

REALM OF TERROR

Core Rules for the RAVENLOFT® Campaign Setting

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FOREWORD



For those who don't know the story, the world we call Ravenloft has roots planted deep in the history of TSR, Inc. In 1982, Tracy and Laura Hickman wrote *Ravenloft* (I6), a replayable 32-page AD&D® adventure designed to fit any campaign.

This tale of gothic horror was a ground-breaking effort in every way, and it was filled with challenges. Our good friend Curtis Smith edited the product, "terrifying" everyone with his

desire for perfection. (We originally met Curtis in college, but we were also at TSR then, so we know this firsthand.) As with many developmental editors, Curtis's efforts were not generally recognized except by those who worked alongside him. David C. Sutherland III was the cartographer, creating the first three-dimensional maps in the hobby game industry. (He did much of that work on his own time, since 3-D maps take far longer to render than normal, orthographic maps.) Clyde Caldwell rendered a magnificent cover, bringing Strahd von Zarovich, Ravenloft's vampire lord, to life (or is it *unlife*?).

When it was published, *Ravenloft* became the single best-selling adventure in TSR's history, and we count it among our personal all-time favorites. Years later—in 1989 to be exact—we were presented with the

opportunity to turn the *Ravenloft* adventure into an entire game world, featuring that same fantasy horror theme. Like the original adventure, it held many challenges, but it was a labor of love for us both. Dave Sutherland once again rendered the maps with fabulous results, and Clyde Caldwell painted an outstanding new cover. Graphic designer Roy Parker and interior artist Stephen Fabian deserve kudos for enhancing the mood and overall quality of the product.


Since then, the RAVENLOFT® game line has flourished. Other key designers, editors, and artists have joined us in tending the campaign world simply for the enjoyment it brings—including William W. Connors, co-designer of *Forbidden Lore*, and David Wise, editor of the product now in your hands. This new RAVENLOFT boxed set combines the heart of *Forbidden Lore* with the original *Realm of Terror* campaign set. It's not a "2nd edition" in the traditional sense; while minor updates have occurred, no fundamental changes to the rules or setting have been made. Rather, this is a fresh reorganization with a few new wrinkles.

We are grateful to have had the opportunity to create a world that so many players enjoy, and we know that all who have worked on RAVENLOFT products feel the same. We prefer not to think of the RAVENLOFT campaign setting as *our* world, but as *your* world. We hope it haunts and thrills you for years to come!

FOREWORD



INTRODUCTION: FROM GOTHIC ROOTS



*What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; Th'unconquerable
Will,
And courage never to submit or
yield . . .*
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Dark, gloomy castles, desolate landscapes, black clouds racing against the moon—these are the trappings of the Gothic novel. Early literature of that genre is replete with stories of mystery, fear, and desire; of vulnerable heroines imprisoned in a fortress, their purity and sanity assaulted by the evil lord of the manor.

Later novels such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* push the heroine into the wings while Evil itself steps into the limelight. Such is the classic horror in which the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting sinks its roots. That macabre darkness can creep into any campaign, any world, if one knows the elements that give it life, but in the land of the Mists it has reached poisonous fruition.

The Nature of Gothic Horror

The creation of fear is at the heart of all horror, yet the traditional Gothic model differs a great deal from today's cinematic and literary blood orgies. Modern horror routinely slices, dices, and disembowels its victims to create a sense of fear. The underlying theme is that the human animal is simply nothing more than *meat*. For all its claims to superior intelligence and divine favor, humanity can be splattered against the bleak wall of hopelessness without so much as a nod to its dreams of truth and nobility—and fear is generated in the realization of that cold, hard reality. In a common “slasher” film, the question is not so much *what* will happen as *when*. Hope that springs forth with the coming of dawn is inevitably crushed, for even if the hero can escape the

maniac with a cleaver, the monster never dies and the poor hero must spend the rest of his days looking over his shoulder.

Gothic horror, by contrast, relies on subtler techniques. It teases and taunts its victims with terrors shrouded in mist. Often the victim is blind to the evil that hovers above like a ravenous spider, and sometimes evil masquerades as virtue, revealing its true nature only too late. By the time danger becomes apparent to the victim, death by an ordinary knife might seem a relief.

There is a fundamental acceptance of the existence of virtue and goodness in the Gothic genre, and evil is all the more terrible for the comparison. The reader doesn't wonder *how* the hero and heroine will die, but whether they are spiritually strong enough to survive the blackest night. Fear comes not from a sense of the impending fall of an axe, but from the horrifying truths and temptations that assault them as they fight for their lives.

In the modern horror tale, the source of evil is usually identified early, for it remains unstoppable despite that knowledge. In the Gothic tale, evil is something sinister and unknown. A dark mystery lies beneath the horror, and the protagonists are compelled to unravel it. The innocents are trapped in a whirlpool of conflicting emotion, driven by the desire to learn the awful truth that they sense lies beyond that black shroud, yet dreading it all the while. With each step beyond their comfortable, day-lit world, they discover that reality is more twisted than they could possibly have understood, and that their own virtues may not be sufficient to see them to the dawn.

Dark Plots and Antiheroes

Traditional Gothic plots involve strange birthmarks, family curses, and bastard children whose origins are at best uncertain. Deformities are commonplace: a scar, a hump, enormous hands, bulging eyes—some singular affliction makes the whole grotesque,