

Best of



2008 - 2009

By Joseph Bloch

Being a collection of the author's self-selected best and most useful articles from his blog, The Greyhawk Grogard, slightly reformatted and edited to make practical application in various pen-and-paper role-playing campaigns easier. Possessing an emphasis on practical articles, most having to do specifically with the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting, but not completely eschewing those which touch on matters of a more theoretical nature.

For the full monty, please visit the Greyhawk Grogard blog at
<http://greyhawkgrogard.blogspot.com>

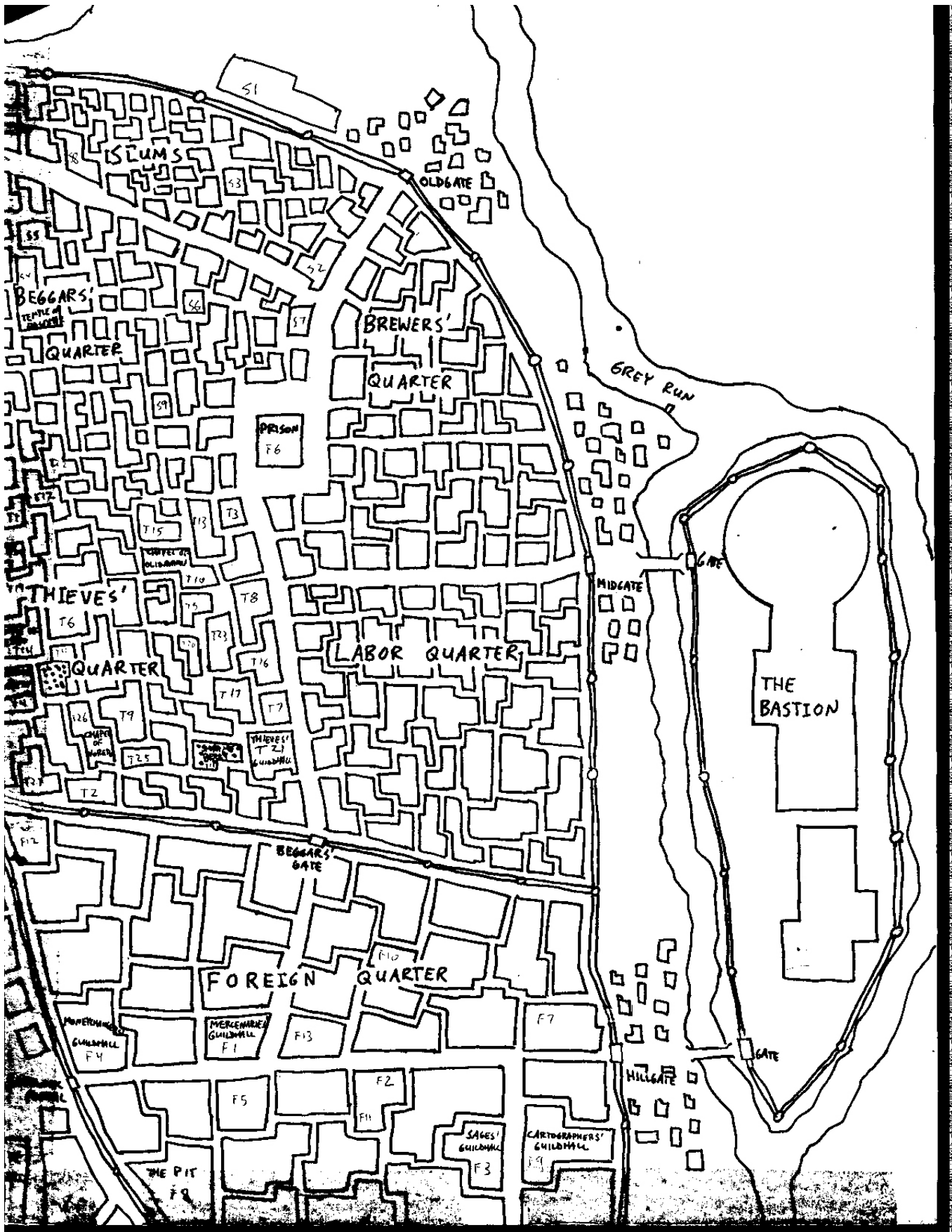
Table of Contents

City of Greyhawk Maps (May 16, 2008)	3
Thoughts on the Elder Elemental God (June 10, 2008)	8
The Land that Lendor Forgot (June 19, 2008)	10
DMing Into the Depths of the Oerth (June 28 – July 12, 2008)	12
Pilgrims and Pilgrimages of the Flanaess (September 5, 2008)	17
Lawful Evil Religion in Greyhawk (September 6, 2008)	21
How to Start a “Gygaxian” Greyhawk Campaign (September 9, 2008)	22
Stairing into the Abyss (November 16, 2008)	23
Water, Water, Everywhere (November 25, 2008)	24
The Fortean Flanaess (December 16, 2008)	25
Old School Campaign Tentpoles (December 19, 2008)	26
Counterspells in AD&D (December 28, 2008)	28
Entering the Dungeons of Castle Greyhawk (January 29, 2009)	29
Dungeons as Logistical Challenges (February 20, 2009)	29
Specialty Products of the Flanaess, Part I (March 18, 2009)	30
In Praise of Polearms (April 3, 2009)	31
“New Round, New Initiative!” (June 30, 2009)	32
Parrying Rules for (A)D&D (September 1, 2009)	32
Main Gauche in AD&D (September 2, 2009)	32
T1: The Village of Hommlet (September 23, 2009)	33
Religion in Greyhawk (October 9 – November 24, 2009)	34
Dragon Types of the Flanaess (December 6, 2009)	40
eXPloring the World of Greyhawk (December 22, 2009)	41

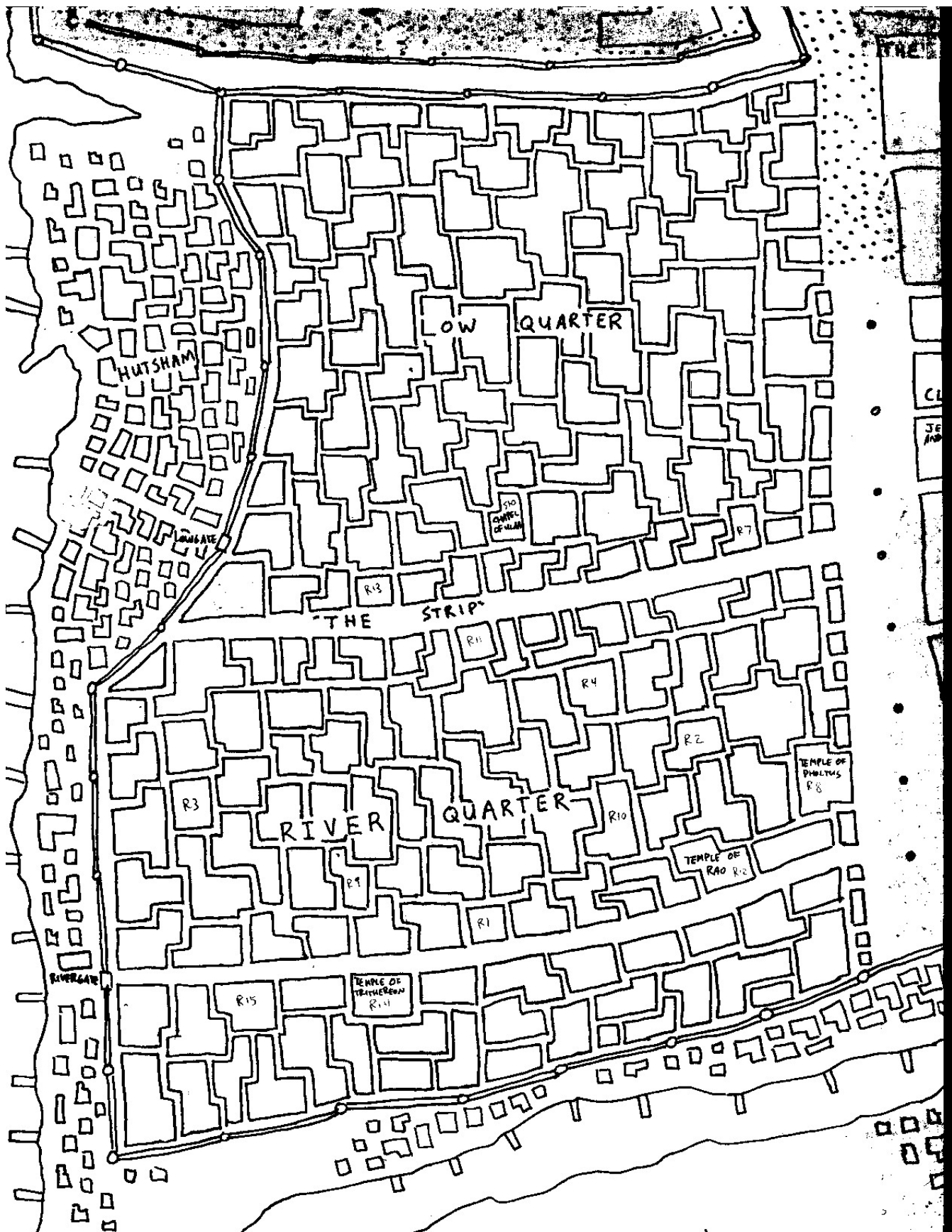
City of Greyhawk Maps (May 16, 2008)

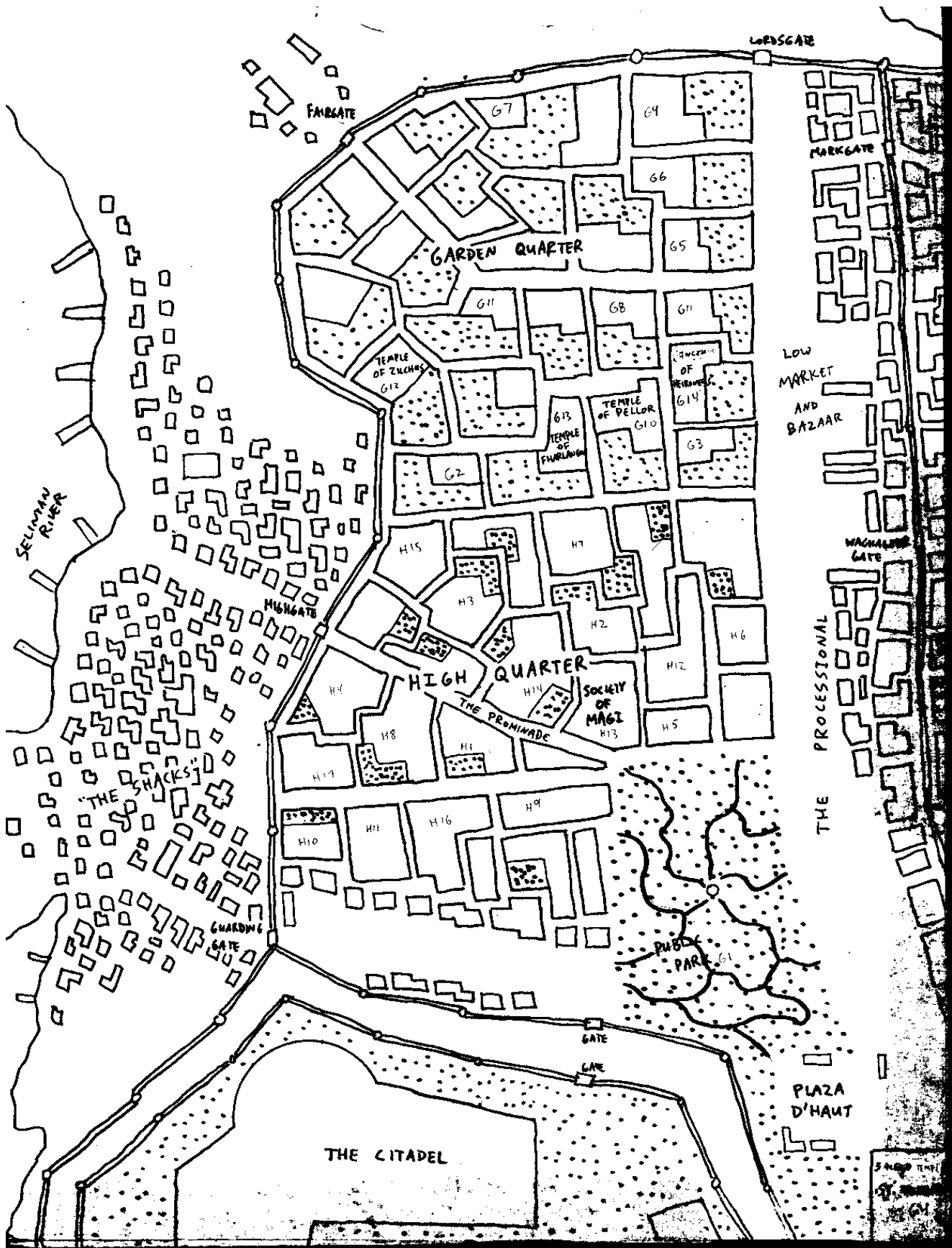
Here are my own hand-drawn maps for the Free City of Greyhawk, done many years ago and finally scanned in. Apologies for the poor quality on some of the edges; I had originally connected the four sheets with masking tape, and over the years it has ossified and shows through. The letter-number keys in some of the city blocks key to the City of Greyhawk boxed set. Not all of the locations in the boxed set are to be found on my maps, but many of them are. Bear in mind that on my original a half inch equals a thousand feet. The irregular shapes that make up my own City are not individual buildings (in most cases) but rather city blocks, and it can be assumed that small alleyways penetrate most of them. The maps here are based on the sketch map found in City of Hawks by Gary Gygax (New Infinities, 1987), but obviously with a great deal more detail.

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Thoughts on the Elder Elemental God (June 10, 2008)

Oh, what heady days they were.

Back in the late 1970's came one of the most amazing and, to this day, iconic series of modules ever released. G1-3, D1-3, and Q1; the Giants series, the Drow series, and the capstone of the epic, "Queen of the Demonweb Pits" (the last not having been written by Gary Gygax, and so not being a particularly good fit either in tone or detail with the rest, but a worthy effort in its own right). They were later collated into several collections, and then into a final expanded version called "Queen of Spiders". But I remember the monochrome versions, the 8-page modules (about \$5 a pop back then), with relish. Hell, I remember being thrilled when "Shrine of the Kuo-Toa" finally showed up on the shelves of my FLGS, but that's perhaps for another post.

They present an incredibly rich tableau which is often overlooked by both players and DM's, who might see in them a particularly high-end shooting gallery. Able DM's will soon put the fear of Eclavdra into their players, with well-coordinated responses from the various giants and creatures of the Depths of Oerth. However, the superior DM will also give his or her PC's various clues and hints to the fractured nature of their opponents. There are schisms within the various giant strongholds, political divisions between the drow and their rivals in the underworld, and perhaps most decidedly strife within the various power centers of the drow realm itself. Without such hints, it is honestly unfair to expect the PC's to puzzle such a thing out on their own; one does not expect the ducks on the shooting gallery belt to be amiable to shooting the squirrels.

Eventually I would like to write at length about the multitudinous possibilities attendant to running the G/D/Q modules, both as a DM and a player. But for now I would like to concentrate on a single feature, sometimes overlooked.

The Elder Elemental God.

We are first introduced (albeit without any detail, and no name to attach to it, such as it is) to the EEG in G1, where we find area 17A, the "Weird Abandoned Temple". It is a place where bizarre carvings induce insanity, disturbing movements can be seen in the corner of one's eye, and nausea is induced. Most importantly, staring at a particular wall of the ruined temple brought forth the following apparition:

"...a writhing, amorphous form of sickly mauves and violets will be seen stretching forth its formless members toward the viewer."

Here we see in full bloom the Lovecraftian flavor that the early Greyhawk campaign is known to have employed to great effect, before it was tossed aside in favor of a more staid and mainstream "high fantasy" aesthetic. Rob Kuntz had a whole "temple of the elder gods" in the original Lake Geneva campaign, midway between Greyhawk's City and Castle, although the PC's were, apparently, too afraid to do much exploration of it (much as, we are told, they were afraid to plumb the depths of the Temple of Elemental Evil, and perhaps for much the same reasons).

Three things are significant about this appearance of the temple of what we will later know to be the EEG; the renegade orc slaves have blocked off the passage to it, there is apparently more to it which has been cut off by a (deliberate?) cave-in in area 18, and the fact that it has been abandoned in the first place.

The first is easy to explain; it is the hill giants, not the orcs, who were converted to the worship of the EEG, and thus they found the place disturbing enough to wall off once they occupied this section of the dungeon level. The second, I think, is deliberately vague, as we have no way of knowing what was or was not included in that caved-in section. Was it merely an extension of the temple, similar to what we eventually see in G3? Or does that caved-in section actually lead to a now-defunct passage into the Depths of the Oerth? If so, what caused its collapse? Such a connection is rank speculation, especially since the parallel temple complex in G3 does not, in fact, directly lead to the entrance to the Depths.

However, it does fit in with my own speculation that the whole campaign of the drow House Eilservs to use the giant clans in their war of conquest came from the burrowers below. That is, the unknowing hill giants were one day confronted with a newly-created tunnel to the Depths, whence came Eilservs ambassadors bearing gifts and promises of easy loot. One the hill giants were in their thrall, they moved on to the frost giants (there is a puzzlingly similar collapsed tunnel, sans the EEG paraphernalia, in area 4A of the lower level of "The Glacial Rift of the Front Giant Jarl"), abandoning the EEG temple beneath the Steading once they didn't need to directly control the hill giants, but could do so through their stronger cousins, the frost giants. And ditto for the Fire Giants.

Which brings us to said fire giants. In G3, "Hall of the Fire Giant King" (and note how the title progresses from "chief" to "jarl" (=earl) to "king"), we are treated to our fullest description and explanation of the whole Temple of the Eye (which, of course, is how the fane of the EEG is referred to). Areas 9-11 of the second level; the Temple of the Eye.

Here we have the temple from G1 writ large, and fully stocked. We now are given the keys to why the effects of the former temple were so weak; they are only fully formed in the presence of the various accouterments attendant to a fully functioning temple site (and as an aside, that should be an inspiration for every temple and shrine in Greyhawk; imagine a temple of St. Cuthbert or Heironeous that was similarly tricked out with magical effects and devices to bring about those effects!).

We are explicitly told that the giants worship here (area 9). That leads me to the conclusion that the fire giants are not unique in this, and a conversion to the worship of the EEG was part of the Eilserv's plot all along; that fits in perfectly with the presence of the EEG temple beneath the Steading of the Hill Giant Chief, but begs the question "what happened to the hill giants"??? (And, I might add, the frost giants.)

I'll get to the specifics of the temple in the fire giants hall in a moment, but this question deserves a bit of thought. We know there was a temple of the EEG beneath the hill giants' steading, with a collapsed area leading down. We know there was a collapsed tunnel in the frost giants' rift, which has no purpose in the context of the adventure unless it is seen as related in some vague way to the collapsed area in G1. If we make the leap of logic and say that the Eilservs drow were behind each, and subsequently destroyed them, it speaks much to the mindset of the Eilservs; to wit, they establish their base of operations with likely lackeys, and then abandon it when they find better lackeys up the chain. This is consistent with their ultimate aim of controlling the drow realm (they turned from the worship of Lolth to that of the EEG when the priests of Lolth did not back their bid for supremacy). It is consistent with a policy of tossing weaker tools aside as soon as they have served their purpose, and replacing them with better ones. It is, in fact, most consistent with Chaotic Evil.

To return to the specifics of the Temple of the Eye, which we find in areas 9-11 of the second level of the Hall of the Fire Giant King, we find here a fully functioning shrine to the Elder Elemental God, one of the images is quite striking, even given the Lovecraftian theme of the area:

...a scene of various creatures crawling, then creeping, up to huge, vaguely squid-like creatures with 10 hairy tentacles. In the forefront of this mass self-sacrifice are elves and men, but ehre are also dwarves, gnolls, orcs, trolls, halflings, ogres, goblins, etc. amongst the crowd. Those near the monsters are being torn apart and eaten as dainty morsels. There are 3 of these ghastly things, mottled in various shades and tints of purple and violet.

Three??? What might that portent? It's quite obviously something that hearkens back to the stories of Lovecraft, but why would there be three squid-like things, in a temple supposedly to the "Elder Elemental God" (note the singular)? Obviously it's not the EEG itself being depicted. Perhaps... just perhaps... they are priests or elder worshippers of the EEG, rather than a representation of the EEG itself. More HPL goodness (and maybe those things are still to be found in the Depths? Serving House Eilservs as advisors? Oh wouldn't THAT be interesting to show to a rival house in Erelhei-Cinlu)

The altar within this horrific place is special as well. It holds a special kind of trap; it is possible to summon some minor aspect of the EEG by using the implements found in the temple itself (the drum, chimes, and triangle). If such is done then the results are quite dire once the golden glowing eye appears in the middle of the altar (the titular "eye" of "The Temple of the Eye", one presumes); insanity, rage, magical aging, etc. However, if such is done in the presence of the tentacle rods (note the repeated use of the tentacle motif) then the harmful effects are not to be found, and indeed the sacrifice presumably chained atop the altar is taken by a tentacle and the ability to "attain the end or state they most desire" appears on the altar. And who has the tentacle rods? The Eilservs clerics. The implication is clear; power is concentrated in select hands, and if the fire giants ever got any aspirations to usurp the Eilservs drow, they would find themselves a tasty snack.

We are told that there exists a pretty-much-identical temple to the EEG close to the estates of the Eilservs in Erelhei-Cinlu. There's no real new insights there; much of the text is a straight copy of that found in G3.

What is left un-emphasized, and sometimes overlooked, is the struggle between the cult of the Elder Elemental God and that of the Demon Queen of

Spiders, Lolth. Again, this is more a topic for a broader discussion of the best way to DM and play this series of modules, but in brief the PC's should be given the opportunity to play the one faction against the other, and thereby work weal in the world above. It should be noted that House Tormtor (allied with House Eilservs) has clerics amongst half of its leaders. It is not stated explicitly, but can be implied that these are clerics of the EEG, since we are also told of the anti-Eilservs faction as "the noble houses worshipping the demoness Lolth".

That the Elder Elemental God is a real deity in Oerth is beyond question; it has clerics of as high as level 10 (Eclavdra), which are capable of casting 5th level spells. Looking to p. 9 of "Deities and Demigods", we see that the EEG could be a demigod, based on that criterion (demigods can themselves grant 5th level spells). "Deities and Demigods" also tells us that:

Female Drow with wisdom of 18 can progress as high as the 14th level of clerical ability.

At least as regards the demoness (and lesser deity) Lolth. Can we assume that is a racial, rather than a divine, limitation? Perhaps, but it's not 100% certain. What is certain is that the EEG can grant mid-level spells and is thus not merely a ploy; there is some real divine power behind it. Given the predilection for things Lovecraftian in the earliest days of the Greyhawk campaign, I'm inclined to believe that Gary Gygax was inclined to treat the EEG as a real deity, albeit one which didn't make it into the printed material as a god or demigod itself.

In fact, Gygax himself stated¹ as much himself:

...the Elder Elemental God I envisioned as an entity of vaguely Chronos-like sort, a deity of great power but of chaotic sort, and not always highly clever in thought and action. Eclavdra ... would prefer to have as "master" a powerful deity she might hope to influence, hence the EEG.

Gygax also stated explicitly that encountering the EEG would have been a possibility for his own players, but they skeedattled soon after reaching the Vault of the Drow.

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(<http://www.enworld.org/forums/showthread.php?t=22566&page=23&pp=30>)

I hope this has been informative, or at least entertaining. There are probably references that I've missed, and I do indeed don't consider this a definitive treatment of the subject so much as a survey, and hopefully I've sparked an idea or two.

The Land that Lendor Forgot (June 19, 2008)

Going through the encounter tables in the Glossography of the first boxed World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting is a trove of inspiration and information, and I highly recommend it to any who wish to plumb the depths of E. Gary Gygax's masterpiece.

The legacy within fantasy literature to place cultures which are separated not only by thousands of miles, but also thousands of years, in proximity to one another in a fantasy world is an old one. Few did it as artfully as did Robert E. Howard in his masterful Conan stories, where we see the medieval French empire of Aquilonia not far removed from the Pharonic Egyptian culture of Stygia. There are quite a few instances of such juxtapositioning within the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting as well; the Swiss-Confederation-Like Perrenland across a slip of water from what is essentially an Asiatic (or perhaps North American) nomadic nation, to take but one example. But what interests me here specifically is quite another juxtaposition indeed.

I speak specifically of cavemen.

Cavemen in the World of Greyhawk? Surely I'm speaking of something from the excellent module "Isle of the Ape."

Not hardly.

Gambol with me through said encounter tables and you will find the following fascinating tidbits in relation to their prehistoric members. Cavemen may be found in the mountainous portions of the Valley of the Mage, the Barrier Peaks (which surrounds the Valley of the Mage), the Crystalmists, the Jotens, Hellfurnaces, the Clatspurs and Yatils; 2-3% of the total encounters therein, as a matter of fact! And we are told that a full 20% of encounters in the Sulhaut mountains, which divide the Dry Steppes from the Sea of Dust, are to use the Pleistocene encounter tables in the DMG (which, I might add, include cavemen).

What the heck are we to make of that???

We know from history that the lands of the Sea of Dust were formerly the Suel Imperium, one of the most advanced cultures on Oerth more than a thousand years ago during the Baklunish-Suloise Wars. Ditto the Baklunish realms, which stretched at least from the Dry Steppes to Ekbir and Tusmit. I find it no coincidence that the easternmost border of the warring realms is coincident with the stated range of the caveman population of the Flanaess. I see two possibilities:

1. They are an indigenous population that had been squeezed between the Baklunish/Suloise realms in the west and the Flan tribes in the east. The Flan don't seem to have been sufficiently widespread, especially in the Sheldomar Valley, for this to be the case, but it is not improbable.

2. They are survivors of the Invoked Devastation and Rain of Colorless Fire that destroyed both the Suloise Imperium and the Baklunish Empire. Fleeing into the mountain fastnesses for safety, they subsequently descended into prehistoric barbarism over the course of a thousand years, where their kin rose to carve out new kingdoms.

I confess a certain affinity for the second scenario, which appeals to my fondness for the works of R.E. Howard, although the first certainly lends itself to the possibility of weird alien ruins that predate Baklunish, Suel, or Oeridian. Nothing says that the two need be mutually exclusive, either; picture the bedraggled survivors of the Invoked Devastation stumbling into the caves of some primitive proto-human people, without food, shelter, or the means for survival. Such exiles might well be assimilated into such a culture, uplifting it with their stock, while descending to its level technologically, except, perhaps, for a few choice relics brought along for safe-keeping...

Note that the encounter tables do not overlap the cavemen encounters with the Pleistocene encounters. There is no need, since the Pleistocene tables in the DMG have cave men well represented; we are seeing, I think, two different aspects of the same phenomenon.

In the line of peaks defining the eastern edge of the Baklunish-Suloise conflict, we see cavemen, whether the degenerate survivors of that conflict, some innocent race thrust aside by it, or a fusion of the two. In the mountains that formed the border between the two warring races, we not only see cavemen, but a full panoply of prehistoric mammals; cave-bears, spotted lions, and so on.

Given the harsh arid conditions to north and south of that mountain range, surely the Pleistocene conditions don't extend at all beyond the mountains themselves, or even to their edge. Irish deer wouldn't do well in a hot desert wasteland.

Perhaps here we might add yet a third scenario to explain the diffusion of cavemen along this particular line of mountains:

3. There is a caveman homeland in the Sulhaults, replete with a full host of Pleistocene fauna and flora, and they have migrated along the mountains to their present range.

I find this option to be particularly satisfying, personally, and it has the added bonus of being compatible with either of the other two options if desired (although I daresay it renders the first obsolete, being a much better story all around!). It would almost certainly be the case that, if there were such a "lost valley" somewhere in the Sulhaults, the war of annihilation between the Suel and the Baklunish would certainly prompt at least part of the population to flee. And, given their prehistoric nature and cave-dwelling predilections, it makes sense that they would follow the peaks and their attendant caves (it also makes sense that they would have found the Depths of the Oerth that lead to the Vault of the Drow, but that might be best left for another discussion).

So that's where I find the evidence and best storytelling possibilities take me. Somewhere in the Sulhaults is a high glacial valley, inhabited by the cave-folk (themselves perhaps descendants of the ancient Baklunish-Suloise wars) who fell into barbarism almost immediately and migrated along their well-known mountains to their current range of habitation. Over the years they might have been met by, and assimilated, groups of refugees bearing unknown treasures from those ancient empires, now regarded as totems by the cave-folk, their original functions long since forgotten. Plus there is that original valley itself, still waiting to be discovered, explored, and, perhaps, plundered, by intrepid adventurers. Who knows? Some ancient treasure of the Suel, or some relic of the Bakluni, may still reposit there.

Now, if only I could figure out what those cave men were doing in the Cairn Hills, I could sleep at night.

DMing Into the Depths of the Oerth (June 28 – July 12, 2008)

CAUTION: This article contains many spoilers concerning the modules D1-3 and should only be read by DMs and those players who will not be actually playing through the series at any time in the future. Failure to observe this caution will lead to a marked lack of enjoyment in the adventures.

Published back in what some old-time gamers fondly remember as the heyday of the original Advanced Dungeons and Dragons game, 1978, the series of adventure modules D1-3, collectively known as the “Descent into the Depths of the Earth” series from the title of the first module, are some of the best-known and yet least-understood elements of the Dungeons and Dragons campaign setting known as the World of Greyhawk. They are, in order, “Descent into the Depths of the Earth”, “Shrine of the Kuo-Toa”, and “Vault of the Drow”. All three were used as the official tournament modules at GenCon XI.

When correctly played and DM'ed, the “Descent” modules are actually a model for those who value political intrigue, role-playing, and exploration of what was (at the time) a new environment for play. They are also, naturally, quite deadly, and foolish or unprepared characters will find themselves at -10 HP in short order. Neither hack-and-slash nor stealth-and-stab should prove worthwhile strategies for these modules.

It should be noted that these three modules were later republished as part of the supermodule “Queen of the Spiders”. Except where noted, this article makes reference to the original monochrome-cover modules published in 1978. I deliberately eschew the term “Underdark” for the areas described in D1-3, as that term was originally coined by author Ed Greenwood for his own “Forgotten Realms” campaign, and to apply it to the World of Greyhawk has always struck me as gauche.

D1: Descent into the Depths of the Earth

This module begins at the entrance to the Depths, across the river of lava found at the end of “Hall of the Fire Giant King”. The players have found a partial map of the underground area, and know that the drow are to be found within. Other than that, they are lacking in any sort of background, this being the first encounter with the drow other than their appearance in the “Hall of the Fire Giant King”.

This very lack of information, however, should be seen as an opportunity for the PCs to collect their own intelligence on what is going on under the sunlit mountains of Oerth. And an astute DM can give subtle clues as to some of the rivalries and divisions within the underground communities. The Descent modules, more than most, reward a DM who has thoroughly read through them, picking up not only the locations of monsters and treasure, but also the subtle points regarding the political situation. To this day, many Greyhawk aficionados don't realize that Eclavdra, the chief villainess in G3, was not a servant of the demonness Lolth, but actually the chief rival of the Lolth-worshippers! It's worth noting that two different factions of drow can be found in Snurre's hall; the DM has an opportunity to lay the groundwork of the “factionalized enemy” theme before the PC's enter the Depths.

Some points worth emphasizing:

If the PCs manage to do damage to the Mind Flayers in the area, and can provide proof to the drow of this, they are 90% likely to be rewarded with a pass that will get them through any drow controlled area without harassment (D1, p. 3). This of course implies that the drow are going to be open to parley when encountered. The DM should not forget this; many if not most of the drow the PCs encounter are not going to be instantly hostile unless they have been alerted to the presence of the hostile PCs. Unless they're on alert, and looking for the PC's, the drow aren't going to “shoot first and ask questions later”! This doesn't mean they'll be fools or pushovers, just that they won't instantly attack.

How can the PCs figure out that the drow and Mind Flayers are at odds with one another? In the second encounter area of the module, in hex M-12, the Mind Flayers are questioning a captive drow merchant. Even if they don't manage to get him out alive (and it would be exceedingly difficult, in all honesty), the mere fact that the Mind Flayers had captured a drow should get the PC's minds working. An interesting twist would be if the PCs decided to try to get the Mind Flayers as allies against the drow! There's got to be an illithid city out there.

One of the most interesting things about the “Caverns and Warrens of the Troglydites” (the main encounter area, at hex Q-19) is that it is entirely possible for the PCs to glide through it with minimal fuss. Those PCs who managed to gain the trust of the drow will simply pass through the cavern, and actually be aided by the garrison in area 6. Those who are not allied with the drow, but who are following the players map and thus

looking specifically for a northwesterly exit from the caverns will at most have to deal with the garrison and its 18 soldiers, and at most only those monsters encountered in the western side of the caverns (areas 1-9 on the map). This is definitely an encounter area which does not reward the "wipe out everything" mentality; in a test of endurance such as the Descent series, taking time to spread out bits and pieces of bugbears, troglodytes, and trolls around the floor of the cavern is not worth the relatively minor treasures to be gained thereby. As DM, you should be ruthless in punishing such a lack of focus, and don't be afraid to drain the PC's of their healing magic and other supplies. That is one of the functions of the main encounter area; distraction.

The key to an enjoyable running of the entire series is that the PC's must not thunder their way through the place. The Depths are not a standard dungeon setting; they are a living, breathing wilderness and should be treated as such by the DM. By seeing signs of "normal" habitation; merchant caravans, kuo-toa pilgrims, etc. the PC's should get enough hints to attempt a strategy of bluff, rather than bash, to make their way through.

D2: The Shrine of the Kuo-Toa

This is, perhaps, one of the most perplexing and dangerous modules in the Descent series. It's unclear as to just what the PC's are expected to do in this module's main encounter area, both from the perspective of the DM and the PC's themselves. Are the gogglers to be smitten hip and thigh? Negotiated with? Bypassed or slunk past? Much of course depends on the style of play preferred by the gaming group in question, but, like all the modules in this series, an overly-aggressive party will soon find themselves overwhelmed.

The minor encounter areas are both of intense interest, and for completely opposite reasons. The first, with the mad ferryman Thoopship, is a fairly straightforward encounter that could be settled by either parley or violence. The most likely trouble the party will face is their lack of knowledge of the common tongue of the underworld. The module explicitly mentions the possibility of an interpreter, but declines to state where exactly one may be obtained. A charmed drow, perhaps? An ally, either among the drow or the illithids? The possibility is certainly there to make allies in module D1, as discussed in the previous article in this series. Aside from the obvious tactical problem of being swept down the Pitchy Flow towards the Sunless Sea (northwest on the map, incidentally), this encounter is pretty straightforward. While it's best

done by simple negotiation (if possible), a combat resolution is certainly not outside the realm of competent play.

The second minor encounter, with the Deep Gnomes, is perhaps the greatest single opportunity the PC's will have in the entire series. They will explicitly agree to accompany the PC's into the Shrine itself, have been scouting it out for at least some weeks, and are familiar with at least the basic layout not only of the shrine, but of the politics of the Depths as well. This is truly a boon, and only a completely incompetent party will manage to not get at least a little information from this encounter.

But it does bring up several questions. The Svirfneblin will agree to accompany the party in exchange for gems. But where, precisely, do they expect to gain those gems? We are told that the Deep Gnomes "hate the Kuo-Toa people as much as they despise the Drow". And there are bowls of gems on the altars of Blibdoolpoolp, the half-crustacean deity of the Kuo-Toa, seemingly there for the taking. Here, I think, lies a trap secreted within a boon. The Deep Gnomes, I believe, would do everything in their power to guide the PC's on a more aggressive path when it comes to the shrine. Trosli Garnetgetter, their leader, must not be a pushover. He, coming as he does "of a very respected family" would certainly not be a milquetoast when it came to questions of strategy. While he might not advocate an all-out assault on the shrine, he would, I believe, most certainly press for a hit-and-run attack on the central ziggurat, with the bowls of gems on the second and third altars. At the very least, were there thieves in the party (and there had better be, if they want to make it in the Depths), he would insist on a mission of stealth to liberate the gemstones from their fishy owners.

Naturally, this is not stated outright, but it is implied by the text. And it turns the Shrine into an encounter that could turn decidedly deadly, where it could have been as simple as walking through and finding the northwest exit. And, as such things go when they are done properly, it would be the PC's conscious choice that turned the place into a deadly encounter rather than merely a tense one. After all, they don't have to follow Trosli's advice...

Once the PC's trigger the gogglers to action (assuming they do), the spectacle of swarms of fish-men billowing forth from every passage should make them quail (motivated DM's may wish to re-read H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" prior to running the module, to get some very nice atmospherics). The good news is that, once they escape the shrine, the

kuo-toa are too disorganized to mount an effective search throughout the Depths. The bad news is that there are doubtless dozens of them between the PC's and the exit they want...

D3: The Vault of the Drow

Ah, the masterpiece. It gave us our first comprehensive look at the Drow, and was thus the inspiration for all the work that followed, Drizzt Do'Urden included. The pinnacle (or nadir, perhaps) of the work is the drow city Erelhei Cinlu, the ultimate inspiration for Ed Greenwood's creation Menzoberranzan. It is the last module in the series that Gary Gygax created, and found by many to be vastly superior to the final module in the series, Q1 Queen of the Demonweb Pits (although more about that later). Even the cover (of the monochrome version) is evocative; an evil High Priestess, curved dagger held aloft, is about to send a soul to Lolth (who is hovering overhead) atop a pile of skulls while a Mezzodaemon looks on. Priceless.

There are three minor encounters that lead to the city of the Drow, but in truth only one of them is really necessary to penetrate the capital of the dark elves, and surely if the party has by this time made allies of the subterranean dwellers here, they will know this. (Although it is interesting to note that on the players' map, the second encounter area does not exist; it merely shows a tertiary passage. Surprise!)

Speaking of the players' map, the glyphs that are marked thereupon should not be overlooked, especially as some of them repeat. The map itself is gained in module G3 Hall of the Fire Giant King, and if the PC's are clever in figuring out the clues, they will profit. Three of the are marked with eyes, similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics. The first one was a Drow checkpoint, manned by soldiers. The second is the major cavern in D1, which contains, well, a Drow checkpoint, manned by soldiers. Any guesses as to what the third one will contain? If nothing else, the PC's should put together the fact that there are Drow in the first two encounters, and expect to see them in the third. And encounter them they do.

The main path to the Drow city is a gatehouse, for want of a better word, manned by dozens of Drow soldiers. PC's which have figured out that infiltration tactics work best here will probably have some sort of plan already in place to get past such obstacles, posing as merchants, prisoners, allies, or somesuch. They might have some of the Drow clan emblems, and could bluff their way through the encounter. The DM should allow and even encourage such tactics on the part of the PC's! As I've stressed, it's the best (and perhaps

only) way the party can conceivably succeed here. Needless to say, the DM must afford the party the chance to do so here. This is not a combat encounter unless the PC's want it to be! The Drow may very well be on alert for the party (depending on how they have comported themselves hitherto), in which case the sentries and their officers will afford them a much greater level of scrutiny than they otherwise might. A very paranoid group of PC's, seeing the Drow fortification, might even decide to split up and approach it hours apart, figuring the Drow would be looking for a group of eight, rather than two groups of four. The DM should absolutely reward such thinking.

The second encounter area is interesting because it is the only one that is not marked on the players' map. Silussa and her lover have set a bit of a trap for those who want to approach the Drow city via the less-used path. It's a fairly standard set-piece encounter, and one that could be theoretically transported into any setting or dungeon. But note that there is no explanation of the relationship of Silussa and Belgos and the regular Drow establishment; herein lies the path to greatness for a seemingly pedestrian encounter.

Do the Drow of Erelhei-Cinlu know of the cavern so close to their doorstep? How could they not? Why do they allow them to dwell here? Do they value their use as guardians of the "end run" around the standard gateway? Let us not forget that there are many factions within the Drow realm itself. Are Silussa and Belgos allied with the Eilservs faction or the Lolth faction? We know nothing, which leaves the DM free to answer those questions as they best serve his or her own campaign. Is Silussa a servant of Lolth? That could yield some very interesting possibilities, if she finds out that the party is there to thwart the ambitions of the Eilservs (rivals of the worshipers of Lolth, remember). And just what clan did Belgos belong to before he died? That could be vastly significant as well. Again, for the alert DM, there are many possibilities that could turn this seemingly-pedestrian encounter into one which drives the plot forward and is a potential source of either great aid or great hassle for the PC's.

The third encounter area really doesn't lend itself to a furtherance of the plot line, and seems to be included as another way that the PC's can find their resources taxed. Nasty spiders, and a potentially nasty treasure at the end. Given the geography of the map, if the players waste their time getting here, they deserve to get pummeled. It's a classic distraction/drain encounter, and the DM should milk it as such.

We now come to the Vault itself. One interesting note on the geography of the Vault; it is a dead-end, except

for the river. No tunnels lead to it other than those stemming from the first (and second) encounter areas. It's a strategic cul-de-sac. I would infer that makes the river all the more valuable as a transportation artery from an economic point of view, and will have a bit to expand on that later. But perhaps it says something of the psychology or geopolitical calculations of the Drow that they would choose to locate their city in a place that was so inaccessible.

This is a module that really rewards a lot of prep work on the part of the DM. A full-blown city map of Erelhei-Cinlu would not be remiss. Bear in mind that the streets are regularly patrolled, but the back alleys are as dangerous as any dungeon. The place is more than a mile in length, and boasts a population of some 25,000 individuals, making it the equal or envy of many cities above ground.

Once the PC's arrive here, they are likely to encounter the inevitable question. "Why are we here?" The answer to that hinges on the question of whether or not they have figured out that only a single faction of the Drow was responsible for the deprivations of the giants, and whether or not they know which one it was. If they still think "the Drow are behind the giants, and we should stop them" then they have effectively declared war on the entire city. Wish them luck, and I hope they have 4d6 handy to roll up new characters.

Every encounter should reinforce the notion that the Drow are riven with division. That doesn't mean that there are allies on every side-- quite the reverse. The Drow version of the old saying could well be stated as "the enemy of my enemy is my tool." Every encounter with a bunch of rakes or a patrol of the Servants of Lolth should be a prime opportunity for the DM to have an NPC make a point of a clan pin pointing to inferior stock, or some ancient rivalry.

It should never be forgotten that the political situation among the Drow is not obvious. House Eilservs was behind the uprising of the giants, as a way of gaining power once their ambitions in the Vault were thwarted. Once the priestesses of Lolth turned against them, they in turn abandoned the worship of Lolth and took up that of the Elder Elemental God (more about whom can be found here).

That sets up a whole dynamic of rivalries, mixed in with religious animosities, which is explained in fair detail in D3. It must be stressed that the DM must give some opportunities for the PC's to get involved in those conflicts, as a way of resolving their own mission. Hiring on to the Eilservs is probably out of the question unless they do so through a third party (and

wouldn't THAT be a difficult game to play-- almost more fun than rescuing a bunch of FARC hostages in Columbia), but not impossible.

One can hope that after a short time in the Vault the party will figure out that there is more than one faction amongst the Drow, and that they aren't all behind the giants' campaign on the surface. (Hopefully they will have picked up on enough of the DM's clues that they will have already figured that out before even getting to the Vault.) But even if they do, there are two possibilities that the DM must be prepared for:

1) "We need to stop the Eilservs once and for all, to halt their ambitions against the surface world"

2) "We need to stop the Drow once and for all, because they are evil and are ultimately a threat to the surface world."

The first attitude bears with it the implication that the Drow factions can be parleyed with, and used against other Drow factions. The second attitude implies that the party should be looking for some way to collapse the Vault itself. Think of all the x.p. from killing 25,000 Drow! (For the record, if any DM allows this to happen, he is entitled to a free cock-punch.)

The module, of course, implies the first option. If the PC's seriously contemplate the second, the DM should not forget that the Drow will mobilize against a threat to them all across all faction lines, and in such a case they should be dead in short order. The party can try the second, but unless the DM is being uncommonly generous, it should fail.

Which brings us to the whole question of Lolth's role in this module, and thus the role of Q1. Since Lolth's minions were never a part of the plot to incite the giants to action, it stands to reason that there would not be a reason to visit the Abyss to confront Lolth. If anything, the PC's should be Lolth's allies, at least in the limited sense of opposing the Eilservs. "The enemy of my enemy is my tool," so goes the saying...

I firmly believe that there is no reason to include a trip to the Abyss to confront Lolth. The PC's can achieve their goals (stopping the force behind the giants) by simply trashing the Eilservs and their allies. In fact, the adherents of Lolth might actually help them in doing so, since the Eilservs and the Lolth-worshippers are enemies within the Drow culture.

As DM you must play into all the politics, factionalism, and so forth that the module implies. At the same time, you must allow your players to use that to their

advantage. Do so, and you and your players will have a grand time. All the political set-up in the world doesn't mean anything if the PC's can't make use of it.

Queen of the Demonweb Pits

"I had what I consider a much more interesting plan for the conclusion of the G-D series, one in which the PC party could loose the Elder Elemental god or send him into deeper isolation, thus assisting Lolth to become more powerful. By very astute play, they could have thwarted the designs of both evil entities. The Demonweb Pits were indeed envisioned as maze like, but there were to be no machines therein." -- Gary Gygax on EnWorld, August 2006²

"My outline for the whole was for a demiplane outside of the Abyss, a great spiderweb with encounters at junctions along the way to the center, Lolth's abode there in the middle. The PCs would need to gather pieces of an artifact based on the four elements in the web in order to be able to face the demoness and send her packing back to the abyss. Of course, that would have called back the Elder Elemental God from his place of banishment..." -- Gary Gygax on EnWorld, June 2006³

Before I even start this, repeat this in your mind, over and over. "The Elder Elemental God was not ever, ever, worshiped in the Temple of Elemental Evil." I'm going to delve into a bit of obscure Greyhawk lore here, and it will be much easier to digest if you keep that simple fact in mind. Now to the case at hand...

I will eventually get around to a full-blown treatment of module Q1 Queen of the Demonweb Pits, but I found the above quotes as part of my research for the Greyhawk Lore project, and found them just too chock-full of implications to let pass by.

First off, it gives a much more logical reason for the PC's to visit the Demonweb pits. They're not there to fight against Lolth (as in the published version of Q1), but rather to hurl the Elder Elemental God (about whom I have written previously) even further into

2

<http://www.enworld.org/forum/showpost.php?p=3024765&postcount=73>

3

<http://www.enworld.org/forum/showpost.php?p=2906026&postcount=330>

obscurity (presumably blocking the Eilservs faction from receiving higher-level clerical spells from it) and possibly thwarting the demoness Lolth into the bargain.

That, of course, implies that the Elder Elemental God does, in fact, exist; not a ploy of the priests of Tharizdun, as was posited in the quite forgettable module Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil.

Earlier, Gygax had said that he envisioned "a link between the Drow modules and the ToEE, mainly in my head, and after Q1 came out I rather lost interest in developing the former, as the EEG was not released from his banishment to a distant star (ala Set). I would have devised some other scenario to accomplish that..."

Remember that in the "Secret History of the Temple" in T1-4 Temple of Elemental Evil, we are told that "many drow visited the Temple after its fall" and were responsible for some of its denizens turning to the worship of Lolth.

So, in the original Gygaxian conception...

- 1) The Elder Elemental God is banished to a distant star
- 2) An artifact that could release it from said banishment is in pieces in Lolth's demiplane outside the Abyss
- 3) There's a connection between the Elder Elemental God and the Temple of Elemental Evil; the latter related to the release of the former from banishment (yes, I am aware of the Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil module, but let us leave it aside for now).

Could Lolth possibly have had something to do with the banishment/ imprisonment of the Elder Elemental God in the first place? Why else would she be in possession of the key to its release? Perhaps there was an ancient rivalry for the loyalty of the dark elves somewhere in the depths of history.

Now, the natural inclination as to why the drow were visiting the Temple of Elemental Evil is because it was, at its heart, a cult of the Elder Elemental God. But recall my plea at the beginning of this article; that idea flies in the face of what we are told in the module itself, that the idea of "elemental evil" was a sham concocted by Zuggtmoy and luz because it had more potential for recruitment than Zuggtmoy's "beloved fungi". Clearly the force behind "Elemental Evil" is not the "Elder Elemental God", despite the fact that both have the

word "elemental" in their name. But how to explain those drow?

Well, quite obviously, those were not drow of the Eilservs faction. If they were, they would not be in the business of persuading the remaining temple faithful to worship Lolth. And let us not forget that Lolth is putting her webby digits into the pie as well; she has apparently taken an interest in Lareth the Beautiful, master of the moathouse and the "dark hope of chaotic evil". They were, in fact, the Lolth-faction of the drow. Perhaps their intent was to seek a counterbalance to the surface influence of the Eilservs? Were they perhaps even responsible for Lareth's rise to prominence?

We are still left with a connection, in the original Gygaxian idea, between the Elder Elemental God and the Temple of Elemental Evil. What the heck could it be? Could it, just perhaps, be that the Elder Elemental God was looking to thwart the machinations of Lolth, and her expansion in the area? There is a certain symmetry to the idea. In G1-D3, we have the forces of the Elder Elemental God seeking to expand their power in the Depths by gaining power in the surface world. Once the Lolth-faction started to do the same thing, could not the Elder Elemental God, now freed (presumably by the incautious actions of the PC's in the Demonweb Pits), not seek to do thwart them as it itself was thwarted? The mind reels.

Man, if I ever run Hommlet again, it'll be a very different experience.

Pilgrims and Pilgrimages of the Flanaess (September 5, 2008)

Pilgrims can be found in most civilized lands of the Flanaess. They can be found wherever holy (or unholy) shrines and places of power can be found, and the devout will often undertake such a pilgrimage as a religious obligation. Scant information, however, is to be found concerning the nature of these pilgrimages, their destinations, or those who journey on them.

The encounter tables in the Glossography of the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting™, pp. 8-11, as well as those listed in the ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE, pp. 179-194, list pilgrims as one of the standard-type encounters. This article will attempt to add both color and substance to such encounters, providing a framework upon which the Dungeon Master may expand such seemingly-dry encounters into an

opportunity for role-playing and setting-building. Circumstances will, of course, determine how your PCs are received by any pilgrims they encounter, but as a rule those on a pilgrimage, even those of evil alignment, are more intent on their destination than in interacting with those met on the journey. (Enterprising PCs may, of course, seek to join the pilgrims, either as fellow seekers or as guards; their motives for doing so, and the outcome, are up to the Dungeon Master to determine.)

A pilgrimage is, by its nature, a journey undertaken for a religious purpose. Different faiths will have different opportunities for pilgrimage in different lands. Too, some pilgrimages are long affairs requiring months of travel; it is very possible that the object of the pilgrimage is nowhere near the location where your PCs may encounter the wandering band of religious seekers. Notes on pilgrims found in different places within the Flanaess follow. Bear in mind that this material is written with the original Boxed Set in mind, and are therefore set in and around CY 576. Campaigns set in later periods will not necessarily be able to use the following information without some modification to accommodate the "advances" in the timeline.

Pilgrimages are usually led by clerical authorities, who organize the pilgrimage for the benefit of those wishing to undertake the journey. It is a misnomer to believe that only those of Good alignment will be pilgrims; groups of pilgrims can be lawful good, chaotic good, neutral, chaotic evil, or lawful evil (see the ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, MONSTER MANUAL, p. 69, for details). The alignment of the pilgrims will, of course, determine with which deity or deities the pilgrimage is associated.

Occasionally (15%), a singular event may trigger a mass of pilgrims to share it as a mystical or otherwise transformative experience:

1. Death of a religious leader
2. The rise of a prophet or teacher with a distinctive message of reform (95% chance this will be deemed heretical by the mainstream church)
3. A miraculous occurrence connected with the deity
4. Victory in a religiously-inspired battle against heretics or a religious rival
5. An avatar of the deity has been sighted
6. A (fraudulent?) relic of a deity has been discovered and put on display
7. The End Is Near. It must be true, everyone says it is.
8. DM's prerogative

Rarely (5%), pilgrims do not have any particular destination in mind, but rather have undertaken their wanderings with the intention of allowing their God to guide their travels and thus reveal some Truth to them in a way that more conventional pilgrimages might not. Neutral pilgrims of this type will invariably be followers of Fharlanghn.

Most often (80%) such a journey is made to a particular sacred shrine or other place of religious significance (details on such destinations are given below, by location).

Almor, Nyrond, and Urnst

The worship of the Oeridian diety Heironeous, God of righteousness and chivalry, predominates these lands. Indeed, the Prelate of Almor, ruler of that clerically-led land, rules the land in the name of the church of the Invincible One. There are many different shrines to be found within these lands, and penitents from far across the Flanaess will be found here as pilgrims. The capital city of Chathold does contain the great Cathedral of Chivalry, with its famed stained glass panels; a very popular place of pilgrimage. There are smaller, but still quite impressive, temples and shrines throughout Almor, including that of Heironeous-by-the-Sea on the coast of the Sea of Gearnat, famed for its powers of healing beyond those of normal priests.

Bissel, Gran March, and Keoland

Holy sites within the once-imperial and still-grand kingdom of Keoland and its neighbors are many and splendid. Lawful Good pilgrims in Bissel will most likely be followers of Rao bound for the holy shrines of Veluna (q.v.). Those found in the Gran March or Keoland will either be devotees of St. Cuthbert (40% chance) bound for the great healing shrine in Shibolet, followers of Heironeous (50% chance) en

route to the Temple of Heironeous Triumphant in Niole Dra, or followers of Delleb (10%) bound for Niole Dra and the great library-cathedral the church maintains there as a holy duty.

Chaotic good pilgrims in these lands will almost always be followers of Kord, who travel to the various temples to that deity in the Sheldomar Valley to participate in the sacred contests of strength and combat that are held throughout the year. The most famous of these are held in Hookhill and Gradsul, with more modest affairs in Flen, Cryllor, and Niole Dra as well. Victory in the contests is said to be a sign of the God's favor for the coming year.

Neutral pilgrims will of a certainty be devotees of Olidamarra, bound for that God's temple in Gradsul. Touching the marble statue within is said to grant good fortune and on occasion the gift of glibness of speech to professional musicians, bards, etc.

Evil pilgrims will maintain a low profile in Keoland, which has little tolerance for such cults. Those of lawful bent will be on their way to visit the pair of shrines to Hextor which are tolerated in Flen and Cryllor, while those of chaotic demeanor will be bound for the hidden shrine to Erythnul said to exist hidden deep beneath Niole Dra itself.

Blackmoor

Pilgrims of all alignments found in this strange boreal land will be bound for the same place; the mysterious ruined city which extends for miles between the Cold Marshes and the sea. Most will be worshipers of strange and degraded cults seeking either enlightenment, power, or bear other, more alien, motives. Even those of good alignment will be odd in their manner and distrustful of outsiders, albeit not overtly hostile. Such pilgrims will often know secrets of the temples and shrines of the city that are unknown even to the most knowledgeable of sages.

Celene and Highfolk

The olven realms of Celene and Highfolk are unique in the composition of their pilgrim populations, inasmuch as they are exclusively of olven stock. The shrines to the olven deities are many and scattered; typically they are small and honor an aspect of one of their Gods associated with a particular natural feature such as a waterfall, spring, or idyllic glade. As such, olven pilgrimages tend to be of shorter length than those of others. There is a 15% chance that pilgrims of Good alignment will be humans passing through the olven

lands; bound for the shrines of Saint Cuthbert or Rao in Veluna and Verbobonc.

Evil pilgrims in these lands will disguise that fact well, and will either appear as good pilgrims or a merchant caravan of some sort. They will almost certainly be bound for either the Temple of Elemental Evil in the Kron Hills (35%) or one of the shrines of Nerull hidden in Veluna and Furyondy (60%). Rarely (5%) they will be pilgrims seeking the “blessings” of Luz, making their way to Dorakaa to join the service of the Old One. Such pilgrimages are usually one-way trips.

Greyhawk and Verbobonc

The Free City of Greyhawk is, of course, one of the most cosmopolitan places in the Flanaess. Faiths of every description can be found there openly, with the exception of the most foul sects of demon- and devil-worshippers. Despite this, there exist within the lands claimed by the City no destinations for pilgrimage*⁴, and those on such journeys are not often found within its domains. Those that are encountered there will be passing through, with a 50% chance of being destined for nearby Verbobonc.

Verbobonc itself is a stronghold of the faith of St. Cuthbert, which is unsurprising given its strong ties to Veluna and Furyondy to the north. Several shrines to the Saint exist within the Viscounty, marking several minor events during Cuthbert's mortal life including the Church of the Holy Cudgel, marking the spot where Cuthbert first cut and hefted the wooden bludgeon for which he would become so famed.

Evil aligned pilgrims found in Verbobonc will sometimes (25% chance) be seeking the ruins of the Temple of Elemental Evil in the Kron Hills. Otherwise, they will simply be on their way to some other unholy shrine in the Flanaess, most probably one of the several well-hidden temples of Nerull in Furyondy and Veluna.

Ekbir, Tusmit, and Zeif

Pilgrimages in the Baklunish lands are limited to those of some civilization and urban nature. Lawful good pilgrims will invariably be heading to one of the many small shrines of the Lost Imam Al'Akbar, whose reputation for miraculous healing powers is famed throughout the Flanaess and beyond; such shrines may be found in all of the cities and most of the villages of

⁴ One exception being those who worship the demigod Zagyg, of course, but such are so few and far between that organized pilgrimages are nearly unheard-of.

the region, each specializing in some particular ailment. Caravans of pilgrims will spend years visiting each and every one in an effort to heal the afflictions of all the seekers present among their ranks. (If chaotic good alignment is indicated by the die roll, treat as if lawful good were rolled.) Neutral and evil pilgrims will be en route to one of the great monasteries found on the edges of the Plains of the Paynims (in which are taught not only the arts of physical self-mastery but philosophical enlightenment under the tutelage of the famed mystics of the mysterious West).

Furyondy, Shield Lands, and Veluna

The faith of Saint Cuthbert of the Cudgel is very well-entrenched within the lands of the central-west Flanaess. Lawful Good pilgrims encountered here will most certainly belong to that faith, and will be most zealous and earnest in their devotion. The Great Cathedral of Mitrik attracts the faithful from all over the Flanaess, along with the Church of the Apotheosis, which marks the spot where Cuthbert was raised to Godhood in a blast of light and crashing of tree-limbs. Those of chaotic good or neutral alignment will be making for the temple of the beautiful Myhriss, whose temple at Chendl has seen the weddings of nobility from across the Flanaess for many years (25% chance the pilgrims encountered are specifically on their way to attend such a wedding as a holy obligation). Any evil pilgrims encountered here will be in disguise, and en route to either the Horned Society (if lawful evil is rolled, they will be in fact of neutral evil alignment and headed to Molag to pay obeisance to the lords of Hades) or Luz (if chaotic evil).

Geoff and the Yeomanry

The Grand Duchy of Geoff is host to a large number of followers of Lirr, Goddess of poetry and art. The great Theater in Gorna is host to a never-ending series of productions, readings, and exhibitions, to which the faithful make pilgrimage at least once in their lives. Caravans of such worshipers are lively and beautiful things, almost pageants in their own right. Pilgrims of either chaotic or lawful good alignment will be of such sort, and can originate from as far away as Medegia or the Thilonian Peninsula. Neutral or evil pilgrims within the Grand Duke's lands are usually en route to smallish countryside shrines dedicated to Ralishaz or Erythnul. The Grand Dukes have, over the years, persecuted these shrines with greater or lesser verve (physical harassment or greater taxes, respectively); their worshipers, however, are no small source of revenue for the Ducal coffers, and economics has won out over righteous zeal over the years.

Great Kingdom, Medegia, North Province, South Province

Although it presently enjoys a great reputation for wickedness, the Great Kingdom was not always so, and it remains to this day a very cosmopolitan and relatively tolerant land.

The See of Medegia, of course, is a clerical state under the suzerainty of the Overking in Rauxes, and as such the worship of Hextor is predominant. But even here the worship of other deities (with the exception of Hextor's hated brother, Heironeous) is tolerated, if not exactly encouraged. Worshipers of Hextor will most likely be making for the capital of Mentrey with its maleficently magnificent Blood Chapel, supposedly the first place the God was seen after His re-appearance around 570 CY. A no less imposing (but, much to the chagrin of the Overking, less revered by the faithful) Temple of Hextor exists in Rauxes as well. There is a 25% chance that pilgrims will be headed towards Rauxes, 75% chance that they will be heading to Mentrey. The fact that this fattens the coffers of the Censor rather than those of the Overking is something that has not gone unnoticed by either.

Non-evil pilgrims will usually be followers of Zilchus, heading for the city of Irongate (if neutral), or those of Pholtus (if lawful good) headed for the Pale. Chaotic good pilgrims will either be followers of Trithereon headed for the famed Free Falls marking the headwaters of the Gray Flood in Hexpools (50%) or followers of Lirr headed for the biannual contests of poetry, song, and art sponsored by the Seven Shrines of Lirr as a religious festival (sacred to them but open to all) held in Innspa to mark Growfest and Needfest. It is said that Lirr Herself appears there at irregular intervals, and that Her presence is known by the supernaturally excellent performances.

Idee and Irongate

It is said that Zilchus Himself was present at the laying of the foundation for the great walls of Irongate, as a sign of the commercial success the city would enjoy in years to come. For that reason alone it has become a destination for those who seek the favor of the God of Business, and pilgrims of neutral or lawful alignment will be such worthies (note that such pilgrims will be a combination of both a pilgrim caravan and a merchant caravan; just combine the entries as described in the ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS MONSTER MANUAL, and adjust the number of mercenary leaders accordingly). Those of chaotic good alignment will surely be headed for the Thin Vale in Idee, which is home to a miraculous shrine dedicated

to the Goddess Wenta. Farmers visiting the shrine are said to have their next harvest blessed by supernatural abundance. Those of evil bent are most assuredly en route to one of the shrines in the Great Kingdom and Medegia (q.v.).

Ket and Perrenland

For encounters with pilgrims in Ket, there is a 50% chance they will be as described in the entry for Ekbir, Tusmit, and Zeif (q.v.). Otherwise, treat them as described here. Evil pilgrims will be on a journey of discovery, bound for the Yatils in search of a legendary shrine to the dark God Tharizdun which passed from the ken of civilization centuries ago. If any have been successful in their quest, none have ever reported it. Those of good alignment will be bound for the spectacular Glittering Cathedral of Ulaa situated on a commanding height overlooking the pass between Molvar in Ket and Krestible in Perrenland. Neutral pilgrims in Ket will be dedicants of Beory, making their way to Her holy shrine in the northeastern tip of the Bramblewood forest. In Perrenland, neutral pilgrims will be adherents of the faith of Zilchus, en route to Schwartzenbruin and the enormous market-shrine therein.

The Pale and Tenh

The Pale is, of course, the seat of the religion of Pholtus of the Blinding Light, and pilgrims of Lawful Good alignment will be adherents of that faith exclusively, as other faiths are actively persecuted within its lands. The Tenha, while more liberal than their neighbors to the south, nevertheless will only have such pilgrims within their borders, en route to the various shrines to Pholtus found in the Pale. The greatest of these is the Grand Cathedral of the Light in Wintershiven, a fantastic amalgamation of glass and stone whose sheen can be seen for miles from the walls of the city. There are a number of smaller shrines to which pilgrimages are often made by the faithful, including the shrine of the Heavenly Courses (in the headlands of the Rakers), where some believe Pholtus Himself commanded the sun and moons in their orbits, as well as the Temple of Doubting Folly a few days' ride northwest of Ogburg, where those who have doubts concerning the iron-clad certainty of the faith are often found to seek the removal of such stains from their souls.

The Scarlet Brotherhood

Pilgrims encountered in the lands controlled by the Scarlet Brotherhood will be of Lawful Evil alignment exclusively; ignore the alignment table given in the

Monster Manual. Pilgrim bands will be members of the Brotherhood itself, undertaking journeys to several of the unholy places maintained by the secretive society.

Sunndi

The great and tranquil Gardens of Chellester in the eastern side of the County, sacred to Delleb, attract a great many worshipers of that deity. It is said that, while walking through the peaceful and immaculately trimmed paths, even the most difficult problem of philosophy or logic will reveal its answer. Pilgrims of lawful good alignment will have that as their destination. Those of neutral or chaotic good alignment will surely be bound for the Four Airs Tor; a singular mesa northwest of Pitchfield which is sacred to the four Gods of the Winds of Oeridian religion; Atroa, Sotillion, Telchur, and Wenta. Particularly favored are those four days of the year when the winds change their direction around the tor, marking the official change of season. Those present for the event are considered to have the blessings of the winds and seasons for an entire season, until the winds once again change. Finally, pilgrims of lawful evil alignment (treat all rolls indicating chaotic evil alignment as lawful evil instead); the Vast Swamp. Somewhere within its trackless mires and pools is said to be the lair of the demigod Wastri Himself, and those who are attracted to His bizarre faith must needs use Sunndi as their highway to so do (often, they will disguise themselves as pilgrims of some other bent, to avoid the attention of the authorities, who find the growing power of Wastri to their south to be inimical to the interests of the County).

Sea Princes

From far and wide, those who favor the Goddess Joramy visit Her great temple complex in the westernmost parts of the lands of the Sea Princes, at the very foothills of the Hellfurnaces. Vast volcanically-fed hot springs and subterranean lava flows are the centerpiece of the spectacle. Pilgrims of lawful good, chaotic good, and neutral alignment will be bound for the temple. Those of lawful evil alignment will be bound for the shrine of Syrul in Westkeep (50%) or they will be among the devil-worshipers who bear the ruby tattoo on their persons and make for the great Infernal Temple that dominates the skyline of Hekar (50%). Those of chaotic evil alignment will be headed for the Hellfurnaces, and will be extraordinarily tight-lipped about their ultimate destination. Ultimately, it can be learned that they are heading towards the unholy places of some demon prince or queen, but the specific identity of the fell monarch of the Abyss is left to the Dungeon Master to determine.

Duchy and Principality of Ulek

Deep in the heart of the Silver Wood there lies a large glade. On its surface, it does not appear special in any way, but to the followers of Ehlonna of the Forests, it is known to be a place of special holiness and magic. Pilgrims of good or neutral alignment in the Duchy will be headed there, to simply take in its quiet beauty and sacred energy in silence and beauty. In the Principality, in the hills north of Havenhill, there is a temple built on the spot where, it is said, the God Fortubo taught the art of metalsmithing to both dwarves and men. Lawful good and neutral pilgrims will be bound for that sacred smithy. Those of chaotic good alignment will have as their destination the shrine of Llerg of the Hills, at the headwaters of the Old River. There, it is said, the God of Beasts gathered the Lords of all animals in special conclave at the beginning of the world. Those who hold the Beastmaster in reverence hold the spot in special regard. In both of the Ulek States, pilgrims of evil alignment will be well disguised and bound for hidden shrines to evil deities or devils and demons that still persist in the Lortmil Mountains. Beltar in particular, among those of chaotic evil bent, is known to still have shrines which are venerated by those of fell intent.

Lawful Evil Religion in Greyhawk (September 6, 2008)

Something piqued my interest while finishing up my article on the pilgrims of the Flanaess. Of all the 60 deities of Greater, Lesser, or Demi- status listed in the original Guide to the World of Greyhawk, there is only one of Lawful Evil alignment; Hextor. One would expect, even with the loading of so many of the Greyhawk deities to the Neutral alignment, there would be more than a single being representing the ethos of both law and evil. I suspect this was not an oversight, but another sideways glance into the vast tableau that stretches beneath the surface of the World of Greyhawk.

We are told, in the Gord the Rogue short story "Cat or Pigeon?" (presented in the book Night Arrant, now lamentably out of print), that the "cult of Asmodeus" is a well-known source of evil doings, at least within the precincts of the city of Greyhawk. Within the precincts of the Horned Society, we are told that "deviltry" is the state religion (itself a change from the novels, where it is implied that the Horned Society serves the Daemons of Hades rather than the Devils of the Hells).

I submit that a cult dedicated to the Dukes of Hell is widespread in the Flanaess, and that most of the human (and possibly demihuman and humanoid) population of Lawful Evil alignment adheres to that faith. This cult would be seen as a great rival to that of Hextor; bear in mind that Hextor dwells on the plane of Acheron, rather than the Nine Hells.

Owing to the nature of their alignment, it would be a very regimented faith. All honor would eventually flow up to Asmodeus, but this could easily be done through intermediaries. Either individual sects would honor different arch-devils, or different unholy days along the infernal calendar would mark celebrations in honor of those lesser, but still puissant, beings. It could be a combination of both, of course, but in either case the chain of command, and the power of the sacrifices, would ultimately flow to the Arch-fiend.

How to Start a "Gygaxian" Greyhawk Campaign (September 9, 2008)

On a game board that I frequent (Pied Piper⁵, if you are curious), someone asked what sort of things they should use in order to start up a Greyhawk campaign with the "original Gary's vision" feel. Here was my response; I think it illustrates some of my thinking about what a good Greyhawk campaign would use. There are a few edits.

You'll want a huge dungeon-crawl, and I would highly recommend "Castle Zagyg: Upper Works" recently published by Troll Lord Games, but with the caveat that you might end up having to do a lot of design work yourself to expand the dungeon, as it is currently unclear as to whether, when, or for what game system the next module in the series will be released. I would definitely include Rob's work offered for sale here, as well; I'll definitely be placing the Living Room and Bottle City somewhere in my Castle Greyhawk when the time comes. I know some people will end up including some of Rob's Maure Castle levels to make up some of the missing levels, and that seems workable, with a little effort. You can also have fun putting in gates to Dungeonland/Beyond the Magic Mirror and the Isle of the Ape.

Adventures outside the dungeons of Greyhawk would be called for as well. You will obviously want to concentrate on the earlier material, given what you say. The original Greyhawk boxed set, definitely. Village of Hommlet/Temple of Elemental Evil. The Giants/Drow series. Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth and Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun. White Plume Mountain. Expedition to the Barrier Peaks. Not necessarily in that order... Personally, I would tend to ignore the books that TSR/WotC published on various kingdoms (Iuz, Marklands, Scarlet Brotherhood) and the Living Greyhawk stuff and concentrate on the earlier modules. But then again I've been told that I'm an atavistic jerk, so take it as you will. :-)

Depending on how creative you want to get, you could cobble together a very workable City of Greyhawk with bits and pieces from the TSR boxed set, material from Gary's books (especially City of Hawks and Night Arrant), and the new city of Yggsburgh material from TLG. The boxed set maps are atrocious, but feel free to use the hand-drawn maps I've got up on my blog.

As a question of campaign philosophy, you will need to decide on the timeframe of your campaign. This will be important for the simple reason that it will determine whether or not your PCs are competing with the likes of Robilar and Erac's Cousin, or if they are hitting the ground with those legendary personages already having come before. You could, of course, start off in CY 560 and just not have Melf et al involved at all, but that seems to lose some of the fun, to my mind. My own players really loved their encounters with Melf and crew...

You should also bear in mind that "original Gary's vision" is a somewhat nebulous concept, as his campaign changed in significant ways over the years (not that I ever had the pleasure of playing in it, alas...). It started out as a fantastic version of North America, with Greyhawk equalling Chicago. That turned into something more-or-less approximating the published Flanaess. Castle Greyhawk itself morphed from a dozen or so levels to 30 to 6 and now to whatever the plan for Castle Zagyg ends up being. Suffice to say it seems to me that there's a lot of wiggle-room for you as DM, even if you want to remain true to the spirit of Gary's Greyhawk.

Stairing into the Abyss (November 16, 2008)

One of the more overlooked features of any dungeon are the stairs. Most of the time these are little more than purely utilitarian vehicles for getting characters from one level of the dungeon to another. I think this is a bit of a shame, myself, and thought I might offer the following ideas to jazz up the usual dungeon staircase. Some are more mundane than others, naturally.

1. Drawers under the stairs. Some steps on the staircase conceal drawers. These might be locked, or trapped, or both, and make an ideal hiding place for small treasures, keys (to the door at the top of the stairs?), a wand of lightning to be grabbed by the wizard as he flees an enemy coming after him up the stairs, etc.
2. The Grand Staircase. In real life, many buildings have a central staircase that wraps around a central empty core. In a dungeon setting, this could be used to give direct access to lower levels of the dungeon (which could in and of itself be a Very Bad Thing). Flying monsters could also avail themselves of the central shaft, presenting a threat to adventurers.
3. Landings. Many DM's seem to forget that a staircase doesn't have to be a straight shaft boring down at a precise angle to the level below. You can have your stairs make right-angle turns (or, heck, any angle you want). Make a staircase that branches at a landing; one flight goes to one level, another to a sub-level (and don't forget they can go back the way the adventurers are likely to come).
4. Musical Stairs. The staircase is made up of white and black stairs. As each one is walked on, a note sounds, like a giant piano (think of that scene from "Big" with Tom Hanks and the giant piano). By stepping on the stairs in various orders to play a tune, the staircase will go to different locations via a magical teleportation effect, depending on the tune played (some sort of clue to this effect should be findable by the players, perhaps in riddle form). Playing no tune (i.e., just trudging up the stairs) will lead to the least exciting place in the dungeon. Playing the right tune could lead players to the locale of Heward's Mystical Organ.
5. The Rainbow Steps. The stairs in this staircase each have a seemingly-random color. If the players use the stairs without regard to which color they step on, they enter an ordinary area.

If they are careful to only step on a single color, they are taken to a more special part of the dungeon (red leads to a fire-themed sub-level, green leads to a plant-based one, blue for water, etc.). If they are careful to ascend in perfect rainbow order (red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet), they are taken to a really special place (a demi-plane or perhaps one of the Outer Planes; Asgard seems mighty appropriate). Whatever you do, don't step on the plaid step!

6. Random Escalator. The staircase is moving; that will either double the speed of the players as they go in the same direction, or cut it in half if they are going against it. Naturally, it should be put in a place where time is of the essence; say, when they will likely be pursued by some Big Nasty Thing, or need to escape poison gas, or something. The stair could also randomly stop or start, or reverse direction, just to add to the fun.
7. Slide. It's a cliché, but I can't remember the last time I actually had a staircase that turned into a slide, dumping the players onto a new level as a one-way trip. Wheee!!
8. Traps. Dig through your old copies of Grimtooth's Traps. Plenty of nastiness there to give your players a second thought when they encounter a seemingly-ordinary staircase. Blades, spikes, poison gas; the fun never ends. Best used sparingly, though; if every staircase is a trap, the tension loses its effect. You don't trap every door and chest, do you?
9. Up the Down Staircase. Player: "We head down the staircase." DM: "Okay, you get to the top of the stairs and you see a hallway in front of you." Player: "I thought you said the stairs went down?" DM: "Yeah, they did. Weird, huh?" The players can never quite figure out when walking down the stairs turns into walking up the stairs; its part of the magic.
10. Mimic stairs. Imagine if a killer mimic turned itself into a staircase, seemingly leading up to a blank piece of ceiling in a room. Or parked itself at the top of a staircase, imitating more stairs heading up. The best part is, the players might think there really was something at the top of the mimic-stairs, and spend time and resources investigating.

Water, Water, Everywhere (November 25, 2008)

I love water hazards in dungeons. Underground rivers flowing through humongous cave systems are a thing of beauty for me, able to conceal all manner of monsters, treasures, etc. Magical fountains can get so ludicrously random it's hard not to grin at the prospect. So here for your edification I present some ideas for water in the dungeon.

1. Underwater pit traps. Sometimes the only way to get from one place in a dungeon to another is by wading through an underground stream. Rarely, though, do the PCs think to pull out those 10' poles while doing so. This will cure them of that omission. It won't do any real damage, except getting wet anything they might have been holding over their heads to keep dry, as they plunge into a sudden 10' pit. Those wearing heavy-duty armor might be in for a bit of a shock as well. Swim? In that?
2. Water-only access. There could be entire areas of a dungeon that are accessible only by going underwater. If the PCs demure because of the notion of having to hold their breath, or because they want to hold on to their potions of water breathing, then they lose out on the goodies.
3. That's not water... Speaking of potions of water breathing, and all the other various and sundry magics that allow for relatively easy action beneath the surface, what if the PCs encounter an area that is filled with, say, oil? Or an underwater pit that is filled with some heavier-than-water substance (so it sinks, filling the pit) that will foil such magics and yet leads to some place of interest?
4. Oxy-gum. The cheesy 1960's Japanese cartoon Marine Boy had something called oxy-gum. You pop it in your mouth and it turns the seawater into breathable air for a time. If you're looking for a non-magical way to let your PCs delve into the depths, you might give them access to a plant or herb that has the same effect, for a limited time.
5. On a (Not So) Slow Boat to Adventure. Nobody says the PCs can't travel on subterranean rivers in style. They come upon a fancy paddleboat, crewed by skeletons, or permanent unseen servants, or orange snirfneblin, or what have you. They pay a coin for passage and climb aboard. What could possibly go wrong?

*There's no earthly way of knowing
Which direction we are going
There's no knowing where we're rowing
Or which way the river's flowing
Is it raining? Is it snowing? Is a hurricane
a'blowing?
Not a speck of light is showing
So the danger must be growing
Are the fires of hell a'glowing?
Is the grisly reaper mowing?
Yes!
The danger must be growing
For the rowers keep on rowing
And they're certainly not showing
Any signs that they are slowing!*

6. Three-Way Fountain. The PCs come across a three-sided pillar deep in the dungeon. Each side has a different face, from whose mouth flows a stream of colored water into its own basin, red, blue, and yellow. Alone, they are mildly poisonous or mildly curative (1 h.p. damage), determined randomly with each drink. However, once you start mixing the streams, you are able to create potions with magical effects; two reds and a blue make a potion of speed, two blues and a yellow make a potion of extra healing, etc. Perhaps the PCs find a key to some of the recipes somewhere else in the dungeon. Lest the PCs think they can just plop down here and go into business for themselves, have the potions lose their magical effect after 24 hours. And naturally some combinations will result in explosions, poison gas, etc, just to add some zest.
7. Scrying pool. The PCs come upon a deep black pool (or well). Drop a gem of not less than 100 g.p. value into the water and the ripples will function as a crystal ball for a round or two. Make sure it's in a place that's somewhat difficult to get to, or the PCs will be dropping gems into the thing like dimes in a gumball machine.
8. Flooded Level. More than just having a water feature, you can have an entire level (or more) of your dungeon completely flooded. Bring out the water trolls, nixies, giant pike, and so forth. This gives you the opportunity to trot out those underwater adventuring rules from the DMG without having to leave the comfort of your own dungeon. It usually works better if you hand-wave the need to breathe with oxy-gum, giant conch-shell diving helmets, piles of bubbles on the dungeon floor that randomly release large bubbles of breathable air, etc., but of course you can build real tension by putting a time-limit on

when the air runs out. Plop a kitchen timer on the table and say; "You've got this long before you drown. What are your characters doing?" Lots of portcullises are a bonus in such a situation.

9. Hollow Man. If you regret ever letting that certain character find that ring of invisibility, here's your chance to make things right. If in a shallow pool or stream, all the monsters need to do is aim above the two foot-shaped indentations in the water. Or, if under water, aim at the big person-shaped space where the water isn't.
10. Wave pool. The PCs encounter a rather large cave with jagged rocks lining the shore. A largish underground lake is there. Every few rounds, however, a huge wave crashes onto the shore, tossing anything on it against said jagged (and painful) rocks. Perseverance would allow the PCs to discover the cause of the waves (some sort of large stone piston beneath the water), and enter into a treasure chamber (via a secret door in the piston chamber, only accessible while the piston is resetting to slam down again, and so very dangerous to get to).

The Fortean Flanaess (December 16, 2008)

Over at Scott's World of Thool blog, we are reminded⁶ that many of the works of Charles Fort are in the public domain and available online. I'm a fan of such things, so I skimmed through one or two of the books over at Mr. X's Fortean Site⁷ for inspiration and came up with the following table of weird events that can be used to liven up a campaign. Just roll percentile dice or pick one from the list that strikes your fancy.

They can happen as often or as rarely as you like (I would recommend leaning on the side of rarity) and they can be as significant or red-herringsque as you please. Is that rain of snails a sign of diabolic visitation, or is it just some random weirdness that will never be explained? You decide.

The list can also be used to come up with bizzare events for prophecies and omens, side effects of magical or divine occurrences, etc. There are a few references to the fact that Oerth has two moons (Luna

and Celene) but other than that it should be portable. I would also say that most of the effects should be pretty local, even the ones that involve figures and lights on the sun and moons (since that only adds to the mystery to me), but if you want to have a planet-wide grey sun for some reason, knock yourself out. Enjoy!

1. Purple gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
2. Orange rain
3. A farm animal with two heads is born. It dies shortly thereafter.
4. A rain of snails
5. Green Sun
6. A meteor shower appears in the night sky. It is not a "regular" event.
7. Green Sunset
8. Purple Moon
9. Black hail
10. Green snow
11. In a stone quarry, workers cutting stone find a mysterious inscription inside the rock.
12. A rain of fish
13. 1d6 luminous objects are seen in the sky, remaining for 1d10 minutes before disappearing at vast speed.
14. Blue gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
15. Black snow
16. A single stone sphere the size of a grapefruit falls from a perfectly clear sky.
17. A humanoid shape is seen briefly obscuring the face of the sun. 35% chance it has wings.
18. Hailstorm with stones the size of hens' eggs
19. Green gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
20. Orange snow
21. Pink snow
22. Hailstorm with normal-sized hail except one the size of an elephant
23. Purple snow
24. Clouds over a particular area are seen to form geometric shapes (lasts for 1d6 hours).
25. A beam of light of unknown origin illuminates a small area (such as a particular farm, a park, an inn, etc.) for 1d4 hours. The light is as bright as daylight, but has no discernable source.
26. Orange Moon
27. Beautiful singing and music is heard coming from a cloudless sky. This lasts 1d20 minutes.
28. A black spot is seen moving swiftly across the face of the sun.
29. Yellow Moon
30. A bright spot is seen moving swiftly across the face of Luna.
31. Green rain
32. Pink Moon
33. Yellow rain
34. Red Sun

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<http://worldofthool.blogspot.com/2008/12/fortean.html>

⁷ <http://www.resologist.net/index.htm>

35. A rain of dead birds of various types
36. Purple Sun
37. Loud thunderous noise is heard in an otherwise clear sky, lasting 1-100 minutes.
38. Blue Sunset
39. Pink rain
40. A rain of perfectly cubical pieces of ice
41. Grey Sun
42. Blue snow
43. Pink Sunset
44. A freshwater fish is caught in the ocean with no ill effect.
45. Purple Sunset
46. An area is subjected to night-like darkness in the middle of the day, lasting 11-30 (1d20+10) minutes.
47. Red gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
48. A luminous ring appears around Luna (50%), Celene (25%), or both (25%).
49. A single smallish stone falls from a perfectly clear sky (5% it has strange writing on it, 5% it is a lodestone).
50. A hitherto-unseen star shines very brightly in the night sky, brighter than any other object save the moons. This lasts for 1d6 days, and then the star disappears.
51. Pink hail
52. A rain of pebbles
53. Hordes of (ordinary) caterpillars are seen after a snowstorm.
54. Red rain
55. Red hail
56. Blue rain
57. Snowstorm with flakes the size of saucers
58. The footprint of a horse (25%), goat (25%), or man (25% bare, 25% shod) appears in a stone floor, step, or street suddenly, overnight, with no witnesses.
59. A large stone found completely inside a tree (5% it has unknown writing on it).
60. A human or demi-human baby is born with a tail.
61. Orange hail
62. In a stone quarry, workers cutting stone find a human footprint inside the rock.
63. Yellow hail
64. Yellow gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
65. Blue Sun
66. A comet appears in the night sky, visible for 1d12 days.
67. Red Moon
68. A rain of small stones
69. A rain of milk
70. A single bright light (50%) or group of lights (50%) is seen in the dark area of Luna.
71. A salt-water fish is caught in a lake or river with no ill effect.
72. A rain of oil (non-flammable)
73. Black rain
74. Pink gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
75. A rain of butter
76. Lightning strikes from an otherwise-clear sky.
77. Orange gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
78. A gold ring is found in the egg of a hen or duck.
79. Red snow
80. A rain of urine
81. Blue hail
82. Green hail
83. A child is born entirely blue-skinned. The color fades away in a few weeks.
84. Green Moon
85. A rain of meat (of unknown type)
86. Yellow snow
87. Black gelatinous substance falls from the sky.
88. A rain of snakes
89. Purple rain
90. A brilliant fireball-style meteor is seen in the sky.
91. Pink Sun
92. Blue Moon
93. A rain of frogs (50%) or toads (50%) - they are always only a few months old, never tadpoles or adults
94. A rain of blood
95. A tree bleeds when it is cut down.
96. The shadow of the Oerth on the moons is reversed.
97. An Aurora Borealis is seen in unusually southern latitudes (re-roll if you are already in a locale where auroras are commonly seen).
98. Purple hail
99. Two effects in rapid succession or simultaneous (re-roll, ignoring rolls of 99 or 100)
100. Three effects in rapid succession or simultaneous (re-roll, ignoring rolls of 99 or 100)

Old School Campaign Tentpoles (December 19, 2008)

James over at Groggnardia is about to launch his "Dwimmermount" campaign, and I wish him nothing but the best of luck with it. It did get me to thinking about the notion that an old school campaign should properly have a "megadungeon" as its tent-pole adventuring locale. James himself admitted that on reflection Greyhawk and Blackmoore were based on that idea, and it's what led him to conclude that Dwimmermount would be a needed component of his own campaign.

I happen to agree whole-heartedly, but it's important to remember (as James has) that just because a campaign has a central megadungeon as its focus, it is by no means the exclusive province of the campaign. Adventurers are free to delve into its mouldy depths if they choose, but they're just as free to poke around in the local town or city, hie off into the wilderness, or explore smaller dungeons that the DM should properly have waiting for those eager for a change of pace.

But what I think is important is that the tent-pole dungeon is there, for those days when the PCs weary of tracking down clues and following whatever plots they have been pursuing throughout the campaign. The tent-pole should, I think, be a sort of refuge from such things, existing in the world but not of it, a place where the PCs can set aside their plot-induced cares and just go someplace, kill things, and take their stuff. In my own campaign, the dungeon of Quasqueton served that purpose; when they needed to take a break from witches, brigands, and conspiracies the PCs would delve into its depths. It helped to bolster them in terms of x.p. and magic items, too, getting them to a place where they could more equally interact with some of the bad guys.

That doesn't mean that the tent-pole needs to be 100% divorced from the rest of the campaign; surely NPCs encountered therein could be found elsewhere later (as the evil dwarf Obmi was in the original Greyhawk campaign), and actions in the dungeon could lead the stalwart PCs to other locales in the wilderness (the most famous example of this being, of course, the fact that those who made it to the lowest level of Castle Greyhawk were sent to the other side of the world and left to make their way home via an extended wilderness trek). Items needed in the broader campaign might be found in the dungeon (special magical items, for instance, or even a piece of vital intelligence regarding a personage or locale), necessitating a trip into the megadungeon to retrieve it. The megadungeon needn't exist in a vacuum.

It should also be remembered that the campaign tent-pole need not be a conventional mega-dungeon. Certainly that's one of the easiest, and most commonly found, devices, but a little brainstorming can provide some other ideas that serve the same purpose.

- The ruined city. If you decide to go with the notion that the players should have at least a rough idea of how tough the territory is (as with the megadungeon idea that lower levels = harder monsters), you could have lower level encounters closer to the walls, getting more

difficult as the PCs get towards the central palace.

- The haunted forest. A maze of twisting forest paths through the underbrush, with clearings, large tree-houses, streams and ponds, etc. filling the role of corridors and rooms. If the PCs dare, they could try to hack through the dense underbrush, but at the risk of getting lost and disturbing the really dangerous things that live off the paths and trails.
- The depths. Rather than a single megadungeon, the PCs foray into the vast underground realms known in some places as the Underdark, Depths of the Oerth, the Wormroad, etc. The essential difference is that miles of caves and tunnels separate encounter areas, some of which could count as dungeons unto themselves, others of which are more modest. The strains upon the PCs are greater, as the logistical challenges of negotiating a miles-long dungeon are necessarily tougher than a megadungeon contained within a fairly compact area. Entrance and egress could be interesting problems as well.
- The uncharted wilds. A "standard" wilderness should never be discounted as a possible tent-pole adventure locale, as long as it is built up as such. Though it may be spread out over many miles, a specific wilderness could fit the bill nicely. Punctuated with small ruins and dungeons, varying sorts of terrain giving rise to very different encounters, the sort of thing the legendary West Marches campaign was built on. I would only change things inasmuch as there would be adventures to be had in the town, and of a different nature in the more civilized areas, but the call of the wilderness would always be there and available.
- The Infinite Planes. Here's something I'm not sure I'd ever have the balls to try to pull off, because it would take a LOT of prep-work, but if you did it right it could be the stuff of legends. Give the PCs access to something akin to the Codex of the Infinite Planes. Each adventure is a jaunt to another plane, or demi-plane, or even epoch. One day they find themselves in the far future, the next in Willie Wonka's chocolate factory, and the next dodging sleestaks and t-rexes. The trick would be to keep it fresh and interesting every time; you don't want to wing this one. One trip to "the infinite desert of nothing notable", while it might make the end of a spiffy Twilight Zone episode, could spell the end of an RPG campaign.

- The sewers. Who's to say the PCs even have to leave the walls of the home city? I once did a game where the dungeon was the sewers. In practice it's little different from a standard mega-dungeon, but the key is that there can be a LOT more connection with the PCs supposedly safe home base. Every building has a cellar, and many of those have secret doors leading to sub-basements and hooking up with the sewers. Hidden temples, an entire zone of crypts and tombs, thieves and assassins who use the sewers as a highway and think they know what's going on, but in reality they only know but a smidgen of what's going on beneath the streets... This is a nice way to combine intrigue and the mega-dungeon directly.

Just some thoughts to get the ol' creative juices flowing. There are hundreds of possibilities.

Counterspells in AD&D (December 28, 2008)

Chgowiz has a fascinating post⁸ up on his blog tonight, dealing with the topic of counter-spells. Turns out that in the hoary mists of the Chainmail Fantasy Supplement, Wizards could attempt to counter the effect of other Wizards on the battlefield. I looked it up, because I didn't remember that particular rule, but sure enough there it was.

Essentially, a more powerful Wizard can spend his turn attempting to counter an enemy Wizard's spells. If he is more powerful than the enemy, he counters the spell on a 7-12 on 2d6. If less powerful, he needs to roll 8, 9, 10 or 11. That works out to around 58.3% and 38.9%, respectively. There's no such thing as equally matched Wizards, apparently; in case of a tie, a die roll determines relative strength.

Obviously, the AD&D rules are more granular when it comes to magic and magic-users, so a tad more expansion is called for if deciding to adapt these rules to AD&D use. I've not playtested this, of course, but I might do something along the following lines.

Counter-Spells

Any magic-user is able to use the magical energy stored in his mind to attempt to counter the effects of

another magic-user's spell. A counter-spell has an effective casting time of instantaneous. The countering magic-user informs the Dungeon Master of his intention to attempt to disrupt the casting of another magic-user (magic-users and illusionists can disrupt one another's spells in this fashion, but not clerical spells), and chooses a spell from his own list of memorized spells to use, before the nature of the enemy spell is known.

(In this way, the choice of which spell to "burn" becomes a real decision and something of a blind bid; do you waste a fireball spell when the enemy could only be casting magic missile?)

Roll 2d6 and compare the level of the spell burned vs. the level of the spell being countered.

Level Difference	Countered On Role Of...
-9	automatic
-7 - -8	3-12
-5 - -6	4-12
-3 - -4	5-12
-1 - -2	6-12
0	7-12
1 - 2	8-12
3 - 4	9-12
5 - 6	10-12
7 - 8	11-12
9 ⁹	12

The difference here between this and the system found in Chainmail is not only the granularity of the odds, but also using the level of the spell as opposed to the level of the caster. If you really want to get into it, a modifier for level of caster could also be included, but you'd need to jig it so as to bear the minimum caster level for a given spell level in mind. I would probably give an automatic success if one happened to burn the exact same spell being cast, especially since it's a blind choice.

Playtesting might also indicate that my own table above is too generous; a 7th level spell should be able to squash a cantrip with no chance of failure. I could also see spreading out the energy in the case of multiple spell-casters, attempting to counter several lower-level spells with one high-level spell in a single go. But I'll save that for another day.

⁸ <http://oldguvrpg.blogspot.com/2008/12/from-chainmail-to-od-counterspells.html>

⁹ Counting cantrips as 0-level spells, it is possible, however unlikely, that a cantrip could be used to counter a wish spell. Yes, I like cantrips. Wanna make something of it? ;-)

This is just a first pass, inspired by that great post. I will drop this into my next AD&D campaign and see how it works.

Entering the Dungeons of Castle Greyhawk (January 29, 2009)

"Those who have explored the countryside between the bustling city of Greyhawk and the castle ruins of the same name which lie on the hill not a league to the east of the city will testify to the fact that there are a number of strange tunnels and wells about. Wise folks avoid them, for they know that these are but entrances to the fiendish maze of dungeons, pits, labyrinths, crypts, catacombs, and caverns which honeycomb the hill and the rock far beneath it. There are those, however, who eagerly seek these ways, for it is likewise well-known that incalculable treasure also rests within these twisting mazes. Dauntless adventurers sally through these entrances to a hideous underworld, determined to gain great fortunes or die." - Gary Gygax, writing in *Wargamer's Digest*, June 1975.

That quote, part of the introduction to the story "The Magician's Ring", is to my mind both evocative and practical. Later in the story, we are told that at least one of those entrances leads to the lower levels of the dungeons directly. Look for such entrances as I continue my own *Castle of the Mad Archmage*, naturally, but also consider the practical implications.

By providing a means of entrance and/or exit from the dungeons, even into the lower levels, higher-level adventurers are able to bypass the upper (and, to them, boring) levels and get straight to the action. Such entrances need be neither obvious nor easy to find, making an expedition merely to scout out the terrain surrounding the Castle a possible adventure in and of itself. Also, those using such entrances might not be certain of which level of the dungeons they had entered, unless they explored enough to run into rooms or features which were familiar.

Too many of my own dungeons in the past have been of the "one way in or out" variety. I'm going to take Gygax's description to heart.

Dungeons as Logistical Challenges (February 20, 2009)

Over at Grogardia¹⁰, James M. posted a list of elements that could be said to go into making an old-school-type dungeon. That got me thinking to an element of the megadungeon-style campaign (not the only thing that's needed to create such campaign, but I would argue it's one of the tentpoles of such a campaign) that is particularly lacking in modern, 4th-edition-style gaming. That is, the dungeon (or wilderness, etc.) as logistical challenge.

Many of the things that really irk modern players about 0E and 1E are actually part and parcel of this idea in action. Cursed items. Unidentifiable teleporters. Level-draining undead. Instant-death poisons and monsters. These aren't the DM trying to "stick it" to the players. They are just another oblique means of challenging the players, rewarding forethought and caution, and offering choices of whether to press on or retreat in the face of adversity.

Take curses, for example. Clerics are, by the very fact that cursed items exist and other curse-type effects can befall adventurers, forced to decide whether they want to spend a spell-slot on the spell remove curse. The fact that they are forced to choose blindly (i.e., not knowing whether or not they'll need that particular spell on the foray for that particular day) is part of the challenge. They must play the odds, and if they choose to gamble that a remove curse isn't worth taking, the PCs will pay the price if they are either reckless or unlucky.

Teleporters. I am told that a certain publisher of old-school modules actually received complaints that there were teleporters therein which were not known to the PCs when they activated. But one of the biggest logistical challenges of an old-school game is to actually be able to get out the way you came! No one is guaranteed an accurate map; unless the PCs are going at 1/10th speed (and therefore getting ten times the wandering monster checks), they don't know whether a corridor is 60' or 80' long. The presence of subtle teleporters (or sloping passages, etc.) is just another way of making an accurate map a harder thing to achieve. And challenge is part and parcel of the game. And at their most challenging, they can even tax the food and drink of the PCs, if they manage to get themselves hopelessly lost.

¹⁰ <http://grogardia.blogspot.com/2009/02/old-school-dungeon-design-guidelines.html>

Level-draining undead are no more, so I'm told, in 4E. More's the pity. Contrary to popular opinion, they're not just a way to punish an uppity player; they're a way of forcing hard decisions and draining precious resources. At their easiest, they take away 10,000+ g.p. from the victim. At their worst, they force the newly-reduced player to decide whether they want to continue on their current level of the dungeon, or retreat to a higher level where the challenges are slightly easier. The same holds true for the venerable rust monster. If a fighter has just gone from AC 2 to AC 9 because his plate mail just became brunch for a propeller-tailed beastie, the party could well have some tough decisions to make. Do we go on, or do we retreat back to the town to re-arm the meat-shields? It's not an obvious choice, and the temptation to explore "just one more room" is a strong one.

This sort of attitude towards the dungeon brings an old, but often overlooked, dimension to the career of dungeon-explorer. It should go without saying that actively rolling for wandering monsters and keeping track of encumbrance (and food) are vital to this sort of play. The use or retention of resources, be they magical or mundane, and the need to balance the benefits of further exploration in the face of losses (whether they be of h.p., levels, armor, weapons, etc.) is a vital decision that adds immeasurably to the game.

Specialty Products of the Flanaess, Part I (March 18, 2009)

It's always nice to give a little "local color" when describing particular items. When the characters are served a drink at the Inn, it's always more fun to say its Celene ruby wine or Aged Special Urnst brandy, rather than just "ale" or "fine mead". The same goes for other things as well; certain lands are noted for certain products, and by dropping such names in descriptions, the DM can add a little bit of campaign flavor with minimal fuss. With that in mind, I give you some notable products from different lands and regions of the Flanaess. Use these to liven up your merchant caravans, taverns, treasure hoards, and marketplaces. Compared to local fare, these items might command 2x or even 4x the value, just by virtue of their reputation and rarity. Some of this comes from module T1 "The Village of Hommlet" while the rest comes from p. 45 of the "Guide to the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting", which details what nations have what notable exports in a general sense; I've filled in the details, with, of course, a lot of poetic license...

- Keolish Golden Wine
- Urnst White Wine
- Celene Ruby Wine
- Sundish Lilac Wine
- Furyondian Pale Emerald Wine. Pressed from the grapes that grow on the endless gentle rolling hills in central Furyondy, this light-green-hued wine is famed for its gentle fruity flavor.
- Velunian Fireamber Wine. A white wine, fortified with a reddish distilled liquor which gives it its famous hue and firey flavor.
- Keoish Brandy.
- Aged Special Urnst Brandy.
- Ulek Elixir Liqueur.
- Medegian Tartan. This is popular in the various provinces of the Great Kingdom; each pattern is representative of a particular Aerdy clan.
- Sulwardian Fine Teak. Largely a misnomer; the huge logs are brought from Hepmonaland and processed in Sulward (in the Lordship of the Isles), and exported thence to the rest of the Flanaess.
- Hoolish Wild Rice. Grown in the large slave-labored plantations in the Hold of the Sea Princes. it originated in the marshes, but its cultivation has since spread throughout the land.
- Ulek embroidery. This is especially very popular with elves in various locales in the Flanaess.
- Traskish Chequered Cloth (from the towns and villages along the Trask river in North Province). This cloth is also popular with the various Oeridian folk in the Flanaess, particularly those in the eastern half of the continent.
- Crystal River Cheques (from the local folk along the Crystal River in Furyondy). The Crystal River patterns are often held in heated rivalry with those of the Trask, with the former dominating the western Flanaess and the latter the eastern. Prices adjust accordingly, as the one is more rare in the other's dominant market.
- Franzish Linen. Both the County of Urnst and the Kingdom of Nyrond hold this to be the best of their fabrics, and there is a friendly rivalry between the growers on either side of the Franz River as to who produces the finest and most luxurious cloth.
- Pomarj Black Wine. Tough purple-black vines cover some of the sunny hillsides of the Pomarj, whose grapes are turned into a highly alcoholic wine highly prized in some quarters.

- Tenha Beef. The cattle of the Duchy of Tenh are prized for their subtle flavor and exquisite texture. The Palish also export identical meat, but it is known by the general name "Tenha Beef" (much to the chagrin of the Theocrats, who once tried to market their own cattle as "Lightbearing beef" to general derision and no real effect).
- Bisselian Angora. The cultivation of the long-haired angora rabbit (from whose soft hair the angora fabric is spun) is commonplace in Bissel, the creatures originally imported from the Baklunish lands. They are found throughout the Flanaess, but nowhere as common as Bissel.

This list is, obviously, not exhaustive. In fact, a sequel might be in the offing on this very blog in the not too distant future.

In Praise of Polearms (April 3, 2009)

I love the vast array of different polearms in AD&D. That *Unearthed Arcana* has an entire appendix devoted to them only makes it all the better in my opinion.

A lot of folks make great sport of the huge number of different polearm options in AD&D. They are seen as an expression of Gary Gygax's "polearm fetish", and are usually completely ignored by both players and DMs alike. But I think this is a huge mistake, and the first time the DM correctly uses polearms in one of his dungeons, the players will be forced to re-evaluate their choice of weapon proficiencies, as well.

To be fair, the variety of polearm options only comes into fullest blossom when three rules are used that, from what I gather, usually are ignored; weapon speed factor, space required, and the dreaded weapons vs. armor class table. Pretty much all of page 38 of the original PHB. (Yes, I am aware that Gygax himself didn't use two of those factors in his own combats, but bear with me.) I happen to use all (when applicable), and have found that they really don't make combats go appreciably slower, once players are used to including another adjustment to their "to hit" rolls.

How I Do Initiative

At this point, I should point out that I houserule initiative in a way that makes the weapon speed factor a piece of cake. Everybody rolls a d10, adds their

dexterity bonus (if any) and adds their weapon speed factor (or the casting time of their spell, in segments). I start counting out loud. 1... 2... 3... 4... when I hit someone's number, they say "I go now" and they proceed to tell me what their character does, roll "to hit", etc. It works really well and it at least approximates the effect of using a slow and clumsy weapon. Monsters using natural weapons like fangs or claws have an assumed speed factor of zero.

The Space Required column on that table (p. 38 of the original PHB) is key to using pole-arms and other weapons in a dungeon environment. Savvy humanoids will, of course, be used to their lairs. Those 10' corridors are that wide, and twisty-turny, for a reason. Remember the weapons types in the *Monster Manual*? How most of them include a large percentage of polearms? That isn't a mistake.

You can, for instance, pack five guisarme-wielding hobgoblins in a 10' corridor, compared to 2 humans with broadswords. Same damage as a broadsword, but it's 8' long and the second and third ranks can attack, so you have to go through 5 attacks just to even get a *shot* at one of the hobgoblins in the hallway (and the way I would work it, due to the reach of the weapons, the hobgoblins automatically get initiative if the PCs decide to attack). The hobgoblins just multiplied their effective attack strength by a factor of two and a half. Working in unison, they're as effective as a 5-HD monster.

And those invincible fighters with 400 g.p. burning a hole in their small belt pouch? Oh, big man with your plate mail and shield. AC 2. Invincible. Except when those footman's picks come out and the orcs get an effective 10% bonus "to hit" because they're wielding what are essentially can openers. You've got a +2 longsword? You're facing 30 humanoids with the effective equivalent of +2 weapons, "to hit", at least. And you're going to automatically yield initiative simply to close to hit.

Still think polearms are silly? They are the perfect dungeon corridor weapon when you've got a lot of troops to use them. And outdoors, if those goblins form a square, with sharp pointies facing outwards, the melee problems in a dungeon corridor are the same, just on a larger scale.

Don't write off the polearms.

“New Round, New Initiative!” (June 30, 2009)

I've mentioned this as an aside once before, but here's how I do initiative. Once I explain how sublime and wonderful my system is, I expect it to catch on like wildfire throughout the OSR. Or, one person might cotton to it and end up using it with a tweak or two. It could happen.

All the players know their weapon speed. Yeah, that table on p. 38 of the Players Handbook? I use it. Monsters with natural attacks (like claws or bites) add zero.

Anyone who's surprised automatically loses initiative. Duh.

When the round begins I say "New round, new initiative!" Everybody rolls a d10 every round. I roll one collectively for all the monsters. It's just easier.

The players add their weapon speed or spell casting time (in segments) to whatever they roll, and subtract their reaction/attacking adjustment (for Dexterity). If they're doing something wacky like swinging from a chandelier and leaping on the foe, I just make up a number and tell them to add it to their roll, because I'm the DM, and that's part of my job description.

I start counting off. 1... 2... 3... 4... When I hit a number of a player's modified initiative, they say "I go!" If I reach the monsters' number, I say "They go".

And that's pretty much it.

You roll a die, add one number, subtract another, and BOOM! You're done. And since they don't change unless you change weapons, it's pretty much a set modifier. It is really that simple.

There are a few special cases, of course, like missile weapons. Godsdamn missile weapons. Look at the rate of fire on p. 38 (ah, my beloved p. 38). If it's 1, you go when you rolled. If it's 2, you go once when you rolled and again at the end. And so forth. If it's 1/2, you go every other round. Simple. There are other special cases, but that's the point of being a DM. Make it work; it's easy.

I have to say, this has worked so very well for me over the years I wanted to share. It gives a benefit to those who choose swift but light weapons over bulky but

punishing weapons. It makes casting times meaningful. It gives all the flexibility a DM could ask for.

Parrying Rules for (A)D&D (September 1, 2009)

Okay...

I think I've come up with an elegant solution to the whole "how the heck do I actively defend against an enemy?" question. And it works so well with (A)D&D, I thought I would share. How about this:

Anyone engaged in melee can opt to parry. The term includes dodging, avoiding, etc. as well as literal parrying of weapons.

The character opts to parry as part of their normal attack in the melee round. Characters who lose initiative may not parry. Parrying subtracts a number from the opponents' "to hit" roll equal to half the number chosen by the character, to a maximum of their level (round down). Characters are penalized by the full amount on their own "to hit" roll. Opponents of fighters (and cavaliers, and sub-classes of both) are penalized the full amount, rather than half, due to the training they receive. Monsters can parry at a level equal to their hit dice, at the full rate as if they were fighters.

EXAMPLE: A 5th level fighter chooses to parry 3 points during his round. Both his opponent and he suffer a -3 penalty on their "to hit" rolls.

EXAMPLE: A 4th level magic-user chooses to parry 5 points during his round. He cannot, however, since he can only be 4th level. He opts to parry 4 points. His opponent is -2 on its "to hit" rolls. He is -4 "to hit" for that round.

Main Gauche in AD&D (September 2, 2009)

My previous post on parrying got me thinking about using weapons as main gauche. For those not versed in the art of sword-fighting, main gauche (French for "left hand") refers to a secondary weapon, something between a dagger and a shortsword, used in the "off hand" to complement a one-handed sword.

I don't recall ever seeing rules in 1E for using a main gauche. I suppose it got covered in one of the various splat books for 2E, but if that's the case, I certainly

don't remember it. For 1E, I would allow characters to use a dagger as a main gauche in lieu of a shield, thus essentially reversing the rule in the DMG (p. 70). A character with a dagger as main gauche can opt to have it treated as a buckler or attack with it at the usual penalties (he chooses at the beginning of the round). The fact that it is treated as a buckler means it can only be used to get a bonus to AC against a single opponent. A hand axe cannot be used as a main gauche.

If the DM chooses to use rules for main gauche, he might also want to allow two new weapons into play, specifically designed to be used as a main gauche. These are the sword-breaker and trident dagger.

The sword-breaker is a long and sturdy dagger with a series of notches cut into the back of the blade like the teeth of a comb. If an opponent using a melee weapon misses by "1" against a character using such a weapon as main gauche, the opponent's weapon is considered to have been snagged. On the next round, the opponent must roll "to hit" successfully against AC 8 to free his weapon. If, in the process, he rolls a natural 1, his weapon is broken. Pole-arms and two-handed weapons cannot be snagged or broken. Magical weapons cannot be broken, except by magical sword-breakers of at least the same bonus as the weapon snagged. While a weapon is snagged, the sword-breaker cannot be used as main gauche. The sword-breaker costs 20 g.p., and otherwise functions as a dagger in combat.

The trident dagger is an ordinary-looking dagger until a secret catch in the handle is activated. When that happens, the blade springs into three parts and the weapon is able to snag opponents' weapons. If an opponent using a melee weapon misses by "1" against a character using such a weapon as main gauche, the opponent's weapon is considered to be snagged. On the next round, the opponent must roll "to hit" successfully against AC 8 to free his weapon. If, in the process, he rolls a natural 1, his weapon is ripped from his hand and hurled 1d6 feet away. Pole-arms and two-handed weapons cannot be snagged or hurled. When a weapon is snagged, the trident dagger cannot be used as main gauche. The trident dagger costs 25 g.p. and otherwise functions as a dagger in combat.

T1: The Village of Hommlet (September 23, 2009)

Hands down, module T1: The Village of Hommlet is my favorite AD&D adventure. Better than Vault of the

Drow, better than Tomb of Horrors, better than the Slavers modules or Expedition to the Barrier Peaks.

Many AD&D fans disagree, and I think I know at least part of the reason. It's a hundred times better without the Temple of Elemental Evil, the long-awaited sequel.

Let us turn back the clock. The year is 1979. One of the several modules that TSR publishes is Gary Gygax's "The Village of Hommlet". It describes an intrigue-filled village and a fairly modest ruin/dungeon complex. What it also does --absolutely brilliantly-- is describe an historical background that is really and truly meaningful to the module setting. The World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting folio was a year away. We had little idea what these powers and kingdoms were like; Verbobonc, the Kron Hills, Celene, etc. were all just names (if that). Too, the deities of the setting, like the central player Saint Cuthbert, were little more than names from artifacts in the DMG. And the Old Faith of the druids? That was a new wrinkle.

It was all so fresh and new. The WoG folio filled in some of the gaps (as well as using the module's background as an historical object lesson), but there was still so much to figure out. And it would all be revealed, we were promised, with the release of T2: The Temple of Elemental Evil.

We waited six long years between the release of T1 and what would eventually be released as T1-4: The Temple of Elemental Evil. (I am proud to say that I purchased the very-first-ever copy of that module sold, at Gencon, signed by EGG Himself. I am less proud to say that I eventually sold it, albeit for a tidy sum, but hardly what it would be worth today.) And what did we do in the meantime?

We ran the hell out of it. Over and over again. I never got around to doing my own version of the Temple, because it was always "just over the horizon" (kinda like Castle Greyhawk, but I digress). But man, I had party after party arrive at the Inn of the Welcome Wench, and interact with all the villagers, whose roles and personalities I could pretty much do by rote. And the obligatory visit to the moat house, and the confrontation with Lareth the Beautiful.

One party ended up finding the lair of the demoness Lolth. She was a Type V demon. Remember, this was way before a lot of that particular mythology got set down. She was little more than a name at that time.

One party got mixed up in the power politics between Burne and Rufus and the Viscount of Verbobonc, after one of their thiefling con-jobs got unraveled. They ended

up burning down the tower and fleeing, after killing one of the Viscount's guard-captains, and with the men of the patrol hot on their heels.

Yet another party did the best yet. They cleared out the moat house and ended up using Hommlet as a base of operations for many months as they explored various lairs and ruins in the Kron Hills and the Gnarlley Forest. They eventually moved on to the Wild Coast, but not after one of them assumed the command of the village militia.

The latest foray into Hommlet didn't end so well. The PCs took on a hireling, who ended up calling down an illusionary blue dragon whilst off traipsing about the Kron Hills. They didn't realize until it was too late that attacking him, rather than the dragon, would have saved their hides. Hommlet doesn't always end well.

See a pattern here? None of them ever made it to the Temple itself. The moat house was the finale. Once that was done, the village remained, and new adventuring opportunities presented themselves. Trade routes, gnomes in the Kron hills, Verbobonc... I didn't need the Temple!

The Temple, once it came out, was bloated. It lacked the elegant simplicity of Hommlet and the moat house. I'm certain there was an element of inflated expectations-- we'd been waiting for six years for the damn thing, after all. But it lacked verve. It was very very complex, and the complicated bits didn't really seem to fit all that well together, especially given the scenario that Hommlet had laid out, albeit in a nascent fashion. Competing factions within the Temple seemed an unnecessary complication, and where the heck was Loth in all this?

Also, the leveling sequence never seemed to make a lot of sense to me. A party would get to 4th level... max... going through Hommlet and the moat house. How they were supposed to go on to the Temple, and engage in repeated forays (even with the help of the notable NPCs in Hommlet and Nulb) is beyond me. The sinister forces in Hommlet have the werewithal to hire a high-level assassin just to take care of nuisances, for crying out loud. Wouldn't they do a little bit more if they were being set upon salami-style? (A slice at a time.)

In the end, I used the kidnapped-prince theme to great effect, but discarded just about everything else. I've actually never run Temple of Elemental Evil (although I've toyed with the idea of making my own). But I've run Hommlet more than a dozen times, and had a

blast every time. Its utility comes from its elegance, and its simplicity. Perfect.

Religion in Greyhawk (October 9 – November 24, 2009)

James over at Grognardia made an excellent post¹¹ about the background of a certain religion in his campaign, and in the comments made the following observation:

I always found the quasi-medieval society of D&D a poor fit for the kind of religion we see in most fantasy settings. Likewise, such religion is rarely pantheonic, tending more toward a kind of weird henotheism.

Now, for the benefit of those who might not be as up on henotheism as I am (it's really weird how it's come up in two completely unrelated blogs I frequent in two days), henotheism is essentially the practice of worshiping only a single God, while acknowledging the existence of others.

While I would vehemently disagree with James on his first assertion about the suitability of quasi-medieval societies for polytheistic religions, I agree wholeheartedly with his point that most fantasy RPGs (or, at the very least, D&D and its derivatives) encourage a certain henotheism by positing a world with many Gods, but requiring clerics (and, by implication, encouraging other characters) to worship a single "patron deity". AD&D was particularly rife with this idea, and it is apparently to be found in the very original Greyhawk campaign as well, with the Gods Pholtus and St. Cuthbert only being invented so clerics in the campaign would have some sort of deity upon which to hang their spiritual hat (or, perhaps in the latter case, chapeaux). The original AD&D goldenrod character sheets even had a box for "patron deity".

Historically, of course, there is a certain precedent for such a thing. Ancient Egypt toyed with the idea, and there are some indicators that the pre-Biblican Hebrews had a similar arrangement (hence the "thou shalt have no other Gods before me" in the Commandments; it is difficult to have other Gods if no other Gods exist). The ancient Romans certainly had folks who worshiped a particular God to the exclusion of all others (although, in a key distinction between

11

<http://grognardia.blogspot.com/2009/10/apotheosis.html>

themselves and the Jews (who had an official exemption from the practice) and the Christians (who, originally, did not), they found themselves capable of making pro forma offerings of incense to the deified Emperor (and, presumably, other Gods as well). We are told that, among the ancient Norse, certain individuals were known to be especially close to certain deities, but it is unclear whether that precluded them from attending a sacrifice on behalf of another. One imagines not, but their private practice was almost certainly henotheistic.

Anyway, to the gaming point here; James made a good point about the lack of historically authentic polytheism in many (if not most) fantasy RPG settings. Greyhawk is no exception to this, although it does have the seed of a solution, originally presented in the gold boxed set. Therein, on pp. 63-64 of the Guide, we have a list of deities that includes, among other things, their racial origin (common, Oeridian, Suloise, Flan, Baklunish, and unknown).

This, I think, provides the kernel for the development of a pantheonic approach to religion, vis-a-vis Greyhawk.

When we break down the Gods listed there by pantheon, assigning the "common" deities to each, we come up with a much more interesting breakdown. Some of the more immediately notable points:

- All of the Flan Gods are common. They have been absorbed by all the other cultures in the Flanaess. Presumably, this is because they were present when the invading Suel and Oeridians came into the Flanaess.
- Oeridians have some unique deities, as do the Suel and Baklunish. Some of them cross over, but not all.

The listings do bring up a few questions that, as far as I know, have never been answered. Some of the "common" deities are listed with a specific racial origin, and some are not. I might speculate that this means they have retained some of their "foreign allure" even though they have been otherwise assimilated into other religions. The others, presumably, each appear in identifiable form in each religion, albeit wrapped in a completely culture-appropriate bundle.

Three Gods are listed as having "unknown" origins; Tharizdun, Wastri, and Ulaa. Tharizdun and Wastri make sense; they are not part of any pantheon, and I can easily see how their worshipers would have an exclusive bond with their Gods. However, Ulaa is also listed as being "common"! If I am following the "foreign

allure" concept from above in such cases, it leads me to the conclusion that she is present throughout the three cultural pantheons, but her presence is discordant. She's universally alien; obviously an import from someplace, as she doesn't fit in to the normal pattern of worship, but her cultural foreignness is truly foreign. Where Pholtus speaks with an Oeridian accent, nobody can quite place Ulaa's.

The Oeridian Pantheon

- Allitur (God of ethics and propriety) LG(N), Flan origin
- Atroa (Goddess of spring and the East Wind) NG
- Beory (Oerth Mother, Goddess of nature, rain) N, Flan origin
- Berei (Goddess of home, family, and agriculture), NG Flan origin
- Bleredd (God of metal, mines, and smiths) NC
- Boccob (God of magic and arcane knowledge) N
- Bralm (Goddess of insects and industriousness) N(L), Suel origin
- Celestian (God of the stars, space, and wanderers) N(G)
- Saint Cuthbert (God of wisdom, dedication, and zeal) LG(N)
- Delleb (God of reason and intellect) LG
- Ehlonna "of the forests" (Goddess of forests, flowers, and meadows) NG
- Erythnul (God of hate, envy, malice, and panic) CE(N)
- Fharlanghn (God of horizons, distance, and travel) N(g)
- Geshtai (Goddess of lakes, rivers, and wells) N, Baklunish origin
- Heironeous (God of chivalry, honor, justice, and valor) LG
- Hextor (God of war, discord, and massacre) LE
- Incabulos (God of evil, plagues, and nightmares) NE
- Joramy (Goddess of fire, volcanoes, anger, and quarrels) N(G)
- Kurell (God of jealousy, revenge, and thievery) CN
- Lirr (Goddess of prose, poetry, and art) CG
- Lydia (Goddess of music, knowledge, and daylight) NG, Suel origin
- Myhriss (Goddess of love and beauty) NG
- Nerull "The Reaper" (God of death, darkness, and the Underworld) NE, Flan origin
- Obad-hai (God of nature, wildlands, freedom, and hunting) N, Flan origin
- Olidammara (God of music, revelry, rougery, and wine) NC

- Pelor (God of the sun, strength, light, and healing) NG, Flan origin
- Pholtus (God of light, resolution, and law) LG(N)
- Procan (God of the oceans, seas, and salt) NC
- Rao (God of peace, reason, and serenity) LG, Flan origin
- Ralishaz (God of chance, ill-luck, and misfortune) CN(E)
- Sotillion (Goddess of summer, the South wind, ease, and comfort) CG(N)
- Telchur (God of winter, the North wind, and cold) CN
- Trithereon (God of individuality, liberty, and retribution) CG
- Ulaa (Goddess of hills, mountains, and gemstones) LG, unknown origin
- Velnius (God of the sky and weather) N(G)
- Wenta (Goddess of autumn, the West wind, and the harvest) CG
- Xan Yae (Goddess of twilight, shadows, stealth, and mind over matter) N, Baklunish origin
- Zilchus (God of power, prestige, influence, money, and business) LN
- Zodal (God of mercy, hope, and benevolence) NG

I'm deliberately leaving demi-gods out of this listing, as I think they have a different status in the context of cultural pantheons that I'll address at a later time.

We have a few Divine Groupings here. Atroa/Sotillion/Telchur/Wenta are an obvious first choice, but it is interesting to note that their genders seem a tad out of whack. Three females and one male. Indo-European tradition allows for Divine Twins to be of either gender (Pollux and Castor, for example, or Freyja and Freyr), but a four-way split seems intuitively to want two males and two females. But it is not so. Perhaps Atroa(spring)/Wenta(autumn) and Sotillion(summer)/Telchur(winter) function as a sister/sister sister/brother combination. Perhaps some Oeridian myth recalls the bitterness felt by Telchur at being the "odd man out" (literally) and thus his affinity with the harshest time of the year. Perhaps Velnius would be their father, and this would be a myth that originated with the Oeridians?

The brotherhood/rivalry between Hextor and Heironeous is already well-attested. There seems to be a bit of a brotherly rivalry between Celestian and Fharlanghn as well, but its nature is unknown to us. Why, exactly, does Fharlanghn wander endlessly?

It's interesting that both the "noble" warriors-for-Good Gods (Saint Cuthbert, Heironeous, and Pelor) as well

as the "soft" Good Gods (Allitur, Delleb, Rao, and Zodal) are here. I think it's possible the two leanings of Good; "active" vs. "passive" could have a mythological conflict.

What I find ultimately fascinating is that, looking at things from a pantheonic perspective, "common" deities like Boccob could be very different in an Oeridian church than he would be in a Suel temple. I'd probably do a whole new write-up for each, one for each perspective (i.e., pantheon).

In terms of numbers, 19 members of the pantheon have Good as part of their alignment. Only 5 have Evil. 10 are Lawful and 8 are Chaotic. A full 29 have at least some part of Neutrality (I'm pretty sure that is a trend we'll see throughout this exercise, and it's a function of Gary Gygax's innate sense that deities should be ambivalent at least on some level). There are 39 deities in all, 25 male and 14 female.

The Suloise Pantheon

- Allitur (God of ethics and propriety) LG(N), Flan origin
- Atroa (Goddess of spring and the East Wind) NG, Oeridian origin
- Beltar (Goddess of malice, pits, and deep caves) CE(N)
- Beory (Oerth Mother, Goddess of nature, rain) N, Flan origin
- Berei (Goddess of home, family, and agriculture), NG Flan origin
- Bleredd (God of metal, mines, and smiths) NC
- Boccob (God of magic and arcane knowledge) N
- Bralm (Goddess of insects and industriousness) N(L)
- Celestian (God of the stars, space, and wanderers) N(G), Oeridian origin
- Saint Cuthbert (God of wisdom, dedication, and zeal) LG(N)
- Ehlonna "of the forests" (Goddess of forests, flowers, and meadows) NG
- Erythnul (God of hate, envy, malice, and panic) CE(N), Oeridian origin
- Fharlanghn (God of horizons, distance, and travel) N(g), Oeridian origin
- Fortubo (God of stone, metals, and mountains) LG(N)
- Geshtai (Goddess of lakes, rivers, and wells) N, Baklunish origin
- Heironeous (God of chivalry, honor, justice, and valor) LG, Oeridian origin

- Hextor (God of war, discord, and massacre) LE, Oeridian origin
- Incabulos (God of evil, plagues, and nightmares) NE
- Joramy (Goddess of fire, volcanoes, anger, and quarrels) N(G)
- Kord (God of athletics, sports, and brawling) CG
- Lendor (God of time and tedium) LN
- Lirr (Goddess of prose, poetry, and art) CG
- Llerg (God of beasts and strength) CN
- Lydia (Goddess of music, knowledge, and daylight) NG, Suel origin
- Myhriss (Goddess of love and beauty) NG
- Nerull "The Reaper" (God of death, darkness, and the Underworld) NE, Flan origin
- Norebo (God of luck, gambling, and risk) CN
- Obad-hai (God of nature, wildlands, freedom, and hunting) N, Flan origin
- Olidammara (God of music, revelry, rougery, and wine) NC
- Pelor (God of the sun, strength, light, and healing) NG, Flan origin
- Phaulkon (God of air, winds, and clouds) CG
- Pholtus (God of light, resolution, and law) LG(N), Oeridian origin
- Phytan (God of beauty and nature) CG
- Procan (God of the oceans, seas, and salt) NC, Oeridian origin
- Pyremius (God of fire, poison, and murder) NE
- Rao (God of peace, reason, and serenity) LG, Flan origin
- Ralishaz (God of chance, ill-luck, and misfortune) CN(E)
- Sotillion (Goddess of summer, the South wind, ease, and comfort) CG(N), Oeridian origin
- Syrul (Goddess of deceit, false promises, and lies) NE
- Telchur (God of winter, the North wind, and cold) CN, Oeridian origin
- Trithereon (God of individuality, liberty, and retribution) CG
- Ulaa (Goddess of hills, mountains, and gemstones) LG, unknown origin
- Wee Jas (Goddess of magic and death) LN
- Wenta (Goddess of autumn, the West wind, and the harvest) CG, Oeridian origin
- Xan Yae (Goddess of twilight, shadows, stealth, and mind over matter) N, Baklunish origin
- Xerbo (God of the sea, water travel, money, and business) N
- Zilchus (God of power, prestige, influence, money, and business) LN, Oeridian origin
- Zodal (God of mercy, hope, and benevolence) NG

First, some numbers. There are 48 deities in total (owing to the large number of Gods who are unique to the Suel pantheon); 31 are male and 17 are female. 38 have some element of neutrality in their alignment, while only 12 are lawful and 14 are chaotic. 20 are good and 7 are evil.

There are some interesting duplications here, now that the Suel-only deities are included. Xerbo is almost entirely superfluous, with Zichus covering money and business, and Procan covering the seas. Magic is doubly represented by Boccob and Wee Jas, whose other sphere of influence-- death-- is also covered by Nerull.

The pattern continues throughout the pantheon; gentle Phaulkon's mastery of the winds is challenged by no fewer than four deities of Oeridian origin (Atroa, Sotillion, Telchur, and Wenta), while even Lendor as God of Time finds his role already taken by Cyndor. Fortubo, the Suel God of mountains, finds a rival in exotic Ulaa, while both Llerg and Pelor make claim to being the God of strength.

Why? Why would the Gods unique to the Suel pantheon find themselves being edged out by more popular rivals? More to the point, why would the Suel themselves bring in alien Gods that would tend to rival their own, more native Gods and Goddesses?

At the risk of playing armchair psychiatrist, this could speak to an inherent inferiority complex amongst the Suel. Once possessors of a large and powerful empire, now reduced to refugees in foreign and hostile lands, perhaps they felt that Oeridian deities might somehow be stronger than their own, failed, pantheon.

The Flan Pantheon

- Allitur (God of ethics and propriety) LG(N)
- Atroa (Goddess of spring and the East Wind) NG, Oeridian origin
- Beory (Oerth Mother, Goddess of nature, rain) N
- Berei (Goddess of home, family, and agriculture) NG
- Bleredd (God of metal, mines, and smiths) NC
- Boccob (God of magic and arcane knowledge) N
- Bralm (Goddess of insects and industriousness) N(L), Suel origin
- Celestian (God of the stars, space, and wanderers) N(G), Oeridian origin
- Saint Cuthbert (God of wisdom, dedication, and zeal) LG(N)

- Ehlonna "of the forests" (Goddess of forests, flowers, and meadows) NG
- Erythnul (God of hate, envy, malice, and panic) CE(N), Oeridian origin
- Fharlanghn (God of horizons, distance, and travel) N(g), Oeridian origin
- Geshtai (Goddess of lakes, rivers, and wells) N, Baklunish origin
- Heironeous (God of chivalry, honor, justice, and valor) LG
- Hextor (God of war, discord, and massacre) LE
- Incubulos (God of evil, plagues, and nightmares) NE
- Joramy (Goddess of fire, volcanoes, anger, and quarrels) N(G)
- Lirr (Goddess of prose, poetry, and art) CG
- Lydia (Goddess of music, knowledge, and daylight) NG, Suel origin
- Myhriss (Goddess of love and beauty) NG
- Nerull "The Reaper" (God of death, darkness, and the Underworld) NE
- Obad-hai (God of nature, wildlands, freedom, and hunting) N
- Olidammara (God of music, revelry, rougery, and wine) NC
- Pelor (God of the sun, strength, light, and healing) NG
- Pholtus (God of light, resolution, and law) LG(N), Oeridian origin
- Procan (God of the oceans, seas, and salt) NC, Oeridian origin
- Rao (God of peace, reason, and serenity) LG
- Ralishaz (God of chance, ill-luck, and misfortune) CN(E)
- Sotillion (Goddess of summer, the South wind, ease, and comfort) CG(N), Oeridian origin
- Telchur (God of winter, the North wind, and cold) CN, Oeridian origin
- Trithereon (God of individuality, liberty, and retribution) CG
- Ulaa (Goddess of hills, mountains, and gemstones) LG, unknown origin
- Wenta (Goddess of autumn, the West wind, and the harvest) CG, Oeridian origin
- Xan Yae (Goddess of twilight, shadows, stealth, and mind over matter) N, Baklunish origin
- Zilchus (God of power, prestige, influence, money, and business) LN
- Zodal (God of mercy, hope, and benevolence) NG

The Flan pantheon can be said to be the most "generic" of the various pantheons described in the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting boxed set, as all of

the Flannae deities are also listed as being "common". As the Flan people were assimilated and/or conquered by the invading Oeridians and Suloise, so too were their Gods and Goddesses brought into the invading culture. This is a process well known to history; the Romans were the masters of such syncretism, and the Germanic tribes (down to the Norsemen of the Viking age) were not above bringing in foreign deities they found particularly attractive or useful.

The numbers: 36 deities total, 22 male and 14 female. 9 are lawful in some respect, 7 chaotic, and 29 neutral. 19 are good and only 5 are evil. This is in keeping with the numbers we've seen in the Suel and Oeridian pantheons, more or less.

What is interesting is the nature of the Gods of Flan origin. Four of them are Greater Gods, which is a record among "common" Gods originating in a particular race (the Oeridians have 2, the Suel and Baklunish have none). And the nature of those divinities is striking in its importance.

Beory is the "Oerth Mother". The very essence of the living world, encompassing all of nature and the life-giving rain. Nerull is the God of Death; the one universal constant that afflicts all mortal races. In the Gary Gygax "Gord the Rogue" novels, he is equated with the arch-daemon Anthraxus. Pelor is the quintessential "sun god"; another universal godly archetype. Only Rao, as God of peace, reason, and serenity, seems out of place in this quartet, but that might speak to the non-warlike nature of the Flannae, whom we are told were excellent hunters but poor warriors, and which led to their eventual downfall at the hands of the more aggressive Oeridians and Suloise.

This could indicate a certain level of respect, even on a subconscious level, for the Flan from the Oeridians and Suloise. Their deities are the Big Guns, and although the Suel have three Greater Gods themselves, none of them has been accepted by the rest of the populace in the Flanaess. Only the Flan Gods are "common". Folks just don't seem to like the Gods of the Suel.

It is somewhat interesting to note that Beory's position of Oerth Mother is bifurcated by both Ehlonna "of the forests" and Obad-hai. She is the Goddess of the forests, and He the God of nature itself. It might be suggested that they form a "divine pair"; the offspring of Beory, and in their way analogous to the various divine twins whom we see throughout European pre-Christian culture (Freya and Freyr amongst the most prominent examples).

The Baklunish Pantheon

- Istus (Goddess of Fate and destiny) N
- Geshtai (Goddess of lakes, rivers, and wells) N
- Xan Yae (Goddess of twilight, shadows, stealth, mind over matter, etc.) N

O_o

Is that it?

Yes. I think an argument can be made that the Baklunish don't import the deities of other pantheons into their own worship. The first is historical; if one looks at the map of the migrations of various races across the Flanaess (on p. 10 of the Guide), the Baklunish made naught but a half-hearted foray into the lands currently occupied by the nomads. The proximity of the Oeridians to the Baklunish heartland explains how the Oeridians could have taken the worship of Geshtai and Xan Yae into other lands, as they spread their own vibrant culture and most of their own pantheon. Yet no other cultures made any inroads anywhere close to the Baklunish lands. They are outsiders; aloof, and they are often portrayed as exotic strangers in some of the fiction that takes place in the Flanaess.

It should be noted, too, that Istus, for all her prominence in the setting (including having a rather large, if uneven, module named after her), is not listed as a "common" deity. She is also the only Greater God in the Baklunish pantheon (not that there are all that many Baklunish gods to choose from...). We are told that her centers of worship are Greyhawk (which boasts a small, if identifiable, native population of Baklunish extraction-- notably the only land in the Flanaess that does), Dyvers, Rauxes, Rel Mord, and Stoink. All centers of trade. It is not unreasonable to conclude that those "centers of worship" are merely for the benefit of the Baklunish traders who frequent those capitals of commerce (Stoink, we are told, is a "wasp's nest" of illegal activity, so those Bakluni indulging in the commerce of contraband might well have something of an outpost within its walls).

There is also the commentary of Gary Gygax himself¹² on the subject:

The plan was to introduce a new pantheon of [Baklunish] deities. Obviously that never

eventuated... nor will it ever unless WotC decides to do so.

EGG's (understandable) bitterness aside, it speaks to the notion that the Baklunish gods were only partially represented in the World of Greyhawk boxed set, and that their expansion was eventually supposed to have happened. To me, that reinforces the surmise that they are not included in the "common" designation for the other deities. Bear in mind, too, that a natural definition of the Flanaess would begin, not at the left-edge of the Darlene map, but rather at the line of mountains beginning at the Hellfurnaces, through the Crystalmists and Barrier Peaks, and up to the Yatils (much like the Ural mountains are said to divide Europe from Asia).

That being said, and operating on the assumption that the Baklunish haven't imported any gods from the other cultures of the Flanaess, but rather only loaned out two of their own, whose worship was disseminated through the auspices of the Oeridians, several conclusions can be made.

They tend towards neutrality, and they tend towards female deities. The lawful neutral alignments designated for Zeif and Tusmit, as well as the neutral good alignment of Ekbir support this notion obliquely, although I would daresay that a fully-developed Baklunish pantheon would display the same characteristics of the other pantheons thusfar found in Oerth; a marked tendency towards neutrality on both axes, but with certain deities of more defined alignments being presented related to specific interests.

Conclusions

In previous posts, I gave a run-down of the Oeridian, Suel, Flan, and Baklunish pantheons individually. They share many (most) deities, but there are interesting omissions and overlaps. The Flannae Gods are ubiquitous; they found their way into the common pantheon of the Flanaess. The Gods of the Bakluni are the opposite; Istus, the Big Goddess of the pantheon, is unique to the Baklunish, and only appears as a prominent figure in those places with a significant Baklunish population. There are some "obvious" groups of deities; the Oeridian Gods of the Winds, for example, or the Divine Pair of Heironeous and Hextor.

Some deities, such as St. Cuthbert of the Cudgel and Pholtus, seem to be robust enough to have full-blown religions centered on them alone; the twins Heironeous and Hextor could almost be said to constitute a dualistic religion. Medegia being the center of Hextor-worship, Almor being the center of

¹² <http://www.enworld.org/forum/archive-threads/171753-gary-gygax-q-part-xii-14.html>

Heironeous-worship, and each mortal enemies of the other, influencing the policies of the secular states around them in their religious quest.

We also have the problem of the "Old Religion" as we see in the module The Temple of Hommlet. The druids seem to have their own faith, completely separate from the religion of the clerics, and yet the Gods of each (notably Obad-Hai and Ehlonna of the Forests) have followers of both clerical and druidic bent. Add to that the fact that Gygax, in later years, said that the druids worshiped not conventional deities but the forces of Nature itself.

How to reconcile all this muddle?

First off, it's important to note that such a muddle is very historical (the example of the Roman Empire comes to mind), and the very fact that there is no clear delineation of religions, deities, and priesthoods is actually a strength of the setting; religion in Greyhawk is messy. In a more "rational" campaign setting, where religion was designed in a more systematic fashion (and I have been as guilty of such in my own homebrew campaigns as anyone), we might miss the sort of organic feel that religion in Greyhawk presents us.

Clerics (and Druids), operate in a polytheistic fashion, although some are henotheistic in nature (other Gods exist, but they aren't worshiped). That is, if a cleric dedicated to, say, Fortubo, was in need of help with healing, he or she might well make an offering to Pelor, despite the fact that they weren't dedicated to that particular deity. I note that Pelor is also a member of the Suel pantheon, so it's perhaps a first-order leap.

A cleric of a deity noted for a more henotheistic approach, such as St. Cuthbert or Pholtus, on the other hand, might well rely on his or her patron deity, regardless of the specific need. But just because a cleric of Pholtus might not be willing (for reasons of ideological and theological purity) to make an offering at a shrine of Wee Jas, the reverse is not necessarily the case. An adherent of Wee Jas might well be more than willing to make an offering to Pholtus, because Wee Jas isn't so picky about exclusivity. The cleric of Pholtus who does so, on the other hand, might well find his fifth-level spells being withdrawn...

The question of clerics vs. druids, and the issue of the "Old Faith" is an interesting one. On the one hand, we have references to druidry as "the Old Faith", utterly distinct from the religion of the clerics of St. Cuthbert (and presumably the rest of the Gods and pantheons), and Gygax's statement that Druids worship Nature

itself. On the other hand, we have the fact that the Guide to the World of Greyhawk states clearly that several deities can have servants of both the clerical and druidical classes. Maybe the Nature-worshipping Druids are the "old faith", and those who worship conventional deities are regarded as interlopers. The monolithic structure of the druids is already cracked by the module "Dark Druids" by Pied Piper Publishing. Maybe there are more fractures than we have been led to believe...

On the whole, I think the less-than-systematic reality of the religions of Greyhawk, and the relationship between some deities and pantheonic religions, as well as the lack of clarity vis-a-vis clerics and druids, adds a great deal of color and flavor to the World of Greyhawk. Just as in the real world, we see different people with different approaches to particular Gods, and no One True Way.

Let a thousand flowers bloom...

Dragon Types of the Flanaess (December 6, 2009)

Dragons are, of course, as iconic a piece of the game as can be imagined. Hell, they make up half the name. Dragon magazine came up with a few excellent ideas for the scaly beasts: I note with particular fondness Richard Allan Lloyd's outstanding "filling in the missing dragons" article in Dragon #65, which gives us the evil Yellow, Orange, and Purple dragons (and which was ultimately revised for 3rd edition in Dragon #248).

Richard Allan Lloyd, by the way, was the man who invented the Starmaster play-by-mail game, and I actually worked for him as a game master for the game for a while. Man, I loved that game. But I digress.

There were also the gemstone neutral dragons in The Dragon #37, offered by Arthur W. Collins (Crystal, Topaz, Emerald, Sapphire, Amethyst, Ruby).

I also liked the combat upgrades dragons got in 2E: wing buffets, tail slaps, fear, etc. I play with those in my own campaign, and almost all dragons beyond the very youngest are also able to use magic (and I assume all dragons are able to polymorph themselves at will). I throw in the removal of "dragon subduing" to make them really fearful opponents. I'm also fast and loose with the 3 breath weapons per day rule. I think that makes 'em a little too under-powered.

But one thing just struck me while I was forced to watch "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" on television tonight. The dragons had such cool names. The Oriental Fireball. The Hungarian Horntail. The Swedish Short-Snout. They refer back to either the physical characteristics of the beast, or its place of origin, or both. The names given to the dragons in the monster manuals are, by any objective standard, quite lame. Red, Black, Copper, Silver...

It occurred to me that, in the World of Greyhawk Fantasy Setting, one might have more interesting names for the standard dragon types in the monster manuals, based on their habitat, their images in the Monster Manual, and so forth. I give you:

The Dragon Types of the Flanaess

Black: Sunndi Proudthorn
Blue: Bright Desert Hornnose
Brass: Suloise Fanwing
Bronze: Almorian Arrowsnout
Copper: Crystalmist Curvehorn
Gold: Suhfang Serpentine
Green: Sussian Mossback
Red: Hellfurnaces Redbelly
Silver: Yatil Silverwing (aka "Cloudherder")
White: Thillronian Fanhead

Naturally, though, as dragons of the Flanaess are sentient, they do not themselves use these by-names, but these more common appellations are used by humans, demi-humans, and humanoids (in their own tongues, of course), in everyday speech.

And, for the edification of those who might not have access to the 2E Monstrous Compendium, here is a very brief overview of the special abilities dragons possess:

- Detect invisible creatures (10' per age category).
- Clairaudience in lair (20' per age category).
- Fear: 15-50 yards range as they get older, young adults cause fear in all >1 HD automatic panic for 4d6 rounds, others save vs. petrification or fight at -2 to hit and damage.
- Snatch: young adults can grab victims (50% chance of pinning their arms), fly up and drop them. Automatic claw damage if you're snatched.
- Plummet: The dragon lands on some unfortunates, crushing for damage equal to its bite, getting between 1 and 12 people depending on its age.

- Kick: Anyone in the rear hemisphere of the dragon can suffer claw damage and get knocked down (save vs. petrification).
- Wing Buffet: Any target at the dragon's side can be attacked by its wings, damage as claws, dex check to be knocked down.
- Tail Slap: Adult and older dragons' tails do 2x claw damage against a number of opponents equal to its age category; they are also stunned for 1d4+1 rounds.
- Stall: If flying, the dragon can just stop in mid-air, attack with all 4 claws, and kick up dust that blinds and prevents spell casting for one round.

Also, their armor class gets better as they age (start improving by 1 AC after Juvenile) and they get +1 "to hit" per age category.

These things are most definitely not pushovers in my campaign. They will have you for breakfast unless you are very well prepared. Literally.

eXPloring the World of Greyhawk (December 22, 2009)

What would motivate a Christopher Columbus or a Marco Polo in a D&D-type setting?

Jeff Rients came up with an absolutely awesome idea¹³ (perhaps "came up with" is the wrong term; "articulated for use in D&D" might be a better one) that one should earn experience points by the simple act of exploring. Reaching certain destinations would earn a character a certain modest amount of x.p.; the idea is that by "broadening" oneself, one gains life experiences (that can be translated into x.p. in game terms). Others have also talked about the same concept both before and after (and apparently it's something that has roots in Warhammer and Rolemaster as a concept), but unfortunately I hadn't run into the idea prior to reading Jeff's post.

This harkens back to the concept of the "Grand Tour" of various Continental centers of culture that English gentlemen-to-be were expected to undertake in order to round out their education and get acquainted with other lands and see for themselves the roots of their Classical educations. In contemporary America, you could make an analogy to "visit the Grand Canyon",

13

<http://jrients.blogspot.com/2009/12/exploration.html>
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"see Niagara Falls" (with bonus x.p. for "go over Niagara Falls in a barrel"-- not any waterfall will do), "go skydiving", etc. Think of it as The Bucket List with x.p. awards for crossing something off the list.

I think this is an absolutely terrific idea, and have, needless to say, jumped on it and poked around with it in Greyhawk-specific terms. I take it a little beyond just "see the sights," though. I think experiences that aren't specific to locale should count, too; seeing a dragon fly overhead for the first time, making a pilgrimage to a shrine of your patron deity, etc. Jeff suggested that he could find a hundred such things on the map of the Flanaess, so below you'll find 100 entries, broken roughly into four categories; geography, religious obligations, general events, and class-specific events. Almost all of the awards are in experience points, but a few yield benefits of another nature.

So, without further ado, I give you...

eXPloring the World of Greyhawk

It should be noted that, unless otherwise noted, all of these awards are one-time prizes, and are in addition to any other experience points that might be accumulated while in the process of earning the prize for the particular geographical feature or special event.

Geography

1. Amedio Jungle. 300 x.p. for traveling at least 10 miles into the steaming jungle. An additional 300 x.p. for finding the vast lake concealed within.
2. Azure Sea. 300 x.p. for sailing from one side to the other (i.e., the Hold of the Sea Princes to Onnwal, the Principality of Ulek to Idee, etc.).
3. Baklunish Lands. 250 x.p. for a non-Bakluni to visit one of the Baklunish nations (Ket and westward) for the first time.
4. Blackmoor. 400 x.p. for reaching the ruins at the edge of the Cold Marshes.
5. Bright Desert. 400 x.p. for traveling at least 60 miles into its expanse.
6. Burning Cliffs. 50 x.p. for seeing the billowing steam and smoke of the Cliffs from afar; 250 additional x.p. for actually travelling into the region of the Cliffs themselves.
7. Castle Greyhawk. 200 x.p. for spending at least an hour on the first level of the dungeons, over and above any x.p. that might otherwise be earned there. Followers of the demigod Xagy receive a bonus of 250 x.p.

8. Csipros Erd. 200 x.p. for visiting the Geysers of Death and living to tell the tale.
9. Corusk Mountains. 500 x.p. for crossing the mighty mountain range by a route other than the pass between Jotsplat and Knudje.
10. Enstad. 400 x.p. for entering the capital of the Elven realm of Celene.
11. Erelhei-Cinlu. 400 x.p. for entering the city of the Dark Elves.
12. Esmerin. 400 x.p. for visiting the fabled vale in the Lortmil Mountains.
13. Greyhawk. 250 x.p. for entering the city. An additional 100 x.p. for staying overnight in the Foreign Quarter.
14. Gull Cliffs. 500 x.p. for looking out over the crashing waves of the Solnor Ocean from their heights.
15. Here there be dragons. 400 x.p. for traveling off the map of the Flanaess.
16. Innspa. 250 x.p. for entering the city and sampling its famous baths.
17. Irongate. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
18. Land of Black Ice. 300 x.p. for gazing upon the vast frozen expanse with your own eyes.
19. Loftwick. 200 x.p. for entering the city.
20. Lopolla. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
21. Nyr Dyv. 250 x.p. for sailing at least 30 miles from land.
22. Molag. 200 x.p. for entering the city.
23. Niole Dra. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
24. Olman Islands. 200 x.p. for visiting these isles which mark the southernmost reaches of the Azure Sea.
25. Phostwood. 200 x.p. for entering the gently glowing forest for the first time.
26. Pinnacles of Azor'alq. 400 x.p. for seeing the famed massive spires in the Dramidj Ocean.
27. Pits of Azak-Zil. 300 x.p. for finding the lost dwarvish mine.
28. Rauxes. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
29. Rel Astra. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
30. Rel Mord. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
31. Rift Canyon. 400 x.p. for gazing over the rim of the mighty chasm. Bonus of 250 x.p. for traveling to its bottom.
32. Rigodruok. 500 x.p. for visiting the legendary Rainbow Vale beyond the Land of Black Ice.
33. Scarlet Brotherhood. 300 x.p. for penetrating the mighty plateau controlled by the mysterious red-garbed monks.
34. Schwartzenuin. 250 x.p. for entering the city.
35. Sea of Dust. 1,500 experience points for traveling one week in the immense desert. A bonus of 1,000 x.p. for reaching the Forgotten City.

36. Sinking Isle. 350 x.p. for walking along the waterlogged surface of the isle when it breaks the surface as it is wont to do.
37. Skrellingshald. 300 x.p. for re-discovering the famed lost city of the Flan, in the Griff Mountains.
38. Stoinck. 200 x.p. for entering the town.
39. Suhfang. 2,000 x.p. for visiting the kingdom in the distant West.
40. Temple of Elemental Evil. 300 x.p. for passing through the front gate into the courtyard of the legendary Temple.
41. Tovag Baragu. 150 x.p. for touching one of the stones.
42. Turucambi. 250 x.p. for visiting the vast semi-submerged limestone complex in the Oljatt Sea.
43. Twisted Forest. 150 x.p. for walking among the petrified "trees".
44. Valley of the Mage. 500 x.p. for penetrating at least 50 miles into the valley.
45. White Plume Mountain. 200 x.p. for viewing the endlessly streaming flow of steam emanating from the famous volcano.

Religious Obligations (see Pilgrims and Pilgrimages of the Flanaess)

46. Those of Baklunish extraction receive 10 x.p. for visiting each of the hundred Healing Shrines of Al'Akbar that are scattered throughout the Baklunish lands. There is a bonus of 15 x.p. if one is accompanying someone in need of the particular healing properties of the shrine in question.
47. Those who worship the Arch-devils of the Hells and their lord Asmodeus receive 150 x.p. for visiting the imposing Infernal Temple in Hoken.
48. Followers of Saint Cuthbert gain 200 x.p. each for visiting the Church of the Holy Cudgel in Verbobonc, the Great Cathedral of Mitrik, and the Church of the Apotheosis in Littleberg. They receive 300 x.p. for visiting the Healing Shrine in Shibboleth, Gran March.
49. Followers of Delleb get 300 x.p. for visiting the great library-cathedral in Niolen Dra, Keoland. They receive 175 x.p. for visiting the Gardens of Chellester in the eastern portion of Sunndi.
50. Devotees of Ehlonna receive 200 x.p. for visiting Her sacred grove in the heart of the Silverwood, in Ulek.
51. Followers of Heironeous get 500 x.p. for visiting the Cathedral of Chivalry in Chathold, Almor. 250 x.p. more for visiting the shrine of Heironeous-by-the-sea on the coast of the Sea of Gearnat. And 350 x.p. for visiting the Temple of Heironeous Triumphant in Niolen Dra, Keoland.
52. Worshippers of Hextor receive 200 x.p. for visiting the Blood Chapel in Mentrey, in the See of Medegia. They also receive 100 x.p. for visiting the great Cathedral in Rauxes.
53. Followers of Iuz get 150 x.p. for paying homage to their deity in person during one of his quarterly Great Audiences in Dorakaa.
54. Those whose patron deity is Joramy will receive 250 x.p. for visiting her temple in the foothills of the Hellfurnaces, in the western portion of the Hold of the Sea Princes.
55. Followers of Kord get 100 x.p. for the first time they participate in one of the sacred contests of strength and combat in Hookhill and Gradsul, with 50 x.p. for the first time they are in the contests in Flen, Cryllor, and Niolen Dra. These awards are cumulative (i.e., one can get 450 total for appearing in all these contests).
56. Devotees of Lirr receive 100 x.p. for attending the great Theater in Gorna (in Geoff). They receive an extra 150 x.p. if they end up performing there. They also receive 100 x.p. for attending one of the performances in the Seven Shrines of Lirr in Innspa (and a bonus of 100 x.p. for performing at one of them).
57. Followers of Llerg receive 150 x.p. for visiting the shrine of Llerg of the Hills, at the headwaters of the Old River.
58. Followers of Lolth get 200 x.p. for visiting the Fane of Lolth in Erelhei-Cinlu.
59. Followers of Olidamarra get 300 x.p. for touching the marble statue of the God in Gradsul, Keoland.
60. Those adherents of the faith of Pholtus of the Blinding light have several destinations in the Pale from which to choose. They receive 250 x.p. for visiting the Grand Cathedral of the Light in Wintershiven, 150 x.p. for paying homage to their God at the Shrine of the Heavenly Courses (in the headlands of the Rakers), and another 150 x.p. for purging themselves of doubt and error at the Temple of Doubting Folly a few days' ride northwest of Ogburg.
61. Followers of Syrul receive 100 x.p. for visiting her shrine in Westkeep, in the Hold of the Sea Princes.
62. Followers of the evil demigod Wastri receive 50 x.p. for visiting the Vast Swamp, and an

additional 150 x.p. for finding the temple of their deity within the endless and trackless mires.

63. Farmers who are devoted to Wenta will find their next harvest increased by 20% if they visit the shrine in the Thin Vale, in Idee (1 in 4 chance; the increase will only happen once every five years, maximum).
64. Worshippers of Zilchus receive 150 x.p. for travelling to the free city of Irongate (and a bonus profit of 10% on whatever trade they happen to be conducting while on their first visit).
65. Any who recognize the divinity of the Oeridian Gods of the Winds can receive 200 x.p. for visting Four Airs Tor; a singular mesa northwest of Pitchfield. If they are present when the winds change, they receive a bonus of 5% to all x.p. earned during the next 3 months.

Experiences

66. Attending a wedding at the Temple of Myhriss in Chendl, in Furyondy will gain one 25 x.p. (Devotees of Myhriss earn 75 x.p. for doing so the first time.) This is an award that can be earned as often as once per year.
67. Seeing a dragon of young adult age or older flying overhead earns 100 x.p.
68. Witnessing the crowning of a king or other royalty earns one 50 x.p.
69. Attending the Midsummer revels in the Elven court at Enstad, when the moons are both full, earns one 400 x.p.
70. Retrieving a treasure marked on a treasure map for the first time; 50 x.p.
71. Witnessing a fireball or lightning bolt spell for the first time earns 35 x.p. (one or the other; not both).
72. Going on a ship for the first time; 40 x.p.
73. Witnessing an honor duel amongst the Rhennee; 40 x.p. Participating in one; 250 x.p.
74. Experiencing one of the great storms in the Sea of Gearnat; 100 x.p.
75. Being on a ship that is attacked by pirates; 125 x.p.
76. Travelling more than 100 miles from the place of your birth; 1 x.p. per 10 miles (greatest distance). (The game master might want to calculate this on a regular basis rather than in real-time, to avoid unnecessary book-keeping.)

77. Those encountering advanced technology for the first time (lasers, robots, etc.) gain 250 x.p.
78. Riding an unusual mount (elephant, roc, polar bear, etc.) earns 25 x.p. per animal type.
79. Flying for the first time (whether by spell, magic item, mounted on a pegasus, etc.) earns 100 x.p.
80. Seeing a character (PC or NPC) of over 20th level; 50 x.p. (Note; this is not per character; anyone only gets this once, and does not apply if the character in question is in disguise or incognito.)
81. Fighting as a soldier in a battle with at least 1,000 troops on each side; 100 x.p. (can be cumulative for multiple battles).
82. Commanding at least 500 troops in a battle with at least 1,000 troops on each side; 200 x.p. (halved if the battle is lost).
83. Spending at least 1,000 g.p. on a single night's carouse; 250 x.p. bonus.
84. Seeing an undead creature for the first time is worth 45 x.p.
85. Encountering an extra-planar creature (devil, elemental, etc.) for the first time earns one 100 x.p.
86. Seeing some creature or representative of some race that is supposedly mythical; 250 x.p.
87. Visiting either Luna or Celene (the moons of Oerth); 5,000 x.p.
88. Solving a murder mystery or other serious crime for the first time; 300 x.p.
89. Witnessing the "Rite of Battle Fitness" in the Hold of Stonefist; 200 x.p.
90. Seeing a king or other ruler in person (as in a parade or procession, etc.); 25 x.p. (can be awarded once per year).
91. Travel as part of a merchant or other caravan; 50 x.p.

Class-Specific Experiences

92. Cleric: successfully converting someone to your own particular religion; 50 x.p.; 10 x.p. for every subsequent convert (lifetime maximum 1,000 x.p.—Saints have no maximum (that's one of the things that makes them Saints)).
93. Druid: saving a grove of at least 30 trees from destruction; 200 x.p.
94. Fighter: defeating another fighter at least three levels greater than yourself (alone); 250 x.p.
95. Paladin: defeating a Greater Demon for the first time; 400 x.p.

96. Ranger: First giant-class creature killed (solo) whose hit dice are at least three times higher than the level of the ranger in question; 250 x.p.
97. Magic-user: watching a spell being cast that is more than three levels higher than you can cast; 300 x.p. (Cannot be cast for the purpose of benefitting the recipient.)
98. Illusionist: watching a spell being cast that is more than two levels higher than you can cast; 250 x.p. (Cannot be cast for the purpose of benefitting the recipient.)
99. Thief: stealing a treasure of at least 1,000 g.p. value where the victim doesn't realize the treasure's been stolen; 400 x.p.
100. Assassin: Assassinating someone twice your own level (victim 6th level minimum); 500 x.p.

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