

Advanced  
**Dungeons & Dragons®**  
**TOMES®**

A D V E N T U R E



RETURN  
TO THE  
**TOMB**  
OF  
HORRORS

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

WITH FOREWORD  
BY E. GARY GYGAX <sup>30°</sup>



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# The Journal Of The Tomb

*Year of the Stag, Day 111*

I, Gerik Desatynno the Sorcerer of Burntstone, contracted my old companions of the Band of the Hand to accompany me on my quest to discover the true tomb of that ancient, but oh, so illusive mage, Acererak. To this end, I've been following clues, digging up old relics, and researching ancient documents. I've learned enough now to feel confident that I stand a far better chance than most of navigating Acererak's legendary burial site, and finally discovering the real truth behind the Tomb. The reward promises to be mighty indeed ...

The Band of the Hand is led by Falon T'relvin, who has a reputation of skill and prowess exceeded by few others. Further, I know this is a strong group by direct experience. I don't doubt their competence, but this may prove to be their most trying adventure if my information is correct. In any event, they accepted the commission; the Band is charged to accompany me and protect me in my explorations of Acererak's Tomb, which is located in the Vast Swamp to the south.

I have assured Falon and the rest that that there will be plenty of loot for all, although I've repeatedly insisted that I'm more interest in knowledge than in treasure. In fact, I've told them the truth, that I have been researching the archmage Acererak for many years, and the venture to the Tomb is but the first step in a greater undertaking. Falon muttered something to the effect of, "I'm sure dusty texts and forgotten knowledge are reward enough for a mage, but me, I'm looking for cold, hard cash and maybe a little excitement." I replied that he was certain to find excitement enough for a lifetime.

### Day 119

Sather and Lyla have never gotten along. It didn't help matters yesterday morning when Sather the priestess woke to find Lyla rifling through her component pouch. After seven days of difficult journeying through the Vast Swamp, tensions were already high. It was touch and go there for a while; I didn't know if Lyla was going to get god-cursed or if Sather was going to sprout a brace of knives. Thankfully, I was able to diffuse the violence before anything serious occurred.

We made camp last night in front of a flat-topped hill which we hope will provide us entry into the Tomb.

When the light of day illuminated the hill this morning, we noticed how the piles of rocks and boulders were arranged to give the entire hill the semblance of a giant, grinning skull. This ominous sign does not deter us, however. While Lyla and Tiefon the dwarf search for a possible means of entry, Falon, Grunther, Sather, and Aaron busy themselves with concerns of their own, and thus I quickly pen this in my journal.

### Day 120

Choosing the proper entrance between the two openings we uncovered was a challenge in itself, but soon enough we entered by what I felt was the proper route when we discovered Acererak's boastful verse. The verse was not immediately clear to us, but we endeavored to decipher its meaning as best we could. I'm sure that if I had the time that I devoted to studying the Amulet, the meaning of the rhyme would become clear as well ... but we don't dare tarry for so long.

We chose firstly the arch, but I fear it may not have been the most productive, as we ended up in what seemed a forsaken prison; a room with seemingly no exits and no features save for a set of three ominous looking levers. We all breathed easier when a little experimentation yielded a configuration for the levers that opened up a previously concealed door in the room.

Suffice it to say that we traversed a few rooms in this manner, side-stepping traps where we could, and wincing in pain when we could not. We are resting now in what appears to be some sort of ancient chapel. I am at the end of my watch; it's time for me to wake Tiefon so I can get some rest myself.

### Day 121

A day much like yesterday. I'm exhausted; we've hardly moved from our last location. I'll write more tomorrow if we gain any ground.

### Day 123

Much has happened, and my heart is sorely heavy; we lost Tiefon the dwarf yesterday. Today, Grunther lost an arm.

A damnable patch of green slime covered Tiefon head to foot in but an eyeblink. The dwarf didn't even have a chance to scream before he was rendered into just so much putrescent plasma himself. We couldn't even recover his belongings in the mess. Never has a companion been lost to me so suddenly or so completely; we don't even have a body for Sather to attempt to restore the tie to. I shall speak no more of Tiefon, as it grieves me too much.

To compound matters, Grunther the big warrior and Falon's friend stuck his arm where he shouldn't have during one of our backtracks. With a horrible scream he pulled it back, but it was completely gone, cut as if by a razor edge. Only Sather's powerful magic prevented all the life blood of the dim-witted Grunther from spilling out upon the uncompromising stones of the Tomb's floor. I expect he'll be able to still swing that axe of his with all his strength once he's calmed down a bit. It's taking all of Falon's leadership to restrain the big man from embarking upon a rampage of destruction through the Tomb for vengeance. Of course, that would only be suicide, and thus Falon proves his friendship by restraining his companion.

At the moment we are taking our rest in what appears to be some sort of abandoned laboratory. We hope that nothing will disturb us here as we attempt to take stock. I am determined to go on, and Falon is bound by his contract to accompany me. He would anyway; he is not the sort to back down from any enterprise once it's fairly begun.

### Day 124

Disaster seems to dog our every step now. It seems that with every chamber we win through to using our wits as our guide, we pay the price of another life. It is Aaron to which I allude. The elven archer was felled by a strange gas, and before we could retrieve him, a massive, magical



juggernaut on stone rollers issued from a hidden door and rolled over the supine elf, crushing him to a pulp in less time that it takes me to write this entry. When the gas cleared and the juggernaut retreated, we recovered the body. Sather tried her best, but the damage was too extensive; Aaron's life had permanently fled from him. Sather was heart broken. I think she and Aaron were very close, closer than the rest of us ever realized. We composed the remains as best we could, but Sather sits and stares now, and the rest of us worry about her. If she can't go on, further hurts and harms which befall us will be difficult to withstand. We shall rest another day before we attempt to persuade her to venture onward.

#### Day 126

Thankfully, I have nothing but good news to write about for a change. After a day of rest following Aaron's untimely demise, we moved inward, towards our goal. We came then into a truly large pillared throne room. Upon an ebony dais sat a silver throne. As if an offering from the gods of balance for our recent losses, the implements to our quest's end lay in easy reach upon the throne itself: a crown and scepter. After a few false starts, we were able to move toward the physical remains of Acererak.

We found an imposing chamber with a ceiling all of silver, complete with a granite sarcophagus. The statuary, the chests, and the gold filigreed urn all indicate that we have finally discovered our real goal. The road has been long, the dangers fierce, and the loss of life is unconscionable; I hope that what I seek makes this all worthwhile. We are resting now before we open the sarcophagus. We need to be utterly fresh and rested, and completely alert when we crack it open. The ancient document which I perused so long ago leads me to believe that this could be our most desperate struggle yet. But if we succeed, I will have the means to proceed to the next part of my plan ...

#### Day 127

How arrogant of me to think that with but a hop, skip, and a jump I should have delivered into my hands the singular material necessary to move on to the lost City and Fortress which I seek. I should have done more research, I should have been more careful, I should have ... not brought my friends here to die.

Allow me to start over so that you may know what befell the once strong company known as the Band of the Hand. We were diverted in the opening of the sarcophagus when the ever-observant Lyla discovered what appeared to be another concealed route. Excited, we issued down this new passage. It seemed that luck was with us; in short order we were able to penetrate two consecutive secret doors. Overeager, perhaps, we at long last discovered the vault of Acererak's physical remains.

A hoard of glittering, flashing treasure first caught our eyes. The quiescent skull seemed of little import; in fact it seemed a treasure itself with its gemstone fixtures. I must admit that I was distracted from my goal at the sight of such treasure. All of us soon payed, some of us more than others.

Alas, the physical remains of Acererak were still connected with his far-roaming essence! If only I had thought to destroy the skull immediately ... before I could do more than stare, the dust of the demilich's body had swirled into a manlike shape and began to press an attack. We reacted as quickly as we could. Some of us targeted this apparition, some the skull ... but this availed us not at all: Acererak sucked the life from Lyla before she could do much more than shriek. Her body mouldered to dust in the next heartbeat. Falon was next; his spirit was stripped from him as easily as an ant eater might suck a morsel from an ant mound. Sather brought the full power of her deity to bear upon the horror that was killing us; it was in vain. Abandoning all thought of the quest, she and Grunther gathered up Falon's body (which did not moulder away as Lyla's had) and fled. My most powerful battle spells were having absolutely no effect and neither did the Amulet when I presented it strongly in hopes of recognition. Fearing imminent death, I grabbed what I had come for and fled as well.

It is now two hours since we have run screaming from the vault. The demilich has not followed us, thank the good gods. I have to believe that if it had made the effort to pursue us, we would all now be dead. However, alive though she is, I fear that Sather has finally broken with reality: she has been cursing the name of her deity for the last half hour. I know only one thing. I have what I came for. I must harden my heart and move on to the next part of my plan. To not do so would make the loss of lives here utterly vain. My conscience could not support such an additional burden, although I now believe that I was out of my reckoning. Acererak's gauntlet



may be too much for me. Be that as it may, I will continue on the long road that I have begun.

### Day 128

If you are reading this, then my struggle for knowledge has not been in vain. My quest has led me to this questionable precipice, and now, finally, I leave this legacy behind me if I should not return myself. Few have preceded me to where I go now, and I'm not certain that I'll have the strength to succeed against the might of the one who names himself Acererak. The road to this point has not been easy, and the loss of many of my erstwhile companions is a sore blow. In any event, I add this short epilogue to the actual journal of my quest into Acererak's tomb of horrors in order to give any future reader an understanding of myself and my goals.

My interest in this subject was roused many years ago, when in my wide travels I chanced upon a document which was obviously many centuries old. I quickly deciphered the old mode of common in which it was written, and was amazed to realize that it was penned by none other than the legendary Acererak, who had disappeared from common knowledge almost a century past. What quite intrigued me is that by the date, the document was over 1,000 years old! In fact, the document was so aged that I'm afraid that it soon crumbled to dust. However, I was able to discover a great many things regarding the origin of this mythic figure.

The document apparently was a sort of personal memorabilia, being the last thing he wrote as a living being. In the same way that I am upon a boundary of no certain returning writing these pages, so also was Acererak writing a quick encapsulation of his earlier life before he moved on to another level of existence from which there was certainly no coming back. He penned the document immediately before he undertook the ritual which he believed would transform his living flesh to that of an undead lich. The parallel intrigues me, but I hope that my journey is not quite so transfigurative as Acererak's ...

In the record, Acererak claims to have been the bastard son of a tanar'ric entity and an unfortunate human female named Valinda. The woman survived the ordeal, and gave birth to a son. The woman did not cast aside the progeny of this union. She could easily have done so because of Acererak's obvious supernatural deformities, but instead raised him with

the love only a mother can lavish upon even the most disfigured of children. A strange tale, I grant you, but the document indicated that Acererak's early years were not unlike many a normal child's upbringing.

This idyllic existence ended in Acererak's 10th year. A mob of nearby villagers, frightened of the boy's appearance, put torch to the house and killed Acererak's mother. The boy lived only because of his cambionic (half-demon) nature. The child became a desperate, hunted fugitive, and only barely survived to adulthood. It was during these years that every vestige of love, mercy, loyalty, and pity were driven from the cambion. Acererak became a cold, hard man with hate in his heart and revenge on his mind for the humans who had killed his mother and hunted him near to death.

Acererak found the means to study the arts of sorcery and evil necromancy. Being an entity of enchanted lineage himself, these arts came quickly to him, and he soon became a master of spells. In the text, there was also a reference to someone or something called Tenebrous, to which Acererak owed much of his power, but the details are unfortunately not explained. In any event, it was during this time that Acererak decides that he shall enhance his magical power by becoming a lich. However, maddeningly, Acererak hints that lichdom is but the first step in some elaborate scheme which he does not deign to describe!

Next, the document discussed a Tomb, a City, a Fortress, and finally something called the Amulet of the Void. It is my belief that the three locations named constitute actual places which Acererak planned to build. Further, it was intimated that through this Amulet passage from one to the next would be made possible. The last sentence of the document read, "And so in the fullness of time I shall cast the Amulet out into the lands of Men, that it may draw to me those of proper mettle. Only those of keenest luck and greatest skill will win through to me in my ultimate Fortress of Conclusion. There, they shall receive a magnificent reward for their persistence."

As you can probably imagine, this greatly intrigued me. A little research into the matter indeed divulged that there was said to be a hidden Tomb of he who called himself Acererak, but nowhere in all my searches was there ever any mention whatsoever of a Fortress of Conclusion. It came to me then that perhaps only I, of all who had sought after it, had access to this secret knowledge. If the Amulet truly existed, and was in the hands of living men, its significance was probably unguessed. Otherwise, it probably



lay long forgotten in some treasury or burial mound. In either event, I decided that I would have it for myself.

Suffice it to say that after a long, arduous search, I ultimately gained the Amulet of the Void. I gaze upon it now, and as I do so, the memory of the years of effort I spent in acquiring it and then the effort I spent in deciphering its encrypted runes rushes through my mind. What a devilishly simple key it was, after all. For those who follow me on my journey of discovery, apply this key to the runes on the Amulet: subtract three, then read. There are two exceptions, but not troublesome ones.

It has all led to this. I regret nothing. When my pen leaves this page, I shall step forward through the portal, leaving behind this record and the Amulet for those with the bravery to follow me.

The Wizard is Now Gone.

He led me and mine to our doom. He gives me this Journal and this Amulet as if it makes up for the loss of everyone and everything I hold dear.

I spit upon him. I hope he finds nothing but death.

I stand now outside the Tomb, looking at the lonely hill of one long undead, one left better off undisturbed. I have cast the Amulet at the base of the hill. Let the wild beasts of the swamp fight over it, or use it if they will.

My goddess has abandoned me, and I can find not a single shred of compassion for any that walk on two legs. least of all, will I carry out the last wishes of he who I despise above all others: Desatyso.