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GLOAMHOLD

CAMPAIGN GUIDE





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GLOAMHOLD CAMPAIGN GUIDE

Glowing amid dark rumours and terrible stories of desperate adventure, death, betrayal and glimmering treasures squat the unutterably ancient halls of Gloamhold. This crumbling, benighted, haunted dungeon complex of unknown, but undeniably vast, extent is buried deep within the grim and brooding spray-drenched headland of the Mottled Spire. It is a place of legends, madness and death. Within this towering, wave-lashed shard of limestone lies the labyrinthine passageways and chambers of Gloamhold's outer reaches and, beyond them, the benighted precincts and canals of the legend-shrouded Twilight City.

Gloamhold is designed for use with any edition of the world's most popular role-playing game.

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Development: Creighton Broadhurst

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Thank you for purchasing the *Gloamhold Campaign Guide*; we hope you enjoy it and that you check out our other fine print and PDF products.

Dedicated to the Wednesday Night Anorakers.

Special thanks to Tom McCarthy.

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Welcome to Gloamhold! I hope this book is the foundation of many happy, memorable years of gaming.

So what's Gloamhold? Simply put, Gloamhold is an old-school sandbox style megadungeon. Since the first years of my love affair with role-playing games I've yearned to design and run a "proper" megadungeon. Gloamhold is my attempt to do just that—a "proper" megadungeon laced with a strong dash of cosmic terror and doom (because—after all—everything is better with tentacles).

While Gloamhold is my (sinister, warped) baby I've not done all the work myself. Chief amongst my co-conspirators is Tommi Salama who has drawn the achingly beautiful maps for the place. I wish I could draw like Tommi, but given I can't I'm delighted he's on-board.

This book is merely the first of many Gloamhold releases Raging Swan Press will be hurling into the world. This is a scene-setter, a primer. From this book, all other material will flow. As such, I've indulged myself and included several essays laying out a lot of my "behind the curtain" style thoughts on megadungeon design and play.

WHAT'S IN THE CAMPAIGN GUIDE

I've broken the *Gloamhold Campaign Guide* down into three distinct sections.

1. **Design Notes:** In the first short section, I discuss some of my design decisions that drove and shaped Gloamhold's design. While the concept of old-school gaming has grown increasingly popular in recent times, I think it's important to state what I mean when I say "old-school." After all, my "old-school" could be your "ancient-school" or "new-school" depending on when your gaming career began.
2. **The Duchy of Ashlar:** Part two presents a brief overview of the nearest civilised state to the Gloamhold's doom-shrouded halls. Ashlar provides a general setting for the campaign and provides opportunities for other adventures, if a change of pace is desired.
3. **Gloamhold:** The final section of the Campaign Guide comprises an overview of Gloamhold itself. Each major section of the dungeon gets a two-page spread. These bare-bones should be enough to get any GM's creative juices flowing (or gushing like a raging torrent!)

WHY SYSTEM NEUTRAL?

Why is this book system neutral? How can you have a *dungeon* without any stats?!

When I was live designing Gloamhold on my blog (creightonbroadhurst.com), I did so with the assumption I'd be using the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game (after all that's what I use in my own campaign). However, during the design process it became increasingly obvious that a sizeable chunk of the people reading and commenting on Gloamhold used other game systems. It seemed madness, therefore, to clutter up this book with stats and game mechanics that many readers wouldn't use. It also occurred to me that if I stripped the bulk of the "rules stuff", I could include lots more lovely flavour; the individual GM can deal with the crunch.

This book, therefore, is designed to be compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. Of course, it's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms—almost all found in the core books of the first edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game—are easily modified to the GM's system of choice. After all, I think everyone should be able to work out "rogue" means "thief" and vice versa...

WHY OLD-SCHOOL?

The short answer is, "because I like old-school-style play."

The long answer is somewhat more complex. Over the last few years I've become increasingly frustrated with modern dungeon design—you know the dungeons I mean: small maps, every room occupied by a monster that needs killing, no wandering monsters, all the challenges level appropriate and so on. I want to play in the gloriously vast, rambling dungeons of yore. I want to face tremendously easy and (avoid) tremendously hard encounters. I want to be able to poke about in empty parts of the dungeon. I want to encounter wandering monsters. I want to enjoy skilful play—instead of simply whacking things until they fall over and die or achieving victory through (magic item) shopping. But most of all, I want to play in a sandbox dungeon in which the players decide their goals and objectives. I want them to drive the story and to tread their own path, not follow a narrow railroad to a pre-determined ending.

I think this is a good place to point out that if you don't like the old-school style of play, Gloamhold—at least in the incarnation presented here—might not be for you. But I hope it is and I hope you have an epic time exploring Gloamhold. Let me know how it goes!





Gloamhold has been designed very much with an old-school megadungeon feel. When you are designing your own adventures in Gloamhold, it might help to keep the following basic design principles in mind. They are what shaped Gloamhold and keeping true to them will help you craft adventures that fit in and make sense with the overall theme and feel of the dungeon. (But, of course, feel free to do what you want.)

LAYOUT & DESIGN

- **Multiple Entrances:** There are multiple ways of getting into Gloamhold. While all might not be obvious (secret entrances are cool) most should be relatively easy to find by all but the most blinkered explorer.
- **The Deeper You Go, the More Dangerous it is and the Greater the Rewards.** This is a tradition of dungeon design. However, it is better restated as the further from the main entrance you go, the greater the danger and greater the rewards. Thus, the challenges lurking in the lower levels of Rivengate are generally easier than those to be found in the Twilight City.
- **Each Level (or Sub-Level) has a Distinctive Flavour.** This flavour shouldn't be unnecessarily odd just for the sake of flavour. For example, a sub-level of twisted natural passageways home to degenerate and feral derro is an example of good flavour. A level dominated by a mad alchemist who has no connection or relevance to the greater dungeon is bad flavour.
- **Sub-Levels:** Smaller, self-contained areas, sub-levels enable the GM to inject different kinds of flavour or monsters into the campaign. Sub-levels may only be accessible from one normal dungeon level. Some may be secret while others may provide a relative haven for explorers.
- **There should be Multiple Connections Between Levels and Sub-Levels.** The PCs should have freedom of choice to decide which parts of Gloamhold they explore. Access points between levels often serve as choke points. The more access points there are, the easier it is for dungeon denizens to move about and the more choices the players have. Some connections should be hidden or secret. Not all should proceed only to the next level; some may provide access to multiple levels or may miss one or two levels.
- **Secret and Remarkable Connections:** Not all connections between levels and sub-levels should be a standard staircase. A dried up well shaft, flooded passage or chasm are all good examples of other connections.
- **Players Should have Meaningful Choices:** This doesn't mean the party get to choose which door to use to get to the villain's throne room. Rather, Gloamhold's layout enables the PCs to pursue multiple paths through the dungeon, exploring different areas, sub-levels and levels as they choose. Wherever possible, the PCs should enjoy freedom of movement through the dungeon and not be forced down a set path.
- **Links to the Deepest Dungeon of All.** Gloamhold has several links to the Ebon Realm. This link provides tremendous design freedom to include strange, ancient monsters crawling up from the lightless depths in search of prey. It essentially answers loads of tricky questions about how and why certain monsters came to be in the dungeon, and provides limitless adventure possibilities.
- **It Should All Make Sense (to a Certain Extent).** Realism is good to a certain extent, but realism for realism's sake is pointless. Worrying about the minutia of dungeon design is time spent not crafting exciting encounters and flavoursome dungeon levels and encounters. Enough information should be present for a GM to answer most basic questions about Gloamhold, and no more. For example, deciding where its denizens get their drinking water is important. Worrying about the minutia of the dungeon food chain is not.
- **Minor Elevation Shifts:** Dungeon levels are rarely flat. Minor shifts in elevation can confuse inattentive explorers.
- **Extra-Dimensional Spaces:** Used sparingly, extra-dimensional spaces provide an interesting change of pace to exploration.
- **Level Size:** The dungeon levels are of various sizes. Not all fit on a single piece of graph paper. Some especially large levels may use a larger scale per square.

HISTORY & MINUTIA

- **Details, Details, Details, but not too Many Details.** Empty rooms are boring. Standard corridors are boring. Dungeon dressing is an excellent cure for boring areas. Are the flagstones broken and cracked? Does dried blood splatter the wall in an otherwise empty room? Such details build verisimilitude and give the feeling Gloamhold is a live setting.
- **Gloamhold Exists for a Reason.** Gloamhold exists for a reason. It doesn't exist just to have adventurers adventure in it. Gloamhold's history has left its mark on the dungeon's layout, architecture and style.
- **There are Secrets to Uncover.** Be it secret doors, lost treasures or shocking discoveries about the dungeon itself, Gloamhold has secrets. The PCs should be able to uncover these through good, attentive play.
- **Relevant and Discoverable Back-Story:** The greatest back-story in the world is pointless if the PCs never get to interact with, discover and understand it. Knowledge of Gloamhold's history shouldn't be automatic—the PCs should have to work for it. Having knowledge of some or all the complex's history should provide insights into the dungeon (and in-game advantages).

DENIZENS & CHALLENGE

- **Wheels Within Wheels:** Gloamhold doesn't have an overall boss or super villain, although several fell powers (Dagon and Amon-Pyr) are influential within the dungeon. Each—of course—works through many proxies, lieutenants and minions; inevitably the PCs will encounter some of these folk (and could even play one off against another).
- **Away with the 15-Minute Adventuring Day.** If every room contains a life or death struggle in which one or more PCs end up unconscious or dead, the dungeon turns into an unending grind. The PCs do a room or two and then retreat to rest. That's boring game play. Instead, the dungeon's design should promote long-term delving. Parties should be able to explore at least a dozen rooms before resting. Easier fights, unoccupied rooms and "easy if dealt with properly" battles are all excellent tools to prolong the adventuring day.
- **Wandering Monsters:** Monsters don't just sit in their chambers waiting to be slaughtered. Some move about—either because they are scavengers or because they have things to do. Random encounters add both an extra level of uncertainty to exploration and to the realistic feel of the place.

NEARBY

- **Settlements:** Two well-sized settlements—Dunstone and Languard—lie within relatively easy reach of Gloamhold. Explorers can retreat to these towns between forays to rest, recruit help, buy and sell magic items (if the campaign supports the practise) and so on. Both also offer the possibility of urban adventures and intrigue, as a change of pace to normal dungeon delving sessions.
- **Wilderness:** The bulk of play in a Gloamhold campaign will happen in the dungeon but occasionally a change of pace may be required. The crags and deep, twisted valleys of the Mottled Spire offer a chance for wilderness exploration and adventure. When adventurers gain access to spells and items enabling underwater exploration, they could also elect to explore some of the many shipwrecks languishing beneath Hard Bay's frigid waters. Finally, even low-level adventurers could explore one or more of the many small islands and rocky outcroppings struggling above Hard Bay's turbulent waters.



For me, old-school play is best embodied by the 1st and 2nd editions of the world's most popular roleplaying game. I'm a huge fan of the old-school style of play, but I love the mechanics of 3rd edition and Pathfinder. In designing Gloamhold, my aim was to create a setting in which the principles of old-school play can be married with the mechanics of whatever game you play. To do that, though, I must first show exactly what I mean by "old-school." For me, old-school isn't necessarily tied to one set of rules or another—the play experience's the thing!

So, what do I mean by old-school?

GAME PLAY

- **Show, Don't Tell:** With the advent of more mechanic-heavy games, most things are resolved with a die roll. This in turn inevitably reduces the amount of description players put into their PC's actions. For example, "I search for traps" or "I use Bluff on the ogre". In old-school games, the lack of a skill system forces the players to describe how their PCs search for traps, gather information, hire a henchman and so on. This style of game play is slower, but more immersive.
- **Manage Resources:** Resource management has fallen out of favour recently. Apparently, it's "un-fun." I disagree. Tracking your expenditure of spells, arrows, iron spikes or whatever is an intrinsic part of the game. Clever or inventive resource management can reward the party ten-fold and provide crucial in-game advantages. It's a great feeling to have exactly the right piece of equipment for any given situation and coming up with inventive uses for such items is its own reward.
- **Large Parties:** Old-school play normally features large parties of adventurers. Later editions introduced the CR system designed for four or five PCs (with few if any henchmen or hirelings). Back in the good old days, my parties normally had about eight players; I remember running one game for 14 players! Obviously, larger parties can handle greater challenges than smaller groups. This can translate into longer delves in larger, more rambling dungeons or simply dealing with more enemies in each encounter area.
- **Someone's Mapping, and it's Not the GM:** Exploration was a key part of old-school play, and a good map could mean the difference between success and failure. In later editions of the game, the GM is the one doing the mapping, but in old-school play the GM merely describes what the PCs see and one of the players must draw the map!
- **Use Your Brains, Not a Skill Roll:** This relates to "Show, Don't Tell". When you can't merely roll a skill check to solve a problem, disarm a trap or even search for treasure you are forced to use your brain to come up with inventive solutions to problems. Players get rewarded for clever play, instead of merely rolling high.

- **There Might Not Be a Battle Mat:** Most of my old-school games featured battle mats—but many other GMs I played with simply described the combat and we used our imagination to visualise the scene. Of course, combat in later editions are much more tactical and your figure's exact position matters.

GAME & WORLD DESIGN

- **Game Balance:** Later editions of the game emphasise game balance, in that most if not all encounters are fair and level appropriate for the PCs. This means, if a group of 1st-level PCs opens a door they aren't going to encounter an ancient red dragon on the other side. In old-school play, the same group of PCs very well might encounter that self-same red dragon if they ignore the warning signs and/or do something colossally stupid. (This is an extreme example). In Gloamhold, the PCs will occasionally have to deal with extremely dangerous encounters (or the like), but these will be clearly "signposted."
- **Magic Items:** In the good old days, magic items were truly wondrous objects coveted by all adventurers. Ironically, in later editions of the game they were renamed wondrous items, but became anything but wondrous as PCs were free to buy and sell them pretty much as they chose. This reduced magic items to little more than a commodity and gave rise to the much-reviled magic item shop (which I hate with the burning passion of a thousand fiery suns).
- **Gritty vs. (Super) Heroic:** In newer editions of the game, even 1st-level PCs can accomplish heroic feats well beyond the reach of a normal person. This is not the case in old-school gaming where 1st-level characters are only marginally more effective than a typical man-at-arms. Even at higher levels, old-school PCs are not god-like figures able to bend reality or crush even the most terrifying foes.
- **Fairness, Not Balance:** We've become increasingly obsessed with balance in recent editions of the game. I'm becoming more and more convinced balance isn't all it's cracked up to be. It creates a more predictable—perhaps even sterile—play experience which is fine as far as it goes. However, when things become too predictable, neither the GM or the players are rarely surprised by events. That's a little sad, for me.

AND JUST ONE MORE THING...

The rules in old-school games are often much lighter and play is quicker than later editions. For me, I like the rich depth and complexity of systems such as 3.5 and the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. I like the customisability of players' characters (and their enemies) and the tactical options available for combat. I don't necessarily see this as incompatible with an old-school style of play—it's just a challenge to resolve!

THE DUCHY OF ASHLAR

Sample file

THE DUCHY OF ASHLAR

Ruler: Duke Armas Nenonen

Government: Feudal fief

Population: 63,200

Alignments: N, NG, LN

Important Religions: Conn, Darlen, Serat

Important Organisations: Order of the Watch Eternal (knightly order), Sagacious Masters of the Eldritch Nexus (wizard's guild), Shadow Masks (thieves' guild), Worshipful Company of Freetraders (merchant's guild)

Languages: Common, Elven, Halfling

Towns & Cities: Languard (pop. 7,923), Dulwich (pop. 4,734), Dunstone (pop. 3,574)

Villages: Ashford (pop. 75), Coldwater (pop. 176), Hard Bay (pop. 138), Kingsfell (pop. 174), Longbridge (pop. 193), Slaughterford (pop. 168), Underdell (pop. 152), Thornhill (pop. 157), Wellswood (pop. 192), White Moon Cove (pop. 328), Woodridge (pop. 138)

Fortifications: Black Tower, Languard, Tor Abbey

Resources: Fishing, timber, shipbuilding

Coinage: platinum orb, gold crown, electrum noble, silver penny, copper bit

Adventure Sites of Interest: Cavern of Forbidden Dreams, Gloamhold, the Mottled Spire, the Sunken Pyramid, Tower of Woe, Valentin's Folly

Dismissively called "Fenland" by outsiders for the broad swath of fetid, tidal saltmarsh almost cutting the duchy in twain, Ashlar sprawls along the appropriately named Hard Bay. Effectively isolated from the rest of the continent by a high plateau crowned by dark, silent woods clustering hard against a legion of fantastically shaped stone spires, Ashlar is an isolated realm of hard, resilient folk.

For centuries, the folk of Ashlar have dwelt in the shadow of ancient evils. Although it has stood for generations, the Duchy is not the first kingdom to claim the lands sprawling north of the Forest of Gray Spires. From his seat in Languard, Duke Armas Nenonen ever watches over his realm. Brooding upon the ancient shadows seemingly clustering ever closer about his land, he looks to the grim, towering bulk of the Mottled Spire as the source of the evil besetting his people. Within this towering, wave-lashed shard of limestone lies the labyrinthine passageways and chambers of Gloamhold's outer reaches and, beyond them, the benighted precincts and canals of the legend-shrouded Twilight City.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NOTE

Several geographical features of note lie inside or on Ashlar's borders:

Forest of Gray Spires: While not part of Ashlar, the Forest of Gray Spires forms its southern border. Deemed all but impenetrable, wild rumours cluster thickly about these brooding woodlands and the legion of strange, slender rock spires thrusting upwards from the plateau on which the forest stands.

Hard Bay: A wide and deep bay renowned for stormy weather and savage tides, Hard Bay is aptly named. Its bounds are a tangle of rivers, rocky headlands, vertiginous cliffs, wooded isles and isolated, stony beaches.

Saltmire: This swath of dismal, low-lying saltmarsh sprawls outwards from the broad, muddy banks of the River Ost and its tributaries. It effectively sunders the duchy in twain.

ADVENTURE SITES OF NOTE

Several adventure sites of note lie inside or on Ashlar's borders:

Cavern of Forbidden Dreams: Buried deep in the Shoalstone and only accessible via a precipitous, oft-flooded tunnel the Cavern of Forbidden Dreams is a place of pilgrimage for those seeking ancient forbidden knowledge.

Gloamhold: A vast dungeon complex of unknowable, but undoubtedly ancient, origin and unfathomable extent, dark rumours and terrible tales of adventure, death and betrayal hang over this forsaken site. It is a place of madness and death.

Tower of Woe: Standing deep in the Forest of Gray Spires, the Maddening Spire (as it sometime called) appears as if it has been twisted and melted. Those daring its interior are often driven mad by their experiences.

The Mottled Spire: This huge chunk of granite glowers over Hard Bay's treacherous waters like an angry giant. Difficult to reach by land or sea, the Mottled Spire shelters Gloamhold deep within its bowels.

The Sunken Pyramid: Lying barely 30 ft. below the water, the Sunken Pyramid looms large in sailors' lore. The surrounding water is cold and dark. Sharks are reported here in great numbers. Sea spirits, gigantic sharks and the ghosts of those drowned nearby are all said to haunt the surrounding waters.

Valentin's Folly: This ruined keep stands upon a wooded bluff overlooking a steep-sided valley. Also known as Ironwolf Keep, or the Shadowed Keep on the Borderlands, the fortress was built by Valentin Ironwolf. The fortress fell into disrepair shortly after Valentin—along with his family—were slain by his orc and goblin enemies.