

Sample file



BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS

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NOTICE: *Book of Vile Darkness* is intended for our adult audience. Parental discretion is advised.

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Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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Poison creation rules adapted from *Song and Silence* by David Noonan and John D. Rateliff. Drug addiction rules adapted from *Lords of Darkness* by Sean Reynolds and Jason Carl.

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& LATIN AMERICA
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620-88161-001-EN
987654321

FIRST PRINTING: OCTOBER 2002

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Introduction

Book of Vile Darkness is a sourcebook of evil. It contains a large amount of new game material—all of it vile, loathsome, dark, and despicable. Although evil monsters, spells, and magic items have appeared in previous products, this compendium is a collection of the most vile, hideous, and disgusting aspects of evil that might appear in a game. Its pages contain references to acts of horrible depravity and malevolent behavior unlike anything you have probably encountered before in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Let this be a warning: *Book of Vile Darkness* is intended for mature audiences. The topics covered herein are not for the immature, squeamish, or faint of heart. This book deals with fictional gore, extreme violence, human sacrifice, addiction, corrupt magic, and deviant behavior. Its content is not a lighthearted take on “badness”—it is about evil, pure and simple.

Before you put this book down in disgust, however, consider this: The darker the shadow of evil, the brighter the light of good. The more horrible the villain, the greater the hero. If you are interested in adding the truly horrific to your game as something for the player characters (PCs) to vanquish, then this book is for you.

HIDE THIS BOOK!

Book of Vile Darkness is for Dungeon Masters (DMs) only. Just as you would keep the contents of a published adventure to yourself, restrict your players' access to this book as well. Don't let them know what's in store for their characters.

EVIL IN THE GAME SESSION

Every powerful force in the universe has an opposite and equally powerful force. Evil and darkness pervade the world of the D&D game, combating the forces of good (as epitomized by the PCs). Each time a great malevolence is vanquished, another springs up to take its place, like a hydra with an unlimited number of heads. Heroes confront evil head-on. Other, less fanatic characters deal with it only when they need to. But smart characters never dwell overlong on corruption and darkness, lest it overtake them. When a paladin returns home from a quest to enjoy time with loved ones and friends, she should put away thoughts of the horrors she has seen.

Try not to let the forces of evil portrayed in *Book of Vile Darkness* overwhelm your game. The power of the archfiends, the insidiousness of evil magic, and the corruption of some of the feats and magic items in this book are extreme. You may be tempted to unleash elements of this book on your characters time and time again. But unless you want to run the bleakest of campaigns—and your players do, too—resist that temptation and use this information sparingly. This book is not an excuse to turn your game into a dreary slog through the bowels of utter depravity. For the deepest evil to have a proper impact, PCs must encounter it

only occasionally. If you can make your players gasp in horror at the foes they face, their victories over those opponents will be all the sweeter.

WHAT'S INSIDE

The eight chapters of this book break down the material into easily digestible sections.

The Nature of Evil (Chapter 1): This chapter deals with the basics of evil and evil acts. It provides advice on creating villains and examples of how to incorporate the ideas in this book into your campaign. Rules are given for various evil predilections that villains might have, such as cannibalism and addiction. Here you'll find many examples of evil cultures, characters, places, and gods that you can put to use in your D&D games.

Variant Rules (Chapter 2): In this chapter, you'll find a miscellany of new rules regarding vile topics. Vile damage, curses, sacrifices, possession, and diseases are among the topics detailed here.

Equipment (Chapter 3): Torture implements, traps, poisons, and drugs are important parts of every evildoer's arsenal. This chapter explains how to use them in your game. It also presents a wide variety of magic items—including artifacts—that are touched by evil.

Feats (Chapter 4): This chapter offers new feats, including some that fall into a new category called vile feats. To acquire a vile feat, a character must be evil.

Prestige Classes (Chapter 5): Some of the prestige classes in this chapter are specifically for monsters or fiends. Others are designed for characters who dedicate themselves to the worship of devils and demons.

Magic (Chapter 6): For characters wishing to delve into dark magic, this chapter introduces corrupt spells. These spells are usable by any spellcaster willing to pay the toll that such magic exacts.

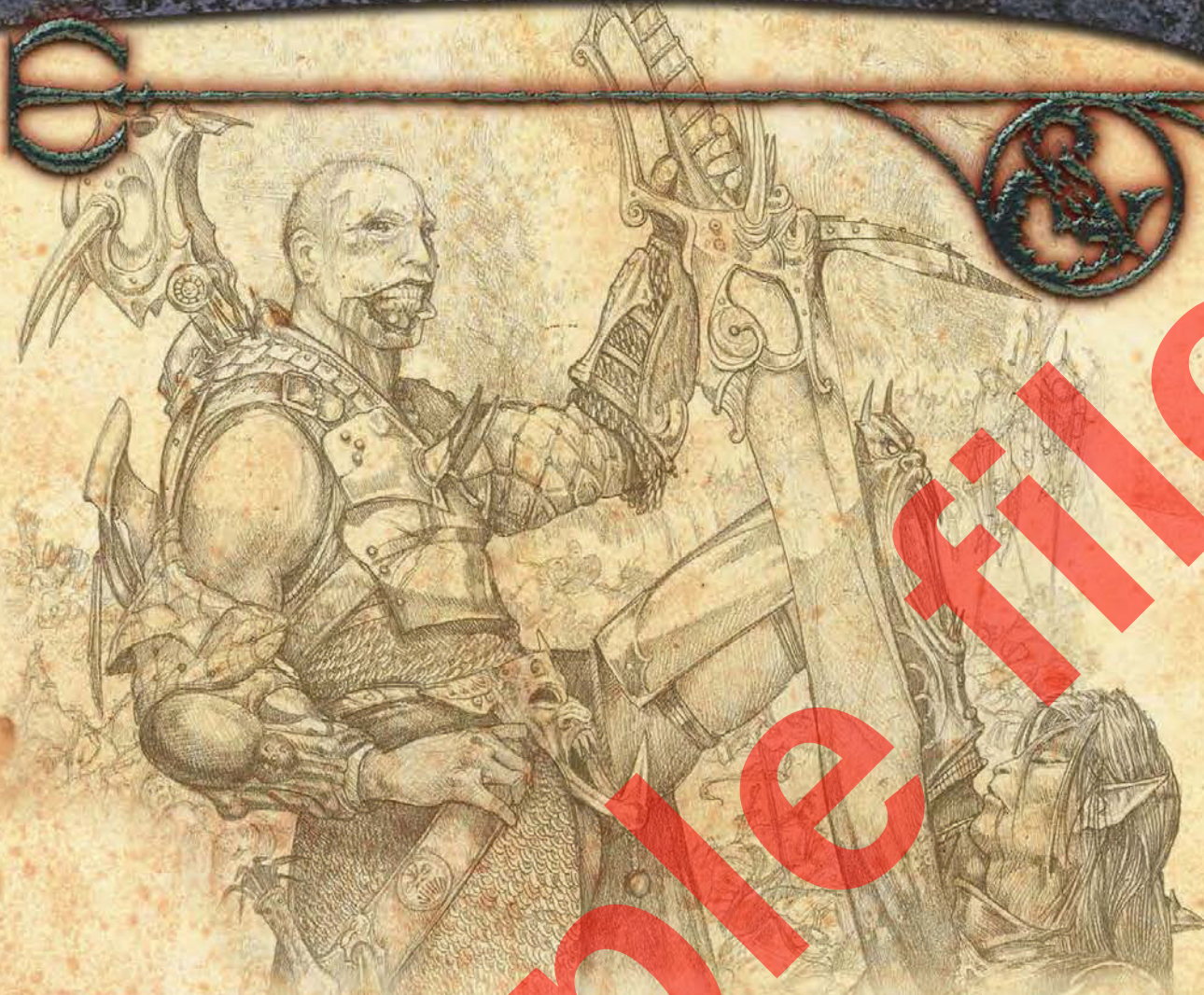
Lords of Evil (Chapter 7): This chapter describes the worst of the worst—the archdevils who rule the Nine Hells and the demon lords who call the Abyss home. Veteran D&D players are probably already familiar with some of these names: Demogorgon, Asmodeus, Orcus, and Baalzebul.

Evil Monsters (Chapter 8): Demons and devils are here, and new undead and other creatures are also detailed. Also in this chapter are templates to make evil creatures even viler than their ordinary counterparts.

All of these chapters are tools meant to aid the DM in constructing malevolent foes. At the end of the book is an appendix that deals specifically with evil PCs, providing some guidance for dealing with situations that can occur if you allow evil characters into your campaign.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I do not condone, endorse, or seek to glorify anything in this book as it might relate to the real world. This is bad stuff, and I'm not a bad person. Really.



Good and evil are not philosophical concepts in the D&D game. They are the forces that define the cosmos.

—D&D Player's Handbook

"Evil" is a word that is probably overused. In the context of the game, and certainly of this book, the word should be reserved for the dark force of destruction and death that tempts souls to wrongdoing and perverts wholesomeness and purity at every turn. Evil is vile, corrupt, and irredeemably dark. It is not naughty or ill-tempered or misunderstood. It is black-hearted, selfish, cruel, bloodthirsty, and malevolent.

EVIL IN YOUR GAME

There are two recommended ways to deal with the concept of evil in your campaign: the objective approach and the relative approach. This second option is a variant approach and should be used with some caution.

THE OBJECTIVE APPROACH

This is the straightforward approach taken in the D&D game, and it is the one stressed in this book as well. From this frame of reference, evil can be judged objectively. The evil nature of a creature, act, or item isn't relative to the person observing it; it just is evil or it isn't. This clear-cut definition allows spells such as *holy smite* to work. Con-

versely, an objective definition of evil exists because the *detect evil* spell works. Want to know what's evil? Don't study a philosophy book, just watch who gets hurt when the cleric casts *holy smite*. Those creatures are evil. The things they do, generally speaking, are evil acts. If your character still isn't certain, he can summon a celestial creature or cast a *commune* spell and simply ask, "Is this evil?" The higher powers are right there, ready to communicate.

The *Player's Handbook* says, "Evil" implies hurting, oppressing, and killing others. Some evil creatures simply have no compassion for others and kill without qualm if doing so is convenient. Others actively pursue evil, killing for sport or out of duty to some evil deity or master."

This objective approach to evil works well for fantasy roleplaying games. Evil is a thing that a hero can point at and know he must fight. An objective concept of evil allows players (and their characters) to avoid most ethical or moral quandaries, particularly the kinds that can derail a game session. If you run an adventure about fighting gnolls, you don't normally want the entire session consumed by a philosophical debate about whether killing gnolls is a good thing or a bad thing.

THE RELATIVE APPROACH (VARIANT)

A second approach considers evil to be a relative concept that is wholly dependent on the attitude of the observer. This is not the approach of most D&D games; rather, it resembles how many people see the real world. Using this variant outlook changes a game dramatically—at least as far as “evil” is concerned. In the relative approach, evil is not something that your character can point a finger at; it’s relative to each individual. While it’s possible for a number of creatures (an entire culture, for example) to have a similar view on what is good and what is evil, another group might have a different or even opposite view. Of course, conflicting views can also occur if your D&D game uses the objective approach, but in that case, one group can simply prove that its views are right.

In a world where evil is relative, a deity might put forth tenets describing what is right and wrong, or good and evil. But another god might have different, even contradictory dogma. A paladin of one deity might talk about the evil, godless heathens across the mountains and eventually go to war with them. If she does, she may find herself battling paladins of a different god and a different culture who look upon the crusading paladin as an evil infidel.

If you decide that this is the approach you want, you have some game-related decisions to make. For instance, in a world where evil is relative, how does a *detect evil* spell work? When two paladins of opposing views meet on the field of battle, can they use their smite abilities against each other? The easiest and best option in this case is to do away with spells such as *detect evil* because they have no real meaning. Take away the good and evil descriptors from spells (so that any character can cast any of those spells), and disregard any holy or unholy damage a weapon deals. Having to know or determine the outlook of a character casting *detect evil* is cumbersome and unwieldy, and it leads to confusion and arguments over who should be affected by the paladin’s holy sword or the cleric’s holy smite.

DEFINING EVIL

Of course, even if you take an objective approach in your game, evil people might not always call themselves evil. They would be wrong or simply lying to do so, but they might still deny their evil nature. Even the most deranged mass murderer might be able to justify his actions to himself in the name of his beliefs, his deity, or some skewed vision of what is best for the world.

A killer might slay any children he deems weak or unfit to reach adulthood. Another might kill children he believes will grow up and become evil themselves. Perhaps such a killer once had a prophetic dream telling him that evil was growing among the children of the town.

On a larger scale, an evil priest might believe that to better serve his dark god, he needs to destroy an entire village and sacrifice all the residents. Is that evil? Yes. Does the priest see it as evil? No, he sees it as a demonstration of his unending devotion and an aspect of his faith. Or perhaps he does see it as evil and doesn’t care.

A dictator might order the elimination of an entire race of good creatures because she believes them to be evil. She might seek to dominate the world and bring its people under her unyielding fist. But such a despot could also believe that she is a good person and that the world will be better off with her guidance. This attitude makes her no less a villain.

INTENT AND CONTEXT

So, does the objective definition of evil imply that intent plays no part in determining what is good and what isn’t? Only to a degree.

Consider the paladin Zophas. When climbing to the top of a hill of loose rocks to get away from some owlbeats, he triggers a rockslide that buries the owlbeats and continues down the hill, crushing a hut full of commoners. Is Zophas an evil murderer who must suddenly lose his lawful good alignment? No, although Zophas might still feel guilt and responsibility. He might attempt to right the inadvertent wrong as best he can.

But what if Zophas’s friend Shurrin said, “Don’t climb up there, Zophas! You might start a rockslide that will crush the hut!” Zophas goes anyway. Now is it evil? Probably. Zophas was either carelessly endangering the commoners or so overconfident of his climbing prowess that he acted out of hubris. At this point, Zophas isn’t exactly a murderer, but he should probably lose his paladin abilities until he receives an atonement spell or otherwise makes amends.

If Zophas can clearly see the danger of the rockslide but climbs up anyway because he wants to get away from the owlbeats, that’s clearly evil. In a world of black-and-white distinctions between good and evil, killing innocents to save yourself is an evil act. Sacrificing yourself for the good of others is a good act. It’s a high standard, but that’s the way it is.

The foregoing text defines three levels of intent: accidental acts, reckless or negligent acts, and intentionally evil misdeeds. Sometimes, however, those categories are insufficient to determine evil intent. You are free to judge an act in the context of other actions.

A maniac puts poison in a town’s water supply, believing (wrongly) that all of the people in the town are demons. Is that evil? Yes. A glabrezu convinces a good character that the townsfolk are all fiends that must be destroyed, so the character pours poison into the town’s water supply. Is that evil? Probably not—at least, not in the context of the rest of the character’s actions and the circumstances involved. Still, good characters shouldn’t commit even remotely questionable acts on a large scale unless they’re absolutely sure there’s no other way to succeed. It’s rarely a good idea to destroy a town of evil people, because there might be at least a few good people in the town as well.

But let’s make it even more complicated. Another character witnesses the good character about to put poison in the town’s drinking water. Is it evil for the witness to kill the poisoning character in order to stop him? No. Again, the intent isn’t evil, and the context makes such an act preferable to the alternative. Standing by while a mass murder occurs—the