

Hello Michael Gray - author of the 1984 D&D adventure *XL-1, Quest for the Heartstone*. Thanks for taking the time to consider some questions:

1. Could you tell us about your work with TSR? Several TSR staffers have shared about hard times at TSR. Was your term at TSR a positive experience?
2. This is a tough question. I had left Milton Bradley to come manage the design department. When I started, TSR Management decided to have me co-manage with Dave Sutherland. In that position I also designed the Fantasy Forest boardgame, which I thought of as “Candy Land on steroids”. During that time I also hired Tracy Hickman into Design, as I saw great promise in his pre-TSR work. A year later, as the company grew, they decided to move me to Marketing where I reviewed game submissions. Then they moved me to the book department where I wrote two Endless Quest books and wrote *The Quest for the Heartstone (XL-1)*. After going back to Milton Bradley in 1984, I wrote a 32-page section of the *World of Krynn* book. The first year of my 2+ years at TSR were very positive. I met my lifelong best friend, Jim Ward, then. Jim and I were the only people who got to go to Gary Gygax’s house regularly and playtest his designs with him and his son Luke in their kitchen. We worked on *Star Frontiers* and the Barbarian class, as I recall. I was also a guitar player in the band Uncle Duke and the Dragons for Gen Con one year. That was great fun, white tuxedo and all!
3. Are you any relation to Anne Gray McCready, TSR editor and author?
4. No. But I was there when she was there. She was (and probably still is) a nice person.
5. Did you DM or play D&D much? If so, what world(s) or setting(s) have you DMed or played in? If you DMed, where did you (or would you) place Ghyr on the map of your world? Do you still play D&D?
6. At TSR, I did not do much DMing as there were many better DMs. I would rather play than DM. I did DM a bit after I went back to MB in 1984.
7. Did you yourself convert those AD&D monsters into D&D; namely, the Dragonfly, Dragonne, Hook Horror, and Roper? Or was there another designer who worked on the conversions?
8. My editor did the conversions.
9. Is the entire XL-1 wilderness map intended to be within the bounds of the Kingdom of Ghyr? Is the whole map nominally a part of Ghyr?
10. I may have a foggy recollection, but I think I created all the text in the adventure. It appears that Ghyr was expanded after I left TSR.
11. Castle Ghyr is located on the southwestern corner of the map. The rest of the map is marshland, with no human or demihuman settlements—only monsters. Is there more to the kingdom? Is the map from XL-1 just the northern portion of a wider kingdom?

12. I designed the adventure as a standalone adventure at the time. I wrote all the text and drew all the maps, the cavern interiors and the Cliffside aviary. I called Jim Ward about his and he had no memory of additional Ghry adventures. At the time, he asked me to do a module, which I did. He later told me it was one of the best final package turnovers he had ever gotten.

13. Could you share any ideas you had or have about Ghyr as a setting (nation, culture)?

14. I am pleased with what I came up with. The idea of a frost giant who collected bird creatures and built an aviary was unique at the time. The master thief living behind the "wellevator" was another fun setting I came up with. It was my first module, so it was a novice effort. There were many way-more-talented writers there at the time who I respected very much. As far as the geographic setting, I think I just made it all up.

15. XL-1 refers to the nations to the south of Ghyr who were involved with the Prism Wars. Any ideas for the surrounding nations?

16. No.

17. *AC1: Shady Dragon Inn* (1983), an accessory book of pre-generated NPC characters by Carl Smith, also featured the action figure characters such as Warduke. Even though it was published a year before XL-1, *Shady Dragon Inn* also refers to the Heartstone:

"Warduke wears a suit of half-chain and a black, winged helmet. His shield bears the sign of a demon's head. He was an old friend of Strongheart's (good paladin), but now the two are enemies. Both were exposed to the Heartstone, and Warduke's cruel nature was brought out while Strongheart's just nature became stronger..."

Did you base XL-1 on that background paragraph, or were AC1 and XL-1 developed concurrently?

I think they were developed concurrently and TSR decided to release Carl's work before mine.

18. Warduke is one of the most iconic characters in all of D&D. Did you design the stats for Warduke and the other AD&D action figure characters, or did you take them from 1983's *Shady Dragon Inn*? Are you to thank for raising Warduke's constitution score from a paltry 8 (in *Shady Dragon Inn*) to a respectable 14?

19. I think this was an error of concurrent design. Not sure. I wouldn't give a character named WarDuke a Con of 8.

20. Was there any intention for the *Shady Dragon Inn* to be located in Ghyr?

21. Don't know.

22. Was there ever any talk about the wider world or planet in which Ghyr was situated? Do you ever conceive that Ghyr was located in the D&D Known World setting of the D&D Expert boxed set? Or was Ghyr meant to be a distinct micro-setting in itself?

23. I think it was just a one-off adventure at the time. I think I got the job because the really good designers didn't want to do a serious adventure using "toy" characters.

24. Given that TSR surely hoped for the action figure line to succeed and flourish for years to come, was there ever any talk of a sequel: XL-2?

25. Not while I was there. I went back to MB shortly after writing that module. When I got back to MB, I redeveloped Axis & Allies to create the 2nd edition because Larry Harris had left and there were a LOT of consumer questions about the rules. Then I designed Fortress America and Shogun to complete the Gamemaster series. Years later, I designed MB's three electronic boardgames: Mall Madness, Dream Phone and Omega Virus.

26. You also authored a couple of Fantasy Forest choose-your-own-adventure TSR books for children. Was the Fantasy Forest ever conceived to be a part of any other setting? Or was it a standalone mini-setting?

27. Standalone.

28. Before I sent you the list of Ghyr-inspired fan-works, had you ever seen any of the various fan writings about Ghyr?

29. I had only seen some of the negative reviews of the module. As I said, it was a novice effort. And the genre had evolved and become more sophisticated over the years. I enjoyed writing it and I know that some players have really enjoyed it. Just last year I got an email from a D&D group in Connecticut who said they loved the adventure. So it pleased some people.

30. Any unpublished D&D manuscripts or notes left over from those days? ☺

31. No. Sorry. I hope this all helps a little. Thanks for asking.