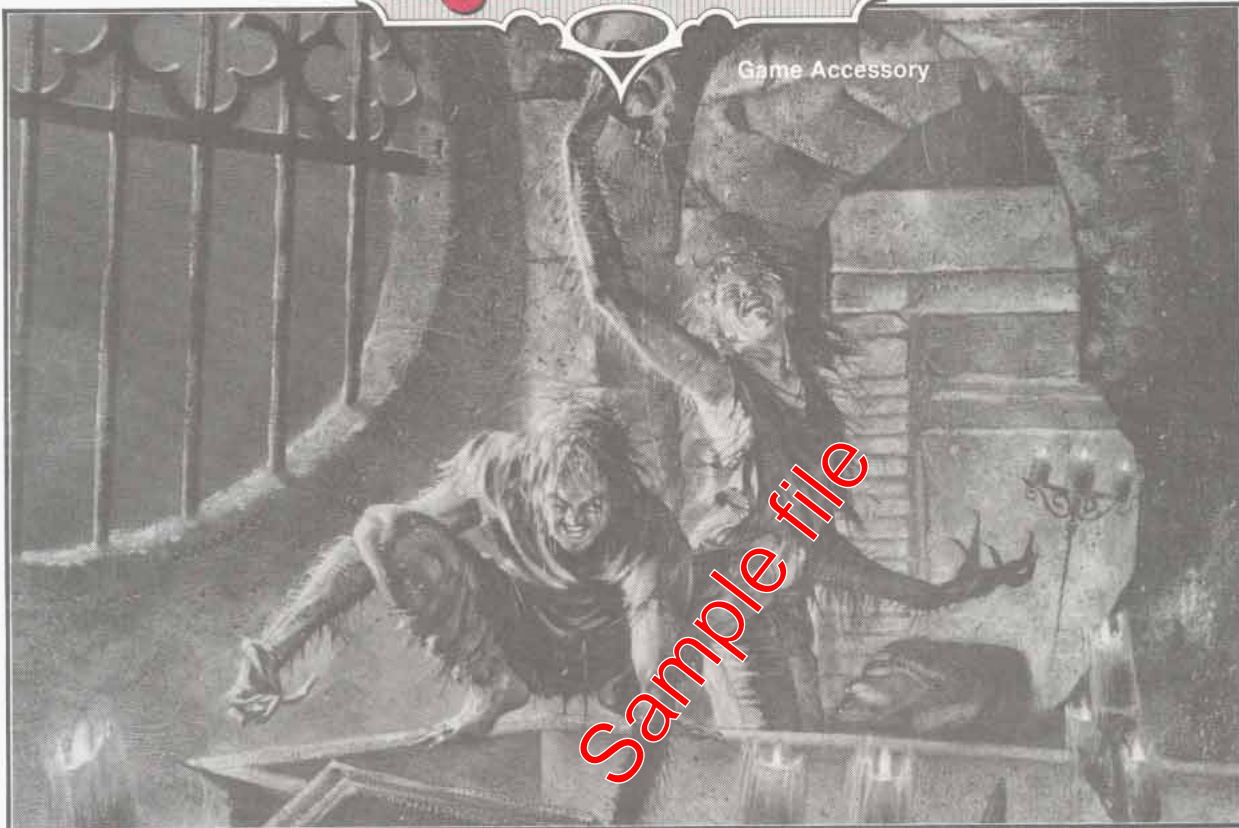


BOOK OF CRYPTS

Ravenloft™

Game Accessory



By Dale "Slade" Henson with J. Robert King

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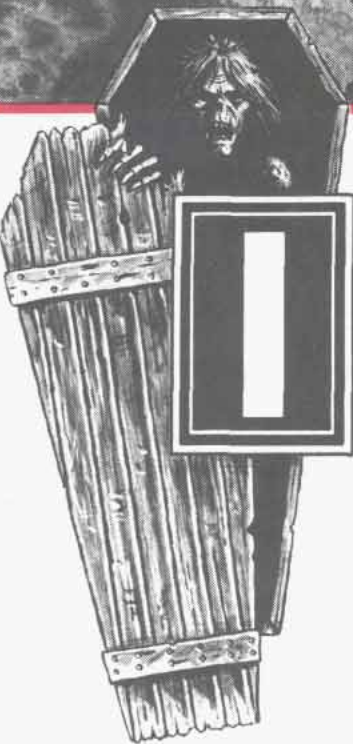
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Sample file

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Fear and Horror



Orongrod sits in a dark corner of the squalid tavern, sipping warmish ale and eavesdropping on the whispered talk of locals. Evidently a gruesome murder occurred last night: a body has been found, its skin meticulously stripped away by a common hunting knife. A knot of revulsion forms in Irongrod's stomach. As he takes another sip, the storyteller

continues, describing the man who fled the murder. With a sinking sense of dread, Irongrod realizes that the description exactly fits him. Another local speaks up now, saying that a knife was discovered beside the body. Irongrod drops his hand from the sweating stein of ale before him, feeling for his hunting knife. It is gone. Anguish begins its slow burn within him.

Suddenly, Irongrod hears an unfamiliar voice in his head, "Don't worry, Irongrod—you're innocent. Sure, I used your body for the crime, but you were asleep. No matter: it won't be your body much longer."

In this scenario, Irongrod experiences the two emotions critical to successful RAVENLOFT™ game adventures: horror and terror. Horror is the revulsion, dread, and anguish that results when a character confronts something that shouldn't be: Irongrod felt horror when he heard of the murder, matched the description to himself, and discovered that his knife was missing. Terror, on the other hand, is the extreme fear that arises when creatures or events immediately threaten one's life: Irongrod felt terror when he heard the voice in his head threatening to take over his body. The interaction of horror and terror is critical to

successful adventures in Ravenloft.

DMs accustomed to running adventures in other AD&D® game settings often excel at inspiring terror in their PCs. Terror is a natural result of deadly combats and lethal traps, both of which abound in adventures in AD&D® game worlds. *Book of Crypts* is no exception, loaded with deadly combatants such as doll golems, ermordenung, evil treants, madmen, liches, werewolves, necromancers, illithids, maniacal jesters, minstrels of death, vampires, and more. The adventures here also brim with terrifying traps—both physical and psychological. Terror should, therefore, come easily to *Book of Crypts* DMs.

In addition to bone-rattling terror, though, Ravenloft DMs should make the most of horror. Horror hits first and prepares characters for the terror to come. The terror Irongrod felt at hearing the voice in his head would be far less intense if he had not first felt the creeping horror of his guilt. In the same way, the terror of hack-and-slash combat with a vampire is tripled if the PCs first feel the mounting horror of something stalking them.

Tormented heroes; tragic villains; dark pasts; secret vices; evil presences; sounds in the shadows . . . this is the stuff of gothic horror. In addition to spicing up adventures, the mood of gothic horror greatly intensifies the terror of combat. The mood, though, is fragile: subtlety is key. If a DM says, "the grass upon the grave before you stirs uneasily, despite the dead calm in the air," the characters may feel horror. If a DM says, "the grass upon the grave before you whips in wild frenzy as the soil bubbles and convulses like boiling flesh, even though the air is as still and putrid as a dead man's rotting heart," the PCs may well laugh.

Make no mistake—thrilling combat is the heart of most Ravenloft adventures. If your characters thrive on hack-and-slash, feel free to add more battles to the adventures contained here. But remember, horror spices up adventures and intensifies combat. In other words, slash all you want, but don't forget the horror!

Sample file

Chapter 1: Bride of Mordenheim

Setup

This adventure is designed for four characters of 2nd to 4th level. During the scenario, the characters meet a hauntingly beautiful woman named Katrina Von Brandthofen.

They are soon flung into an insidious plot devised by Doctor Victor Mordenheim, who is trying to restore life and beauty to his cursed wife. Her body is now mutilated and broken. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to read the information regarding Victor Mordenheim and his wife in the RAVENLOFT™ boxed set. This data is located in Chapter 13, "The

Who's Doomed of Ravenloft." See "Lamordia" in Chapter 11 for a description of the domain, and the card titled "Mordenheim's Estate" for details on the setting.

The Adventure

The characters' travels take them to a dark and misty beach.

You stand on a sandy beach in the fading light of early evening. Dark, murky waves lap at the shore. Seashells and the decaying remains of small jellyfish lie scattered about like broken toys, and fiddler crabs scurry about in search of food.

Bordering this beach, sharp, jutting rocks reach stiffly into the magenta-tinged, midnight blue sky; they are resolute against the crash of the white-capped waves. In the distance, a lone woman kneels on the sand, retrieves a shell, and throws it back into the sea. It disappears into the surf, then she gracefully pulls her boots off and begins wading in the lapping currents.

She takes only a few steps before she stops, noticing you. Her gaze riveted on you,

she rushes to the shore, retrieves her boots, and cautiously approaches.

Her beauty comes into focus as she closes the distance.

This is Katrina, who will try to draw the PCs into this sorrowful adventure. If the characters draw their weapons as she advances, she stops, stares wistfully at them, then turns around and runs away. If the PCs do not catch her and show they are peaceful, the adventure ends before it even begins.

However, if the PCs do not threaten her, she strides toward them and asks, "To whom do you owe alliance?"

If the characters say they owe alliance only to themselves or to no individual, she relaxes and claims that she is aligned with herself—and all that is lawful. While she speaks with them, she searches for any symbols of evil that may be visible on the party. She questions any clerics about their gods. Katrina is trying to make sure the PCs are not evil. She will not deal with an evil party.

Katrina's Story

The woman sighs, and a smile tugs at the corner of her rose-tinted lips. "I believe you are without evil," she states softly. "I truly hope you are. My name is Katrina. In this land, it is difficult to determine who is evil and who is good—except by one's actions. I am willing to give you a chance."

If the characters ask why she is here, she tells them her story. This is detailed in the NPC roster at the end of the adventure, but it is also paraphrased here for the Dungeon Master's convenience.

"I am searching for my maternal aunt, Elise. She was my mother's twin. Aunt Elise married a man, Doctor Victor Mordenheim,

Sample file

Bride of Mordenheim



who lost his mind in his work shortly after they were married. My aunt disappeared several years ago, and I have been looking for her ever since. It is rumored that he performed grotesque experiments on her, and I am here to seek vengeance if this is true. I have been unable to locate his private laboratory, and my travels have led me here. All the rumors point to this area, so I believe he is close. I ask your help, if you will give it."

If the characters ask for payment, Katrina explains she has barely enough to cover her lodging and food expenses for the next few weeks. If the characters refuse to help without promise of payment, she offers to pay them with a portion of anything they may find at Mordenheim's residence. If they still refuse, she bids them farewell and sets off on her own.

However, if the characters decide to help her, she is relieved. She suggests they set up camp (the nearest town is 10 miles away) so they all can get an early start in the morning.

If any of the PCs stand watch, they observe something strange during the night. If no one stands watch, the DM should roll randomly to have one character awoken. The PCs observe small streaks of lightning and a glowing aura coming from a small mansion perched atop a cliff several miles away. The hill overlooks the nearby sea.

When Katrina sees the glow in the sky, she grows excited. "That is it! That's the house! I knew you were a good sign in this evil land. We shall leave in the morning and head for that hill!"

In the morning, Katrina leads the PCs in the direction of the house, eating dried fruits and jerky and sipping water from a suede waterskin as she travels.

Bride of Mordenheim

Mansion Atop a Cliff

The wind is brisk and cold, chilling you through your clothes and armor as you ascend the steep slope to the house. The deep green trees and nearly black grass absorb what weak sunlight peeks from above the dense cloud cover. The only sound is the snapping and crackling under your feet as brittle, dry branches and twigs give way under the weight of your footsteps.

Reaching the top of the hill around mid-afternoon, you see the house has a paramount view of the ocean. Below, the sea's murky surface waves and shivers from unseen forces. Only the wind in your hair and the call of lonely seagulls breaks the deafening silence that hangs in the air. Far across the ocean, a mist-laden island is vaguely visible.

The wooden door to the old mansion is reinforced with iron bars. The bars are blistered and flaking with blood-red rust; the wood is cracked and splintered with age. Shutters on the second floor bang and rattle against the house.

Unless the characters are wearing gauntlets, they suffer 1 point of damage when they knock on the door. The wood splinters mercilessly into their knuckles. It will take 2d4 rounds to remove the splinters.

The knock is never answered. The door is locked, and a thief trying to pick the lock must do so with a -20% penalty because the mechanism is rusted. The door can be battered open if 40 points of damage are inflicted upon it. When the PCs get the door open, continue with the following:

Strange Lodgings

The door rasps and whimpers painfully when opened, and a rush of stale air flows

from the building. Nearly two inches of dust fill this room, making it appear as though no one has entered this house in decades.

The dark and gloomy entry room displays rotting tapestries and paintings hanging precariously on rusting nails. Spider webs dangle from every conceivable locale, and the husks of their former residents lie tangled in their desperate strands.

From upstairs, a clanking sound cuts through the musty air. It soon stops, and a cry of terror follows, dying down to a morbid wail.

If the characters decide to go up the stairs, read the following:

As you mount the stairs, the steps creak horribly with every footfall. A spider, the size of a gold coin, drops down in front of you as if to see who intrudes. The dust on the banister flows to the floor in a spooky cascade as you vibrate the stairs with your movements.

The only way the characters can mount the stairs silently is by using a *silence* spell. A thief's Move Silently ability functions at one-half his normal ability on the rickety stairs. If the PCs have not made efforts to quiet their movements, by the time the PCs have climbed one-third the way up the stairs, the man on the second floor (Victor) hears them and begins hiding everything in sight. If the characters move up the stairs quietly, they find Victor. If, however, Victor was alerted to their movements, read the following:

Suddenly, you hear something slamming and banging overhead. Within a few short seconds, the noise has ceased. At the top of the stairs, you see only one door; its pale exterior is outlined by the glow of light cast under its fragile frame. The door is closed,