



# FOUNDING Greyhawk

## The Creation and Development of the GREYHAWK® Campaign, 1972–75

by Gary Gygax

It was late in the year 1972, near the start of winter. Wisconsin then is cold and dreary, but all the current local regulars of the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association, meeting at my house, were as cheerful as if the finest spring weather were at hand. For some time the club had pretty much dropped historical wargaming for playing the CHAINMAIL™ game. Now they were about to launch into an altogether different variety of fantasy gaming, and the enthusiasm was unbounded. They knew their stuff on the tabletop, understood the combat system and magic, recognized the monsters, but had yet to venture into the subterranean depths of a castle dungeon. So, waiting with impatience for me to finish were the stalwarts Don Kaye, Rob and Terry Kuntz, Ernie Gygax, and newly interested Elisé Gygax. A mere handful that would in a few months swell into ten times that number.

### Model Castle to GREYHAWK Dungeons

Late the night before I had gone down into the basement, measured out my tabletop gaming model of "Castle Bodensadt," and from those measurements plotted out a draft of castle ruins. Most unsatisfactory! The darn castle didn't mesh well at all with the scale of the sheets of graph paper I was going to use. The castle was square, and I fully intended to use every bit of the rectangular paper that would map the underground mazes I had outlined in name, and thus in vague form. The ruined upper works were secondary stuff anyway, so I just elongated a couple of curtain walls, and solved the "problem." In this first incarnation, Castle Greyhawk was to have no substantial above-ground presence. A few rats and minor bandit nuisances only, with entrances to the real adventure area below hidden by rubble, so the "upper works" received short shrift. Entrances here, here, and there. Four minor encounter areas, and a pit area where an adventurer of incautious sort might slide down and take damage, but possibly find another hidden entrance to the first level. All done!

There were to be nine exploration levels when the dungeon construction was finished. I had listed names that went something like this: #1 Barracks, #2 Storerooms, #3 Cells, #4 Torture Chambers, #5 Maze, #6 Labyrinth, #7 Catacombs, #8 Crypts, #9 Arena, and an "Invisible Monster" bottom level where the triumphant heroes would receive their reward and next adventure, as it were. More

about that later on. At the time under consideration, the first level only had been drafted.

That drawing took up all my spare time during the following day. It was a level that had lots of corridors and rooms, few squares penciled in to indicate solid stone. There were, however, only about 20 encounters on it, for I was truly a novice Dungeon Master and quite unprepared for the avid plundering that was about to begin. Closeted in my little study at 330 Center Street in Lake Geneva, I hastily completed sketchy notes on the monsters and treasure to be found there on level one of the dungeons of Castle Greyhawk, while the assembled players waited impatiently at the dining room table.

A word about the naming of the castle and campaign. It was done for Chief Blackhawk, the Indian leader of the Fox and Sauk tribes in the Illinois-Wisconsin area in the mid-1800. As an amateur historian, I was much interested in the Native Americans, and I always felt that Blackhawk was a brave and tragic example of the fate of the original inhabitants of the continent. I envisioned a fantasy world setting where the main city would be in a location similar to that of Chicago, a port city on a great lake, on a continent similar in form to North America, and the world generally vague but something like the actual earth. But I didn't want the players to know that general formulation, so "Greyhawk" served the purpose without giving away the show, so to speak, or misleading the group either. After all, this was to be a fantastic world of magic and monsters, a medieval sort of place not anything at all like North America at anytime in regards to culture and society. That explained, let us return to the first adventure.

### The First Bold Adventurers

Early evening, and the first adventurers to explore the ruins of Greyhawk Castle set forth. All were humans. Rob and Terry were the fighters Robilar and Terrik, Don and Ernie were the magic-users Murlynd and Tenser, Elisé was a cleric, but I have lost her 3" x 5" index card with the character stats, and I cannot recall the name she chose. The group slew a few rats, found stairs leading down, and entered the dungeon with torches flaring. What was that noise? (Early on I used a lot of illusionary sounds in the dungeons but found in the long run they helped, not hindered the PCs, so out they went!) Anyway, all were tense,





edgy, and wide eyed. No surprises, a pit avoided, much exploring and mapping, and—amongst other denizens of the dark underground trashed—a group of kobolds decimated and sent fleeing, and a great treasure chest full of copper pieces hauled out. Great disappointment that, for they had deemed it the best of the loot, and 'twas but a trifle.

A few hours later, with loot counted and divvied up, experience points awarded, and planning for the next expedition completed, the players turned on me! "So when is the next adventure?" I suggested that a couple of days later would be best, because I wanted to get another level finished and—"Tomorrow!" and "Yes, tomorrow!" After some grumbling from Don, who had a regular job and couldn't make it, the others browbeat me into an afternoon adventure session. So when I had seen some out and others off to bed, I went back to the study and went to work on adding a few more encounters to level one and roughed out level two. The characters had come dangerously near a flight of stairs leading down, and there was, of course, no lower level at the bottom of those stairs. The level finished, but lacking encounters, I crashed on the studio couch around 2:00 A.M., or so to get a few hours sleep. As with Don, I had to get some work done that day before resuming important things like playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game.

I had earlier put together a list of names I thought would suit the game. Then I polled my kids. My youngest daughter, Cindy, was champion of the name noted, and I, loving alliteration, agreed. So with the first adventure went the now-famous name, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, which the group instantly abbreviated to D&D. The third D&D adventure would follow close on the heels of the second, as Don Kaye showed up in the evening, and others happily joined in hunger for excitement, loot, and the ever-desirable experience points. An ogre lurking in the shadows of the second level sent the troops hastening back from a descent to lower depths. More night work followed for the next couple of weeks as I hastened to create the fullness of Castle Greyhawk.

In a relatively short time, I managed the task. It followed the general plan stated above, and the group, increasing by a couple of players every week or so, roamed and romped joyfully through the levels. Although I increased the strength and numbers of the monsters, the

frequency and deadliness of tricks and traps, as the levels descended, the skill of play and arsenal of weapons more than kept pace with my Dungeon Masterly impediments to progress. Because they were seemingly always present and ready for another go at it, and very able players too, Rob, Ernie, and to a slightly lesser extent Terry, soon had the highest-level PCs. After some truly memorable adventures on ever-deeper levels, a recounting of which would be inappropriate herein, save for one I can not resist telling, those three managed to attain the then-bottom-most of the dungeons beneath the castle.

### Monte Haul Prime!

A short digression to relate the tale I call "The Sack of the Sixth Level." This level was a labyrinth with a lot of wereboars and other shape-shifting creatures lurking around. To the east were several large open areas, all alike of course, and on the western faces of the seemingly solid areas of stone forming these big chambers were secret doors. These accessed six secret rooms. These hidden places were filled with gold, jewels, scrolls, potions, other magical items, and enchanted weapons. All save two, that is. The second and fourth of these six secret chambers held a mated pair of the oldest and largest black dragons held in stasis, freed when the secret door was opened, that act also triggering a lowering of a large wall section for the good dragon to exit.

Well, soon enough Tenser, Robilar, and Terrik found the level. They slew some of the wereboars, did this and that, but kept coming back to the larger chambers in the east. Ernie, for no discernable reason other than his own hunches, had Tenser search for secret doors in exactly the right area, and all too quickly found the monetary treasure chamber. Such looting! They brought back lower level PCs a second time so as to clean it out to the last copper! As might be expected, these three villains then began checking elsewhere, figuring similar locations might have similar secret entrances—which I had foolishly done. So, one by one, the other four hordes of treasure were discovered and looted. How they managed to miss the two dragons I could not understand, and I was forced to grin and bear it, being a fair DM, fairly outwitted. Revenge was at hand!

Greed overcame caution, so one day the three, with a train of henchmen to

assist, went back to the sixth level well once too often. They opened the cell of the female black dragon, saw what they had done, and ran off at highest speed, losing her in the labyrinth and escaping unharmed. Not satisfied, certain that more heaps of wealth awaited, they snuck back, thought to open "her" hidden den, made a really big location error, and instead activated the secret door that triggered the male black dragon's release. Out it roared, itching to slay after its incarceration. A distant response indicated that its mate had heard and was coming. The adventurers were desperate. The male dragon spat, and the PCs struck to subdue. A few hirelings died, the others suffered damage, and the dragon took its lumps to the tune of about 40% of its hit points. The percentile dice rolled out, and the score was over 50! The players groaned, the acid flew, their characters bashed back. Everyone concerned was sorely battered now, but the black dragon had suffered over 80% damage. Surely it would now roll over and beg for mercy. Again come the dice, and the score is over 90! The PCs fled with the dragon in pursuit. Robilar, bringing up the rear, was inspired to grab a gargoyle he had forced into his service and toss it on his back in a sort of fireman's carry.

For the third time the great black dragon belched forth its acid stream, and fortunately for Robilar, the gargoyle took the brunt of that attack. It was changed to a mess running off his armor as Robilar managed to round a corner and head for safety. They had discovered previously that there was a shaft that went upwards of several hundred feet in the far eastern portion of the level. With his *boots of levitation*, the fleeing fighter could easily ascend this small space, leaving any pursuit behind.

Because the reunited pair would take time out to greet each other, I had allowed the whole party to evade pursuit. Robilar, separated from the others, would have the first check for a random wandering monster, of course, seeing as how there had been considerable commotion. The result was positive, and the dice couldn't have been better. A purple worm was indicated, and it could be only one place ... coming down the shaft! So Robilar "deflated" his boots, dropped and ran for his life, right back into view of the black dragons, naturally.

Both spat, missed, and took up pursuit. In his haste to allow his character to escape, Rob forgot that the passageway

down which he said Robilar was fleeing happened to be the very one in which a large black pudding had taken up residence in a depression in the floor. It ate those *boots of levitation* off his feet as Robilar ran across, and delivered sufficient additional damage to put the poor fighter near his end.

It wasn't the end, for the evasive action worked, and Robilar soon rejoined the others, who had encountered no additional monsters to deal with. Battered, *sans* a fair amount of magical items and equipment, and without any loot, the survivors beat their hasty retreat. Thereafter, they avoided the former "Labyrinth I," for it had become "The Black Dragon Level." A couple of additional forays were made, but the dragons were tough [lucky dice too], and had no discernable treasure, so for years thereafter the pair ruled supreme there. However, in the previous looting, the three discoverers went up a couple of levels each, and some of the other players' PCs managed to gain a level also, from which lesson I learned never to have so much treasure so unguarded.

### Down and Out

With malice aforethought, I had put in a series of long, slanting passages that took the unwary characters to lower levels unbeknownst to the player. Rob, playing solo with fighter Robilar, went exploring and without meaning to followed these ways right down to the lowest level of Castle Greyhawk. There, invisible stalkers and other minions of the secret master of the castle herded him to the center, where a magically enabled "slide" carried Robilar down through the earth and out again on the other side of the world, exiting in a strange temple in a land very much like Cathay (China), where nobody could understand him, and from whence he would have to adventure his way back to Greyhawk over land and sea. Before being launched, though, as a fighter Robilar had found +3 *armor*, *shield*, and *sword*; and as he careened down that chute to elsewhere he saw none other than Zagyg the Mad Archmage waving bye-bye to him from a *sphere of force* above, granting by that gesture one whole experience level to Robilar for his accomplishment.

Later that day, Ernie as Tenser, of course, sought for Robilar to go adventuring with him. In the campaign it was the next day, as I did not equate real time with game time. I informed him

that he was nowhere to be found, but through inquiry of Robilar's henchmen, Tenser discovered that the one he sought had earlier set out to explore the lower levels of the castle. Robilar's associates—Rob now had a handful of other PCs—were worried, I informed Tenser. Without hesitation, Tenser went to see whether he could find his comrade. Other DMs can attest to the fact that players manage strange feats indeed for their PCs. Ernie somehow, after a couple of hours wandering off into other areas, had Tenser follow the route taken by Robilar. He received magical items akin to the +3 goodies gained by his fore-runner, and then Tenser too was shaking his head in strange land, pondering what to do next.

And what of Terry Kuntz and Terrik? You guessed it. Not long after, and I kept my eyes glued to the pair who had already "graduated" to see that they made no sign nor signal, the fighter too delved into the lowest levels of Greyhawk Castle bent on finding and rescuing his missing fellows—or, at worst, bringing their corpses back in hopes of being restored to life again. Instead, a third PC in succession, and with no help from his comrades, attained the distinction of "falling clear through to China."

There were now three high-level (11th to 12th, as I recall) PCs in the campaign, safely returned after separate harrowing outdoor adventures, and quite able to tell others of what occurred. Furthermore, Don Kaye's magic-user was only a couple of levels behind those three, and a couple of other regulars had risen nearly as high. With a really large group of lesser-level PCs, ranging from meager 1st and 2nd to strong 5th and 6th, it was time to reconsider the whole dungeon. Before going into that, I will digress to discuss the community in which the PCs dwelt and adventured.

### City Sketch to Sketchy City

Immediately after the initial adventure, I realized I had overlooked detailing the place where equipment was purchased, lodgings kept, and so forth. To manage for the time, I "fudged" a city, making notes and a line map as I went along. From this came a single sheet of graph paper with a walled city. The crooked streets were mostly unnamed. Blocks of buildings were mostly filled in in the dull gray of pencil marking. Only the major points were indicated. These were done in various shades of colored

pencil. Red was an arms dealer, green an inn, blue a tavern, brown a merchant, yellow a money changer, and so on. Such places, and a handful of guilds, temples, other public buildings, frequented streets and byways, and notable places were eventually named, as discovered by exploring PCs and hastily given such identity by the DM. With more players continually joining the campaign, the map was overwhelmed with scribbles and notations. Thus the City of Greyhawk had to grow.

I quadrupled the map. The City of Greyhawk now filled four sheets of graph paper, one for each city quadrant, with slums and thieves quarter, merchants quarter and high, and a citadel area now clearly show. Various temples and wizards' dwellings also became major features at this time. Nonetheless, much of the map remained dark blocks of unnamed buildings on like arteries. Crooked alleys, lanes, and angling streets were mostly nameless, save by their identity as "the way to the Green Dragon Inn" or "the close that encircles the wizard's tower."

This form was reasonably satisfactory for me as constant DM, as with notation and notes, I could keep from major gaffes in handling the bands of PCs seeking adventures in the city. It was just after creating the map that the group grew so large that I could not properly manage it, so I asked Rob Kuntz to join me as a co-DM. He agreed. This brings us to a time in mid-1974, when the D&D game had been available commercially for about six months. The three top players, already mentioned, had "beaten" Castle Greyhawk, and I needed to do major revisions not only on the castle but also to the rules.

### New Castle, Bigger Dungeons

The castle comes first. Because of the number of new players coming to each adventure session, the initial level of Greyhawk Castle had to be much enlarged. Using a couple of sheets of 17" x 22" graph paper, I drafted a complete, mostly undamaged castle above ground. It had multiple levels, and a lot of encounters, the higher up, the more dangerous. Then, using the same sort of paper I drew a new first level that could accommodate both bands of fledgling adventures and the initiated. Four separate descent areas were created with designation by the cardinal directions. Each had multiple flights of stairways leading lower, some ending several levels



farther down. Three were "guarded" by dungeon denizens—elves, dwarves, a very large and strong ogre. One descent area only, that most difficult to find, was deserted and free of "charge" by some guardian. The vast majority of the space, however, was filled with passages, chambers, and rooms. The inhabitants there awaited encounter with the neophytes just learning the basics of dungeoneering. So the fledglings sought their fortunes there, while the veterans ignored such trivial stuff and headed straight for the depths where the big treasures could be found.

As was indicated in the Gord short story, "Heart of Darkness," Castle Greyhawk indeed had a fifth descent area. In the very center of the first level, where most explorers entered via the circular stone steps there, was a hard-to-discover secret entrance to the continuation of that spiral stairway. It went down all the way to the ninth level, with some side exits along the route accessing some intermediate levels not generally accessible save from this shaft. This was the route taken by the very strongest of the PCs, naturally.

The side entrances to the second and lower dungeon levels were basically insular. That is, each led to a series of seven lower levels that were distinct, so that there was North #2 through #8, East #2 through #8, South #2 through #8, and West #2 through #8. Again, plenty of space for progressing PCs to adventure and gain experience. These sets of levels had few inter-connections, save at the very bottom, where each eighth level had a connection down to the ninth, central, level.

From nine on, the levels of Castle Greyhawk progressed straight down for another dozen or so tiers, with mostly cave and cavern areas featured, because large monsters with long-range weapons need space in which to operate. Not surprisingly, a number of these levels also had magical transportation places that sent PCs off to distant lands, other dimensions, strange worlds, or different times. (The general design served so well that I have recently used it as the basis for a new set of dungeon levels I am currently in process of creating for a new fantasy role-playing game.)

### Dungeon Construction and City Planning

To manage all of this new construction, a cannibalization of my original dungeon, and Rob Kuntz's, gave about

half of the needed material beneath the expanded new first level. To complete the gigantic new dungeon plan, I cut back to about half of my usual Dungeon Mastering time, and Rob doubled his. In relatively short order, the "new and improved" Castle Greyhawk came into being before the year's end. What a joy for all!

But that didn't mean I was now able to get back to the fun of DMing. In the course of all that really intensive play, I had found a lot needed to be done for the D&D game, so I began to write the manuscript for the GREYHAWK supplement. Having myself adventured mainly in Rob's campaign, a lot of the ideas I now wanted to put on paper came from him, so we agreed on a co-authorship of the work. Because I had, in fact, previously begun compiling material from about the time the original game was released, something over half of the content was mine, but Rob's contribution was indeed considerable. So, again, I took a back seat in DMing to Rob while writing the work.

When it was finally done, I found that there was no problem in picking up the castle, but when city adventuring was the order of the day it was pretty difficult to follow what Rob had been doing there. Thus I determined to do a really big map of the City of Greyhawk, in a scale small enough to allow writing in the names of arteries, building number identifiers, and all the like. Out came the big sheets of graph paper, the rulers and pencils, and work commenced. It was a project that was never to see final completion for a multitude of reasons. First, the map was so large that it covered the whole playing table, and that was a good-sized one indeed, able to accommodate a dozen or more players with the DM having an end for himself. Second, it demanded so much time and effort of detail it wasn't worth it. Third, PC activity in the city made the setting change unexpectedly. Fourth, to use the new map meant it had to be completed properly and then folded or cut into manageable, concealable portions. Fifth, we weren't doing the fourth, and play went on apace in the old version of the city, thus altering the yet unfinished new one. Sixth, we (and here I must properly say I) gave up. Outside of the "Odd Alley/Strangeways" area and a couple of others depicted on the big map, we went back to the four-sheet, general version and remained with it for most City of Greyhawk adventuring.

### The Complete Milieu with Room to Grow

This brings us nicely to the end of the time period indicated, the year 1975. As of then, both Castle Greyhawk and the City of Greyhawk were formed into the shape they retained in the campaign run by myself and Rob Kuntz for many years to come. To accommodate my play of Mordenkainen, Yrag, Bigby *et al*, and the rest of the crew with very powerful PCs, Rob began a second series of adventuring areas, outdoors and subterranean as well. One of these areas is described in the module WG5 *Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure*. Similarly, I too did separate areas for Rob's PCs and the other top regulars, and many of these were published by TSR, Inc. The one least popular with the Greyhawk Campaign players was *Ile of the Ape*, very nearly the most beloved by me as the DM.

Do I have the original material written about above? Well, most, if not all of it. The original one-page map of the city might have gone missing, but I think I can find the rest. As for the castle dungeons, of course! The main problem is that the lot is in typical DM form, quite suitable for the campaign's directors to manage when immersed in the action, but rather cryptic now after all these years. Hundreds of different players with yet more PCs adventured in city and castle, blasted buildings, created constructions, wiped out walls, closed passages, created new ones, trashed monsters, brought in others, and who can say what else!

Battered and now-neglected, these first two campaign creations remain as legends of the D&D game, and I am proud to say they brought as much enjoyment to so many others as they did to me.



Gary Gygax became active in role-playing games when he authored the D&D® game as its co-creator. He later created the AD&D® game and many D&D and AD&D modules and accessories, including the GREYHAWK setting. He is the author of numerous novels, short stories, and even more magazine articles, mostly dealing with gaming.