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“Beyond the Grave: The legends and lore of the wight, wraith, and mummy”

By Tom Moldvay — Dragon #198 (October 1993)

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Undead, Wight, King-wight

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any, usually subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary, but may have followers
DIET:	Carnivore (living beings)
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15)
TREASURE:	50% A
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-1
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	12 +23 (77 hp)
THACO:	4
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3/2 by weapon type or 1 by touch
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8+5
CRIT. HIT/FUMBLE:	85%(+20%)/15%
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Energy drain, wight control, spellcasting, earthquake, magical items
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immunity to some weapons and spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (6'-7')
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	30,000

A king-wight was once a powerful evil king. When he died, he became undead, continuing to rule the ranks of the walking dead. His death is often voluntary, a self-sacrifice made to gain a prolonged existence.

A king-wight looks corpse. At nighttime, in artificial light, it can even be mistaken for a living being. It wears its favorite armor and carries its favorite weapons, and is often decorated with expensive jewelry. While a king-wight can appear almost alive, the stench of the grave follows it and gives it away.



Combat: A king-wight fights much the same after death as it did in life. It wears *chain mail* +3 and wields a *sword* +2 (any type possible). A king-wight was an exceptional human and continues to have excellent attributes even in death. Its attribute statistics are: Str 18/50, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 15 (to undead only), Ego 15, Obs 15, San n/a. These scores and the magical items are already calculated into the king-wight's statistics.

When it becomes undead, a king-wight gains many special abilities. A successful attack can drain two life levels from a victim, as per a vampire. Any victim completely drained of life points by the king-wight becomes a full-strength wight under the control of the king-wight.

A king-wight also has the ability to cast *spectral force* and *confusion* spells, one spell per round, without limit. It can *teleport* once per day, but only to or from its barrow home. When the king-wight is destroyed, the action causes an *earthquake* (as per the clerical spell, at the 14th-level of effect), centered on the king-wight's body, in 4-16 rounds. Since a king-

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wight is often encountered in its underground barrow, such an *earthquake* can be especially deadly.

A king-wight is so powerful that any individual of a level lower than the king-wight must make a saving throw vs. spells or flee in panic from *fear*. The following spells or attack forms have no effect on a king-wight: *charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, electricity, insanity, and death magic*. A *resurrection* spell turns the king-wight into a normal 12th-level fighter unless a saving throw vs. spells is made.

A cleric attempting to turn a king-wight should use the "special" column. A king-wight can be harmed only by magical weapons.

Habitat/Society: A king-wight retains its court, even after death. It is often surrounded by its faithful warriors, who were turned into wights by the king-wight and remain under their master's control.

A king-wight encountered in its barrow usually controls 4-32 normal wights. A king-wight delights in tricking the living. It often travels to someone's abode to flaunt its treasure and tempt heroes into searching out its lair. A king-wight may appear gracious and hospitable at times, but such appearances are illusory. In reality, the king-wight hates to give up any part of its hoarded treasure and tempts heroes only as a ploy to trap them in its underground barrow, to either slay the heroes by the sword or turn them into wight slaves.

The breaking of the burial mound

Gests pattr Bardarsonar (The Saga of Gest Bardson) is more of a fantasy told around a warm fire than a tale based in history. In it, the hero Gest breaks into a barrow mound and confronts the undead king Raknar:

At that time (A.D. 995-1000), King Olaf Tryggvason was ruler of Norway. On Christmas Eve, the king was sitting on his high-seat and the whole court was present, each man in his own seat.

When the men had been drinking for some time, a man walked into the hall. He was tall and evil-looking, with dark skin, flashing eyes, a black beard, and a broad nose. This man wore a helm on his head, a shirt of ring mail, and a sword at his belt; he had a gold necklace round his neck and a thick gold ring on

his arm. He walked up to the king's high seat. People were greatly amazed at this sight. No man greeted the stranger.

This man stood before the king for a while, then said: "I came here thinking that I would at least be offered some hospitality by such great and noble men. I'm going to be more open-handed than that, for I shall offer possession of these fine things I am wearing now to the man who dares come and fetch them from me."

Thereupon, the man went away, and an unpleasant smell spread through the hall. Many men fell unconscious and half-dead. All the watchdogs died, except for the king's dog, Vigi, and Gest's dog, Snati.

The king said, "Who do you think he can be, Gest, this man who came in here?"

Gest replied, "I've not seen him before, but I've been told by my kinsmen that there was once a king, called Raknar, and I think that I recognize him from their accounts. But that king was buried in Helluland at Raknar-sloda.

Then King Olaf Tryggvason said, "This is my request to you, Gest: that you should fetch those fine treasures."

Gest made ready for his journey. The king gave him 40 iron shoes, all lined with down. He found a Christian priest to go with Gest, a man named Jostein. The priest was highly esteemed by the king, yet Gest had little liking for the man, for Gest still followed the old faith of his ancestors.

The king said, "The priest will give you the finest proof of courage at a time that matters most to you."

"Then he might as well come" said Gest. The king gave Gest a one-edged sword and said it would bite if there was need. And the king gave Gest a candle and said it would light up of its own accord if it was held up in the air. "For it will be black in Raknar's mound," said King Olaf. "But don't stay there any longer once the candle is burned out—you must take heed of this."

Gest and his men sailed north along the coast all the way past Halogoland and Finnmark as far as Hafnsbota. Then they turned west and sailed until they reached the uninhabited parts of Greenland. By then winter was

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coming on, so they spent the winter there.

In spring they left there, each man carrying his own provisions. At first they went along the coast, going west-southwest; then they went across country. At first there were glaciers, then great fields of lava. Then they put on the iron shoes that the king had given them. But there were 40 shoes and 21 men, including Gest. No iron shoes had been provided for the priest. Without them the man's feet would be burned open when walking over the lava.

"So now come here, priest, said Gest, "and sit yourself on my pack."

The priest did so. Then Gest walked ahead and walked most sturdily. They went on for three days, then the lava-field came to an end and they came to the sea. A large island lay offshore there. A long, thin reef ran out to the island; this was dry at ebb-tide. When the men went out to the island, they saw a huge burial mound.

Gest set his men to work breaking away into the mound by day. By evening they had broken an opening into the mound, but by next morning it had grown together as before. They broke it open again the second day, but by morning it was closed again.

After a third digging, the priest kept watch over the hole. He sat there all night, and he had holy water and a crucifix with him. When time wore on toward midnight, he saw Raknar. Raknar bade the priest come with him, and he would reward the priest with fine gifts.

The priest answered nothing and sat quietly as before. Many extraordinary creatures appeared to him. Some tried to scare the priest, others tried to trick him. Jostein took no notice, no matter what wonders he saw or however savagely these fiends behaved. Toward sunrise, all these wonders vanished away.

The men lowered Gest into the mound. It was a 50-fathom drop to the floor of the mound. Gest had the one-edged sword, the king's gift, belted around his waist. He carried the candle in his hand, and it lit itself as soon as he reached the bottom. Gest could now see all around the mound.

He saw the ship *Slodi* and 500 men in her. Gest then

climbed up on the ship and saw that all the men had been on the point of rising to their feet when the candlelight fell on them; none of them could now move. Still, their eyes blinked and their nostrils flared. Gest drew his sword and cut off all their heads, and the blade bit as if it were cutting water.

Then Gest went in search of Raknar. He found an opening going deeper into the ground, and there he saw Raknar sitting on a chair. The undead king was horribly evil to look at. A foul stench was there, and it was cold, too. A chest full of money stood open under Raknar's feet; he had a necklace around his neck, and a thick gold ring on his arm. He wore a coat of mail and had a helm on his head and a sword in his hand.

Gest went up to Raknar and greeted him respectfully, as a king should be greeted, and Raknar bowed his head in answer.

Gest said, "It is true that you are famous. I've come a long way to visit you in your home. You will surely let me have a good reward for my errand, and give me those fine treasures you have. I shall spread the tale of your magnificence far and wide."

Raknar bent his head toward Gest, with the helm on it. Gest took the helm, then stripped Raknar of his coat of mail. Raknar made it all easy for Gest. Gest then took all Raknar's treasures away: from him, except the sword. When Gest took hold of this, Raknar sprang to his feet and threw himself at Gest. By then the candle, the king's gift, had burned right out.

Then Raknar turned into such a troll that Gest was quite overpowered by him. Gest thought he could see his death for certain. The dead men from the ship also rose to their feet. Gest called upon Bard, his father, who had great power against every type of troll. Bard came, but he accomplished nothing. The dead men kept Bard away from his son.

Then Gest made a vow to Him who had created heaven and earth, that he would accept the Christian faith King Olaf preached if he escaped alive out of the burial mound. Gest also earnestly invoked King Olaf, that the king might aid him. Thereupon Gest saw King Olaf come into the mound with a great light. All the dead men sat back down when bathed in that light. At

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this sight, Raknar was so troubled that all his strength ebbed out of him. Gest pressed so hard that Raknar fell over backward. Then Gest cut off Raknar's head with the sword the king had given him. The whole task now ended, King Olaf vanished from the mound.

Back atop the mound, while these wonders were happening, the men became so upset and frightened that they all ran mad, except for the priest. He never let go of the rope and hauled Gest out of the mound, along with all the treasure. Then the two of them went to where the men struggled with each other. The priest sprinkled holy water over them, and they recovered their wits at once.

As the men made ready to leave, the ground began to shake. The sea rose all along the reef in such crashing breakers the island was nearly flooded. The men could no longer find the reef, so Gest sent his dog Snati out to find it. But the dog could not stand against Raknar's magic and drowned. Gest thought this the greatest loss he had suffered.

Then Jostein the priest went forward, crucifix in hand, sprinkling water upon the waves. The sea divided itself so the men could cross dry-shod to the mainland.

Gest brought all the fine treasures to the king and told King Olaf all that had happened. Gest was then baptized, as he had vowed to do in Raknar's mound.

The following night after Gest had been baptized, he dreamed his father Bard came to him and said, "You did wrong when you abandoned your faith, which all your forefathers had held. Because of this, you shall lose both your eyes.

Then Bard touched his son's eyes, causing such a severe pain that both eyes burst. At this, Gest died, still wearing his baptismal garments. King Olaf thought this the greatest loss.