

ISLANDS OF TERROR



By Colin McComb and Scott Bennie

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Sample file

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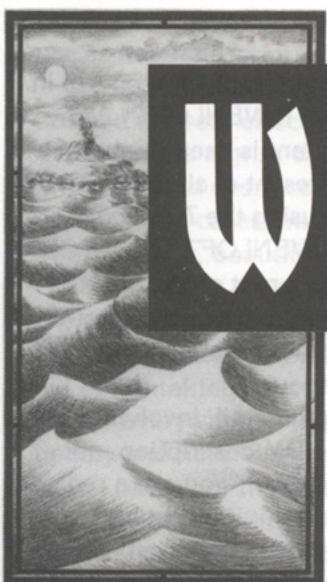
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INTRODUCTION



*hat though the field
be lost?
All is not lost; the
unconquerable will,
and study of re-
venge, immortal
hate,
and courage never to
submit or yield.*

Milton

Whatever paths a traveler may tread, the call of Ravenloft is irresistible. When the mists spring from the cobblestones of the road-

way, it is much too late to plan an escape. Ravenloft beckons and even the most resourceful and courageous cannot avoid its summons.

Within this book you will find several domains and stories of the lords and ladies of the islands. Some are human, such as Elena Faith-

hold, and have fallen from grace through corruption or the lack of virtue. Others, like Draga Salt-Biter, make only a pretense of humanity, revealing their true selves only when their prey is defenseless. And then there is the Hive Queen, who does not affect the guise of humanity, burning instead with bestial desires no human can comprehend.

These are only a few of the lords of the Islands of Terror. This book is the final decaying lock on the crypt of insanity and dread, the key to thrusting your players into ever more horrifying situations.

Playing in the Islands

Although some consider the lords of the islands to be less foul than the dread Dark-
lords of the core, nothing could be farther from the truth. Their malevolence rivals that of the most evil lords of Ravenloft and their lands reflect this. They draw their power from the land itself. The lords of the islands are indeed creatures to be feared.



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Since their domains are generally much smaller than the Lands of the Core, the lords of the islands take a more personal interest in what transpires around them. This does not mean that the lords have nothing better to do with their spare time than to lie in wait in dark corners, hoping that adventurers will chance by. Rather, they are more likely to keep an eye out for circumstances which threaten their well-being. So the adventurers must keep their presence quiet or risk the personal intervention of the lord.

Each island offers many opportunities for role playing and can recur periodically in the lives of the characters.

The Darklords

The lords of the islands are not foolish individuals. As a rule, they will not risk their lives in mortal combat against adventurers unless they are confident of victory or have no choice. There are always exceptions, such as Elena Faith-hold who is so confident in her abilities that she is frightened of nothing. Others, like Sir Torrence Bleyson of Staunton Bluffs, will do everything in their power to avoid a direct confrontation.

The lords are the pulsing heart of evil in every domain. They are attuned to changes wrought in their lands and are capable of wielding great power themselves. Some are able to alter the topography of the domain, while others can control the weather at whim. The players should find it difficult to use the land against the lords, for the lords are integral parts of their domains.

It is easy to see that even the weakest of lords would be a match for a well-prepared adventuring party. It is imperative that the Dungeon Master remember this in the rare event that a party encounters a lord. No lord should be an easy target, for they are fully aware of their many powers and will use them to their fullest extent.

The Mood of Ravenloft

There are several important things to keep in mind while running a RAVENLOFT™ game session. Most important is keeping the mood of Gothic horror present at all times. This can be accomplished by using the *Techniques of Terror* described in the RAVENLOFT™ Boxed Set.

Isolation is an important part of mood setting. The characters do not have to be physically separated to be isolated. Establishing a feeling of alienation is enough.

Describe each setting in detail, involving each of the senses in the DM description, not just the visual. If the DM says, "You see a red splotch on the wall. You think it might be blood," much of the effectiveness is lost. On the other hand, it is much more dramatic and helps to set the mood if the DM says, "As you enter this room, the stench of decay assaults your nostrils and the monotonous hum of a buzzing fly invades your ears. A maroon smear covers much of the eastern wall. It looks flaky and dry." If the PCs examine the stain more closely, the DM reveals that this stain appears to be crusted blood. Using vivid descriptions gives the players a much greater sense of participating. The DM involves their entire imagination, not just the visual portion.

The DM must make sure that he describes each scene in terms that can make it seem like the land itself is alive and conspiring against the players. The players will begin to react more and more carefully to each situation, wary for any surprise. This makes them even more vulnerable to any surprises the DM might wish to spring, for the DM can deflate their tension with a simple "boo-scare," as popularized in the movies. Just when they have relaxed from that scare, the real menace pops up like an insane jack-in-the-box.

On the other hand, the DM should avoid too much description. This tends to turn off gamers very quickly if they must listen to an extended series of descriptions; be evocative, but be as brief as possible. The best compromise is for

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the DM to judge the mood of the players and use as much description as is necessary.

One feature of RAVENLOFT™ games that can be used to great effect is contrast. Many see the demiplane as a gray, dreary, dismal place, full of evil around every corner. While this may be true in some cases, much of Ravenloft is an awe-inspiring, beautiful place. The forests of Nidala are truly marvelous, the thick trunks of the mighty oaks thrusting high into the azure sky. The illusions Lemot Sedium Juste weaves are breathtaking spectacles of craftsmanship. Nearly everywhere in Ravenloft one encounters beauty and natural splendor.

The beauty of the lands makes the contrast with the lords' evil that much greater. Even the swampy, terror-filled Saragoss has its moments of calm and serenity. The shock of encountering such malevolence in the midst of so much charm is far more horrifying to the players than stumbling across a vampire in the heart of an old, crumbling tomb. Finding the cancerous heart of darkness after relaxing amid the beauty created by it becomes traumatizing to even the most experienced adventurer. Finding oneself that close to temptation before seeing through the mask to the festering darkness beneath it tends to be rather unnerving.

The DM should avoid discussions of game mechanics and curb his use of game terms. Very little deflates a good scary mood faster than *gamespeak*. Instead, the DM should describe each combat as a player would feel it personally. We don't know our hit points in real life and neither would the player characters know how many their characters have.

Optionally, the DM might wish to keep a separate sheet with the PC's ability scores, Armor Class, and hit points listed; keeping this sheet secret, and telling them only how badly their character is feeling from that recent werewolf bite. This also lets the DM perform subtle manipulations of statistics if necessary, perhaps because of vampires, diseases, or malefic magic.

Let it be noted though, that keeping this sheet means a lot of extra work for the DM. If the DM discovers that this creates a burden, he shouldn't do it. Likewise, if it actually enhances the general mood of role playing sessions and the DM doesn't mind the paperwork, he should feel free to keep the system.

The DM should be judicious in what the players do and do not know about Ravenloft. Even the lords do not know that the plane on which they are trapped is called Ravenloft. All they know is that they are prisoners in their own domains, in a land that is seemingly a reflection of their own evil desires though most deny this on a conscious level. The natives tend to be unaware of any sort of Ravenloft's evil. They are simply peasants in a harsh place. Few people in the demiplane, if any, have any clue that the domains are run by especially evil people. The land is the land, with all of its vagaries and strangeness.

And now, welcome to Ravenloft. As the Mists arise, the terror mounts. Struggling to avoid fate is of no avail, for the dark land has its unremitting grip on the unfortunate and will not let go despite their entreaties. The screams of the ill-fated fall on deaf ears or even worse, draw the attention of unfriendly ears.

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into the Abyss, the Abyss looks also into you.

Nietzsche

In all the world, there can be nothing more terrible than good gone astray. Whether it involves the seduction of innocence or the corruption of an upright, holy woman, such a loss can only be a great gain for evil.

The Lord

In a simpler time, the young paladin Elena Faith-hold thundered across the world, bearing death and destruction to the enemies of goodness everywhere. Her mighty sword and her great beauty won her renown far and wide. She and her companions, who included the Lady Kateri Shadowborn (see the RAVENLOFT™ *Darklords* accessary), cut a swath through the evil and corruption in the world. When the time came for the parting of their ways, Elena did not falter from her path, but continued with her holy mission. Her power increased vastly and followers of her god flocked to her, knowing her to be the instrument of retribution for which they had searched so long.

Their praise and adulation filled Elena's ears and heart. Although she knew that she was merely the undeserving vessel of her god's power, and thus unworthy of the worship bestowed upon her, she still basked in the adoration of the masses and took their sacrifices for herself. After a time, she once again girded herself for battle, saddled her unicorn, and went forth to crush evil utterly. At her back rode thousands of fanatics, all of them intent on proving themselves to Elena and their god.

The forces of evil rose up to combat this crusade. Lawful, chaotic, and neutral all forgot their differences to assure their survival. In-

deed, in the spirit of survival, they neglected the spite and petty bickering and the machinations and plots that made them evil. The War of Evil lasted many months on the blood-soaked plains, each side sustaining huge casualties. In the end, the forces of good emerged victorious though vastly reduced. All that remained of the evil forces in Elena's lands were tiny strongholds, which proved to be easy hunting for various eager converts.

Elena rested on her laurels for a time, secure in the love of her people. She was confident that no further evil would trouble the peace she had established in her land. Naively, she underestimated the human penchant for self-destruction. This proved to be her downfall.

In the wake of her victory, many of her subjects came "to see the light," and they converted to the worship of Elena's god. No doubt some of these conversions were the result of pressure applied to nonbelievers by some of the extremists, but the majority were certainly sincere.

Some resisted these gentle, and occasionally not-so-gentle, urgings toward "the One True Religion." Angry at being repulsed, zealots approached Elena with venomous lies about the stubborn ones.

Elena, never one to reconsider a course of action once she deemed it correct, leapt into a new holy war against any who were not firmly allied with the side of good, ruthlessly crushing the unbelievers and the heathens. During this conflict and through the times of her pogroms against the "new evil," Elena's gifts as a paladin, along with her unicorn mount, deserted her. This did not worry Elena, for she knew that occasional tests of faith are important for the righteous. She never stopped to think that she might be angering her god.

In time, Elena's armies extinguished the neutrals. Not satisfied with simply eliminating those who opposed her religion, she decided to annihilate those who were not firm allies and those who were not human. As she waged her ruthlessly grim war against those who had once fought at her side, a nagging doubt spoke to