even sixty years later, insisted that as a child he had experienced the supernatural. “Of course there is the paranormal,” he once insisted. “To deny it is to flout reason. There are things that happen that cannot be explained by any scientific means.”³⁶

The first grim instance of this experience occurred in the early summer of 1946 or 1947, when he was eight. His mother and father had gone to San Diego (intending to better secure their plans involving the land in La Jolla), leaving Gary at home with some house-sitting family friends, the Dimerys. This was no occasion for sadness; in fact, Gary had instigated the matter and convinced his parents to leave him behind because he wanted to have some unsupervised fun with one of his buddies. Joe and Jean Dimerys’ son, David, was another of Gary’s good companions, having met and befriended Gary in Chicago.³⁷ (David had in fact been one of the Kenmore Pirates in Gary’s neighborhood “gang.”)³⁸

One evening, having been put to bed early and then joking with David until almost midnight, Gary got himself in a bit of trouble. He had the ill-fated lower bunk, while David enjoyed the upper. David and Gary were shouting and playing and having a great time, forgetting the late hour. David’s parents heard the boys’ horseplay when they approached from down the hall, and summarily separated the two by dragging David into another bedroom across the hall. Gary took the hint and went to sleep.

Not long after dozing off, he was wakened by a thundering crash overhead, as something massive shook the entire attic. Whatever it was, it stomped over Gary’s ceiling, as if seeking something. There were seven long strides in all, taking the unknown figure from one end of the attic to the other. Someone was up there. Whoever it was, he was heavy and huge.

Was there an intruder? Was Mr. Dimery, perhaps, doing something up there in

³⁶ Online interview: *The Ultimate Interview with Gary Gygax*, with Ciro Alessandro Sacco of dungeons.it; hosted at theyngdoms.com. See also ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A Part VIII, posted March 4th, 2005.

³⁷ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part I. Posted September 21st, 2002.

³⁸ *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the Birth of Dungeons & Dragons*, by Michael Witwer, pg. 17.

the middle of the night? As Gary hid beneath his covers, Mrs. Dimery surged in and demanded to know what Gary was up to. Gary could not see her; he was curled up under his sheet. It was only then that they both realized that no one in the house had made the sounds. Alarmed, Mr. Dimery waked and checked on his son, but David had managed to sleep through the entire visitation.

Mr. and Mrs. Dimery, with a hastily awakened David and a nearly petrified Gary reluctantly in tow, crept down the long shadowy hall which ran the entire length of the house. Mr. Dimery went ahead, carrying a baseball bat, and opened the door which led up into the attic.

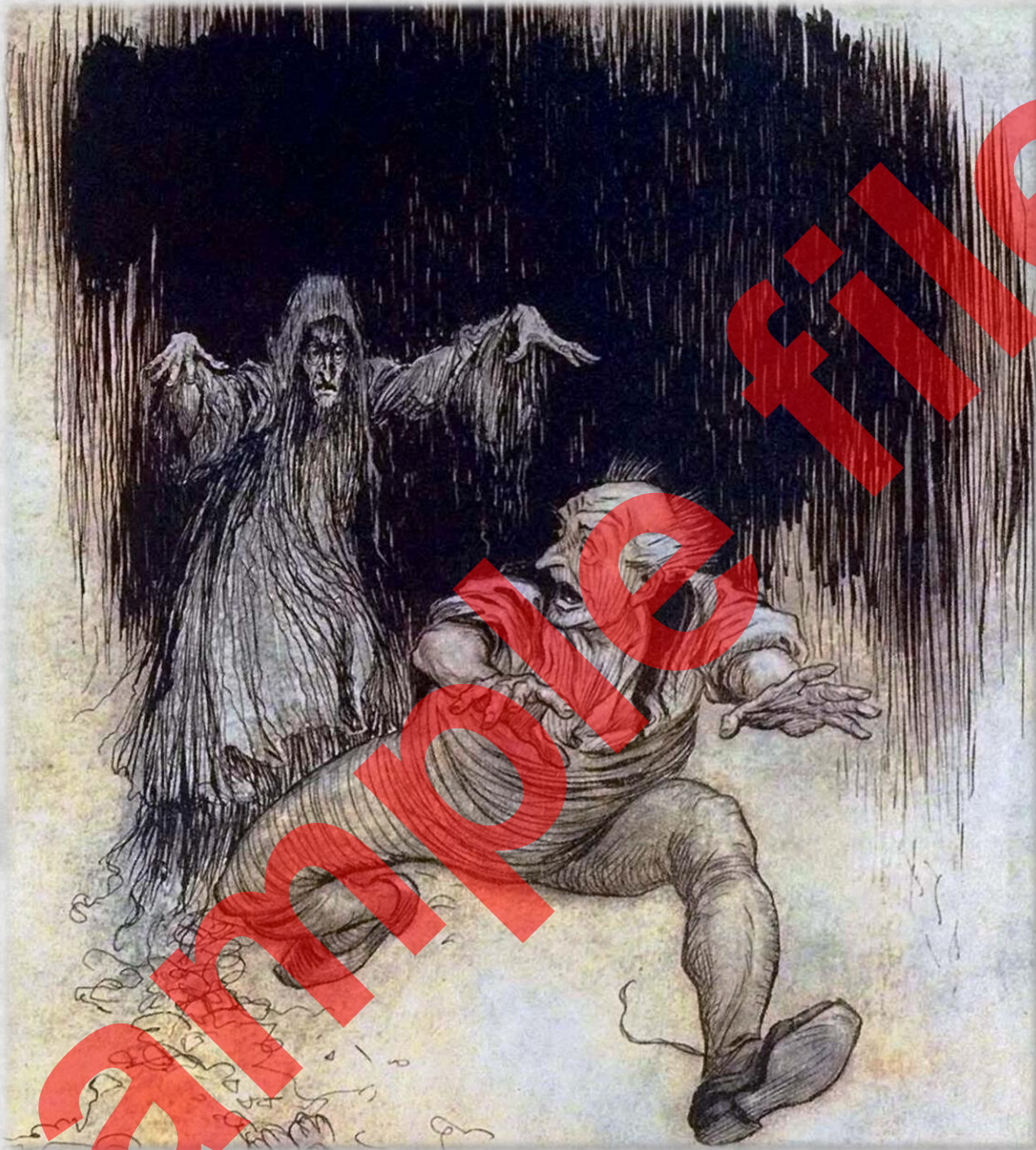
He crept up the stairs. This was followed by long silence, and then finally his return. But there was nothing up there to be found. Regardless, the Dimerys made certain to lock the attic door before they all went back to sleep. The only person permanently affected by it all, it seems, was Gary.³⁹

And that was not the only instance. In November of 1948, Gary suffered an even more striking encounter with the supernatural. It was a dark and frigid school day and an unusual one, at that. While Gary was just making his way home, his mother was enjoying an outing with family in the Chicago suburbs, leaving her ten-year-old son all alone. Feeling the press of isolation upon arriving home, Gary sought out his beloved tomcat, Cueball. He decided the weather was perfect for some reading — something Gothic — and so he selected his grandfather's copy of *Tales of Terror* by Edgar Allan Poe. He turned on a lamp, curled up in Grandpapa Burdick's chair, and Cueball jumped up beside him.

While immersed in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and reaching the point where the Lady Madeline is pounding away in her escape from the crypt, Gary was startled by a jolt of pain. Cueball rose, arched and hissing while raptly staring at the half-open door which led into an old maid's chamber. Floorboards creaked, first from behind the door, then nearer in and around the door. The untouched door creaked visibly open, and inward. The cat hissed louder. Gary could see nothing but the moving door, and yet the sounds were moving toward him. The creaking presses swept straight toward his chair. And then? Only a trembling cat slowly returning to his ease, and silence.

There was nothing there. But if there were no more noises, no more footsteps, was the unseen presence standing right over the back of Gary's chair?

³⁹ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 9 (Issue #9), May 2008. "How It All Happened," by Gary Gyax, pg. 2.



What's wrong with a little midnight fun?

After long heartbeat-driven seconds of being frozen in fear, Gary leapt up out from the chair (poor Cueball went flying), and went on a frantic crusade. He turned on every light that he could reach, and gathered up a few of his trusty friends: a bow, some arrows, a baseball bat, his hunting knife, and even a machete. Then

Gary sat back down again, and watched.⁴⁰ It must have been a very long vigil. His mother did not return until seven that evening.

Despite these disturbing experiences, Gary enjoyed reading of (but not experiencing!) the supernatural. His love of fantasy fiction took firmer root within his heart and mind. He would be forever changed when he read his first story by Robert E. Howard, in *Conan the Conqueror*. Today, this story is more commonly entitled *The Hour of the Dragon*. The tale was “an early taste of the elixir of fantasy,” Gary wrote, “to which I rapidly became addicted. ... After I finished reading that piece of Sword & Sorcery literature [*Conan the Conqueror*] for the first time, my concepts of adventure were never quite the same again.”⁴¹

Howard’s passionate, vigorous and dynamic prose would have a lifelong influence on Gary’s imagination. Quite simply, drawn in through the gateway of Howard’s tales, Gary fell irrevocably in love with the pulp fantasy fiction genre now known as Swords & Sorcery.⁴²

In Howard’s tale, the formerly barbaric Conan has become a dark and jaded older man of earthly power and earthly apprehensions. Having slain King Numedides of Aquilonia, he has taken the throne as his blood prize and veritably trapped himself in a life of eternal suspicion. His enemies, in the name of Numedides’ rightful heir Valerius, use black and forbidden magic to raise the corpse of an Acheronian sorcerer, the dreaded Xaltotun. Conan is seized by treacherous men, but is later saved by the lovely slave maiden Zenobia. In the end, Conan is forced to risk his life so that he can annihilate Xaltotun, and then finally claim the bold Zenobia as his queen.⁴³

Gary was hooked, and for him the saga of Conan was only the beginning. He would later (in *Wargamer’s Digest* #7) describe his enthusiasm for Swords & Sorcery:

⁴⁰ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 9 (Issue #9), May 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 2. Gary by the way had a lifelong love of, and respect for, weaponry of all kinds. He owned various knives and sabers. Growing up in rural Wisconsin, he also became acquainted with firearms early on. He had a BB pistol by 1948, a Daisy lever-action BB gun by 1949, and a .22 Winchester rifle (a gift from his grandfather) by 1952.

⁴¹ *Dragon* magazine, issue #95, pg. 12.

⁴² *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 3, Number 5 (Issue #5), Winter 2007. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 1.

⁴³ This tale cast a long shadow in Gary’s imagination. Although the lich monster in *Dungeons & Dragons* would be inspired by Ambrose Bierce’s “The Death of Halpin Frayser” and Koschei the Deathless in Slavic folklore, it is virtually certain that the original inspiration was this deathly, deathless wizard Xaltotun, High Priest of Set.

“Somewhere in between the children’s works and the (often dry and slow) so-called adult works there lies the world of “Swords & Sorcery” — fast-paced, heroic yarns which are filled with brawny swordsmen, magic swords, wicked magicians, monstrous beasts, and beautiful women who must be rescued from them.”

He soon discovered that he loved the imaginative concepts underlying not only the Swords & Sorcery yarns, but those of science fiction tales as well. The first sci fi story he ever encountered was “The World the Children Made,” later entitled “The Veldt.” The author was Ray Bradbury.

In this story, the concept of virtual reality is explored. Two young children live in a nursery with holographic screens, quite similar to the later Holodeck featured in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The screens respond to the children’s telepathic wishes, endlessly entertaining them with vistas of the primitive and savage Earth of long ago.

The nursery is *enthralling*, however. It is *intelligent* and self-protective. The children grow spellbound by visions of African predators, and even though they scream at the sight of bloody beasts *feasting upon prey*, they cannot look away.

Eventually, the imprudent parents become *concerned* by this obsession, and turn the nursery off. The deprived children beg for one last moment to share in secret with their nursery, so that they can *say goodbye* to their virtual friend. The parents reluctantly agree, and leave the room. Forming an unspeakable primal link with the nursery AI, the children *do something ... wrong*. Then, they encourage their parents to enter the room.

When the parents come in again, the children lock them in and leave. Bradbury’s story ends with the parents *screaming*, as the holo-screens project deathly lions crawling through a veldt. Licking their fangs in anticipation, the lions crawl straight off the screens (much like the horrific Samara in *The Ring*). And once again, they feast ... but this time, the blood they taste is real.

What a story to usher in a love of science fiction! Gary, who had never read anything like this before in his life, was enthralled. “I loved it,” he once wrote, “[and] was horrified by the action of the children, and gave it to my mother to read. She too was taken aback, for she wondered if I wanted to feed her and my father to lions. I assured her that was not the case.”⁴⁴

While Gary estimated that he had read the story in 1948, it appears to me that the tale was not published until September 23rd, 1950 in the *Saturday Evening*

⁴⁴ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part V. Posted May 6th, 2006.

*Post.*⁴⁵

Gary related that he found the story in *Blue Book* magazine, a publication known for selected reprints of pulp adventure and science fiction. So it is likely that Howard came first, and Bradbury thereafter. Gary may have been remembering the later version entitled “The Veldt,” which appeared in a collection called *The Illustrated Man* in February 1951.⁴⁶ But whenever “The World the Children Made” was actually read, it is intriguing to note this ghostly theme resonating once again in Gary’s life: the bridging of the real and the unreal, a crossing of fantasy and reality where the imagined becomes more tangible and malleable than reality itself.

While signature works by these dark masters — Bradbury, Howard, Poe — definitively formed Gary’s nascent tastes in speculative fiction (tastes which would later encompass L. Sprague de Camp, Fritz Leiber, H. P. Lovecraft, A. Merritt, Michael Moorcock and especially Jack Vance), a few tales were never enough. “From 1950 on I was a devoted science fiction and fantasy fan,” he explained. “I read a book or pulp ‘zine or two a day.”⁴⁷

Gary read whatever else he could find that spoke to his curious inclinations, regardless of the genre: “The books at my house were most influential in forming my mindset, one of non-conformity and love of adventure.”⁴⁸ Books were not always enough, however. Sometimes Gary felt compelled to bring the literary adventures to life. Gary once joked, “My mother said her worst mistake in raising me was reading Tom Sawyer to me. I loved reading myself, but being read to allowed more visualization of the story. Indeed, a friend of mine helped me to build a raft to float around on the lake [*Geneva*] when I was around age 12.”⁴⁹

* * * * *

In the 1950s, fantasy literature did not yet formally exist as a respectable genre (at least from the majority viewpoint of adults in America). Pioneers such as Lord Dunsany, Arthur Machen, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Algernon Blackwood made considerable inroads into dark pockets of the imagination, which were later tapped

⁴⁵ Internet Speculative Fiction Database, “The Veldt.”

⁴⁶ Internet Speculative Fiction Database, “The Illustrated Man.”

⁴⁷ “Jack Vance & the D&D Game,” an article by Gary Gygax which originally appeared in *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*, Volume 1, Issue #2, 2001. See also ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A Part VI, posted February 18th, 2004.

⁴⁸ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 3, Number 7 (Issue #7), August 2007. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 1.

⁴⁹ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX, posted April 10th, 2007.

more deeply by H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. But without genre solidification and the resultant ease of access to fantasy fiction, Gary sometimes had to make do with whatever he could find.

Therefore, throughout the 1950s he read a seemingly random assortment of readily available works which would include Thorne Smith's racy *Topper* supernatural pulps, older works such as Victor Appleton's *Tom Swift and His Giant Cannon* (1913), and the vibrant, unfettered fiction of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Favored tales by Burroughs ranged from the quite worthy *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* (1916-1918), to the rather more brusque and shameless *Cave Man* and *Cave Girl* (1913-1917). *Cave Girl* by the way was Gary's first Burroughs novel, and so would lead to Gary picking up *A Princess of Mars* later in life.⁵⁰

He read many stories by Robert A. Heinlein, John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (c. 1953),⁵¹ and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* saga as well (c. 1951).⁵² Beyond science fiction, one remarkable Burdick family favorite was William Clarke's *The Boy's Own Book: A Complete Encyclopedia of all the Diversions — Athletic, Scientific, and Recreative — of Boyhood and Youth* (London, 1828; Boston, 1829). This crafty tome is basically a 19th century survival manual, its ideals perhaps best represented today by spiritual successors such as *The Boy's Book of Adventure* and *The Dangerous Book for Boys*.

This voracious reading of speculative fiction and other "adventure" works would continue unabated through 1956, when Gary felt that he had finally "caught up" with most of the published classics written up to that point. He read "literally thousands of S[c] F[,], fantasy, folklore, and mythology books" during those formative years.⁵³

He once also mentioned that he read "about every book of Fantasy and Science Fiction published in the US."⁵⁴ And "by the tender age of twelve," he wrote separately, "I was an avid fan of the pulps ... and I ranged afield to assimilate

⁵⁰ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part II. Posted March 13th, 2003.

⁵¹ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part VII. Posted February 14th, 2005.

⁵² Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part XI. Posted July 21st, 2006.

⁵³ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A Part XI, posted July 19th, 2006.

⁵⁴ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part II. Posted February 17th, 2003.

whatever I could find which even vaguely related to these exciting yarns. Meanwhile, I was devouring ancient and medieval history, tales of the American frontier, historical novels of all sorts, and the [*Horatio*] *Hornblower* stories in the old *Saturday Evening Post*.”⁵⁵

(The *Horatio Hornblower* tales, by the way, ran prominently in the *Post* in 1951, '52 and '53, with a smattering of dates before and after.)

He even went back in time, as it were: “I bought used pulps so as to read back through the entire 1940-on era,” he wrote. “That’s why I included so extensive a reading list in the [*Dungeon Masters Guide*] ... I read and enjoyed, was inspired by, a large number of authors.”⁵⁶

The finest of these books, and his strongest recommendations, would be culled into a list which he would publish in his *Dungeon Masters Guide* (1979) as “Appendix N” (with several later additions).⁵⁷ *Dungeons & Dragons*, in itself, can in some ways be considered a highly complex synthesis of Appendix N and many earlier historical games, as we shall see.

There were other inspirations as well. While these enticing books were boundless and radio was virtually omnipresent, for Gary the movies of Hollywood were a rarer and more impressive treat. One of the most captivating films he saw in his teens was *Ivanhoe* (released in July 1952), an award-nominated Robert and Elizabeth Taylor epic set in the age of Richard the Lionheart. The movie’s fight scenes featured knights in shining armor (including a great skull-and-raven crested helm), caparisoned horses, jousting, archers repelling a shield wall formation of harried men-at-arms, sword fights in castle stairwells, and a very dangerous-looking axe-vs.-flail battle fought both on and off horseback. (Spoiler: the axeman wins in a frenetic dismounted melee, but only barely.)

⁵⁵ *Dragon* magazine, issue #95, pg. 12.

⁵⁶ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part II. Posted February 17th, 2003.

⁵⁷ Gary’s list of authors which he would add to Appendix N, if he had the chance, was surprisingly small. It included Glenn Cook (specifically the saga of *The Black Company*) and Terry Pratchett (specifically the *Ringworld* saga).



“Quickly, before our parents see us!”

And here again, boring reality would be dashed with fantasy: the *Ivanhoe* joust and tourney scenes inspired Gary to engage in one of his many bouts of rowdiness:

“The movie inspired me to make a flail. ... [*Boyhood friend*] John Rasch and I actually were able to smite each other’s garbage-can lid shield several mighty blows, before we were spotted by anxious parents and the tournament brought to an untimely end.”⁵⁸

This surging interest in medieval battles was heightened when the famed German toy company of O(tto) & M(ax) Hausser began releasing their composite plastic “Elastolin” historical figures in 1955. A series featuring Prince Valiant and cohorts seemed to have been the most popular line. These immaculately painted masterpieces would eventually include the knights of King Arthur, Huns, Vikings, Romans, Templars, Lansquenets, American Indians and frontiersmen, all intricately sculpted. These coveted “Hausssers” were little works of art, which put Barclays and lesser toy soldiers to shame. Animal, army and domestic figures were crafted by the company as well. As an example of range and production quality, the company’s 1958 *Lineoplastik Dresden* catalog (for example) features draft horses in full harness, realistic farm animals, wildlife with accurate fur markings, and a variety of jungle primates.

It seems that Gary tried to create an early wargame using his own figures during the early 1950s. As he once said in an interview, “I got into military miniatures when I was in my teens, just trying to make up a game with all of the neat toy soldiers I had.”⁵⁹ He and Don Kaye tried to devise rules for Gary’s collection of World War II figures and tanks, as well as for his 54 mm Britons soldiers. The fact that they could only think to use coin flips instead of dice for combat resolution slowed the game down drastically, and the use of ladyfinger firecrackers ensured that the collection would not have survived too much play testing.⁶⁰

Gary and Don therefore abandoned the idea of codified wargaming until little later in life (when they would discover it another in an entirely different published form).

Games were not the only events in Gary’s life at this time, however. Escapism brought him comfort, and it also protected him from sorrow. He suffered a great loss on January 1st, 1956, when his father died. Ernest Sr. had been suffering from

⁵⁸ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 2, Number 4 (Issue #4), Spring 2006. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 1. See also *Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A Part VII*, posted August 15th, 2006.

⁵⁹ *Masters of Fantasy: TSR, the Fantasy Factory*. A documentary which aired on the Sci-Fi Channel in 1997. The comment appears at approximately 7:05.

⁶⁰ Refer to the Foreword to H. G. Wells’s *Little Wars*, the 2004 Skirmisher Publishing LLC edition, written by Gary Gygax.

cancer, and lingered over the Christmas holidays. “It is all too recent in memory,” Gary wrote in 2002, “despite the many years that have passed.”⁶¹ This event and others would hurt him deeply. Later in life, he would sometimes feel that he had lost his way during his final teen years. Gary never did graduate from high school, but he did attend junior college while he was living in Chicago (likely in the late 1950s and early 1960s). He resided in the city near Bryn Mawr and Broadway, where he would live for about eight years.⁶²

School was not everything, of course. Gary’s competitive gaming habits took further hold around 1958, when he attended the Chicago Chess & Checker Club. However, the veteran players there wanted to play for money, and so he spent his time at the Rogers Park Chess Club instead.⁶³

While working on his education he enjoyed anthropology, sociology, and English classes. His professors knew he was intelligent, and he managed to make it onto the Dean’s list and to be admitted to the University of Chicago. Regardless of his further educational potential, when all was said and done he decided to take a job in insurance instead.⁶⁴

That was a few years in the future, however. Throughout his teen years, Gary was still obsessed with stories. In the early to mid-1950s, he was “fascinated by castles, medieval history, and secret passages and hidden treasure rooms.”⁶⁵ He spent his free time creating rudimentary floor plans to supplement the many adventures he read about in his books. “Most [*of these maps*] were of castles,” he once related, “or castle-like mansions with secret stairs and rooms.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part I. Posted December 17th, 2002.

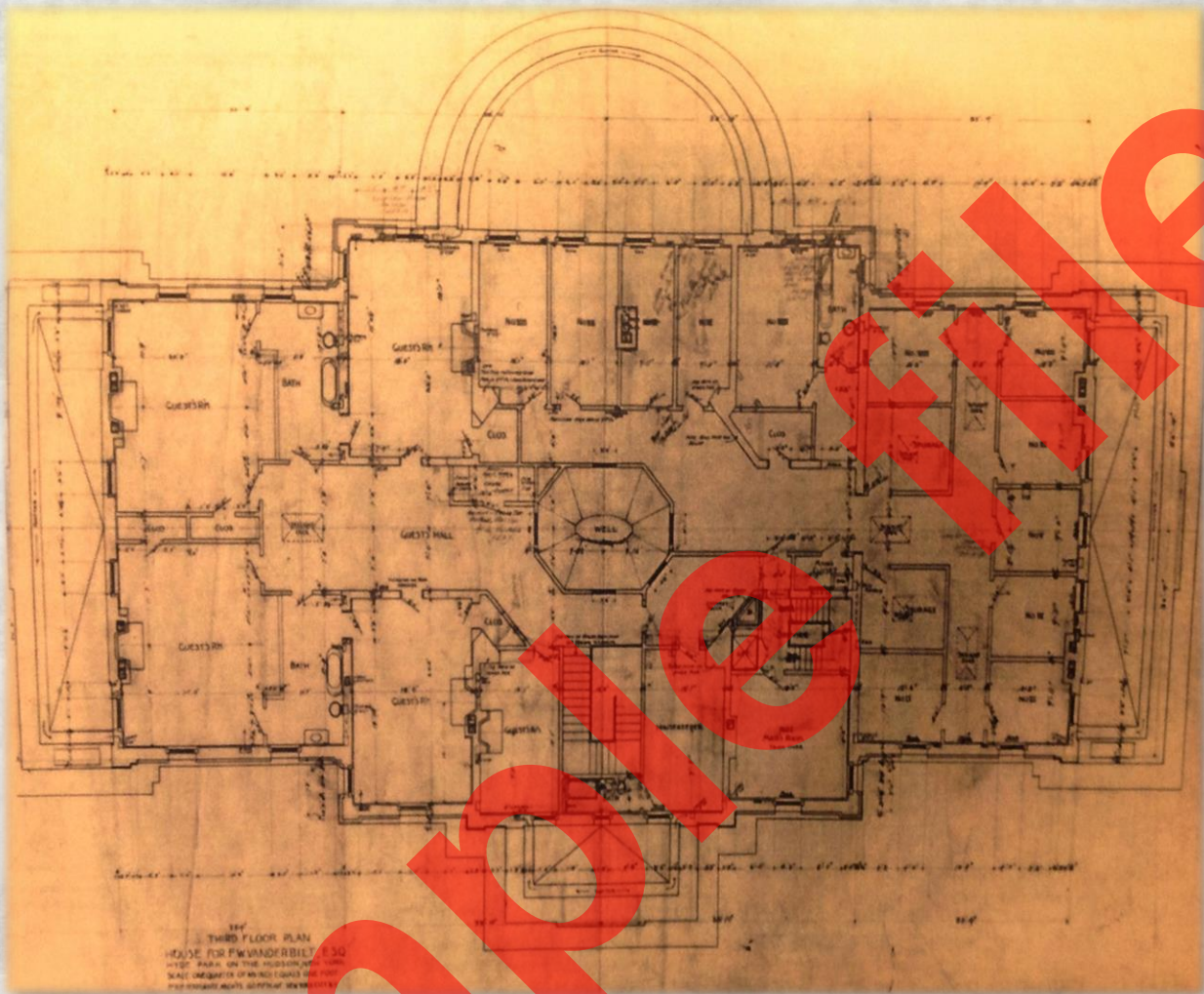
⁶² Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IV. Posted October 17th, 2005.

⁶³ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part VI. Posted June 19th, 2006.

⁶⁴ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part VI. Posted February 16th, 2004.

⁶⁵ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part V. Posted June 1st, 2006.

⁶⁶ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 10 (Issue #10), October 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax, pg. 2.



Old floor plans for refurbished castles, manor houses, and Victorian mansions and sanitariums tend to offer interesting opportunities for creative embellishment ...

Such vivid imaginary exploration of fearful secret passageways, however, was never sufficient to satisfy Gary's ever-increasing appetite for adventure. He was in later life rather cagey about the details, but it is known that he loved to explore the dangerous multi-level ruins of the "Crazy House," more colloquially known as the Oakwood(s) (or "Oak Leigh," per medical journals, or as Gary called it, "Oak Hill") Educational Sanitarium on Catholic Hill.



An early Sanitarium view in Lake Geneva, c. 1905-1910. Contrast added to show the figures at ground level for scale.

(A warning: There are apparently two separate historical Sanitarium institutions — one at the lakeside, and one on the hill; one torn down, one not; one having been opened in 1884/1885, and the other in 1903 — so some of the tales and directions between the two become conflated in the telling. The record is not entirely clear, and I am hoping to make this distinction clearer in the future. Herein, I will simply call Gary's remembered edifice "the Sanitarium" to avoid further confusion.)

It seems that one of the Sanitariums was run by one Dr. Mary E. Pogue as of 1903, Medical Superintendent, for the purpose of aiding troubled youths who were suffering from various physical and mental illnesses. Both institutions was highly regarded, and some of the wealthier families of Chicago kept their afflicted children in the Sanitarium's secrecy and care. Dr. Pogue's theory was that mental illness was

a hereditary condition, and that it could be prevented (at least for the benefit of future generations) through civil learning and careful attention to the youthful developing mind. This misguided but well-meaning belief gave the “Educational” Sanitarium its name, and soon enough its prestigious reputation.

Some of the more dire afflictions attended to at the Sanitarium are mentioned as having included cerebral palsy, epilepsy, meningitis, sensory deprivation, trauma, and “dementia praecox” — now more commonly known as youthful-onset schizophrenia. The *Chicago Medical Directory* of 1905 lists the Sanitarium as benefitting “feeble-minded children,”⁶⁷ and Dr. Pogue herself was noted for specializing in “sterilization, segregation or custodial care of mental defectives.”⁶⁸

Gary also provided some more historical information (from local recollection, spiced with a bit of folklore) in his own personal account of the Sanitarium.⁶⁹ Gary explained that around 1880, a mill was built upon the White River which exits Lake Geneva. The Sanitariums arose thereafter, one in 1884-1885 and another in 1903. The earlier facility “kept a large ... boat on [*the mill pond’s*] shore so as to be able to recapture escaped patients swimming in it.”⁷⁰ According to Gary’s folkloric account, a little after 1910 the managing doctor of the Sanitarium went insane.⁷¹ The tale is a bit of a lurid haunted house aside, of course.

I have yet to determine whether Mary Pogue was ever indeed stricken with mental illness during her career. However, this was almost certainly a sensationalized urban legend, because the 1916 *Program of the Annual Meeting* (for the American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality) lists Dr. Pogue as serving on the Committee of Membership in that year.⁷² Nevertheless, it makes for a good story and I have no doubt that the lurid tale was shared with absolute sincerity by the brave Lake Genevan boys who sought to explore the

⁶⁷ Specifically, refer to pg. 231, second column. The *Directory* can (at the time of this writing) be accessed via archive.org and other online sources.

⁶⁸ *The Illinois Medical Journal: The Official Organ of the Illinois State Medical Society*, Volume 26 (July to December, 1914).

⁶⁹ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷⁰ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷¹ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷² This book, among several other sources relevant to the Sanitarium, can be accessed via books.google.com.

“haunted” Sanitarium on many a cold October night.

Gary had several adventures in the five abandoned stories of that ominous Sanitarium, as well as in the pitch-black subterranean steam and laundry tunnels underneath.

A beautiful tree-lined drive led up to the five-storied primary building, and one period mention in the *Chicago Medical Recorder* noted that the facilities were “situated on high ground, in a park of seventy-three acres of exceptional beauty, overlooking the lake and city of Lake Geneva.”⁷³ But Gary insisted that the forested location was eerily desolate at night, with a full orange moon rising behind the ruins of its silhouetted towers!⁷⁴

Around the autumn of 1949, Gary and two friends entered the Sanitarium on a dare. The other boys wanted to catch pigeons for sport, while Gary — eager to prove that he was not afraid, although he was and very much so — tagged along. Inside, the beautiful building had once been replete with paneled walls, marble floors and gold and silver fixtures. Most of the more portable prizes had been vandalized and stolen long before Gary’s time. The jaunt that night went off without a hitch, and Gary’s craving for more venturesome sallies in the future grew omnipresent.⁷⁵

Several of the building’s features would later inspire Gary’s rendition of traps, tricks and secret rooms in the Castle Greyhawk dungeons. The Sanitarium had a mechanical elevator for the transfer of patients from floor to floor. The nearby laundry facility was connected to the Sanitarium by an underground tunnel which was difficult to find. The central bell tower may have inspired the “Endless Stair,” which spiraled from the heart of Gary’s imaginary castle. The Sanitarium building was also said to have featured several sealed treatment rooms which could be flooded with smoke to knock a “rampaging inmate” unconscious.⁷⁶ Another makeshift locale the daring boys called “Big Mike’s secret room” would later inspire Gary to fill more fantasy maps of his own devising with sliding walls and secret doors.

⁷³ This fascinatingly evocative advertisement, along with many others, can be found in the back of Volume 31 of the *Recorder*.

⁷⁴ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷⁵ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷⁶ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

Clearly, it would have been very easy to imagine the ruin as being filled with “monsters” too. On one occasion, along on yet another dare-jant with some friends, Gary was prowling about the ruins in the middle of the night. Suddenly, there was a huge crash (a wild animal shifting the debris, perhaps?) and everyone but Gary leapt out of the shattered windows, leaping from some 8’ to 12’ off the ground. Fortunately, no one was badly hurt.

In another Sanitarium adventure, Gary and company finally discovered the blind and nightmarish “maze of tunnels” awaiting beneath the ruin.⁷⁷ And so, his first-ever “dungeon crawl” began. Using penlights to pierce the shadows, holding their collective breath and pushing spider-infested cobwebs aside, the boys explored much of the claustrophobic labyrinth which — as they soon learned — really did stretch beneath and beyond the main building’s massive structure. Feeling reckless, Gary also climbed all the way up to the roof, where he almost got arrested by an exasperated patrolman (who was likely reduced to shouting threats at Gary from ground level, some sixty feet below). Another time, he nearly saw friends fall to their death; and once, when he was trying to impress a girl, it was almost Gary himself.

He never forgot the place, nor the delicious fear born of these dangerous adventures. Gary once wrote that the asylum ruins “were [very] influential in inspiring the D&D game ... the place had the tunnels under it, and ‘secret rooms’ created by the boys who haunted [explored] the place. Such places were needed, for the police took a dim view of us being in the building.”⁷⁸ “If anyone has any doubts,” Gary wrote, “about where much of the inspiration for castle ruins and dungeon adventures came from after reading about the Oak Hill Sanitarium, I have failed in communicating.”⁷⁹

There were other clear influences for Castle Greyhawk as well. When Gary and his friend Tom Keogh (or “Keoghtom,” as he is known to Greyhawk gamers) were teenagers, they created a secret imaginary “torture chamber” in Gary’s basement.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁷⁸ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IX. Posted October 14th, 2005.

⁷⁹ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax. See also ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A Part IX, posted October 14th, 2005.

⁸⁰ Tom Keogh Sr. would be the inspiration for a magic item in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, Keoghtom’s Ointment. The father of Gary’s friend was a freelance artist who worked for

They painted the door to the root cellar gray, so that it would blend in with the dimly-lit wall ... a perfect “concealed door” in later *Dungeons & Dragons* terminology. This newly-concealed door was locked, and a second more secret entrance was created by removing a block from the farther concrete wall.⁸¹ This setup was probably inspired by “Big Mike’s” improvised secret room in the Sanitarium, which had in turn been devised to frighten friends as well as to offer emergency sanctuary from the annoyed policemen who were sent in to hunt the death-defying boys down (for their own good, of course).⁸²

Tom and Gary also created rope manacles for their own “torture chamber,” and fastened them to the wall. Soon thereafter however it seems that there was almost a nasty incident involving two other boys and a young girl who had been taken into the secret chamber. But fortunately, Gary caught the miscreants in time and threw them out. In doing so he learned not to hold underage parties when his parents were away.⁸³

* * * * *

Such risky youthful adventures had finally been reigned in by the time Gary discovered board-based wargames during the Christmas season of 1958, when he purchased the Avalon Hill game *Gettysburg* at the Chicago bookstore Kroch’s & Brentano’s. This game’s price was \$4.98, a princely sum when we consider that the c. 2017 equivalent would be over \$40. The game was in fact so expensive that Gary and Don had to save their money before they could afford to jointly purchase it.⁸⁴ Gary played the game endlessly with his good friend Don Kaye. As Gary would later comment, “[*Gettysburg*] sufficed to make me a convert to board wargaming.”⁸⁵

Entranced by this new (and safer!) diversionary venture, Gary and Don kept

Walt Disney, and a great lover of speculative fiction himself. Imagination certainly ran in the family.

⁸¹ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 11 (Issue #11), August 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁸² *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 12 (Issue #12), September 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁸³ *The Crusader: The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*, Volume 4, Number 11 (Issue #11), August 2008. “How It All Happened,” by Gary Gygax.

⁸⁴ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part II. Posted January 31st, 2003.

⁸⁵ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part I. Posted March 1st, 2005.

playing the Civil War game and exploring its full potential. *A lot*. In fact, the game would waken Gary's interest in serious game design, and the lessons he learned modifying the board and rules for various other battles would influence many design decisions made later in his career. It seems that by the spring of 1959, Gary had written four lined-paper pages of "house rule" additions for the *Gettysburg* game.⁸⁶ However, he noted that these rules were "tossed aside," because they added complexity to the game but not enjoyment. This first attempt at game design, although regarded as a failure, would inform his later rules decisions made in writing *Chainmail* and many other games.⁸⁷

Gettysburg with its original release had made the Avalon Hill company an "overnight success."⁸⁸ As such, multiple new editions would be forthcoming throughout the 1960s. The game was re-released with hexagon ("hex") grid maps, which replaced the original square-grid maps, in 1961.⁸⁹ As Gary's wargaming hobby became an obsession, he tried his own hand at map and game design with some more serious *Gettysburg* scenario revisions. It should be well-noted that Gary created many professional games throughout his career before and after *Dungeons & Dragons*, including *Alexander the Great*, *Arsouf*, *Don't Give Up the Ship!* (an important game designed in collaboration with Dave Arneson), *Dragon Chess*, and *Legendary Adventure*. Many of the earlier games are now relatively obscure, but in their day virtually all were highly regarded.

Becoming intrigued by the limitless potential of the hexagon game boards, Gary was apparently the first person to inquire with Avalon Hill concerning the availability of blank hex sheets for new map designs. He wanted five sheets for the creation of custom gaming maps, presumably so that he and Don would be able to play test the other battles of the Civil War. It is not known if these early maps still exist, but a lifelong precedent was certainly set by Gary's plans. The path was clear: "The desire to create games for a living struck me in the early 60s," he once wrote.⁹⁰ Gary would continue to create hundreds if not thousands of similar game maps over the next 40-plus years. Incidentally, the person he wrote to in 1963 to acquire these hex sheets was one Tom Shaw. Much later (in 1973), Gary would invite Mr. Shaw

⁸⁶ Online web forum post: Dragonsfoot.org. Dragonsfoot Gary Gygax Q&A, Part I. Posted March 7th, 2005.

⁸⁷ Online web forum post: ENWorld.org. ENWorld Gary Gygax Q&A, Part IV. Posted August 17th, 2003.

⁸⁸ *The General*, Volume 1, Number 1, pg. 1.

⁸⁹ Refer to the Boardgamegeek page for *Gettysburg*.

⁹⁰ Random Events, the TSR Newsletter, June 1983, pg. 1.

to consider his own game *Dungeons & Dragons* for publication by the Avalon Hill company. Shaw's lack of a concrete answer may have convinced Gary that he needed to found his own game design company, so that he could fulfill his dreams.

Following *Gettysburg*, Gary discovered H. G. Wells' *Little Wars* and *Fletcher Pratt's Naval War Game* in the 1960s. His copy of *Little Wars* was loaned to him by a friend,⁹¹ and in 1976 he would devise a magazine of the same name devoted to the subject of historical miniatures gaming.



Mr. Wells, measure in hand, prepares to give the forces of his miscalculating gentleman friends a belligerent pounding.

Also in the 1960s (perhaps in the second half of 1968), Gary became involved with a fascinating and groundbreaking play-by-mail (PBM) science fiction wargame, entitled *War of the Empires*. The original game was invented by Tullio Proni, and it involved (as Gary defined it) “a universe-wide power struggle between two socially hostile groups. On the one hand was the Greatest Empire, a

⁹¹ Refer to the Foreword to H. G. Wells's *Little Wars*, the 2004 Skirmisher Publishing LLC edition, written by Gary Gygax.

monarchy/aristocracy with dreams of binding every habitable planet to the throne. Opposed to this colonialist empire was the League of All Worlds, basically a confederation of all planets, systems, and multi-system governmental forms wishing to resist the expansion of ‘The Empire.’”⁹²

Mr. Proni served as the “Master Computer,” parsing the many move requests received from the players by mail, and then dictating the outcome of the many disparate results. The game was played “in the blind,” meaning that players were at the mercy of calculated guesswork due to limited reconnaissance and the PBM-engendered “fog of war.” Moves and their residual aftermath were all reported by Proni in a short-lived fanzine entitled “The War Report,” beginning in February of 1967.⁹³

The game was a deliberate exercise in confusion. Conflicting attempts at colonization upon the most desirable and resource-rich planets would inevitably lead to conflict, and the pulses of simultaneous movement — combined with haphazard reconnaissance in the form of reports from inferior scout ships — would quickly devolve into entertaining chaos. The best players, it seems likely, would be the ones who could patiently wait for two or more rivals to nearly wipe each other out over a particularly desirable world. A savvy lurker fleet’s crews could then swoop in as “saviors” and claim the ill-won prize. The game would probably also have encouraged a certain degree of metagame communication between players (in terms of treaty declarations, or proposed trade agreements, or even pronouncements of intended territory), if the community had ever grown sufficiently to support such derivative communiqués.

But despite the game’s many promising innovations, the time-consuming referee role was dropped by Mr. Proni for unknown reasons during the spring of 1967. The dozens of players were left in the hopeless dark of “the void” as soon as the decisive proclamations from the omniscient Master Computer lapsed into static and silence.

A while later, Gary became interested in the game’s mysterious legacy. He tried for many weeks (in early 1969) to get a written response from Mr. Proni, to determine if the interstellar campaign would ever continue; but there was no answer forthcoming at all. Around the spring of 1969, Gary “took the bull by the proverbial horns and went to work on the project,” which seems to indicate that

⁹² *The Dragon*, Volume 1, Number 3 (Issue #3), October 1976. “Does Anyone Remember? War of the Empires?” pg. 4.

⁹³ *The Dragon*, Volume 1, Number 3 (Issue #3), October 1976. “Does Anyone Remember? War of the Empires?” pg. 4.

he started running *War of the Empires* as the Master Computer himself, with or without Mr. Proni's regards.⁹⁴

Gary expanded the game "into a larger and more complex system" and then encouraged people to send in moves via mail once again. This time, mail was to be directed to Lake Geneva.⁹⁵

He even published a successor fanzine, "The New War Reports," in April and May of '69 so that the game might take hold and potentially spread afar by way of positive word of mouth or gaming fanzines.⁹⁶

A small ad appeared in *The General* magazine as well: "If you're interested in space warfare," it read, "certain issue [heirs] of *The Galaxian* [a zine] have printed rules to a game designed by Tullio Proni pitting members of 'The Greatest Empire' and 'League of All Worlds' against each other in one tremendous holocaust. To find out how you can join either of these two factions, contact Gary Gygax, 330 Center Street, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin 53147. A form will be sent that will be the basis for your 'Potential Rating' as determined by the 'Master Computer.'"⁹⁷

A third issue of "The New War Reports" appeared in early September, when the campaign had blossomed to included forces controlled by over 60 players ... the most ever in the game's existence! Gary's eager successor in the project, Bill McDuffie, kept this new fanzine going for another year. But the game again fizzled out, likely due to the colossal amount of time-consuming calculations and minutiae which required constant tracking. Without such work on the part of the DM-like Master Computer, it would be impossible for anyone to keep the starfarers' battles ongoing, accurate, timely and fair.

Mr. McDuffie may have succumbed to fatigue as well. Another hardworking and creative gentleman named Alan Lucien (later of *Tomb of Horrors* fame, as we shall see) tried to summon the game's third phoenix-like incarnation in late 1971, but alas, all that remained were ashes. The players were weary of the on-again, off-again nature of turn parsing and ever-sporadic battle reports. "By then," Gary

⁹⁴ *The Dragon*, Volume 1, Number 3 (Issue #3), October 1976. "Does Anyone Remember? War of the Empires?" pg. 4.

⁹⁵ Online interview: The RPGnet interview with Gary Gygax, part 2 of 3. Conducted by Scott Lynch, May 17th, 2001.

⁹⁶ *The Dragon*, Volume 1, Number 3 (Issue #3), October 1976. "Does Anyone Remember? War of the Empires?" pg. 5.

⁹⁷ Please refer to the May-June 1969 issue of *The General*, pg. 15.

reported, “participants had undoubtedly lost both interest and faith.”⁹⁸

Nevertheless, in daring this endeavor Gary had learned a lot not only about speculative fiction game design, but also about campaign logistics, referee-driven mass combat, and creative tactics to assist in handling collaborative parties comprised of many allied players. These lessons, supplementing his numerous prior experiences in wargame design, would serve him well in future years when he would be running dozens of eager players through his own campaign ... a speculative fiction setting which would soon become known as the World of Greyhawk.

* * * * *

Many other games appealed to Gary as well, but perhaps the most significant game which had a profound influence on the future creation of *Dungeons & Dragons* was a medieval battle scenario created by a hobby shop owner named Henry Bodenstedt, entitled *The Siege of Bodenburg*. This game was published as a serialization in issues of *Strategy & Tactics* (S&T) magazine, beginning in July of 1967 and completed by that December.

The Siege of Bodenburg was meant to be played with toy medieval soldiers. Henry, as designer, had a vested interest in encouraging his readers to buy the model Elastolin plastic castle and soldier figures required to play his game. And why, precisely? Because Henry could provide the full needed sets to interested buyers! He worked hard to import the figures from Germany and to make them all available to North American customers.

The *Bodenburg* game itself features archers, knights, arquebusiers (gunners) and catapults. Interestingly, each unit has a Combat Value, indicating how many “hits” that unit can take before being killed — an early example of the concept of hit points.

⁹⁸ *The Dragon*, Volume 1, Number 3 (Issue #3), October 1976. “Does Anyone Remember? War of the Empires?” pg. 5.



Siege calamitous, the walls are breached!

The huge castle required to play *Bodenburg* was part of the Hausser Elastolin *Forten en Kastelen* series. To this day, the castle is still an impressive piece of work. The “miniature” is about 2’ x 2’, featuring the castle’s entire bulk embedded high upon a craggy hill. A drawbridge crosses over a partially-encircling moat, leading into a gatehouse barbican and thereon into a small rising courtyard. A great tower and a few colorfully-roofed fortifications complete the elaborate piece. This is, once again, a specter of the future silhouette of Castle Greyhawk.

The *Bodenburg* scenario surrounding this castle, as outlined in the S&T articles, involves the besieged forces of one Count von Boden, waiting for winter supplies. The Count’s forces, weakening with hunger, are suddenly assaulted by a horde of Turks and Huns. In the skirmish and siege game which follows, each figure represents a single man. In other early wargames, a single unit would often

represent 20, 50, or even 100 men or more, which tended to make the determination of casualties a rather abstract affair. *The Siege of Bodenburg*, however, employed a 1:1 representation (one figure representing a single fighting man). This intimate scale — especially when coupled with the detailed Hausser soldier figures — creates a tense air of personal investment and loss as each casualty takes place. Each imaginary soldier, however anonymous at the beginning of the game, is soon given his own dire tale to tell. Every wound would be an event, an almost cinematic occurrence. This unusual game mechanic, while now commonplace, would have a profound effect on Gary Gygax (and a fellow medieval wargamer, Jeff Perren) some years later on, influencing profound choices in game design.

Outside of this key innovation of scale, a full game of *The Siege of Bodenburg* can be a rather dragging and dull affair. The rules are effective and detailed, yet rather blasé (admittedly, from my own biased and 21st-century perspective). There are some intriguing asides hidden away beneath the doldrums, however. Interesting details include a sally gate, from which castle defenders can rush out to attack the besiegers at their peril; the morale and scatter rules, simulating wounded men in panic; and the rather grisly option of allowing starving knights to sacrifice their horses to add to the castle's rations. Gary read these rules with interest, and later (in the summer of 1968, as we shall see), he got to play the game with Elastolin miniature figures for the first time.

In later years, Gary would pay respectful tribute to *The Siege of Bodenburg* by modeling the ruined Moathouse in his own work (Dungeon Module T1, *The Village of Hommlet*, 1979) directly upon Castle Bodenburg's scenario and floor plan. The *Forten en Kastelen* model is almost exactly represented by the module's map of the Moathouse Ruin, and the history of Greyhawk itself pays homage to the battle. For in T1, we can read:

“Only after the battle which destroyed the main armies of the Temple of Elemental Evil had ended was attention turned to this place [*the Moathouse itself, situated to the east of Hommlet*]. ... A detachment of horse and foot with a small siege train came to the marshlands to lay the castle low. The common folk for miles came to help, and the Moathouse was surrounded, cut off, and battered into extinction.”⁹⁹

This game would later inspire Jeff Perren to make his own medieval miniatures rules, and a passing mention of soldiers running through “underground passages” to reinforce parts of the castle may have been the kernel which would later get

⁹⁹ *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Dungeon Module T1, The Village of Hommlet*, by Gary Gygax. TSR, 1979.