

## INDEX

### PLACES

Insamdursil – A mountain. Remote, rocky, and cold. Sparsely settled by humans and goblins. A culture of golems developed within this mountain. This mountain later collapsed due to a combination of over-mining and frequent accidents. Generally, this was considered the fault of the golems.

The River Innis -

The Kingdom of Rhuuz – A small and irrelevant kingdom which was destroyed about 450 years ago.

The Domain of Erngastron – A large empire composed of many kingdoms and republics. It is over 900 years old.

Dihumvia – A swampy territory which is constantly in rebellion against whoever controls it.

### PEOPLE

The God of the Wilds – Known by many names, including Baxthos.

Alastair Cromwell –

Broak -

High Dogmat Thengus III – An unremarkable leader of the nature god's cult at Gray Haven. Died in the Battle of Gray Haven, [DATE A].

Honthaz the Vigilant – A famous and productive historian of [DATE A MINUS 200]. He wrote many biographies and chronologies.

Dormav the Magnificent – Born [DATE A MINUS 600]. Author of *Various Alchemies*. He produced little original work, but devoted his life to collecting and summarizing all the knowledge of the world.

Mongthrax the Dour – Born [DATE A MINUS 580]. Rather than producing remarkable inventions and spells, as was fashionable at the time, he astonished other magicians by producing numerous examinations of failure and its causes. His research (and the criticism of his research) eventually formed the basis for the modern methods of experimental inquiry.

Lord Rose – [DATE A MINUS 575]. 15<sup>th</sup> Guard of the Northern March of Rhuuz. Performed admirably in the Dihumvian Campaign.

Krungus the Wise – 54<sup>th</sup> King of Rhuuz. Ironically, he was not especially wise. In fact, he chose the title for himself and insisted that other people use it.

#### I. The Battle of Gray Haven

- A. (Just a lot of gratuitous violence.)
- B. Lots of civilian casualties.

#### II. The Life and Times of Alestair Cromwell

- A. Made self-replicating golems because he was lazy.
- B. Didn't really think things through.
- C. Golems, like gremlins, are a magical creation which escaped.

### III. Broak's Revelation

- A. The god of nature is uninterested in helping him against the golems
- B. In fact, the golems are "my people"
- C. He'd do well to flee or lead his people in exodus
- D. The master of the monastery is not in harmony with nature

I.

The Battle of Gray Haven, [DATE A]

A History

By Mob Rob Dsen

In the winter of [DATE A], an army of Golems marched down from Insamdursil's peak and built a fort above the treeline. That site is now called Golem Fort Crag. No human found the place useful before, nor has any human found it useful since. The Golems, which had been mining the mountain for decades or centuries, undetected, now built a road down from their fort, into the forest, and built a logging-camp.

By an ingenious system of conveyances, they transported lumber uphill to their mine. Presumably, to fuel furnaces. Golems ingenious creatures, but their habits are alien to Men. They will mine ore for a century, then smelt for a century, then forge for a century, then return to mining. We suspect they had finished mining, and so needed of fire.

Now these Golems, known for their industry, soon cleared all the trees for miles around their logging-camp. They built their road farther south and they built a second fort above the River Innis, at a place called Innis Gap. Then they built a second logging camp, and once again commenced to clear the trees.

This attracted the attention of the monks at Gray Haven. These monks worshiped nature. They made their living by hunting, trapping, gardening, and doing small crafts. They depended upon Insamdursil Forest to survive, and they defended the forest with great vigor. The temple at Gray Haven was fortified with stone walls. Within these walls, the monks practiced martial arts and wild magic. There were over two hundred of them.

A Gray Haven monk traveled to Innis Gap, where the Golems received him politely. He asked them to leave the forest and return to the mountain, or else to adopt a more sustainable kind of forestry. When he returned, he reported that the Golems had either failed to understand him or refused to comply. Evidently, their self-expression was difficult for him to comprehend.

In the following weeks, the monks of Gray Haven undertook to organize a defense. They rallied local human militias and made peace with the Goblin tribes. All in all, their forces totaled about six hundred: two hundred monks, three hundred local militia, and seventy-five or a hundred goblin raiders. They were led by the High Dogmat, who was not a military tactician. The Golems probably numbered eight hundred or a thousand. Their leadership and method of organization was unknown.

As soon as their forces were ready, the monks of Gray Haven dispatched a party to attack the fort at Innis Gap. This was in late winter, before the thaws made the terrain unstable. Human militia marched along the river, arriving beneath the fort, and lay siege to it with flaming arrows and earthworks. Monks and Goblins took the hill above the fort, raining down stones and logs upon it. The Golems made no response for several days. They ceased their logging operations and repaired their walls, but made no foray.

Then a group of twenty Golems climbed onto the hill above the fort. Fifty more followed them. The monks made all sorts of attacks, having prepared various magics and weapons, but the Golems repelled them easily. The monks had expected the Golems to be strong and hearty, but were surprised to find them intelligent, skilled in all arts of war, and nearly immune to magic. This miscalculation cost them the battle. One Golem seized a fully-grown tree and ripped it from the earth, swinging it wildly and sweeping a half-dozen monks off the hillside. Another charged into the fray, seizing men and crushing them with its bare hands. The sight of these monsters, bloody and sooty, must surely have inspired fear. The Goblin raiders soon fled, and the monks were not far behind.

When the militia-men beneath the fort saw that the hill had been lost, they promptly retreated. The Golems then opened the gates of their fort and sent forth a contingent of cavalry. Such a thing had never been seen before. Evidently, the Golems had constructed Golem-horses, tireless and mighty steeds. Their cavaliers were armed with enchanted halberds, and they rode through the militia-men and trampled them to death. A great many died. Others dove into the River Innis, where they died of the cold.

Two hundred fighters went out to attack the fort at Innis Pass, and about fifty returned. These losses were not all casualties: most of the Goblin raiders had abandoned the cause without struggle. Nevertheless, morale diminished severely. Many of the militia-men returned to their homes. The monks of Gray Haven planned a desperate second attack.

Before such an attack could begin, however, word traveled south that the Golems were marching, two-by-two, toward Gray Haven. Now the local militias were organized in earnest. They supplied strategists, who repaired the walls of Gray Haven, dug earthworks, and laid traps.

Gray Haven was built on the banks of the River Innis. In the old times, it was a farming colony. The stone walls were built to protect the town and temple against thieves and bandits, but Gray Haven was never intended to defend against armies. It was built on the banks of the river, I repeat, beneath a noble bluff. This bluff would have been a fine place to build a castle, but it was too inconvenient for the monks, who preferred to live by the water.

The Golems seized this hill and placed catapults upon it, then bombarded Gray Haven. They also blocked off the northern course of the river, which ran up into the mountains. Then they dug down into the hill, emerging at the base, and attacked the walls directly. The militia held the wall, but could make no foray.

The Golems then executed an enormous feat of battlefield engineering. They dug down into the hill, eroding its structure, then pulled away the supports. This caused a controlled avalanche, which swept the Gray Haven away and blocked the course of the river. The resulting

flood killed nearly all breathing land-creatures in the area, and later destroyed several towns. The Golems, meanwhile, tunneled through the ruins of Gray Haven and killed all survivors.

After that, the Golems devoured another large portion of the forest. Then they retreated into Insamdursil's Peak, now a mighty fortress, and abandoned their lesser forts. When emissaries came to their doors, they bade no-one enter, and they would not treat.

*They got a little fort up there at the top of that mountain*

*And they see everything we do down here*

*But no-one knows what they got down there.*

II.

The Life and Times of Alastair Cromwell

A Biography by Honthaz the Vigilant

Alastair Cromwell was born in [DATE A MINUS 580] in the Kingdom of Rhuuz, in the Domain of Erngastron. The Family Cromwell was a mercantile family. His father was a trader in textiles. His mother was a famous beauty, well-read and trained in many arts. They ensured that their son would enjoy a comprehensive education. In his seventh year of life, he manifested a capacity for enchantments. In his ninth year, a conclave of mages declared him a genius. With much anguish, his parents enrolled him in the Academy of Erngastron.

At that time, enchanters had just begun to formally experiment with the properties of various materials. For many long centuries, it had been known that crystals and gemstones held complex enchantments most reliably. Dormav the Magnificent published his seminal treatise, *Various Alchemies* in the very year of Alastair's birth, and Mongthrax the Dour wrote *Doomed Variants: Collapse and the Enigmatic Alignments* only three years later. By the time Alastair reached adolescence, however, these texts had only just begun to produce a revolution in the field of enchanting.

While records of his schoolwork are lost, we can surmise, based on the curriculum of the time, that Alastair probably practiced making burning-stones, freezing-stones, healing-stones, and so on. Having read his journals, we can guess that he excelled in these exercises, but also found them abominably boring. In his youth, he formed an impetuous and libertine character from which, to the end of his days, he never deviated. His grades were middling, but he began to pursue more challenging experiments alone.

His journals describe these experiments: he combined enchanted crystals with clockworks, furnaces, and pneumatics. He produced a quartz which could recharge itself by seeking out sunlight. Using an array of eighteen gemstones, he produced a machine which could calculate divine geometries. Upon graduating from the Academy of Erngastron, he immediately accepted a job at a craftsman's workshop.

His journals tell us that he nearly lost this job due to his fondness for, “fine beer, charming women, dramatic performances, and modern music.” He worked four days a week, rarely arrived on time, and often spent days at a time “thinking, planning, and dreaming” with no concrete results to show. He often dreamed of starting his own workshop, but knew that he lacked the discipline and business acumen to drive the project to completion.

After an unpleasant encounter with his employer, Alastair formed a desperate plan to save his job. This plan would form the outline of his life’s work. In short, he designed machines to replace him. He produced artificial hands, gear-cutters, clockwork assemblers, timing golems, and a logistical assistant. When his master attempted to obtain ownership over these designs, Alastair promptly vanished, taking all his machines with him.

Several months later, he purchased a small tract of land in the hills near the City of Rhuuz and built a workshop there. Using this workshop, he began producing golems of classical design. Golems like these, humanoid and able to obey commands, had not been seen in Rhuuz for centuries. The art of making them had been lost. When they saw Alastair’s creations, the people of the area called them “mechanical laborers” or “artificial serfs.” They feared these creations. The common folk feared that the golems would replace them. The nobles feared that the golems would usurp them. Alastair resolved these concerns by placing his golems directly at the command of humans. Soon travellers remarked, with some shock and admiration, on the sight of a poor farmer leaning against a shade-tree while a golem hoed his field. Morton Astraz painted *The Golem-Farmer* in [DATE A MINUS 550].

To resolve the concerns of the aristocracy, Alastair supplied Lord Rose (15<sup>th</sup> Guard of the Northern March of Rhuuz) with a contingent of twenty-five golem soldiers, who evidently performed admirably in seventeen battles over the course of five years. They also constructed earthworks and fortifications. This was during the Dihumvian Campaign. In the future, when Alastair donated or sold such contingents of golems, he included artificer-golems, which were capable of repairing the others and designing fortifications, as well as logistician-golems, which were capable of analyzing scouting information, designing battle-plans, managing supply-lines, and looting battlefields.

Following the many successes of his golems, his workshop, and his many designs, Alastair was appointed Chief Artificer to the Throne of Rhuuz. At that time, the King of Rhuuz was Krungus the Wise. From his journal, we may glean that Alastair was distraught. As an independent artificer, he worked little and profited enormously. As a courtier to the king, troubles beset him from all directions. Everyone in the capitol, it seemed, believed that Alastair was able to build machines which would solve their problems. He undertook, therefore, to build golems which would handle more and more of his labors.

In [DATE A MINUS 545], Alastair’s journal gleefully attests that he had nearly finished this project. “When a person comes to my office, they are greeted warmly by one of my clockwork assistants. This assistant will serve tea and cake, then inquire as to their needs. The person is invited to wait for my return, but the wait times are always quite long. Indeed, I never attend to my office. These assistants are designed to produce excuses for me. They are capable of fabricating quite complex schedules. Inevitably, the guest will leave a detailed request with my assistants, who will then convey the request to my logistical-engine. This engine will never convey the request to me unless the workshop proves unable to solve the

problem itself. Once in a while, I will be required to produce some dreams, ravings, or (god forbid) designs. Thus, the whole system functions smoothly without my interference. Even the distant mines in the foothills scarcely require attention.”

As Alastair retired from public life, his vices began to claim his life. Soon, his absence was noted. As the golems began to tear up the foothills in search of crystal, metal, and stone, worried rumors spread around Rhuuz and Erngastron. In [DATE A MINUS 540], Alastair’s golem-army outnumbered the army of Rhuuz. One mathematician calculated that it would soon outnumber the army of Erngastron.

A group of noblemen went to visit Alastair. They found him incoherent, so they kidnapped him and took him to the palace. There, it took five days to sober him up. When he was informed of his workshop’s expansion, he expressed astonishment. Reluctantly, he ordered his Prime Logistics Engine to turn over the complete manifest of all golems under its command. Then he ordered them to cease their labors and rally for inspection. Fifty mages, armed with spells for the nullification of enchantments and artifacts, destroyed every one of Alastair’s creations. He was then publically executed. His crime was heresy, usurping the power of gods by creating artificial life.

Only after Alastair’s death was it discovered that the Prime Logistics Engine had disappeared. Moreover, seventy-five of the golems included on the manifest could not be accounted for. Over the years, many enclaves of golems have been discovered which share similarities to Alastair’s design. They always exhibit similar behavior. They dig tunnels into mountains, where they mine resources to produce more golems. They obey no central authority, but allocate tasks amongst themselves. Perhaps most worryingly, they are capable of producing original technology, including songs, clothing, and weapons.

Alastair’s golems bear similarities to another magical-synthetic species, the gremlins. Over ten thousand years ago, an unknown wizard produced the first gremlin by synthesizing a variety of magical creatures. Some rumors even suggest that he used samples of his own blood. Gremlins have proved remarkably difficult to eradicate, and still plague us today, because they reproduce by division rather than sex and because they can, in some ways, consciously determine which traits their children will acquire.

The similarity between gremlins and Alastair’s golems likely led to his execution. Mages of the time, who spent a great deal of time eradicating enclaves of gremlins, must have dreaded the thought of another magical plague. We might wonder why Rhuuz and Erngastron chose to destroy Alastair’s army rather than to employ it in conquest. The learned mages likely persuaded the nobility to choose prudence over power.

Only one question remains unanswered, but it is probably the most important one. When Alastair’s Prime Logistical Engine abandoned its duty and fled into the hills, did it do so at Alastair’s command? Or had it somehow gained the capacity for self-direction?

### III.

An Account of a Divine Revelation,  
Delivered Unto Broak of the Gray Haven

In the year [PLACEHOLDER], a contingent of golems burst forth from beneath the crust of the Insamdursil Mountain, which at that time still rose high into the firmament. Those golems scoured the land of trees, which they conveyed beneath the earth, presumably to fuel their furnaces. They built a road down from the mountains and they built forts along this road, defending the forts with a goodly array of armaments and traps. As near as I can recall, they favored ballistae, trebuchets, crossbows, halberds, spike-pits, trenches, and palisades. The human militias which defended the Insamdursil region fared poorly against the golem contingent, and the mages dispatched to resolve the problem soon reported difficulties. The normal solutions, it seemed, were of no use.

The Gray Haven Temple was built in [PLACEHOLDER minus 550] in the South Insamdursil Forest, in the foothills by the river Innis. When it was first built, the temple consisted mainly of farms, gardens, and cottages. The only stone building was a small shrine to Baxthos, God of Nature. At the time of its destruction by the golems, the Gray Haven resembled the cloistered monasteries of human realms: it featured high stone walls, a humble chapel, granaries, stables, apartments, and armories. The monks of this temple were led by High Dogmat Thengus III.

I joined this temple in my fiftieth year of life, following an unexceptional career as a diplomat. Following the tradition of the Gray Haven, I gave up my name and my history, my glories and dishonors, all of my possessions, citizenships, and certification, in order to become an Animal Resplendent, Servant of the Leaf, Technician of Forgotten Orders, and so on. I now write this account having revoked those titles as well. I have fallen out of the order. This account shall tell you why.

This golem incursion occurred twenty years after I joined the Gray Haven. When we heard that they were denuding the forest and building logging-fortresses, we took it upon ourselves to repudiate them with force, lest their incursion should grow more bold. We planned to repel them with nature-magic and martial arts. Twenty monks accompanied seventy-five militia in foray. I did not accompany them. Instead, I travelled to the nearby goblin kingdoms and made peace treaties. A few tribes supplied us with raiders. I am no military historian, so I will summarize it simply: our attacks were unsuccessful. Few survivors returned. They reported that the fortresses were well-founded and ingenious. The golems themselves possessed an innate resistance to magic. Immeasurably strong, ever watchful, and skilled in all the arts of war, they fought like demons. When I heard that the golems employed ambushes and false-retreats in battle, I grew deeply worried.

After our unsuccessful foray, they must have tracked our soldiers back to the temple. A few days later, they besieged us, employing all manner of constructs and weapons. While their bombardment was overwhelming, they did not cut off all avenues of retreat. I think they wanted us to flee. Indeed, I believe that the golems never intended to cause any undue harm to thinking beings. They simply intended to push us out of their way.

When the siege began, High Dogmat Thengus III called all the monks together in the crypt while local militias defended the walls. He instructed us all to meditate and pray for salvation. We adopted the appropriate poses.

I had barely adopted the meditation-posture when I felt myself seized by an all-encompassing light. It lifted me up out of my body and transported my soul to another plane.

I later learned that I had lain down as if to sleep, even beginning to snore peacefully. No-one had been able to rouse me. I cannot remember lying down like that, so I suspect that my body was moved by a god.

I found myself in a chapel-hall not unlike the one in Gray Haven. This hall was warm and well-lit. Boughs and berries adorned the walls and a huge fire burned in the hearth. Three thrones stood before this fire. On the left throne sat Braxos, his image identical to the icons we worshipped on [EARTH]: a wolf-headed humanoid with antlers, clad in heavy furs, an owl perched on his right wrist. On the right throne sat a god I had never seen before, a beautiful woman with green hair and green eyes, clad in gossamer veils. On the center throne, which was larger than the other two, sat another god I did not recognize. This one had an extremely beautiful face, but it was neither male nor female. Its hair was a cascade of flowering vines, and these vines covered its entire body like a robe. Yet its face was entirely human. It smiled slightly at all times. For the entirety of my vision, the center-god never stopped smiling. All three of them were looking at me. I stood before them. Then I knelt.

When I was kneeling, the center-god continued to smile. After a moment, it said, "Rise, child." I rose, and I looked upon its visage. Its smile grew mild and generous. I bowed my head. "Rise," it repeated. I looked upon it again and I managed to smile myself. The god seemed beautiful and kind.

"You prayed for salvation and I will save you," the god declared. Its other two companions continued to look at me, but they did not speak. "I have chosen you and no-one else. You will be saved and those who follow you will be saved. Gray Haven will be destroyed."

I fell upon my knees and clasped my hands. "Please!" I cried. "I beg of you! Can you not save our home? Can you not save us all?"

You may feel that a man should not speak to a god in this way. Indeed, I agree. When I awoke and recalled this plea, I felt embarrassed, as if I had committed a treason or a blasphemy. Yet in that spiritual place, I had been stripped of all restraint and all capacity for dishonesty. Without a body, the soul cannot hide its truth – so I dared to speak boldly to my god.

The god continued to smile. "I am the god of the wilds," it said. "When a starving wolf hunts a deer, they both run for their lives. When the wolf closes its jaws on the deer's throat, should I answer the deer's prayers? By doing so, I would doom the wolf.

"You are my child. Thengus, your high priest, is an unnatural man and an abomination to me. Gray Havens were lost before you arrived. Lost to dogma and offices and unnatural men. But the golems are my children. They have no gods and no kings. They are free folk. Like you meat-beings, they reproduce and survive. They flee and pursue. They build and destroy."

I remained on my knees. I understood the god's meaning at once. Its revelation pierced my soul. I could not move. It was devastating to feel that my last twenty years had been spent in the service of unnatural men, men who betrayed the very god they worshipped. A keening escaped my lips, a high whine of misery. The god continued to smile.

"What should I do?" I asked.

"Take your things and leave. Do not fight. Do not struggle. Simply flee."

The god stood. It walked around the fire to where I stood, then it knelt beside me, placing a hand on my shoulder. Its hand was heavy. It caused a warmth to spread through my body, relaxing my neck and shoulders. I raised my face to the god. My weeping ceased.



The god continued: "Imagine a carcass in the sun. Two dogs come to this carcass. They do not know each other. They are hungry. What will they do? Perhaps they will share. Perhaps they will fight. If they fight, there will be a great snarling and a gnashing of teeth. They will nip each other. They will wrestle. But they will not kill. The loser will flee with its tail between its legs. The winner will eat. There is no need for death. There is no delusion of honor or dishonor.

"Your battle is like this. If you flee, you will survive. If you fight to the death, you will die. I am the god of nature, and you prayed to me. Did you pray so you can die for glory? So you can die for ideas? These things are unnatural. Give up your home. Give up your records and your walls and your routines. Keep your life."

I awoke at once and saw myself surrounded by monks. I sat up, blinking and looking around. They pressed in upon me, asking questions. I rose, feeling energized, and set about gathering my things. "I'm leaving," I said. "I'm leaving. I spoke to my god... our god... I spoke to him, or it, and they told me to leave. There were three gods..."

As I set about gathering my things, I continued trying to explain what I had seen. The other monks, who were giving up their meditation and setting to various tasks of war, looked upon me with worry, as if I were a madman. The ceiling and walls of the crypt rumbled from the siege-strikes. Cries of commotion echoed down the stairs. When I was almost ready to go (needing nothing but my clothes and a satchel), High Dogmat Thengus III appeared.

"Explain your vision," he commanded.

"I spoke with the nature god," I said.

"With Braxos?"

"With a higher god. But Braxos was present."

"There is no higher god."

"There were three nature gods present. But they are all faces of the same god."

"No. You were deluded. This is the work of a demon. It deceived you. You received a false prophecy."

"I did not. I know the truth of my soul. In the spiritual plane, there can be no delusions."

"What knowledge do you have? I am the High Dogmat! You did not enter the spiritual plane. Cease these ravings. You claim that a god told you to flee? Then flee. But do not spread these heresies, this ramblings, to the other monks. Your betrayal is astounding! We will survive! We will destroy these invaders! We will protect our refuge!"

I almost believed him. He began to give a speech, talking to the other monks more than me. He declared that the golems were unnatural machines. He compared them to the industries of the great cities, which destroyed forests and replaced them with farms and towns. "If we do not fight these golems," he said, "We will have nowhere left to run, because the entire world will become an enormous factory!"

I fled before he finished his speech. I liberated my favorite horse from the stables and took to the road. Fleeing south, towards the river, I came upon a camp of golems. They had blocked the road with thickets of sharpened sticks. My horse was fleet and strong, well-used to the woods, so I drove it off the road. We travelled in a wide arc to circumvent this camp, but I looked up and saw three golems standing uphill, watching me. They carried crossbows and spears. One sat atop a mechanical horse. I felt sure that I would die, so I made an obscene gesture at them. They looked at me, and it almost seemed that they smiled. Their faces

resembled, in a strange way, the face of my god. When I realized that they intended to let me pass, I began to smile too.