Black Dragon

Red Mists

Swords Against Sorcery

DISMEMBER

IMPALE

CRUSH

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Black Dragon 2

Welcome to the second issue! I hope you enjoyed the first issue and that the sequel meets or exceeds your expectations!

IN THIS ISSUE

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"This one's probably trapped. Looks like another job for the lantern bearer."

ZERO LEVEL
Creating Unique Henchmen

Henchman (or hirelings, retainers, or whatever flavor your tradition calls them) are a staple of OSR rulebooks. At the gaming table, they tend to fade into the background more often than not; your characters might be assumed to have henchmen lugging your treasure or holding lanterns to light your way. Beyond these nods to "realism" (how can any party be expected to drag thousands of gold pieces, handfuls of jewels and magic items along and still function?), we generally don't involve henchmen in gameplay. I would hazard a guess that most henchmen aren't even given names. It's certainly understandable – when there is so much going on at any given time,

paying attention to even the basic details of a henchman can interrupt the pacing of the adventure.

And, yet, if given just the right amount of quirks and functionality, henchman can add flavor to any dungeon crawl. This article provides a fun method for creating flavorful lantern bearers, pack animal tenders, treasure haulers, medics,mappers, cooks, and guides.

The method for creating these helpers is simple: begin at Table I and continue to the next table until you're finished. Then roll 1d10+5 for each of the six abilities, 1d6 for hit points (modified by Constitution), and you're good to go!

NOTE: PCs are free to give henchmen extra gear, including weapons & armor.

TABLE I: SPECIALTY, BASE DAILY WAGE, GEAR (d10)

1-3	Lugging Treasure	5 sp	2 stout poles
4	Lantern bearing	5 sp	Lantern, oil, pole
5	Mapping	10 sp	Parchment, quill, ink
6	Cooking (4 PCs)	10 sp	Pots & pans, spices
7	Patching injuries (stabilize, stop bleeding)	15 sp	Bandages, splints
8	Repairing armor	15 sp	Mail links, rawhide
9	Tending to horses & pack animals	8 sp	Animal tack, feed
10	Wilderness guiding	15 sp	Maps

TABLE II: NAME FORMAT (d12)

1-5	First Name (TABLE III), Surname (TABLE V)
6-7	First Name (TABLE III) the (Adjective, TABLE IV)
8-9	First Name (TABLE III) the (Quirk, TABLE VI)
10-12	First Name (TABLE III) of (Place, TABLE VII)

TABLE III: FIRST NAME, SEX and RACE (d100)

1	Jerkin (M Dwarf)	15	Toddo (M Halfling)
2	Polly (F Halfling)	16	Patricia (F Human)
3	Markus (M Human)	17	Tomas (M Human)
4	Flossy (F Halfling)	18	Lisabeth (F Human)
5	Bert (M Human)	19	Halthalas (M Elf)
6	Wynona (F Human)	20	Gretta (F Dwarf)
7	Grendleman (M Half-Orc)	21	Lathglada (M Elf)
8	Aerthawhit (F Human)	22	Kurg (F Half-orc)
9	Cooper (M Dwarf)	23	Bwali M (Dwarf)
10	Annabelle (F Human)	24	Edith (F Human)
11	Henric (M Human)	25	Bartholomew (M Human)
12	Johanna (F Human)	26	Kithora (F Half-elf)
13	Etienne (M Humann)	27	Dryden (M Elf)
14	Dawnna (F Half-elf)	28	Daisy (F Halfling)

29	Daffer (M Halfling)	61	Snouty (F Half-orc)
30	Dennka (F Dwarf)	62	Bernard (M Human)
31	Yonas (M Human)	63	Hazel (F Human)
32	Miriemme (F Human)	64	McBeardy (M Dwarf)
33	Wythlamas (M Elf)	65	Madsah (F Dwarf)
34	Happie (M Halfling)	66	Webster (M Human)
35	Dedhmala (F Half-elf)	67	Briannah (F Human)
36	Erginnla (M Half-elf)	68	Gorfenblip (M Gnome)
37	Sparkles (F Gnome)	69	Snow (F Gnome)
38	Bobop (M Gnome)	70	Roland (M Human)
39	Keely (F Human)	71	Princess (F Human)
40	Madhammer (M Dwarf)	72	Faejin (M Elf)
41	Stoutie (F Dwarf)	73	Melia (F Elf)
42	Mikkel (M Human)	74	Wilhelm (M Human)
43	Kirstena (F Human)	75	Maud (F Human)
44	Goldree (M Elf)	76	Rollo (M Halfling)
45	Silverenne (F Elf)	77	Petals (F Halfling)
46	Gunna (M Human)	78	Lloyd (M Human)
47	Laynna (F Human)	79	Sunshine (F Human)
48	Fatty (M Halfling)	80	Ewalin (M Half-elf)
49	Rosie (F Halfling)	81	Alewe (F Half-elf)
50	Martigan (M Human)	82	Frank (M Human)
51	Florence (F Human)	83	Etta (F Human)
52	Rusty (M Gnome)	85-87	Your first teacher's forename
53	Snow (F Gnome)	88-91	Your first pet's name
54	Otis (M Human)	92-94	Your childhood best friend's first name
55	Shirl (F Human)		
56	Hallas (M Half-elf)	95-97	Your mother's maiden name
57	Xyxa (F Half-elf)	98-00	Your father's middle name
58	Jessup (M Human)		
59	Matilda (F Human)		
60	Gruel (M Half-orc)		

TABLE IV: ADJECTIVES (d100)

01-02	Drab	51-52	Sleeveless
03-04	Slippery	53-54	Rotund
05-06	Filthy	55-56	Famous
07-08	Silent	57-58	Short
09-10	Brown	59-60	Grotesque
11-12	Loud	61-62	Magnificent
13-14	Crooked	63-64	Beardless
15-16	Immense	65-66	Fragrant
17-18	Crimson	67-68	Beautiful
19-20	Shaggy	69-70	Fearless
21-22	Bald	71-72	Gray
23-24	Toothless	73-74	Sexy
25-26	Ginger	75-76	Hairy
27-28	Mysterious	77-78	Old
29-30	Tall	79-80	Tiny
31-32	Cunning	81-82	Clean
33-34	Quick	83-84	Aberrant
35-36	Terrible	85-86	Young
37-38	Flatulent	87-88	Triumphant
39-40	Steadfast	89-90	Rebellious
41-42	Stout-hearted	91-92	Fastidious
43-44	Blameless	93-94	Loquacious
45-46	Tremendous	95-96	Obsequious
47-48	Hungry	97-98	Sagacious
49-50	Blunt	99-00	Waggish

TABLE V: SURNAMES (by race; 1/2-elves roll once each on elf and human)

DWARF (Roll d20 twice, combine results, ignore duplicate results)

1	Broad	11	Hammer
2	Cleft	12	Barrel
3	Hard	13	Shield
4	Forge	14	Axe
5	Beard	15	Thane
6	Chain	16	Fist
7	Mine	17	Keep
8	Stone	18	Iron
9	Vault	19	Gold
10	Mountain	20	Silver

ELF (Roll d20 twice, combine results, ignore duplicate results)

1	Green	11	Breeze
2	Silver	12	Hart
3	Tree	13	Birch
4	Wood	14	Song
5	Feather	15	Light
6	Cloud	16	Sky
7	Golden	17	Willow
8	Leaf	18	Snow
9	Glade	19	River
10	Sea	20	Wind

GNOME (Roll d20 twice, combine results, ignore duplicate result)

1	Silvery	11	Bluebird
2	Round	12	Honey
3	Butter	13	Nose
4	Burrow	14	Boots
5	Red	15	Trout
6	Chuckle	16	Cup
7	Dance/Dancing	17	Nut
8	Sunshine	18	Fruit/Fruity
9	Fox	19	Twinkle
10	Badger	20	Cloud/Cloudy

TABLE V: SURNAMES (by race; 1/2-elves roll once each on elf and human)

HAFLING (Roll d20 twice, combine results, ignore duplicate results)

1	Bag	11	Blower
2	Proud	12	Toes
3	Bottom	13	Brandy
4	Barrel	14	Stout
5	Green	15	Row
6	Buck	16	Field
7	Wine	17	Feet
8	Bridge	18	Barley
9	Horn	19	Mill
10	Wheel	20	Cotton

HALF-ORC (Roll d20 once)

1	Ugbrick	11	Splitskull
2	Grighnax	12	Nosegoblin
3	Lerk	13	Bignutz
4	Kraggen	14	Guuuurg
5	Raaargh	15	Bigtooth
6	Hagk	16	Jughead
7	Spatterboy	17	Venjintz
8	Gutz	18	Bigboy/Biggirl
9	Kroog	19	Pigswill
10	Thrud	20	Ugga

HUMAN (Roll d20 twice, combine results, ignore duplicate result)

1	Smith	11	Wood
2	Cooper	12	Baker
3	Field	13	Gold
4	Son	14	Bell
5	Sword	15	Hill
6	House	16	Man
7	Berg	17	Hunt/Hunter
8	Bridge	18	King
9	Copper	19	Mason
10	Wright	20	Cook

TABLE VI: QUIRK (d20; quirks in parentheses are names used for Table II only)			
1	Clucks tongue (Clucker)	11	Faints at Blood (Fainter)
2	Always sniffing (Sniffer)	12	Picks nose (Picker)
3	Taps foot (Toe tapper)	13	Obsessively neat (Neat)
4	Curses (Foul-tongued)	14	Stutters (Stutterer)
5	Hacking cough (Hacker)	15	Always apologizing (Atoner)
6	Colorblind (Grey-eyed)	16	Paranoid (Loon)
7	Spits a lot (Spitter)	17	Tries to be funny (Stooge)
8	Cracks knuckles (Knuckler)	18	Rude comments (Lewd)
9	Talks to themself (Mumbler)	19	Hypochondriac (Sick)
10	Won't shut up (Gibberer)	20	Egotistical (Righteous)

TABLE VII: PLACE (d10, by race; choose elf or human for 1/2 elf)			
DWARF		**HALFLING**	
1-2	Deepmine	42	Mikkleford-Upon-Swale
3-4	The Durden HIlls	43	Sackville
5-6	The Crystal Mountains	44	Over Yonder
7-8	Tin Town	45	Shiremoot
9-10	Roll on human table	46	Roll on human table
ELF		**HALF-ORC**	
1-2	The Whispering Wood	1-2	The Craggs
3-4	The Silver Glades	3-4	Junktown
5-6	Lathvislogh	5-6	Swinefort
7-8	The Eves of Willowbluff	7-8	(no home)
9-10	Roll on human table	9-10	Roll on human table
GNOME		**HUMAN**	
1-2	Merrywinkle	62	Rolling Brown
3-4	Gigglebrook	63	Greensborough
5-6	Badgerhome	64	Vicar's Bush
7-8	Laughinglark	65	Ewarsburgh
9-10	Roll on human table	66	King's Acre

TABLE VIII: Form wages are paid* (d100)	
01-50	Wages to be paid in silver or copper
51-75	Wages to be paid in silver or gold
76	Wages to be paid in electrum only
77-79	Wages to be paid in vegetables
80-82	Wages to be paid in livestock or vegetables
83-84	Wages to be paid in the form of training (fighting, magic, etc.)
85	Wages to be paid in the form of a pre-paid bar tab
86	Wages to be paid in finery
87	Wages to be paid in the form of a political position
88	Wages to be paid in membership to a guild
89-91	Wages to be paid in the form of the erasure of a debt
92	Wages to be paid in the form of release from prison
93	Wages to be paid in the form of a religious blessing
94	Wages to be paid in the form of someone's hand in marriage
95	Wages to be paid in the form of making an enemy "disappear"
96-00	Wages to be paid in a percentage of treasure won
* If wages are not paid in coin, the GM should estimate the worth of the goods and services as they relate to their value in silver as given on Table I.	

TABLE IX: Reputation (d20)	
1-2	Asshole
3	Boring
4	Unpredictable
5	Unreliable
6-10	Hard worker
11	Lies
12	Brave
13	Foolhardy
14	Cheats
15	Weird
16	Stubborn
17	Misunderstands orders
18	Takes more than her fair share
19-20	No reputation (new around these parts)

TABLE X: Contract Stipulations (1d100, roll 1d4-1 times; if the result is 0, the henchman has no contract stipulations. Re-roll duplicates)	
1-10	Mandatory 10 minute rest every 2d4 hours
11-18	3 meals per day
19-25	Will not enter a room where combat occurs
26	Will not tolerate being reprimanded or shouted at
27-35	If injured slightly (1-3 hp), wages (or equivalent) increase 50%. If knocked unconscious, wages (or equivalent) increase 100% and takes the rest of the day off
36-40	If killed, the equivalent to quadruple wages to be paid to a person as set forth in the contract
41-45	Working day begins no earlier than 5am and ends no later than 9pm
46-47	An end-of-day drink of no less than 2 pints of ale must be provided
48	No singing by PCs or other henchmen will be tolerated
49-55	Receive 1d4% of all treasure won per day
56-60	Will not be ordered to "go ahead of the party and search for danger" unless 2d6 sp is paid in advance
61-70	Will not fight monsters or NPCs unless 10d10 sp is paid in advance. Negotiation is allowed depending on the perceived threat level.
71-75	Will not check for traps or monsters unless 2d6 sp is paid in advance
76-80	Will not be used as bait unless 3d6 sp is paid in advance
81	30 minutes grieving time must be given per death of other henchmen
82	A small pet must accompany the henchman
83-84	A base minimum of leather armor must be provided, and it must fit
85-86	A short sword or hand axe must be provided
87	If killed and resurrected, an extra 3d6 gold must be paid upon arrival at home base
88	Will not eat meat of any kind
89-90	Will only eat meat
91	Gloves must be provided if rappelling is expected
92	An extra pair of socks must be provided
93	If torrential rain occurs, a leather poncho must be made available
94	Will not climb trees or cliff faces unless 2d6 sp is paid in advance
95	Consent must be given before any personal nicknames are given
96-97	One mandatory 5 minute toilet break made available every 10 hours
98-99	One potion of Cure Light Wounds must be provided
00	Must be consulted on decisions of routes taken, in or out of dungeon

TABLE XI: HENCHMAN EVENTS (1d20)*	
1	Henchman is injured by a stray arrow, suffers normal damage
2	Henchman is injured by errant blow, suffers normal damage
3	Henchman trips and falls hard, 1d3 damage
4	Henchman tumbles, breaking foot. Cannot carry more than 1/2 normal baggage or items. Must use a crutch. Move at 1/2 speed.
5	Henchman bites off tip of tongue, bleeding all over jaw and chest. Speaking is difficult and painful,
6	Henchman's stomach feels lousy for 30 minutes and then begins vomiting loudly. Stomach bug lasts 24 hours.
7	Henchman sees a scary shadow and shrieks.
8	Attack of narcolepsy! Henchman falls asleep for 1d20 minutes.
9	Something falls on henchman's head (part of the roof, a tree branch, etc). Henchman knocked unconscious for 4d10 minutes.
10	Henchman falls into a concealed pit the GM didn't know was there.
11	Something falls or is kicked/blown into the henchman's eye; blindness.
12	Henchman drops what s/he is carrying. One random item breaks.
13	Henchman hears voices in her head telling her to attack one of the PCs when they are asleep or their back is turned. Roll equal to or lower than Wisdom on a d20 to refuse the orders. Roll every 6 hours. The voices continue for 3d8 hours.
14	Henchman starts complaining about the temperature or weather.
15	Spontaneous combustion! The henchman starts burning from the outside in and will die unless healed with magic.
16	A random monster leaps out of nowhere and attacks the henchman.
17	A random song runs through the henchman's head and she can't get it out. She begins humming or whistling. If ordered to cease, she stops for 5 minutes. Then roll equal to or lower than Wisdom on a d20 to stop. Roll every 30 minutes. Three consecutive successes means the song is gone.
18	The next time the henchman is next to a torch, his hair catches fire.
19	After the next occasion a PC or henchman falls unconscious or is killed, the henchman gets cold feet and quits. He turns back and tries to go home.
20	The henchman becomes overconfident the next time the party defeats an enemy. She begs the PCs to let her become an official adventurer.
* After every hour of game time, the GM rolls a d20. On a result of 1, an event occurs. The GM may wish to alter the requirements of an event occurring.	

Name	Controlled by	Specialty
Race	Home	Quirk
Reputation	Wages	Appearance

Ability	Score	Notes
STR		
DEX		
CON		
INT		
WIS		
CHA		

Hit Points

Armor Class

Gear

Contract

Name	Controlled by	Specialty
Race	Home	Quirk
Reputation	Wages	Appearance

Ability	Score	Modifiers
STR		
DEX		
CON		
INT		
WIS		
CHA		

Hit Points

Armor Class

Equipment

Contract

Name	Controlled by	Specialty
Race	Home	Quirk
Reputation	Wages	Appearance

Ability	Score	Notes
STR		
DEX		
CON		
INT		
WIS		
CHA		

Hit Points

Armor Class

Equipment

Contract

Taking Stock
Inventory Made Easy
by John Jessop

It's been seven days since restocking in Riverwood. Seven days in the Haunted Vale where the Stone Queen and her half-calcified servants lurk. The rain is thick and noisome, poking and slapping every inch of exposed skin until it's fish-clammy and your skin has been rubbed red and bloody by stinking layers of soaking linen and leather. Your torches are wet, your lantern useless, and as night falls one thought pounds your weary mind like this damnable rain: I should have been prepared for this.

Therein lies the struggle. The OSR is predicated on a game that demands strategic planning. Packing for a dungeon or a lengthy quest should be as important as deciding whether to attempt to seize that gem from underneath a sleeping dragon's claw or how to storm an outlaw's wooden fort in the dead of night. However, it's also a game of imagination and adventure: sitting down and poring over pages and pages of adventuring gear and pinching coppers can make you feel less like a mighty sorcerer or clever thief than like a fantasy accountant. This system at-tempts a compromise between the two extremes, abstracting encumbrance and miscellaneous gear while demanding an understanding of where your character is storing everything.

Stock

The inventory on your character sheet notes weapons, armor, shields, treasure, mounts, and other large and important items, including magic items.

Everything else is handled as Stock: torches, rations, marbles, flammable oil, lockpicking tools, books of lore, coils of rope, etc.

Stocking Up

It costs 5 of whatever the standard coin of your game is (typically silver) to buy 1 Stock. This is the typical price, reflec-tive of the high prices freebooters, mer-cenaries, and adventures are charged. In a place with exorbitant taxes, this might be 10 silver. In a prosperous and fair village, it might be 3.

Let me check my pack...

When you need a useful item that would have made sense to pack, spend 1 Stock and you have it.

At the GM's discretion if it would

have been hard to come by or expensive where you got supplies, spend +1 Stock.

If you packed a ton of it – enough for several days or far more than was strictly necessary spend – spend +1 Stock.

Write it down on your character sheet in your inventory along with where it's carried. If you have nowhere to carry it, then don't spend the stock: you couldn't have carried it in the first place.

Where is that damnable potion?

When you attempt to find something in your pack in a tense situation (in combat, before a door you've locked is broken down, before agents of the local lord find you, etc.) roll a d20. If you rolled above your Stock, then you find it in a timely manner. If you rolled below your Stock, name something else you've packed, spend the Stock for it and you've pulled that out instead. Doing this in combat takes your full turn.

Organizing your pack takes about 10 minutes or so, and avoids the chance that you might not have a torch at hand when you desperately need one. Once you rummage through your pack in the middle of a tense situation – falling from a great height or dealing with anything else that might disrupt your miscellaneous equipment – you'll need to reorganize it all again.

Note: This might seem like it rewards carrying as little Stock as possible. You'd be right. It's easier to find the holy water you bought from the blind priests of Alathor if you didn't have to sandwich it in between a few bear traps and a collapsible 10 ft pole. You can get around this by taking the time to organize your Stock, but doing so in a dungeon or the wild can waste valuable time and potentially draw random encounters. Whether it's worth doing so is your decision.

How Much Do I Have?

When you spend Stock, you have a good and useful quantity of the item. For arrows, bolts, or spell components this is enough for a battle.

For rope, this is enough to scale a cliff or tie someone up. For torches, rations, and other consumables, it's enough to last a day. For anything else, it's enough to "do the job." Remember, your character knows what they're doing in this world, even if it's up to you to ensure they survive it.

If you packed a ton of it (see above) it's enough for three days, or else you have multiples of it: enough to give as gifts, break a few, etc.

Example: Faedamius Dorn is an apprentice mage freshly hired as a bodyguard for a merchant caravan alongside two surly warriors. Before setting out from the little town of Fardale, he spends his meager allowance on 3 Stock.

The journey is expected to be three days to Bleston. That's before the goblins attack, killing one of the wagons oxen and damaging a wheel. In the battle, Faedamius made use of his few meager spells and spent 1 Stock to represent
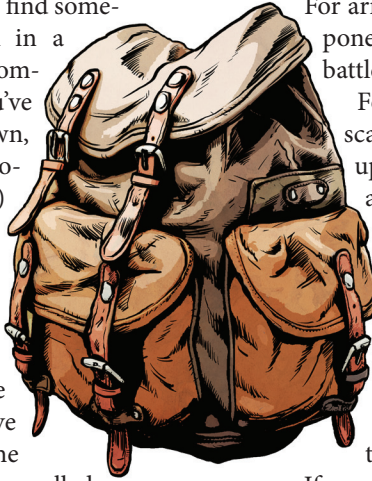
having enough spell components for the battle, and 1 Stock for a poultice to put on his wounded side.

Good thing that the caravan's paying for his meals.

Encumbrance

Under this system, in addition to any weapons, armor, and other important items, you can carry Stock equal to half your strength score without being overburdened and can lug up to your strength score if it comes to that. Having exceptional strength as a warrior lets you carry 1 Stock without it counting towards your load, +1 for every point your strength is beyond 18. So a warrior with a strength of 24 because of gauntlets of giant's strength can carry 19 Stock before they're overencumbered.

A mule, giant lizard, ox, or other pack animal can carry Stock equal to its strength score without becoming overburdened and up to 1.5 times its strength score without being heavily burdened.

Halfling or gnome Stock is assumed to be small-sized. If a small demihuman ends up carting around Stock made for a human or humanoid of similar size, halve their carrying capacity to a quarter of their strength score.

If you're overburdened, halve your speed and apply a -2 penalty to all attack rolls, attribute checks and skill or proficiency checks. Thieves who are overburdened cannot make use of Hide in Shadows, Move Silently, or Climb Walls.

If you're grotesquely overburdened (at your max possible Stock), double these penalties.

Treasure and Stock

Weapons, armor, shields, and anything you wear or carry don't count as Stock, but what about other stuff? That gem-encrusted idol you pilfered from that horrid jungle has to weigh something, right? Well, it does. 75 coins, or a single decently sized piece of treasure, like a silver candlestick or a golden idol, count as 1 Stock for purposes of encumbrance. At the GM's discretion, an especially heavy piece of treasure might count as 2 Stock, but this should be reserved for truly cumbersome items like a lump of gold ore or a diamond the size of someone's head.

This might seem punitive, but coins (especially pre-modern coins predominately of silver or gold) are heavy (50 Spanish doubloons weigh about 6 pounds) and take up a surprising amount of room. Under this system, a donkey with a strength of 14 can haul about 700 gold pieces without too much trouble, and up to 1,050 without being heavily burdened. That's roughly equivalent to the real world load limits of an average donkey: about 112 pounds if you're willing to move at a fairly slow pace.

Ridiculous Weight

If an item is of truly ridiculous weight (like a great boulder, or a mahogany armoire) the GM may require a minimum number of people to attempt to lift the item. In addition, such obstacles or treasures of dubious practicality require a strength check to move from all individuals who attempt it. Everyone must succeed to proceed.

Weights of this magnitude are not tracked as Stock. You can't carry a bookshelf around a dungeon, no matter how mighty your thews. While lugging

such a massive item around, you count as heavily overburdened, taking a -4 penalty to attribute checks and Armor Class. Attacking is impossible without releasing your grip on the item, something that will no doubt cause plenty of consternation amongst your allies.

Bags of Holding and Other Wonders
It is recommended that bags of holding and other similar extradimensional spaces be handled using the following rules that render such items useful without eliminating the strategy and resource management elements of this system:

A Lesser Bag of Holding can carry 5 Stock without counting said stock as part of what you're carrying.

A Greater Bag of Holding can carry up to 10 Stock without counting said stock as part of what you're carrying.

A Portable Hole can carry up to 10 Stock without counting said Stock as part of what you're carrying.

Because of the uncanny nature of such items, attempts to find a particular item in any of these require rolling twice and using the lower result. It's significantly more difficult to find your caltrops when they are located in a portable demi-plane.

Revisiting the "Domains of Dread"

*How I Overcame My Fear
and Embraced the Mists*
by Chris Walck

Back when I was 19 and muddling my way through college in upstate New York, a friend of a friend needed somebody to fill in for a 2nd Edition AD&D game set in a land of mists and fog. Along with his girlfriend and a couple of other people, he was using what I would later learn to be the TSR setting known as *Ravenloft*.

Now, almost 25 years later, Ravenloft is the setting that is closest and dearest to my heart. For years, it was known as the place to send PCs who had pissed off the GM once too many times. Let them fight against vampire lords that couldn't be killed and liches that used their brains in experiments. Ravenloft was known as the 'weekend in hell' setting because of the overall brutal nature of the demiplane. Only with the release of the hardcover book known as the '*Domains of Dread*' was Ravenloft finally considered a setting where characters could be native to.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of running multiple campaigns in the Lands of Mists for people who told me in very plain terms "I'm not touching Ravenloft and you can't make me." There were many reasons why players didn't want to journey into Ravenloft. There were several modules that had PCs killed early in the adventure and then forced to do some dark lord's bidding (see the modules *Adam's Wrath, From the Shadows/ Root of Evil* and a few others).
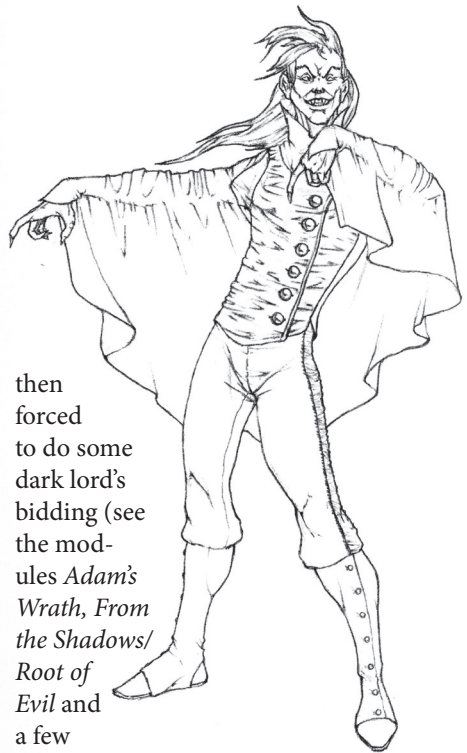
In order for an adventure to advance, PCs would frequently face an encounter with a pre-ordained outcome– there were no ways to get around these railroad scenarios. As such, some modules killed off characters just so they could become the unwilling minions of the dark lord *du jour*.

Other modules (*Thoughts of Darkness* for example) were regarded as unfair to the players even at higher levels. Yes, I know lots of players who wanted to fight against vampiric illithids, but this may have been one of the biggest blunders in the entire line – vampiric illithids do not fit the themes of Ravenloft as a whole. Where dreams play an important role in creating Ravenloft's unique mood (look at *The Nightmare Lands*), anything that happened in the

land of the illithids was absolutely brutal.

At the end of the day, the people who said to me, "I'm not playing in a Ravenloft campaign" found out that they really enjoyed the setting. I don't know if it was because of my GMing style or that I was able to break through the misconceptions that had been built up over the years. Now, when I talk about my gaming, players that I don't know say, "Hey. You're the guy who runs Ravenloft. I've heard good things about you."

There are many ways to introduce players to Ravenloft (low level, mid level and high level characters), and I'm going to highlight some of my favorite published modules from the lifespan of the setting. Note that White Wolf expanded upon the setting a lot in the 3e era, but I'm going to focus on the 2e era. If you're looking to expand the setting and learn more in-depth information, take a look at the 3e books. They are REALLY good.

Good Starting Places

There are three modules that stand out when it comes to low level adventures Although each of the modules have their problems, they give you a good starting point to introduce characters to the Domains of Dread.

Neither Man nor Beast - This module is based off *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. In it, the group of characters are sailing somewhere, get attacked by a kraken and wash up on an island as the guests of the dark lord of the domain. As the players explore the island, they discover a brewing civil war and need to figure out a way off the island as the dark lord and his creations meet in combat.

The Night of Walking Dead - This module is pretty much obvious in its set up and the execution. The players land up in a swamp and find a village that is about to be attacked by a horde of zombies. Those who know the backstory of Ravenloft will understand that this is one of the six modules that made up the Grand Conjunction storyline.

The Created - Ravenloft was known to spin various fairy tales and stories in interesting directions. *The Created* takes the story of Pinocchio and creates a village where all the adults are gone and only children survive. Part of the joy of this module is that the characters are transformed into stick figures/puppets.

Mid-Level Modules

Because Ravenloft was originally conceived as a place characters were involuntarily sucked into, I suggest running a module and letting the PCs escape at its conclusion. There are a number of modules built for levels from three to about seven. There are many bad modules in the bunch but honestly, if you're looking for something to explore and play, here are a few of the better options out there.

Howls in the Night - Set in the fog infested realm of Mordent, this is a ghost story that deals with spectral hounds and a haunted house. With a twisted love story at the center of the module, one of four different endings could occur. Having PCs surrounded by fog and being hunted by hounds is a great way to scare players at the table.

Ravenloft - The classic module that launched the line, *Ravenloft* is the story of the land of Barovia and the vampire Strahd. This module was written for 1e but can be modified for 2e pretty easily.

In the adventure, the PCs get trapped in Strahd's castle and have to figure out

a way to escape the domain while not becoming the vampire's next dinner. This all-time classic was revamped for 3e and 5e.

Hour of the Knife - Based off the Jack the Ripper legend, this module takes the players to an isolated town during a series of murders. As the module progresses, characters are killed off and replaced by dopplegangers. This twisted story concludes in the sewers beneath the town.

The Evil Eye - Welcome to the land of Invidia, a domain of mysteries and darkness! Here, the players are drawn into a story where the Vistani need their help to stop the creation of what is known as a Duhkar. When the players fail and the Duhkar is born, minds are shattered and destiny is rewritten.

Boxed Sets

TSR was known for their love of releasing boxed sets. In Ravenloft, this was no different. As the line progressed, there were a number that was released. The two that I'm going to highlight in this section are the best of the bunch.

Castle Forlorn - This is probably the hardest module to run in 2nd Edition but it is probably my second favorite module. In it, the players land up in a domain called Forlorn and must deal with a ghost dark lord and a castle that is split between three different time periods. This boxed set is ideal for use as a backdrop for other stories that need to be told. If you desire to run the module as written, it will be one of the hardest to pull off, but one of the most rewarding I have found over the years.

Bleak House - This boxed set tells the story of the death of one of the heroes of the demiplane. It is split up into two different books, each with a widely different tone. In the first book, *Sea of Madness,* the players become patients in an asylum controlled by a group of cerebral vampires. The players get put through strange and horrible experiments that might be 'unfun' to players if you ran through it today. The problem is that players lose their 'choice' once they land on the island and become patients. There is no fun in being experimented on and being forced to deal with situations where the character could become debilitated for a long time – possibly permanently. The GM could force a fighter to be unable to fight (due to a fear of blood) or a mage unable to read their spellbook (lowering of their Intelligence) or have still other characters land up with multiple personalities that the player has no control over as to which personality comes to the surface and when.

The second book, *Homecoming*, is the star of the show and the quintessential haunted house story of the Ravenloft line. Every time I need a haunted house themed story, I go back to this book and tweak it here and there to keep it new and fresh. If you don't use the backstory (a series of murders that repeat day after day), you still have a large house with lots of unique twists along with ghosts and zombies to deal with.
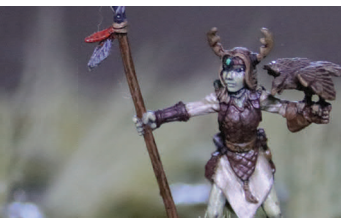
Although there are a number of other modules out there, these are the best of the bunch in my opinion. Ravenloft is near and dear to my heart and my favorite setting of all time.

When somebody says "We're playing Ravenloft for a session or two," overcome your fear and embrace the Mists.

You will be glad you did.

Figuratively Speaking

HT3d – Pig-faced Orc IV

This roaring brute is in the midst of swinging a flail. He wears studded armor but no boots. While it is difficult to see in the image, his hands are holding the flail behind his head, lending the orc a pleasingly unorthodox attacking posture.

HT3a – Pig-faced Orc I

Bare-headed with big tusks, this orc swings a scimitar and carries a shield. He wears a gambeson and carries a large pouch. His posture suggests he is beginning to charge ahead into battle. Without any headgear, we can see the small cranium these orcs possess, a nice to way convey limited intellectual capacity.

In this issue, we'll take a look at a perennial fantasy creature: Orcs! While there have been dozens of miniatures companies that have produced lines of orcs, this issue will focus on two recent production lines: those of Otherworld Miniatures and Wizards of the Coast – for the latter, orc miniatures produced for the Chainmail game from the early 2000s.

When you think of fantasy orcs, your version generally depends on when you entered the hobby. If, like me, you joined the fray in the early 1980s or earlier, you think of the orcs depicted in the 1st edition Monster Manual. These orcs were notable for having the heads of pigs. If you entered gaming in 1990s or later, the pig-faced orc was nowhere to be seen. Orc faces became more ape-like, projecting a monstrous – yet somewhat human – visage.

If the classic pig-faced orc is your preference, Otherworld Miniatures has your back. They produce an extensive line of wonderful warriors, archers, chieftains, and even little runtlings. Several also come mounted on giant boars. There is also a pair of shamans. Strangely, their half-orcs lack snouts.

Soon after the release of *Dungeons & Dragons* 3rd edition, Wizards of the Coast revived the *Chainmail* miniatures game. The first releases were box sets providing an immediate warband for players to begin their battles with.

The *Drazen's Horde* Faction Box contained six miniatures: an orc druid, a hobgoblin fighter, an ogre trooper, a war ape, an orc berseker, and a goblin scout. Further miniatures were released for the faction as individual blister packs, and you could purchase the same miniatures contained within the faction box on their own as well (in case you wanted multiple orc berserkers, for example).

The quality of the sculpts of the entire *Chainmail* line was excellent. The miniatures – all metal – were blessed with high levels of detail and satisfying proportions. Many of the sculpts from the *Chainmail* line were later used for WOTC's line of pre-painted plastic miniatures.

The orcs from *Drazen's Horde* were representative of the "modern" take on the creatures: vaguely simian faces, tall and robust physiques, and gray-colored flesh (although you were obviously free to paint them however you wished).

The orcs not contained in the *Drazen's Horde* Faction Box, but offered as blister packs, included:

- orc trooper: a slightly smaller figure weilding a spiked club
- orc champion: beefy, helmeted, with a huge battle axe
- • orc rager: a large brute bearing an "orc double-axe"
- • orc gangfighter (x2): a pair of skinnier-looking orcs weilding polearms

By collecting the blister packs, players could easily field an orc-only force.

Orc Berserker
Drazen's Horde Faction Box
WOC88342
A massive head and an even bigger axe stand out, but the small details (a tooth necklace, earring, and chin hair) really make this mini shine.

Orc Druid
Drazen's Horde Faction Box
WOC88342
A mini so heavy you could use it as a bookend, the druid is marked with decorative welts, a long multi-braided beard, and a suitably fearsome totem.