

BARD'S TALES II

A Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Compatible PLAYER'S RESOURCE by Martin Tideswell



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A Pathfinder Roleplaying Game supplement by Martin Tideswell

Do you want to play a bard, but don't want to simply make a lot of boring Perform checks? Do you want to enliven the game and breathe life into your bard's performances? *Bard's Tales II* is a rich resource of easily customisable dark, Lovecraftian stories, legends and poems interspersed with some lighter material designed to bring your bard's performances to life!



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ERRATA

We would like to think *Bard's Tales II* is completely error free and that absolutely no mistakes have crept in during design or editing. However, we are realists. So in that spirit, we shall post errata for this adventure three months after first release on ragingswan.com. We aren't going to be correcting typos and spelling errors, but we will correct any game mechanic or balance issues that come to light.

CONTACT US

Email gatekeeper@ragingswan.com with questions and comments about this adventure.

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ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Martin was eleven years old, overweight, rubbish at sport and thought girls were a different species. He also had a vivid imagination honed by years of playing with toy soldiers and an unhealthy interest in vampires.

At age eleven, he discovered the Dragonlance Chronicles and devoured them – wanting desperately to be the morally dubious wizard Raistlin Majere. To this day, he remembers walking the mile and a half or so to his friend's house one Saturday to play Dungeons & Dragons for the first time. The game was *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*. It took him about thirty seconds before he was hooked. Maybe less. The rest is history...

Martin is now 38 and a full-time newspaper journalist. Through school, college, house moves, job changes, marriage and the arrival of children, fantasy roleplaying has been his one constant.

Martin lives with his wife Denise and his two adorable daughters – Lois and Mina – in a quiet avenue in Wirral, Merseyside. In the box room, he burns the midnight oil scripting adventures and plotting world domination and/or immortality by nefarious means.

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FOREWORD

Playing a bard isn't for the faint-hearted. Simply put: shrinking violets need not apply.

Storyteller, musician, prankster, magician, spy, scoundrel and lover - the very best bards have a little of all of these elements in their characters.

And, of course, so much more...

Do you have what it takes to change the course of an encounter with subtle diplomacy or a witty riposte?

Have you the skill and the nerve to enthrall the patrons of a crowded inn, sway a hostile crowd or even intrigue a dragon?

No matter how good you and your character are, the bottom line is that you need good material or you're stone dead (and perhaps not just in the theatrical sense).

With *Bard's Tales II* we hope to give you stories, songs, fables and rhymes which will delight and entertain your fellow players and, crucially, ensure your bard is never stuck for something to say.

It's showtime...

—Martin

LIMERICKS

A buxom young dwarf named Dinah,
Had ambitions to be a miner,
She went in a cave,
And was really quite brave,
But ever since no-one can find her!

Longshanks was as happy as an elf could be,
Living high in the boughs of an old oak tree,
Then he suffered a fall,
Now he's not quite so tall,
Only a half-elf it seems to me.

There once was a dragon of green,
The smartest wyrm ever seen,
He polished and scrubbed,
He dipped and he rubbed,
Oh he did like his scales to be clean.

Dantus the minotaur owns a rough inn,
A great big club he carries with him,
If trouble is brewing,
And you hear him mooing,
You know it's a fight you can't win.

The mere mention of drow makes folk want to run,
But are dark elves so scary when all's said and done?
They're no use in the day,
Their skin gives them away,
And they can't even look at the sun.

If dungeons crawls must be started,
It shouldn't be by the faint-hearted,
Filled with monsters, traps and magic,
They are often quite tragic,
Just ask characters recently-departed.

A wizard of no little power,
Lived alone in a ruined old tower,
Friends he eschewed,
To many he was rude,
And to the others he did nothing but glower.

Grinkle the goblin was a terrible cook,
Who could curdle soup with just one look,
The chieftain would've killed him,
If not for the pilgrim,
Who brought Grinkle a recipe book.

Even for a halfling, Fergus was weak,
But a career in adventuring he did seek,
He couldn't heal, couldn't cast,
In a fight wouldn't last,
So he chose thief because he could sneak.

Vlad the vampire made a mistake,
When an undead wife he did make,
She made him so sad,
That it drove him mad,
So he finished her off with a stake.

Three favourite campsite tales of wandering blademaker and bard Aris Cutler.

PRIDE BEFORE A FALL...

There was once a mighty but mean and spiteful king who ruled his city famed for its huge, impregnable walls with an iron fist lived in a vast city.

Eventually, after many years, the monarchs of surrounding kingdoms decided they had suffered enough at the hands of this tyrant. Thus, they brought together an army the likes of which had never been seen before – incalculable in number.

For three long years, their forces assailed the walls of the despot's city but it was to no avail. The defences were too strong and the defenders lived in such fear of their king that they fought with an almost fanatical zeal. Desperate, the attackers finally turned to the Archmage Santallus for help. She worked through the night on a plan and the following morning the defenders of the city were astonished to see the great, besieging army had vanished. All that remained of their presence was a beautifully-woven tapestry nailed to the city's main gates.

The king came down to inspect the item for himself and was struck by the intricate detail of the piece which depicted the siege and the massed ranks of his enemies throwing themselves in vain at his city walls. Against the advice of his counsellors, who bid him burn the wretched thing, the vain king decided to accept this trophy of the lengthy conflict. He was convinced the tapestry was a tribute to his magnificence as a war leader – a gift from his vanquished enemies. As such, he ordered that it be given pride of place in his palace.

In the dead of the following night, the tapestry's magical weave came undone and tens of thousands of soldiers, hardened by years of warfare, came to life and emerged from the fabric into the heart of the invincible city. Within minutes, all was pandemonium and the king awoke to find the palace in disarray and his guards slain. A short while later, as he looked over the smoking ruin of his city the tyrant was knocked from the palace balcony by a mob of courtiers fleeing for their lives. He fell to his death without anyone even noticing and the great city was levelled and written out of the pages of history.

The moral of this story? Pride comes before a fall.

DONOVAN'S RELIC

In the dusty corner of a curiosity shop in nameless town, the young priest Donovan discovered a strange object. It was a skull made of what appeared to be glass but was jet black in colour. Intrigued, the cleric enquired as to the origins of the item but the shopkeeper could shed no light on its background, claiming to have come upon the piece during a house clearance.

Donovan felt oddly drawn to the object and purchased it for a few silver coins – taking care not to touch the skull with his bare hands because of some primeval fear it had awakened within him. Thus, he took it home and set it on a bookshelf near the fireplace. That night he experienced the most unsettling of dreams which gave glimpses into the life of a little boy called Tomas. The same dreams recurred for several nights until Donovan became convinced that the skull was attempting to communicate with him.

Finally, Donovan plucked up the courage to place his hands on the skull and he was immediately assailed with the dark vision of Tomas's brief, sad existence. The skull told him that it contained Tomas's soul which had been imprisoned eons before by a fell necromancer by the name of Astreus the Unforgiven. Tomas was barely eight years old when his life was snuffed out and his essence transplanted into the strange obsidian skull.

Donovan wept for the poor boy but their connection soothed both and was to aid Donovan numerous times during his distinguished career. For reasons unknown, Tomas had gained the power of foresight and an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the dark arts. Thus, when Donovan and his adventuring companions were facing evil sorcerers or wizards, very often Tomas was able to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The priest lived to the ripe old age of 99, almost unheard of for a human, and remained sprightly and mentally astute until his dying day. The skull is said to have vanished with his last breath and lies waiting to be rediscovered by a similar gentle soul for whom it would prove a priceless asset.

THE SEVEN SISTERS

On a bleak, lonely and windswept moor lie the crumbling ruins of a church surrounded by timeworn and toppled gravestones. It is an unremarkable sight, save for the odd cluster of trees which surround the ancient graveyard. Each of a different species, they stand in an almost perfect circle, all appearing to lean forward with some strange purpose.

Passing travellers regard The Seven Sisters with idle curiosity – few being aware of the sinister story behind

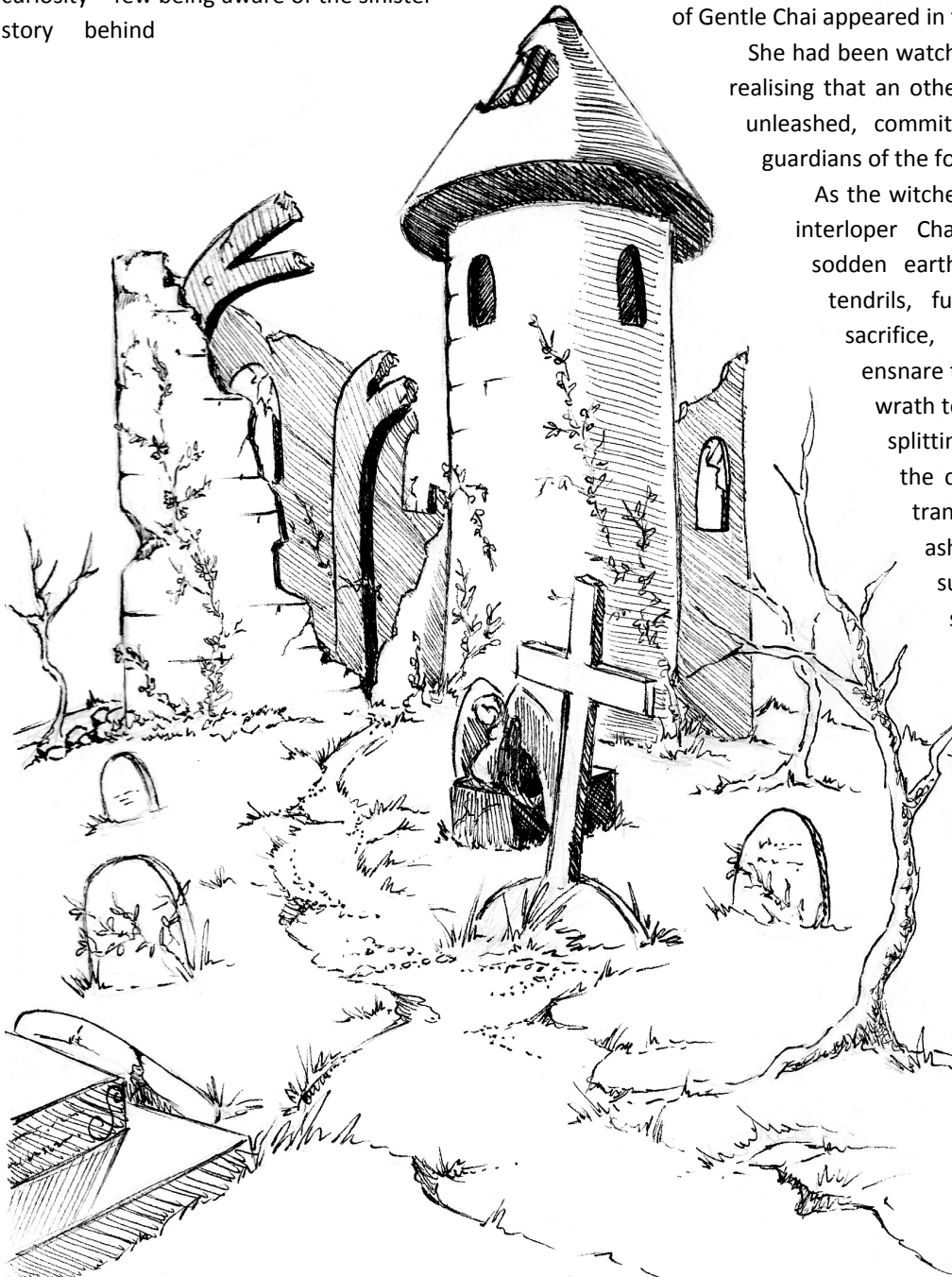
this unholy grove. Legend has it that hundreds of years ago a coven of witches enthralled to a demon of the pit had made the burial grounds their own. Unspeakable rites they had conducted and tombs they had robbed in pursuit of their ultimate goal to have their master appear in the flesh.

On a night most profane and sacred to the coven, they began the summoning ritual as rain lashed down and lightning lit up the cloudless sky. Just as their moment of triumph approached, however, a young druid by the name of Gentle Chai appeared in the centre of the circle.

She had been watching the coven for months and, realising that an otherworldly evil was about to be unleashed, committed her soul to what elder guardians of the forest call The Lifetime's Wish.

As the witches prepared to strike down the interloper Chai drove her staff into the sodden earth and disappeared. Grasping tendrils, fuelled by the young druid's sacrifice, burst from the ground to ensnare the witches – enabling nature's wrath to take its course. Amid ear-splitting screams each member of the coven was frozen to the spot, transformed into trees of elm, oak, ash, or sycamore. The summoning was averted, the storm abated and no more was heard of Gentle Chai.

Long centuries have passed since that day and wise men now say that the magic which cages The Seven Sisters is finally weakening. Perhaps soon, on a hallowed night when the weather is foul, the witches will finally escape their prison. Once freed, they will surely fulfil their promise to their dark lord and wreak vengeance on an unsuspecting world...



FORLORN HOPE

Original story as told (to anyone who'll listen) by Jerentys Noble-born, bard...and scoundrel.

Some say the place doesn't exist – except in the minds of weary travellers on a lonely road. But I, stranger...I have glimpsed it with these very eyes and ne'er a more desolate and mournful sight have I seen. Even now, I shudder at the memory of those lonely towers and eerie, pock-marked battlements.

Cursed for eternity, it is said – and I can well believe it. It was late autumn, when I chanced upon the ghostly relic they call The Forlorn Hope. I don't mind telling you I was lost, low on supplies and not a little scared when I rounded a bend in that mountain road.

There before me stood an ancient fortress, the like of which I had never imagined. The walls and buildings were carved from a striking blood-coloured rock which looked totally alien against the backdrop of the grey-stone mountains. It was at once both awesome and somehow desperately sad.

As dusk approached, I could see that no lights shone from the place but I continued on to the dubious safety of those impressive walls.

I was terrified. For you see, there's nought so humbling as such timeless feats of architecture to remind us of our own mortality.

I recall that all that remained of the giant gates that had once held armies at bay were great iron brackets, rusted with age. I dared not venture too far inside and so hunkered down in what must once have been a stable for I could still smell the animals.

That night I experienced such powerful dreams of blood and death. Not of battle, my friend, but of a pestilence that had taken the lives of every man, woman and child in that gods-forsaken place. They had fled to the Forlorn Hope seeking refuge from an unseen enemy – a terrible pestilence. But that plague

was an enemy too fierce for even those mighty walls and they died screaming, cursing the fortress that had become their tomb. The suffering was so great, so indescribable, that the spirits of those poor wretches seeped into the very stone of the place until it took on an unlife of its own.

Now it appears to the desperate and the lost – a chill reminder of that awful apocalypse. When I awoke from that dream, I was lying by the roadside. The stable – indeed the whole fortress – was gone.

Had I imagined it, I wondered? Had I dreamed of the Forlorn Hope in my tired, fevered state?

All I know is that my trail rations had been replenished; my waterskin was full and – at the bottom of my backpack – was a small, blood-red stone...



HOOK NOSED MOLL

Inspired by the legend of Molly Leigh, witch of Burslem.

In Old Boslem, there was a reclusive woman whose ugly features earned her the nickname hook-nosed Moll. She lived alone on the outskirts of town. Alone, that is, save for the small herd of cows she tended in a nearby field.

Moll scratched a living selling milk, cheese and herbal remedies to the superstitious townsfolk who were both needing and mistrustful of the eccentric woman.

Of an evening, as the sun went down, she was to be found sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of her ramshackle cottage – her pet blackbird perched on her shoulder.

Over time, her unfortunate looks and unusual habits earned her an evil reputation among the locals who shunned her home.

Children taunted her mercilessly and any mishap or misfortune was blamed on Moll, with some even proclaiming her a witch. If ale turned sour, horses went lame or a fire broke out people blame Hook-Nosed Moll for the way she had looked at them in the street.

Eventually the local priest started to take an interest in the old woman and began to preach against the evils of sorcery.

Then one winter's day, as Moll was bringing milk into town, she was pelted with stones by an angry mob who blamed her for the death of a child.

Dazed and bleeding she fled to her cottage but collapsed on the porch from her wounds and

the cold. It was a passing woodsman who heard her curse the town of Old Boslem with her dying breath.

So frightened were the townsfolk that for three long weeks none dared approach the body. When they finally did, they discovered Moll's pet blackbird frozen stiff beside her.

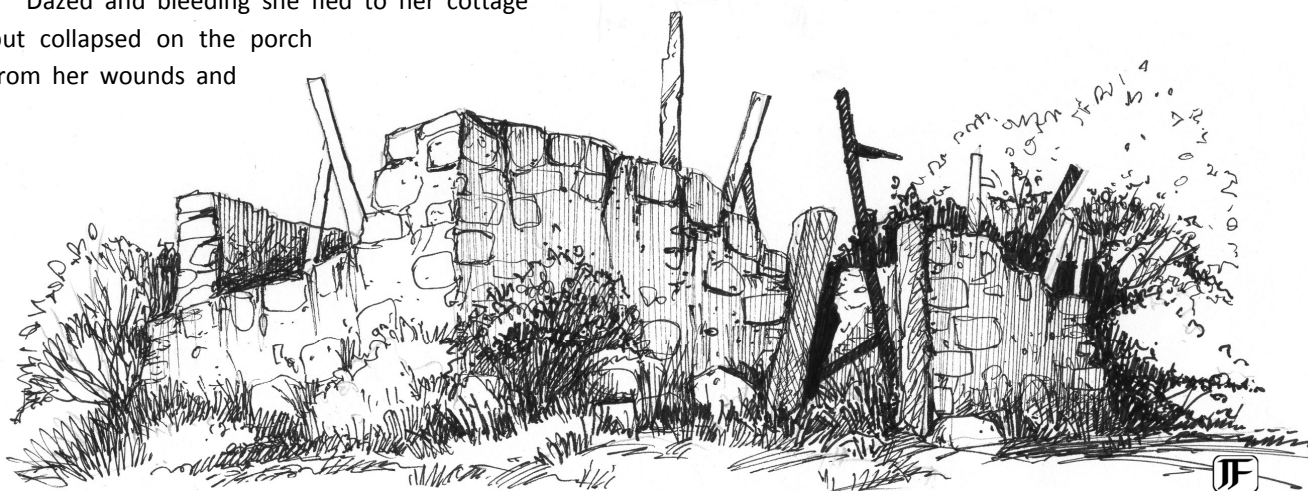
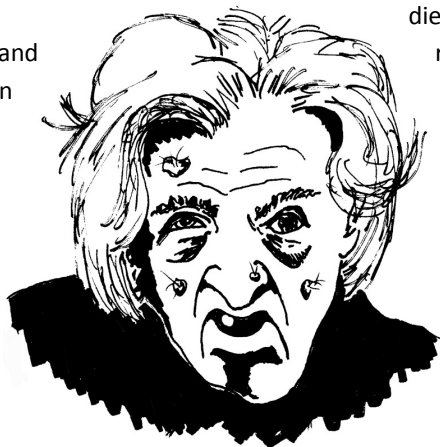
Both the bird and Moll were hastily buried in a box in a shallow pauper's grave. That night, the locals toasted her death with flagons of ale and thought no more about hook-nosed Moll.

But as the months passed nought but ill-luck befell Old Boslem. The people suffered through the longest, harshest winter in living memory and when summer came crops failed.

Then a year to the day that Old Moll had died the priest happened to glance up at her ramshackle cottage. In the twilight, he saw a figure sitting on the porch and he heard the familiar creaking of a rocking chair – back and forth, back and forth. And above a dark bird circled.

Horrified, that is when the priest saw the first spots on the back of his hands. Within two days he was dead – the first victim of the plague which killed every man, woman and child in Old Boslem.

It was only some years later, when Moll's body was re-buried with proper ceremony, that the creaking of that rocking chair was finally silenced.



LEGENDARY ITEMS

Here are a couple of short stories to tell around the campfire.

THE GRAVEN GRIMOIRE

Common translation of an elven saga poem. Author unknown.

There is an ancient tome as black as night,
That seethes and groans with otherworldly might,
A book after which witches and warlocks crave,
They search through library, tomb and grave.

They seek an artefact imbued with eldritch power,
Born of evil work in a dark elf's tower,
Written in blood and bound with bone,
Its secrets are many, its victims unknown.

A tome that corrupts all who touch, see or hear,
A devourer of souls drawn foolishly near,
Its users are legion... all now serve a book,
That has started wars with a withering look.



Trapped in its cover, frozen in a scream,
Is the face of its last owner... lost in a dream,
One who dared dabble with a darkness so deep,
It poisoned their heart and stole their sleep.

Now the tome languishes, hungry and burning,
A book without ending, constantly yearning,
Pray the tome never finds you - this Graven Grimoire,
This sentinel of evil spawned in lands afar.

Now trust in your gods, Ever look to the light,
And away from the reason all elves fear the night...

TWIN BLADES OF AMRAS KISHNAK

It is said that the lost swords of the cursed ranger Amras Kishnak will only be re-discovered when civilisation's need is at its greatest. Amras was a freak of nature – born to an elven mother and fathered by a marauding orc. Abandoned at an early age, the human druid Artos raised him and taught him woodcraft. A key member of the Company of the Black Wyrms, he devoted his life to good deeds – all the while wrestling to keep his orc heritage in check. His cunning, fearsome battle prowess and wicked weapons proved invaluable to the group as they plundered dungeons and confronted foul beasts.

The Company's ultimate fate is unknown, but Amras is widely-believed to have been the last to die. The story goes that as old age took its toll, the elf-orc buried his weapons beneath an ancient oak in a trackless forest.

Forged by elves using techniques long since forgotten by metalsmiths, Amras's blades are the stuff of legends. The Dusk Blade is a scimitar – shaped, it is said, like the crescent moon under whose light it was created. Its rune-covered blade is as black as night. As well as causing wicked injuries the weapon also allows its wielder to create globes of darkness to confuse enemies. The weapon's deadly secret, however, is that anyone cut by the Dusk Blade is immediately blinded.

The Dawn Blade is a wickedly-sharp shortsword, imbued with the essence of the breaking day and believed to offer great protection to its wielder. It is said that the weapon, which appears to be translucent, is able to shine with the power of the rising sun.

THE SACRIFICE

Battle hymn of the Severed Head barbarians; first line is sung by the shaman followed by the warriors singing the second.

Would you stand in the wind and the rain and the hail?
We would,

Could you face down nightmares and still prevail?
We could,

Is your back broad with toil from the rest of the year?
It is,

Have you mastered the bow and the blade and the spear?
We have,

Do you stand for your families, your tribe and your lands?
We do,

Can you strike, maim and kill with your bare, calloused hands?
We can,

Have you made your peace with the spirits of old?
We have,

Will we be proud when your body lies cold?
You shall,

Can you confront all manner of threats and beasts?
We can,

Will you give us new songs to sing at our feasts?
We shall,

Go then my children and pay the reaper with blood,
We will,

Kill and be killed like only the bravest should,
The gods be with us...



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