

# TOMB OF HORRORS

**I**N THE FAR REACHES OF THE WORLD, UNDER A lost and lonely hill, lies the sinister Tomb of Horrors. This labyrinthine crypt is filled with terrible traps, strange and ferocious monsters, rich and magical treasures, and somewhere within rests the demilich.

The legend of the tomb is an old story with many parts, some of which may be lost or obscured. Characters attempting to glean special information by consulting sages or through *legend lore* spells may still have difficulty obtaining as much background as they desire, for the scraps of information thus gained are often minimal and mystical.

The essentials of the legend can be furnished to the players from the following section.

## LEGEND OF THE TOMB

Somewhere under a lost and lonely hill of grim and foreboding aspect lies a labyrinthine crypt. It is filled with terrible traps and not a few strange and ferocious monsters to slay the unwary. It is filled with rich treasures both precious and magical, but in addition to the aforementioned guardians, there is said to be a demilich who still wards his final haunt. Be warned that tales have it that this being, called Acererak, possesses powers that make him nearly undefeatable!

All accounts conclude that it is quite unlikely any explorers will ever find the chamber where the demilich lingers, for the passages and rooms of the tomb are fraught with traps, poison gases, and magical protections. Furthermore, the demilich has so well hidden his lair that even those who avoid the pitfalls will not be likely to locate their true goal. Only large and well-prepared parties of the bravest and strongest should even consider the attempt, and if such a group does locate the tomb, they must be prepared to fail. Any expedition must have magical protections and weapons, and must be equipped with every sort of device possible to ensure survival.

## THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGEND

Ages ago, a human wizard/cleric of surpassing evil took the steps necessary to preserve his life force beyond the centuries he had already lived, and this creature became the lich known as Acererak. Over the scores of years which followed, the lich dwelled with hordes of ghastly servants in the gloomy stone halls of the very hill where the tomb is.

Eventually even the undead life force of Acererak began to wane, so for the next eight decades, the lich's servants labored to create the Tomb of Horrors. Then Acererak destroyed all his slaves and servitors, magically hid the entrance to his halls, and went to reside in his final haunt, while his soul roamed strange planes unknown

to even the wisest of sages. If the characters gain access to the innermost part of the tomb where the lich's crypt lies, their actions along the way will have caused his soul to be called back to the Material Plane and alerted Acererak, now a demilich, that interlopers have invaded his resting place.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

As clever players will gather from the information in the "Legend of the Tomb," this dungeon has more tricks and traps than it has monsters to fight. This is a thinking person's adventure, and if your group is a hack-and-slay gathering, they will be unhappy! Only high-level characters stand a chance of surviving, but every player who braves the tomb will have the experience of a lifetime.

Negotiation of the tomb will require quite a long time, so be prepared to spend several sessions with this material. When the game ends for the day, assume the expedition is spending the intervening time resting and recovering until play again commences. Since there are no monsters to be randomly encountered within the tomb, the party might be able to encamp close to the entrance without fear of being disturbed, but if you do so opt, do not inform the players of this.

As characters enter the various areas, read aloud appropriate sections of text, but never give any additional

### PLACING THE ADVENTURE

In the original *Tomb of Horrors*, Gary Gygax suggested six possible, far-flung locations for the adventure in the Greyhawk setting—proof in itself that the tomb is liable to turn up just about anywhere. Those possibilities are as follows:

- Inside the highest hill on the Plains of Iuz
- On an island (unmapped) in the Nyr Dv
- In the Bright Desert
- At the western border of the Duchy of Geoff
- Somewhere in the Vast Swamp south of Sunndi
- On an island beyond the realm of the Sea Barons

Other settings offer choices that are just as varied.

**Dragonlance.** The tomb on Krynn might be in the foothills near the Eastwall Mountains, in the Cursed Lands of Newsea, or in the Shadowglades of Krynn, where a renegade wizard who served Takhisis was said to dwell.

**Eberron.** Appropriate sites for the tomb in Eberron include the Ashen Spires of Karrnath, or among the tors in the Vile Marsh between Droaam and the Shadow Marches, among Shargon's Teeth. Eberron's Boneyard could hide the tomb and thus speak to Acererak's enmity for Eberron's dragons.

**Forgotten Realms.** The tomb could be in the Serpent Hills or the Trielta Hills on Faerûn. It could be in the High Moor or amid the isles that make up the Korinn Archipelago in the Moonshaes. It might be somewhere in the Anauroch desert, perhaps tying Acererak to ancient Netheril.

information that player characters would have no way of knowing, and avoid facial expressions or voice tones that might either give helpful hints or mislead players. The real enjoyment of this adventure is in managing to cope, and those players who do so with even moderate success will appreciate your refereeing properly and allowing them to “live or die” on their own.

The starting information given here simply assumes that the expedition has arrived at the site of the Tomb of Horrors. After relating the salient features of the “Legend of the Tomb,” you may fill in whatever other background is needed to get the characters to the site.

## ADVENTURE START

The characters have arrived at the site of the demilich’s last haunt. Before them is a low, flat topped hill, about 200 yards wide, 300 yards long, and 60 feet high. Only ugly weeds, thorns, and briars grow upon the steep sides and bald top of the mound. There are black rocks upon the top of the hill, and if these are viewed from a height of about 200 feet or so above the mound, it will be seen that the whole is shaped like a human skull, with piles of rock appearing as eyeholes, a nose hole, and the jagged teeth of a grinning death’s head.

A thorough inspection and search of the entire area reveals only that the north side of the hill has a crumbling cliff of sand and gravel about 20 feet high in the middle of the whole. (This cliff face is represented by the northern edge of map 7.1.) A low stone ledge overhangs this eroded area, and shrubs and bushes obscure it from observation at a distance.

It takes 10 minutes for characters to search each 10-foot-wide space along the cliff face. This examination must be done from a distance, using a long spear or a 10-foot pole to poke into the sand and gravel, looking for an opening. Any prodding into the cliff face must be suf-

### DEMONIC ATTENTION

Characters who become astral or ethereal in the tomb might attract a demon. Roll a d20 whenever this occurs. On a roll of 1 to 16, no demon appears. Otherwise the following demons could appear: 17, a **vrock**; 18, a **hezrou**; 19, a **glabrezu**; or 20, a **nalfeshnee**.

ficiently high off the ground in order to collapse enough material to expose a portion of a tunnel entrance. Once an entrance is exposed, it takes about 1 hour for characters to thoroughly clear the passage that lies beyond, but a crawl space can be opened in 10 minutes.

Probing of the gravel and sand face can begin wherever the characters choose—east side, west side, middle, several locations at once or merely a single one at a time. Leave this strictly to the players to decide. The best manner to handle it is to ask where they will search, once they have determined that they will investigate the area and they have stated how it will be done and with what. Remember that probing low to the ground, or probing with short implements (daggers, swords, and the like) will not reveal anything.

As soon as any entrance is cleared and entered, go to the appropriate location on map 7.1: either area 1, area 2, or area 3.

## LOCATIONS IN THE TOMB

The following locations are identified on map 7.1.

### 1. FALSE ENTRANCE TUNNEL

If the characters clear the passage on the west side of the cliff face, read:

The corridor before you is made of plain stone, roughly worked, and it is dark and full of cobwebs. The ceiling overhead is obscured by hanging strands of webbing.

Casual observation will not reveal that the ceiling, 20 feet overhead, is composed of badly fitting stones. The cobwebs must be burned away for someone to be able to inspect the tunnel ceiling. Anyone who does so and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check realizes that the ceiling is unstable and in danger of collapse.

Daylight is sufficient to reveal a pair of oaken doors at the end of the passageway. The doors open outward by means of great iron ring pulls. When either door is opened, it is revealed to be a false door, and the trap is triggered.

### ABOUT THE ORIGINAL

*Tomb of Horrors* was born in Gary Gygax’s home campaign and introduced to the world at the first Origins game convention in 1975. Since its original publication in 1978, *Tomb of Horrors* has risen to legendary status among D&D players and is generally regarded as one of the greatest adventures of all time.

In the words of its creator, “This is a thinking person’s adventure.” It was designed not for player characters of a certain level—though high-level adventurers are certainly necessary—but for players who enjoy a mental challenge and DMs who want to put their own spin on this truly unique dungeon.

